Religion, Faith and Toleration

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The religious intolerance that is nowadays feeding many current conflicts makes us rethink our conception of toleration, which arose from the theological and philosophical debates accompanying or thrown up by the 16th and 17th centuries' doctrinal controversies and politico-religious wars, which historians call 'wars of religion'. The phrase covers those wars that set religions against each other in Europe or were waged in their name to defend the faith: medieval wars, the Crusades, those in which Christians – Catholics and Calvinists – fought each other, and which were ended for a while by the Edict of Nantes (1598), fratricidal wars that had lasted since 1562 and were to resume after Henri IV's death, until the supporters of both sides agreed at the Peace of Alès not to take up arms any more to resolve their religious differences. The phrase 'wars of religion' also refers to those that were waged in the name of Islamic *jihad*, as well as the 15th-century persecutions that Jewish communities in Spain and Portugal fell victim to. So it was in this context characterized by intolerance that the modern concept of toleration was born.

Among those who reflected on toleration we cannot fail to mention Locke and Bayle. It is defined by respect for distinct orders: of conscience and of the law, private and public, faith and reason. It bears the mark of its origins in religion and theology, and relates to the idea of human dignity, which was given its ethical foundation in the 18th century by Kant's doctrine of autonomy.

We know from current events that still today people are being killed and persecuted in the name of faith, in the name of God, in the name of religion, because they have a different opinion or belief, just as they were in the 16th and 17th centuries, with the same barbarity, even if the religious motives – and this is new – are not always openly admitted. And so it is as if religion was leading people to war or preparing them for it, as if war and violence were inseparable from religion and as if, in order to have peace in the world, it was necessary either to reform religion or to eradicate it, as Rousseau had already suggested when he devoted the final chapter of *The Social Contract* to civil religion, convinced as he was that the spirit of religion is naturally unsociable and constitutes a threat to the state's foundations.

It cannot be said that current conflicts connected with religion serve religion's interests, which have already been profoundly shaken by the advances of the Enlightenment and science. Religious authorities' call for inter-religious dialogue may be the sign that they have become conscious of their responsibility for the future of peace in the world. The Catholic Church has recently not passed up the opportunity to stress its desire to enter into dialogue with all cultures and all religions. It has recognized officially the spiritual, moral and socio-cultural values of other religions such as Judaism and Islam, and invited their representatives to a 'frank' and 'sincere' dialogue, as can be seen from the following statement:

> Though many arguments and enmities between Christians and Muslims have appeared over the centuries, the Council exhorts them all to forget the past and to try sincerely to reach mutual understanding, as well as to protect and promote together, for all human beings, social justice, moral values, peace and freedom. (Aucante 2008: 19)

This strategy has been confirmed and illustrated several times by the Pope's speeches.

The reactions of Muslim religious authorities and intellectuals to Benedict XVI's speech, delivered on 12 September 2006 in Regensburg, though critical, were accompanied by statements supporting a genuine dialogue, like the one penned by the authors of the 'Open letter to Pope Benedict XVI, 13 October 2006':

> We share your desire for a frank and sincere dialogue and we acknowledge its importance in an increasingly interconnected world. On that frank, sincere dialogue we hope to continue to build peaceful, friendly relations based on mutual respect, justice and the common foundation of the Abrahamic tradition we share . . . (Aucante 2008: 127)

And so the question is: what should we expect, what should we hope for from inter-religious dialogue? If toleration, the child of the Enlightenment and critical reason, which is based on the distinction between the order of reason and that of faith, has not won out once for all in a rational, technical world, we might wonder whether that is because faith has been neglected. In other words, peace is also the business of religion. So could faith be the antidote to intolerance? Drawing the conclusion from the distinction between reason and faith that they are antagonists has not led to eradicating intolerance from the human mind. What can faith do?

We shall first ask ourselves what religion is, then we shall look into history to see if there have been periods when together religions have been factors for progress and peace, and finally we shall examine how faith can conquer religious intolerance.

I

What is religion? I shall not spend long on the definition of religion, which in any case is well known. I shall base my argument on a text by Claude Lévi-Strauss in chapter 15 of *Tristes tropiques*, whose title is: 'Earth and humanity'. The ethnologist is in India. He describes for us the towns he has visited. He is impressed by the multitude, the huge, dense crowds filling the streets, whose vast number does not prevent

them from getting on with the normal, varied activities of ordinary life. So he asks how they can exist in so small a space. Here is life on a 'pocket handkerchief'. What makes that possible? Only an intense spiritual life can explain it. Thus his observation leads him to uncover those people's highly spiritual values such as hospitality and community, respect for others. Where do they get these values?

