

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

There is a certain degree of ambiguity when we talk about “inter-religious **dialogue**” and «inter-religious **meetings**”. In general public opinion, the expressions above, “inter-religious **dialogue**” and “inter-religious **meetings**” are equivalent, and are often linked to the search for theological consensus, in the light of a wish to bring religions together. It is also often confused with “ecumenical dialogue”.

Inter-religious dialogues, or *dialogues between religions*, in the sense of talks and debates between theologians of several religions in search of unification, do not exist, and indeed, if they did, they would be to no avail. However, what can exist are *inter-religious meetings*, or *meetings between religious members*, in defence of common goals or interests. First of all, I shall explain just why there cannot be *dialogues between religions* for the unification thereof, and then talk about the possibility of there being *inter-religious meetings* for the discussion of issues which are of common interest, although *not religious* in nature.

Definition of Religion

Religions are systems of beliefs or dogmas and **obligatory and sufficient** practices for Salvation (either during life or after death). In the three revealed religions of the Mediterranean, religions are the expression of God’s wishes, dictated by people sent to do so:: 1) In the case of the Jewish religion, by the prophets of the Old Testament; 2) for Christianity, by the incarnate Son of God himself, Jesus Christ; 3) in the case of Islam, by the Prophet Mohammed, the last of the prophets sent by God. **The three religions are based on strict dogmas.**

For each of the three religions here considered, the Holy Texts represent the **definite and unchangeable Word of God.**

Each religion considers itself to be a divine revelation, perfect and finished, resulting from God’s Word, as eternal Truth *par excellence*. And there can be only one Truth, which is its own. **Each theological system is organised according to a coherent construction of the Divine Truth.**

This does not mean to say that religions may not be tolerant with those who have strayed or those who do not believe.

In this analysis, I have excluded Buddhism which is not a religion in itself, but rather routes to perfection (there are several subtypes of Buddhism) and which may be practiced at the same time as other religions (a person may be Buddhist and Christian at the same time).

Requirements for an intended theological dialogue

For there to be an *inter-religious dialogue* in the sense of a theological debate, one would suppose that the dialogue participants were theologians themselves, as also true interpreters of the doctrines under discussion, and that one would give way to the other in favour of the speaker and correct their Truth. Well, this contradicts the very nature of religion itself, whose Truth is definitely revealed and declared.

May we say, with full honesty, the following: **the proposal coming from a reliable theologian or the person responsible for the ecclesiastical institution, for a religious discussion with their counterparts of other religions, in order to find a**

common denominator, a commitment or a consensus, this proposal for dialogue is an operation of proselytism, propaganda, or even a case of provocation.

Religious dialogue between
individual people

However, one must make a distinction between, on the one hand, the theological institutions that defend and publicise an orthodoxy and, on the other hand, individual people who follow these religions. Many religious people, as also agnostics or atheists, believe that there could be a dialogue or even **union between the three main religions of the Book or the Bible** (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) as they all originate from the Patriarch Abraham, and that it is even said that “**God is the same**” (the God of the three religions could be the same, if he exists, but the fact is that, from one religion to another this God becomes very different)¹. Individual people may meet, compare their respective truths, participate in the activities of others and co-operate in religious activities, without making an issue of the orthodoxy of their religion; these are private acts. The guardian institutions of theology may not themselves enter into confrontation, as they are the bearers of one single Truth.

Religions are
exclusivist

All religions or theologies have the common factor of being exclusivists. Only your religion grants Salvation. One religion denounces the other, either as being false or as having been invented by Man, or as being useless for Salvation. All the religions are competing with each other. The three Western religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are practically competitors because they start out from the same text, the Old Testament, that all three use with regard to the promise of the Messiah (or the last prophet).

Theologies are
forms of power

Religions are not just theological systems. They are also forms of institutional power - the power of theological wisdom, social power, power bestowed by culture.