How should we interpret otherwise the ease with which these people take their place in the cosmos? Here is the civilization of the prayer-mat that represents the world, or the square drawn on the ground that defines a place of worship . . . To be able to bear this there must be a very strong, very personal connection with the supernatural, and it is here that lies perhaps one of the secrets of Islam and the other religions of this region of the world – the fact that all individuals constantly feel themselves to be in the presence of their God (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 161).

Religion is defined here by the very personal connection with the supernatural. It is a link, what connects believers with their God, through prayer, without any intermediary, with the beyond, Transcendence. This is the essence. A simple prayer-mat suffices. It is the only sacred space that is fitting for God, a prayer-mat or a square drawn on the ground. The prayer-mat space is not the one for our daily survival activities. That space belongs to everyone. It is the place where life happens but where wars do too. God asks only for a prayer-mat. He would be happy with a temple as well, a synagogue, a mosque, a church to receive the worship due to him. The prayer-mat space is not a space for conquest, domination, power, war, but rather for peace, fraternity. In this text from *Tristes tropiques* Islam is defined as the prayer-mat civilization. That is to say that religion is culture, it is the first expression of culture which represents the world.

What is the world? As Jacques Derrida reminds us, the world is the totality of the earth and all of history, the humanity of mankind, the rights of men and women, the political and cultural organization of society, the difference between humans, God and animals, the phenomenality of the day, the value of life, the right to life, the treatment of death . . . That is culture. All the values of civilization. Thus religion is not independent of civilization. Present from the beginning in relations between people, between people and nature, people and the environment, it dictates their rules for behaviour, shapes their representation of the world. It breathes life into them. It is a social fact, a social institution that has a more or less complex administration, and rituals, organized worship, theological dogmas and commentaries, art. All these elements help to create a community and a community spirit.

We might conclude by pointing out that religion is a link that unites the spirit of piety, belief in God, faith in god and community spirit, that is, the social and historical organization of worship. These two features are essential, so that we cannot give the name religion to a belief in God that is not embodied in an institution, a religious community. Let us go further and leave the text we have just quoted for a moment. Not all religions are identical. Referring to the classification adopted by historians of religion, Edmond Ortigues distinguishes religions of the Book from religions of Custom. This classification depends on the way religions are communicated or transmitted.

The religions of the Book are the monotheistic ones: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. These are the missionary religions based on belief, faith in God as revealed in scrip-

tures, dogmas, truths that are to be provided with commentaries and to be communicated through preaching, broadcast to all nations. For each of these three monotheistic religions scripture is the locus of authority. Each claims to be the religion of a people with whom God has made an alliance, which is covered by the phrases: 'chosen people', 'baptised people', 'people of believers', as opposed to or excluding others, infidels, atheists, pagans. The very notion of chosen people, baptised or believers introduces into the mind, to use Régis Debray's expression, an idea of 'being closed in' on oneself, different from one's neighbour, and therefore the idea of 'territoriality', 'mental border' (Debray & Bricmont 2003: 131).

This idea of 'territoriality', even if mental, which is associated with monotheism's missionary character on which its claim to universality rests, represents a package that carries the risk of intolerance and thus of violence. Indeed monotheism states the existence of one God conceived as the God of a single people who, by the preaching of their faithful, extend their domination over others. There is a risk of intolerance and violence if the chosen people end up confusing or identifying God's cause with their own interests, thus seeing as God's enemies those of another belief.

The religions of Custom on the other hand are ethnic religions, religions of the home transmitted through ancestral custom. They are distinguished from religions of individual salvation, which, as we have just seen, are transmitted through doctrinal preaching with a universal intention. On the contrary the customary religions are characterized by the cult of ancestors, that is, the continuity of life, the continuity of a society. They connect the living and the dead. By sacrificing to the ancestors, what people are seeking is not individual immortality, personal salvation. They are seeking instead union with the ancestors. Indeed there is a kinship bond with the ancestor. An emotional bond. We see clearly here that religious piety is first and foremost a filial sentiment that binds us to our relations, our ancestors, before being diverted to God. The ancestor is not the God. The emotional and religious bond is primary compared with the spirit of piety that connects us with God, the one God.