¹ Sociologically, God is a cultural and a historical creation. The concept of God is very different in the three Abrahamic religions. The Jewish god is a creator, a legislator and a vindictive judge (“The Eternal God of revenge”, who punishes the children and the descendants for the misdemeanours of their forefathers); it is tribal in the sense that there is only protection for their own people. He is the legislator for civil and dietary questions. The Christian God is a Trinity (in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, which is considered serious heresy by Judaism and Islam). Jesus Christ, Son of God, defined God as “a Father and Love”, and a universalist God, individual and also intercultural (not belonging to any ethnic group, detached from the cultural differences of His children); he is not segregationist concerning gender; He is not a legislator for earthly questions, of civil, social or dietary nature (His Kingdom “is not of this world”), leaving “to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God”; His first Commandment is love between humans without any kind of distinction. The God of Islam, the one-part God, is like that of Judaism, an absolute legislator for all civil, social and dietary issues, without distinction of civil society (State) from religion. This God is a war strategist and vindictive judge, yet shows compassion and mercy for those who have converted (“Islam” means peace and submission). The Islamic God is strictly segregationist concerning gender and also concerning believers and non-believers. There is communion with the nature of tribal gods as the language of prayer tends to be exclusively that of the tribe of the Prophet, while the privileged prayer location, Mecca, was the birthplace of the Prophet and the origin of the tribe.

Those who possess religious power have been “steered” towards this task, as predestinated people, and, for social purposes, they are professionals of this knowledge. To give in theologically is like losing part of one’s power, as the bearer of religious knowledge. In addition, religions are long historical continuums which, through the millennia, have moulded out cultures, to the extent that religions and cultures often overlap.

Strict Religions
of the Mediterranean
unchangeable

The religions of the Mediterranean set out from different and contradictory versions concerning the Word of God. The Jewish religion dogmatically rejects the idea that Jesus could be the Son of God (the base of Christianity), or that there is a Word of God beyond the last inspirational text in the Bible (the Old Testament). For the Jewish faith, the Truth lies exclusively in the Torah and in the Prophets (of the Old Testament). The Koran, which partly derives from the Old Testament, goes as far as denying the very base of Christianity which is the divinity of Jesus, applying the death penalty to people who defend this essential principle of Christianity.

Here, I must recall a famous discussion, of the Middle Ages, in which the King of Aragon invited Jewish and Christian theologians to have a public debate about their respective religions - an inter-religious dialogue. The Jews made the following argument: “You Christians defend the view that the Old Testament is the Word of God, that God is the eternal Truth and hence God never contradicts Himself. In this case, how could God have proposed “eternal decrees”, the eternal Truth, and then sent his ‘son’ to revoke his eternal doctrine?”. The Inquisitors, before the undeniable logic of this theological argument, could only find one solution: definite silencing, the extermination of the Jews. This mediaeval dialogue is typically like a dialogue between “deaf people”, which serves the unique purpose of each side emphasising its convictions and finding new arguments.

Dialogue between
confessions of a religion

We must bear in mind that religions are by no means monolithic. Within one religion, there are several churches or “confessions”. In the Christian religion, we have Roman Catholicism, the different Protestant Churches, the Anglican Church and the Oriental and Slav Orthodox Churches. In Judaism, we have Sephardi Judaism and Ashkenazi Judaism. In Islam, we have the Sunni and Shi’ite movements and also Ismaelism.

There could be, and indeed there has been, cases of dialogue between different “confessions” within Christianity, but only about secondary issues that have not become the object of dogmatisation. Ever since the moment when a confession has stated that a certain doctrine position is dogma, discussion becomes impossible, because **the very concept of dogma is that of an indelible truth, that cannot be altered**. Ever since the middle of the 20th Century, the different Christian confessions have had attempts at ecumenism. However, the results are largely limited to gestures of courtesy, mutual respect and refraining from theological attacks. The theological dialogue with the Catholics would have little chance of success, due to the dogma of the infallibility of the pope at Rome, declared in 1870. You would find very few theologians who would be prepared to discuss theology or philosophy with an infallible leader who therefore is

unable to change direction². Dialogue between the different lines of Protestantism is common.

Turning now to the dialogue between the Jewish religion and Islam - some authors hold the view that Islam is just a variant or a continuation of the Jewish religion – dialogue is also impossible, but the Jews have always lived in harmony with Islamic circles, without significant persecution, up to the creation of the State of Israel.

Dialogue between the Sephardi and Askhenazi lines of the Jewish religion is quite easy.

Confessions within Islam

Turning now to the different confessions within Islam, we see that Islam is by no means homogeneous. There are the Sunni, Shi'ite and Ismaelite divisions (not to mention other less numerous groups such as the Alauites). The fact is that there has never been any kind of dialogue between the Sunni and Shi'ite groups, as from the very start of Islam the differences have been evident. The Sunni Muslims regard the Shi'ites as enemies even worse than the Christians. Between Shi'ites and Christians, there got to be some dialogue at the time of the Crusades, in which the Shi'ites and the Christians joined forces against the Sunnis. We shall now take a look at the positions which render impossible a theological dialogue between Shi'ites and Sunnis.

The Shi'ites obey a leader and also a hierarchy of clerics that have absolute power over their followers, much in the same way as the Catholics obey the Pope and the Church (in not so doing, they would run the risk of being excommunicated and stripped of Salvation). The Shi'ite faith is centred on the Supreme Imam Ayatullah (the very word Ayatullah means "sign of God"). It is he, and only he, that has the capacity to interpret the Koran, passages in which resort both to violence and pacifism, with the Imam Ayatullah proceeding with the symbolic or allegorical interpretation and literary context. In practice, the Supreme Ayatullah controls religion based on historical, social and political situations. In the event of any religious conflicts, the Shi'ite Muslim, to act should always obey the Supreme Imam Ayatullah. The individual may not make decisions that are contrary to the direction of this leader. The declaration of holy war is the exclusive prerogative of the Supreme Imam Ayatullah.

Turning now to the Sunni line, we see that in Sunnism there are no bosses, institutions or religious hierarchies to whom the faithful owe obedience to be good Muslims. Indeed, the Sunni Muslim only needs to obey the Koran and the Suna (the traditions of the Prophet). Indeed, the Koran and the Suna together make up the *sharia*, or law. To comply with the requirements of the religion, everyone should learn the Koran, and often know the whole work by heart. In the view of Sunni Muslims, the interpretation of the Koran is more literal, like a manual ready for use, without resort to

² On the other hand, Catholicism dogmatically defends the idea that salvation can only be obtained by practising the seven sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, ordination and matrimony). This is a dogmatic doctrine that may not be questioned. From this point hence, a dogma states that "there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church", because this Church is the only one with the power to administer these sacraments. Among Protestants, the discussion about Salvation may always be open because, in their view, for Salvation only faith and a state of well-being with regard to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures shall suffice. Therefore, on one side and the other, Salvation is placed under unconciliable conditions. The Vatican II Council softened this dogma somewhat, using the principle that "Other religions may grant Salvation, but by means that only God knows". However, this is not a dogma (as it would contradict the preceding one) but just a principle for use by the missionaries. Here we have a certain degree of contradiction but Catholicism has experienced a lot of difficulties because of its dogmas.

any symbolic or allegoric resources, understood verse by verse, without any literary context, as if each verse were an independent law in itself. In defence of Islam, the Sunni Muslim may take action individually, on their own initiative, without a boss, and can consider himself or herself to be an illuminated being, the only one in the trail of Islam to whom God requires one sacrifice or another. The Sunni philosophy stands within a perspective similar to that of libertarian anarchy in 19th Century Europe. The Sunni will say: "I shall not need leaders or theologians. I only need Koran." We should also take note of the fact that the terrorist attacks we have witnessed for years in Europe, in Magreb, in the Near East, in India, in Pakistan and Indonesia, were all carried out by Sunnis. Similarly, the Al Qaeda movement, the terrorists of Magreb (Salaphites), in Israel, India, Pakistan and Indonesia, are Sunnis³.

Someone wishing to dialogue with the Sunni block of Islam will have no-one to represent them officially, or shall have to strike up an individual dialogue with each Sunni Muslim. They may find only local leaders, politicians or academics, more or less influential, but which do not have the right to be followed or respected by individual believers.

The Sunni leaders shall have to resort to the use of force to be respected. Ancient History of Islam, as also the current state thereof, shows this very well.

Religious
Legitimacy in Islam

Indeed, Shi'ites and Sunnis have opposite concepts when it comes to the legitimacy of religious and political power. In the case of Shi'ism, the legitimacy of religious power rests in the ecclesiastical hierarchy with the Imam Ayatullah supreme, at the top. The Supreme *Ayatullah* is the successor and the representative on Earth of the 12th Shi'ite Imam, who in turn is descended from Fatima, daughter of the Prophet, and Ali, Fatima's husband, who went into hiding in 940 (Hidden Imam) and who shall soon be revealed as the Messiah and Saviour. Hence, all religious power rests with the Supreme Imam Ayatullah.