So what is universal, the only absolutely universal fact found in all societies, is religions of custom, ethnic religions, ancestor worship, religions of the home, to which most African religions belong. They continue to nourish with their milk from the people the great missionary religions, which would not have been able to hold on very long without them, because religion is what unites living and dead (Ortigues 1999).

Nevertheless we need to add, before we go further, that the customary religions are different from the religions of the Book in that they do not have any creed. This is an important factor: ancestor religion cannot be 'exported' as a doctrine would be. For this reason, and compared with our problem, it does not contain within it the risk of intolerance, violence, domination – a risk that, on the contrary, is very present, and in an identical form, in the three missionary religions, the three monotheisms. Because it has to do with home, the family, the clan or the ethnic group, customary religion is not intended to be exported or imposed on others as the only true way. Paradoxically it reveals the universal essence of religion, which is to unite all human beings, not based on a doctrine or dogma but on the mutual acknowledgement of their belonging to the same humanity: religion, as Edmond Ortigues stresses, is what unites living and dead. It is universal because it exists in all societies but also because

it carries the idea of the universal community of humans, the bond between living and dead, between this world and the beyond. Though the religions of the Book aspire to universality and though, as missionary religions, they may have the ambition to embrace the whole of the human race, that aspiration also seems to depend on the exclusion of other religions.

II

The question we need to ask now concerns the coexistence of religions at those periods of history when together they represented factors for progress and peace. Such periods have occurred even if they were brief. Returning to the text of *Tristes tropiques*, we find Islam is presented there as a religion coexisting with others such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Those Indian religions obey a different tradition. They talk of 'revelations' and have produced sacred writings, but they are not the same as the monotheistic religions' scriptures because the source, the absolute origin of those sacred writings is not accessible to us. In the monotheistic religions, those of the Book, god is both the object of adoration and the source of revelation. But it would be difficult for Hinduism, whose origins are spread out over millennia, to find an absolute beginning, whether in the form of scripture or prophetic founding preaching. Each of the three monotheistic religions refers us back to a founder. They are able to go back through the line of their prophets and identify their absolute beginning. This is not the case with India's religions.

What the ethnologist notes, and what interests us, is the cohabitation of monotheistic Islam with local religions. He points out that they share the same 'secret', a common rule: 'that individuals all should feel they are constantly in the presence of their God'. It is obedience to this rule that guarantees friendly coexistence between religions and thus peace, freedom of worship, freedom of conscience. Here it is not a matter of coexisting in an indifference that would then be a disguised intolerance. Friendly coexistence implies sympathy with others, understanding of others, love for others. This is what characterizes toleration. Indeed it requires that we go beyond accepting others' existence to the point of acknowledging what makes them different, that is, what makes them have a different viewpoint, a different belief, a different faith, a different origin from ourselves. It implies the need to go beyond simple coexistence in indifference to the point of acknowledging and welcoming others. So what is toleration? In concrete terms being tolerant means recognizing the plurality of beliefs. It means accepting that other beliefs are possible and that we are not the only ones possessing a truth conceived as the sole truth.

The famous axiom often invoked: 'The truth has rights, error has none', should be amended. In the past it has served to feed intolerance. To refuse the right to error is thus to believe that in theology every new thinking, every new interpretation is heresy, and the heretic is an enemy of the faith, the adversary who has to be fought. But truth and error exist only in a judgement. The only holder of rights is the person and never a truth conceived in itself and separated from the free human effort to reach it. Truth and error exist only in the affirmation of a reality by a subject. If we are made for truth we should then give subjects the rights they need to exercise

their intelligence. We should recognize their right to truth but also their right to error. Refusing them those rights means removing them from the path to any kind of truth.

What emerges from that text is the culture of hospitality in that overpopulated region of the world. Though there are too many inhabitants and too little space, there is no hatred or fear of the stranger. Even more, what the ethnologist tells us he notes when the stranger passes 'is the courtesy of smiles . . . often accompanied in a Muslim area by a « salaam » with a touch of the hand to the forehead'. The touch of hand to forehead has a superior, spiritual value. It is the sign recognizing that we belong to the same family, the same spiritual and religious, or simply human, community, a sign of the respect due to every human being. This sense of welcome, hospitality, this benevolent attitude to strangers, to others, is here acknowledged as a basic value of Islamic culture.