In contrast, in the Sunni branch the legitimacy of political and religious power rests on the very maintenance of this power. Power is due for he or she who conquers it and keeps it, within Islam. This means that, in essence, the bearer of power acquires legitimacy from the fact of being obeyed. The Sunni Muslims that feel that the leader defrauds or betrays Islam shall take on the commitment of tackling this leader. The history of old and recent Islam is full of attacks against Heads of State, some democratically elected, but which, for some, are illegitimate holders of power in Islam, and have betrayed the Islamic movement. Half a dozen enlightened people are enough to cause a catastrophe.

In Ismaelite Islam, which is a branch of the Shi'ite line, religious power rests exclusively with the Imam Aga-Khan, who is considered as a direct genealogical descendant of the 7th Shi'ite Imam, who in turn is descended from the Prophet Mohammed, through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. The Imam Aga-Khan has always been considered a leader of peace and tolerance, within his confession and also inter-religious.

An example of dialogue
in Madrid

³ The Hezbollah Party (Party of God), which is active in the Lebanon, in Syria and Palestine, with the support of Iran, is of the Shi'ite line. However, its activities and ideology of violence are due to the problems arising from the State of Israel.

So, returning to the issue of dialogue between religions, we see that on 16, 17 and 18 July in Madrid there shall be a “Meeting of Religions and Cultures”, which some journalists call “Dialogue between religions”, called by the King of Saudi Arabia, who also organised the list of guests. The justifications of this leader, which appear in dozens of discussion tables, are the following, according to the King of Arabia himself: “In the current world, there are phenomena that lead to disconsolation in the wise people of all religions, in more than one aspect. Humanity suffers from the disintegration of the family, moral decadence, contamination of the environment, wars that touch the hearts of intellectuals and are a major concern when seeking solutions to save humanity from its ills. We all expect that the leaders and the followers of the different religions and cultures find adequate solutions to save humanity from the dangers which jeopardise its future”⁴. However, the commentators expect that this initiative is just a strategy to clean the image of the King of Saudi Arabia, whence came Al Qaeda, and that still keeps the most segregationist regime in the world 1) in relation to women (who may not walk in the street except with their husband, father, brothers or sons, and where adulterers are put to death by stoning), 2) in relation to sexuality (homosexuals are hung) and 3) concerning religious liberty (the Catholic Church does not have any temples in the Kingdom, and the King treats the Shi’ite and Ismaelite minorities as heretics; and these were not invited to the aforementioned meeting in Madrid). This meeting in Madrid came after an International Islamic Dialogue or Conference, held at the end of May, in Mecca. Why did the Saudi King not organise this meeting or dialogue in his home country? Because in his country, which is officially a Sunni Muslim nation (following the particularly strict Waabite code), there may be no free discussions about religions, as also there is no sign of freedom of worship, no temple of any other religion. Did the Guardian of the Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina (this is the religious title), an absolute monarch, went abroad to invite people to a dialogue between religions, or did he just come to propose a better image of his own religion? He chose Madrid to engolden his image, it is true, but also because Sunni fundamentalists are seeking the reconquest of Andalucia. This event held in Madrid is just a typical example of how the **theologists or religious leaders, when they invite people to discuss religion, act just through proselytism.**

In these proposals for dialogue between religions, if there is no desire for proselytism, there is at least a search for a marketing effect, a good image for the religion of who made the invitation (speaker, open, welcoming, etc.).

Intentions of laypeople
proposing dialogue

When it is the laypeople that invite to a dialogue between religions, we admit that these are full of good intentions, civic feeling, desires for religious pacification and human solidarity. However, they may also be enticed into a Utopia, as they **are not aware of the dogmas, the irreversibility of theological foundations, the exclusivity of the Truth**, of which the religious leaders are the defenders (otherwise, they would be dethroned or overtaken by other people within their religion or theological institution).

At a recent inter-religion meeting held in Lisbon, the Patriarch Cardinal of the city said that “we shall have to wait a long time yet before we have a real inter-religion dialogue” between religions. Diplomatically, this means that no person in charge of a religion or a Church may commit himself or herself to this dialogue. All honest and

⁴ El Pais Newspaper, 14 July 2008.

responsible religious people would say the same, diplomatically, speaking to the public in general, but without explicitly showing the impossibility of these dialogues or that these would not lead to any positive results.

INTER-RELIGIOUS MEETINGS or MEETINGS BETWEEN RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

Meetings between religious people are quite possible - provided the issue of religion is not discussed, or at least **provided no mention is made of what separates religions and is part of their respective bases. What the religions have in common is, theologically, secondary and insignificant - the concept of the sacred and the divine, some taboos, the importance of rites... What separates them are abysses or insurmountable walls.**

Praying
Together

Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders may get together to pray, although each one prays according to different formulas. It is highly unlikely that they would ever pray according to a common formula. Another possibility would be for them to invent a common prayer system common to the three doctrines (maybe some prayers from the Koran, and the Biblical Psalms could easily be adopted). **However, they would never pray in the same language.** For Muslims, prayers only have value if uttered in Arabic. Christians, in contrast, could pray in any language.

Prayer
Space

In relation to the prayer space, this would have to be a profane space: the Christians do not forbid Muslims from entering Christian temples at will, be they Catholic or Protestant, and from praying as they wish. However, according to Islam Muslims are not allowed to enter sacred places of other religions. These Muslims, about to enter, could be considered as apostates by their correligionaries (and subject to the death penalty, according to the *sharia*). But Jews and Christians are prohibited, according to Islam, from entering a mosque to pray. If they wish to enter a mosque, then at the entrance they must recite the Declaration of Faith which effectively converts them to Islam.

In Portugal, the Sanctuary at Fátima has been visited by Buddhists, Hindus, Shi'ites and Ismaelites. The history of these locations goes back to a worship of Fatima the daughter of the Prophet, the "Mother of Shi'ism", the mother of the 12th Shi'ite Imam, the Covered Imam, which shall then appear as the Messiah. At this location there was a worship of Fatima, at the time of the Moroccan Moors that conquered the Peninsula, and that were either Fatimites or Shi'ites. The Roman Catholic symbols (images, for example) that now exist at the location are incompatible with Shi'ism or Ismaelism, but, given the width and the openness of the space to the surrounding hills, there is the possibility of a diverse meeting and some variety of religious practices. The problem is that the Vatican itself has expressly stated that this Sanctuary may not be used by other religions. It is exclusively Catholic. They went as far as giving the new Basilica the name of Holy Trinity (the Christian God is divided into three persons) to push away all non-Christian influence, especially that of the Shi'ites and Ismaelites. In

other words, the Catholic Church says they are always open to dialogue, yet pushes non-Catholics away from their religious spaces⁵.

Themes of the Dialogue

The meeting between theologians of the three Mediterranean religions could only be possible if the themes are neither theological nor essentially religious - themes from fields such as science, society, politics and culture, or humanitarian issues. In this way, the “inter-religious meetings” are not that different from other civic, academic or political meetings. They only appear a bit more “religious” because the religious elites, at a given moment, also show interest in these themes, mundane or lay, and that are common to Humanity as a whole. All religious leaders may discuss themes concerning Ecology, Economics or Social Assistance, that are concerns shared by many other people, even lay people or atheists. This is not because they are theological or religious issues. The consensus of the religious leaders around these mundane issues does not assume any kind of religious unity. The Church of Rome and some Sunni leaders had a meeting in Cairo to discuss the defence of the family and demographic growth, and here the Church stood beside the Muslims in rejecting contraception and defending large families. These are social issues. But, beyond the basic issue of the defence of the family unit in general, procreation and some sociological humanism in common, the Catholics may not go further alongside the Muslims, as the religious rights and, indeed, respective family rights are very different and even opposite (in Islam: possibility of polygamist families, rejection of the wife by the husband, divorce, subservience of the wife to the husband...).

The authorities of all religions may meet to discuss peace. Nowadays, religious wars only exist with Islam. But, as we have seen, the Sunni Muslim leaders may not request the right to be respected by other Muslims, as there is not a common direction in Sunnism. Their opinions about peace appear to be simply individual. The problem here is that, in the Koran, there is the plan for holy war, or *jihad*, a concept often mentioned in the text, and which some lines of thought and many Sunni Muslims raise to the pedestal of the *Sixth Pillar of Islam*⁶. Well, the holy text is to be carried out, so they shall say. The Koran term *jihad* which, etymologically, means “effort”, may apply within the Koran, to the war against non-Muslims, in passages like the following: “Thou shalt kill all the unfaithful people around you” (Surate 9:5; the Sunnis carry out the verses of the Koran as if they were independent requirements, without any historical or literary contexts). Therefore, the war is also made legitimate by the religion of one of the parties. It is very interesting to see peaceful people reaching a consensus about the peace issue. The problem are the bellicose people that are left out and that - for theologically legitimate reasons - are not required to enter these peace consensuses.