And so the 'secret' Islam shares with the region's religions ensures a friendly coexistence. It corresponds to a widely accepted opinion, for example in antiquity: 'that all peoples venerate their ancestors' gods'. Thus the ban on sacrificing to 'strange gods' may be a matter of life or death. Nevertheless it does not imply that the 'strange gods' are false gods. That is how monolatry is distinguished from monotheism. Monolatry is exclusive worship of the national god. Monotheism is exclusive worship of one true god. Once again it is about the truth that sets monotheism apart and defines it by excluding strange gods and exalting the transcendence of God, emphasizing a chosen people selected among all others. But though it is a monotheistic religion, Islam has managed to be tolerant of other religions and abide by a tradition of hospitality. In that region of the world religions have therefore been factors for concord. The same is true of other regions. Vincent Monteil, who lived for a long time in Africa, especially Senegal, describes in his book *L'Islam noir* the encounter between Islam and African customary religions. He recalls that after the *jihad* period that encounter occurred in an atmosphere of respect for customary beliefs, even where there were conversions. He concludes that Islam is not seen in Africa as a 'strange' religion. For most people it is 'the religion of the heart'.

Our text from *Tristes tropiques* privileges the example of Islam. But in reviewing the history of the three monotheistic religions we see that they also went through exceptional times when together they were factors for progress, maintaining relations of hospitality and friendliness. Those periods may be rare but they have occurred. In her 'Réflexions d'une hispanique' Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux describes one of those periods. At the time the city of Toledo in Spain had become a meeting place where Arab scholars, with the help of Christian translators, had undertaken to provide access to Hindu, Persian, Coptic and Greek texts, and above all disseminate the wisdom of Isidore of Seville throughout the Islamic world by turning it from Latin into that philosophical language, Arabic. She writes that there was a real interpenetration between east and west. That cohabitation produced a brilliant culture in every field – metaphysics, astronomy, astrology, sciences of the body and of nature. Toledo was a privileged site for the cross-fertilization of peoples and cultures.

In the history of this region of the Mediterranean it is possible to mention other cities to the east of Spain which had the same role as Toledo. At an earlier period Alexandria or Hippo were places noted for a similar cross-fertilization. But Toledo's

influence, which dates from several centuries later, is special. It has the particular feature of showing the coexistence of the three monotheistic religions. That unique moment of coexistence and dialogue between the three monotheistic religions was to be swept away by a violent eruption causing Spain, the country where an open tolerant Europe might have been born, to abandon its mission and in 1492 to take the tragic decision to expel the Jews. This development is indeed recalled by Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux in her 'Réflexions'. Thus, through radicalizing intolerance, Spain put an end to that historic and unique moment. It bears the responsibility for introducing intolerance into the Americas, which it reached in the same year, 1492, carried by the triumph of Castilian Catholicism. We know about the treatment of the local people, who were decimated when they were not compelled to convert.

The decision of 1492 had been prepared by earlier processes, which were characterized by conversions to Catholicism after the 1391 pogroms, the migration of Jews to other countries such as Portugal, North Africa and France. A few years before, in 1480, the Inquisition had been tasked with tracking down and unmasking those who were called *conversos* and who secretly practised Judaism. Expelled from Spain, the Jews suffered the same fate in Portugal in 1496. They proceeded to spread through the Mediterranean world and also to England, northern Europe and America. They were welcomed in Islamic North Africa and by the Ottoman rulers. There, as in Thessaloniki, which became the new Sephardic capital, they enjoyed freedom and autonomy.

These examples prove to us that the religions of the Book are not congenitally incapable of toleration. During brief periods of history they managed to show they could be factors for progress, solidarity and peace between human beings.

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III

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So how should we understand the fact that still today these religions can be rivals and even factors for intolerance and conflict? How should we understand the fact that religions which make love and forgiveness their ideal could have committed the worst crimes, and still allow them to be committed in their name? A new element, pointed out by Jacques Derrida, is that in their rivalry not one of them fails to use the powerful modern communication media. We are witnessing an unprecedented situation, which Derrida sees as a 'new form of religious war'. Indeed he thinks that what is going on behind the competition between the great media companies is a new form of religious war between the three monotheistic religions for world control and domination. They are being unleashed, he says,

> on the earth inhabited by humans (which is not the world) and even today are fighting to control the skies with hand and eye, a virtually immediate digital system and panoptic view, aerial space, telecommunication satellites, information superhighways, a concentration of capitalist-media powers, in a word digital culture, media and tv, without which there is no religious presence today, for instance there is no journey or speech by the pope, no organized appearance of the Jewish, Christian or Muslim faith, whether 'fundamentalist' or not, that is not broadcast by those modern communication tools. (Derrida & Vattimo 1996: 35)

Benedict XVI's recent speech, delivered on 12 September 2006 in Regensburg, illustrates this. That controversial lecture would not have received such worldwide publicity if it had not been amplified by the media. His predecessor John Paul II managed to use effectively a technique that had been perfectly mastered by the communist regimes of the eastern bloc. The success of his trips should be attributed as much to the media as to the ardour of the faithful. The media were attracted by the success they helped in large measure to create. The worldwide success of the World Youth Days initiated by John Paul is still today inseparable from their media prominence. Analysing this unprecedented situation represented by the alliance between religion and tele-technoscience, Derrida compares it to 'radical sickness'. Religion is on one hand 'globalatinization; it produces, allies itself with, exploits the telemedia's capital and know-how: otherwise neither the pope's journeys nor his transformation into a worldwide spectacle, nor the international dimensions of the "Rushdie affair", nor global terrorism would be possible at the same speed . . .'. But on the other hand religion resists, reacts against this alliance while giving it this new power, protects it by strengthening it but at the same time threatens it, forcing it to react and defend itself. To borrow a metaphor from biology, there is a kind of dual contradictory structure, both immune and auto-immune, which religion has to assume (Derrida & Vattimo 1996: 62).

In the text from *Tristes tropiques* I have quoted it is Islam that the ethnologist presents as being in perfect cohabitation with the region's religions. But in the book's final chapters Claude Lévi-Strauss notes, coming back to relations between Islam and Buddhism, that those two great religions both claim universality. One of them turns dogmatic and sectarian as it becomes universal and reaches its goal. The other, Buddhism, avoids intolerance because it accepts that it is possible to be both a Buddhist and something else. Islam does not escape; however it was in fact Islam that invented toleration in the Middle East. We should remember the welcome given by Muslim countries and rulers to Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal, and also to Christians.

The fact that religious intolerance feeds many current conflicts is proof that, despite the Enlightenment, toleration has not completely triumphed once for all. It is a point that does not escape Régis Debray and Jean Bricmont, and one they stress in their interview published in 2003. Debray admits that

> In the 1970s, as I travelled around the Arab-Muslim world, I was struck by the fact that fundamentalists were being recruited essentially from faculties of science and technology. It was the same in Cairo, Tunis, Algiers, Damascus. And it was in the faculties of literature, history, human sciences and theology that progressives were to be found. The roles were reversed. When you met literature students they were rationalists. This reversal has been verified since. We know that the leaders of fundamentalist parties went through MIT, Harvard and other great institutions devoted to efficiency and precision, just as Bombay computer scientists vote en masse for the Hinduist BJP. (Debray & Bricmont 2003: 149)

How can we explain that a mind fed on science and trained in modern rationality should behave so irrationally in the name of faith? Jean Bricmont, the physicist, provides us with an explanation. In his view the teaching of technology can be carried out by stressing 'what works' and so leaving out what is subversive in the scien-

tific approach to religion, that is the notion of truth and the need to test opinions empirically. Here Jean Bricmont emphasizes the education and training of scholars which too often targets what is useful – technological skills – and neglects the essential contribution of science to the mind, criticism, attachment to evidence, refusal to accept the appeal to authority, the search for truth and the need to test every opinion through experience.

Descartes made the same observation when, in the first part of *Discours de la méthode*, he deplored 'the failure of culture' in his time, regretting that on such a sure science as mathematics 'with such firm, solid foundations' nothing higher had been built than practical applications like the art of fortifications, that of surveying and drawing up plans . . . We should not mistake Descartes's disappointment. It was certainly not that of a consciousness hungry for technology but for something higher and related to Jean Bricmont's observation. In fact his remark is a criticism of the teaching of the sciences to scientists, just as Descartes criticized mathematics teaching in Jesuit schools. But in my view it could also mean that an overweening, triumphant reason which is too sure of itself, to the point where it contemptuously turns away from faith, achieves the opposite result to the one it expects. By convincing ourselves that the debate between science and faith has been finally resolved to reason's advantage we have instead promoted the return of the irrational, of religious intolerance.