Possibilities of Inter-Religious Meetings (between religious members)

⁵ With such a historical tradition of prohibition and repression of other religions, with the Portuguese state being a lay state by definition, we would also like to know what the Catholic Church could do against someone who built a mosque in the vicinity of the Sanctuary, or who remembered to pray within Sanctuary land, in Arabic and facing in the direction of Mecca.

⁶ The Five Pillars of Islam, on which this religion is based, are: the Declaration of Faith (“There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet”), the Obligatory Alms-Giving, *Zakat* (a kind of tax), Five prayers every day, the Ramadan Fast and a trip to Mecca at least once in the person’s lifetime. Some Muslim media add the Holy War here.

Societies are becoming more and more lay in nature, while at the same time seeking alternative and individual paths for spirituality, leading to a discredit of the dogmas, even in Islamic societies where secularisation advance surreptitiously (Islam where the *sharia* is applied is a social, religious and judicial system which overlaps with the State).

In Western societies, nowadays neither the Catholic nor the Islamic doctrines are well known, and the Utopian ideal situation of religious unification is considered as desirable. Based on this Utopian situation, and religious individualisation, the meetings with well-meaning religious people are feasible, to discuss universal and humanitarian issues, such as peace, human rights and the eradication of poverty. Several Christian organisations throughout the world, like the Community of Saint Egydius, proceed to host inter-religious meetings, both for prayer in the same space and also to discuss humanitarian issues. Here we must highlight their activities in favour of peace in several parts of Africa. It has some 300 communities scattered throughout the world, where they intervene with the belligerent or conflicting parties, in favour of those afflicted with AIDS, refugees and the like. However, theological discussions are not held. Between 24 and 26 September 2000, the city of Lisbon hosted the event by the name of "*Inter-Religious Meeting - Oceans of Peace*". Here, we should notice the use of the word "*Meeting*" rather than "*Dialogue*". This event had the participation of the most professed religions of the West. I must remember that the Sunni Muslims who participated in these events, however high their religious or political prestige could be, do not represent Sunni Islam. They only represent themselves or their respective civic organisations, not religious in character. Their presence is not conditional on other Muslims. In contrast, the presence of the Patriarch Cardinal of Lisbon, at the same meeting, is representative of the whole patriarchate in Lisbon and even, should the Portuguese Episcopal Conference so establish, the whole of the Catholic Church in Portugal.

It is also worth saying that the concept of universal social solidarity, to which some feel we should dedicate these Inter-Religion Meetings, also have conditions from one religion to another. Among Christians, social solidarity is a fundamental religious duty, introduced by Jesus Christ himself, and regardless of race, nationality or religion, universalist and globalising, with the most in need having top priority. This is not the criterion used in Islam. According to the Koran and the Suna, Muslims are not required to show solidarity to people of other religions, as also other believers, atheists and heretics, only being required to show such solidarity towards other Muslims.

The Meetings of religious people from different quadrants promote tolerance and co-operation between the peoples of the world, as also between religious majority and minority groups, with the effect of public relations and well-being, regardless of the States seen as belligerent or repressive. These Meetings may be a corrective factor for correcting the actions of these belligerent States. They produce a strong mediatic impact and, in the light of secularisation and also the poor religious background of the masses, which in this case is positive, they lead to short-term results and demobilise the fundamentalist and obscurantist religious trends. **However, they may be used for proselytism or to strengthen the good or evil of one religion, or Church, or another.**

The ambiguity of what I said at the beginning (confusion between inter-religious dialogues, theological dialogues and meetings between religious leaders), resulting from the ignorance of public opinion that feels that there could indeed be dialogues between

religions, is, in this case, beneficial, because it leads to religious tolerance and to the co-operation between individual people of different religions.

Inter-religious dialogue as a platform for common understanding in the Mediterranean, unable to be promoted by theological institutions, has good chances of being promoted by social organisations or even individuals, detached from orthodoxies. We are seeing more and more people taking on human fraternity based on faith in the God revealed to the Patriarch Abraham and the Prophets. Well, this conforms to the modern trends of seeking new forms of spirituality rather than the traditional orthodoxies. These trends towards spiritual emancipation are showing significant progress in the midst of Christianity. These are trends for the future.

However, what is most important is that the States shall be required to impose religious freedom, and equal judicial treatment for different religions and confessions, however small the groups may be. **Religious equality and liberty should be the first platform for common understanding, for brotherhood between peoples.** But... these principles of liberty and equality should be characteristics of the States on both sides of the Mediterranean, which does not yet happen.

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