When Descartes, the scholar and metaphysician, demonstrated the existence of God it might have been thought that unwittingly he was putting 'a fly in the ointment'. His distinction between reason and faith never meant for him an opposition, or a mutual exclusion, between the two words. The distinction means autonomy and not independence. The great Arnauld, author of the *Logique de Port-Royal*, had understood this very well, because in his philosophical and theological controversies he had defended cartesian orthodoxy most vigorously against the daring metaphysical thesis of Malebranche, whose fusional and unifying conception of reason and faith was based precisely on disobeying the distinction between the two orders, thus compromising the advantages religion might take from cartesianism. In answer to those who condemn reason to error, even in mathemtics, if it is not 'God's disciple', Arnauld recommends that they refrain from attributing to the church, 'out of misunderstood piety . . ., an authority to judge in matters that are not its domain . . .' (Arnauld 1775–83: 98). In the matter of Galileo, whom he supported, Arnauld quite naturally took the heliocentrist position, showing 'liberalism and farsightedness'. He shared the same opinion as Pascal and Malebranche. It was a sign of victory for Copernicus, who emerged victorious from the conflict between theology and cosmology. However on the issue of the distinction between reason and faith, our three classical thinkers, Arnauld, Malebranche and Pascal, do not give the same meaning to the distinction. On this point Arnauld is the most cartesian.

Their 17th-century heirs, the philosophers of the Enlightenment, thought that to end religious intolerance it was enough to make do with a 'natural religion', rational, independent of any institutional support and therefore, to quote Rousseau, 'without temples, without altars, without rites, restricted to purely internal worship of the supreme God and the eternal duties of morality'. In his *Difficultés sur la religion*, *proposées au R. Père Malebranche*, one of deism's precursors in France, Robert Challe,

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also known by the pseudonym Philosopher-soldier, criticized the metaphysicians for their metaphysical extravagances, which led to atheism and fostered endless disputes and violence. His criticisms anticipate those of Rousseau, who agreed with the Philosopher-soldier in challenging the dogmas on which religion as an institution rested. In attacking this aspect of religion, dogmatic faith, Enlightenment philosophers saw quite well that that was the element by which intolerance might take root. And so they tried to construct a natural religion without institutional support. By doing so they displayed a certain misunderstanding as to what religion is; as we have seen, it cannot exist without its institutional, that is, its historical and social, character. The failure of Enlightment philosophers was thus inevitable.

It was thought that with the Enlightment and the promise of a better world, a world of progress which it foreshadowed, religion was gradually going to disappear because of the victory of 'light' over 'shadow'. After some perods of 'disenchantment' in some parts of the world, now the 'shadow', religion, which had been labelled 'foolishness and nonsense', 'mystification', is making a comeback and is still with us. Régis Debray, author of that criticism, nonetheless recognizes that, despite his harsh judgement, 'the important thing is to understand why this incongruity is returning today contrary to the glorious withering away our great forerunners predicted'. So we have to undertake a new adventure in relations between reason and faith.

In his *Entretiens avec Gwendoline Jarczyk* (1999) Claude Geffré, a contemporary theologian conscious of the issues, pertinently stresses the responsiblity of religions for the future of peace in the world:

> It is important that, instead of struggling against one another to extend their influence, religious traditions should recognize their common historical responsibility for the destiny of mankind. Indeed beyond international institutions, political and cultural mediations, religions must put their spiritual resources at the service of a coexistence between people by promoting in particular a spirit of peace, an education for that peace, which is the condition for peaceful coexistence. (Geffré 1999)

The spirit of peace is the spirit of unity, the spirit of dialogue which the religions have the duty to defend against war, against intolerance, at the risk of denying themselves in their essence of spiritual communion if they happen to fail in their mission. The monotheistic religions must first resolve the contradiction between the universal reach of revelation and acceptance of the plurality of faiths. On this condition a genuine inter-religious dialogue is possible. Organizing that dialogue already means adopting the attitude of ruling out any idea of conversion and making inevitable each person's necessary internal and critical deepening of their own faith. Indeed what would be the effect of an inter-religious dialogue if even one of the religious traditions involved did not make space within itself for a critical dialogue among its disciples? At the base of an inter-religious dialogue, which should not exclude any religious tradition, there is the affirmation of freedom of conscience, freedom of mind, which is not simply a rationalist claim but is today identified with hopes for communication, spiritual circulation between human beings.

Indeed humanity is what circulates from person to person, is accomplished in that very circulation, and is the monopoly of no one, because in each one it belongs to all

and to all in each one. It is the law of the Word in the noblest sense of the term, the law of communication and spiritual circulation between people, the law of *logos* and reason. If religion gives up on that, it would mean not only being prevented from defining itself in its essence of spiritual communion but, graver still, reducing faith to a simple opinion. The dialogue should be a dialogue of reason. In response to my initial question, only a reflective and questioning faith in each person, questioning and public, can be the antidote to intolerance.

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