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**"MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS:  
HOW CAN WE LIVE TOGETHER?"**

**SYMPHONY AND HETEROPHONY  
AMONG RELIGIONS**

**DEMARCATIION LINE BETWEEN RELIGIOSITY AND FUNDAMENTALISM**

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# SYMPHONY AND HETEROPHONY AMONG RELIGIONS

## DEMARCATION LINE BETWEEN RELIGIOSITY AND FUNDAMENTALISM

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### Introduction

Religion existed ever since man existed. It is inheritant to man’s nature. In fact, the first movement of man’s intelligence is to define the relation with the creator of the universe. The universe preceeded man into existence. Therefore, each time that man comes to admire the creation, he is driven to confess the almighty Creator. This sensitivity to the Creator’s presence urges man, on one side, to define His attributes, and on the other side, to seek His will in creating man and the universe. In this perspective, religions form a diversity of roads leading towards conviviality among men in a way that complies to the Creator. At any rate the plurality of visions among religions should not reach the point of confrontation, as it happens to be many times, offending the religion it self and giving birth to religious fundamentalism.

Religious fundamentalism rises from confinement to one’s self (ghetto), and disdaining any other. It has two forms, “*intellectual fundamentalism*” and “*racial or ethnic fundamentalism*”.

“*Intellectual fundamentalism*” excludes from its principles the universal vision of God, creator and unique. Besides, it refuses categorically any possibility of worshiping God except under its own prescriptions and according to its own faith. In this perspective, any intellectual difference puts the light not only on cultural differences, but on an existential separation much more profound, leading deliberately to the religious suppression of the other.

On the other hand, “*racial or ethnic fundamentalism*” speaks of a God who is father of a party, excluding any other party from His paternity. This leads to the fact that one’s racial or ethnic membership to any other party gives justification to his extermination.

In this occurrence, religious wars motivated by racial or dogmatic background clearly show the reality in which religion, in some dark ages, came to sink. Nevertheless, such deviations were not generated by the religious principle itself, but more by mastery of personal interests over the truth proclaimed by these religions. If religions were wholesome, it was not the same for their acolytes.

What is evident and simultaneously escapes from religious fundamentalism’s scope is that religious authenticity resides in a deeper comprehension of the truth that religion proclaims. Religion is the resultant of man’s response to the divine initiative first revealed at creation. This initiative should stimulate a suitable human response which is nothing else than faith. Otherwise, neither God would be the Unique, nor its creature would be this universe in its extension and uniqueness. On the other hand, one should expect that man’s response to such an appeal would not be uniform. It is quite natural that the divine appeal would have different repercussions on man’s level, since every one has a different expression related to various parameters such as traditions, cultures, etc, independently from the place and the way that underlie such an expression.

Generally, one common characteristic to the three monotheistic religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is their unanimity about God’s uniqueness. God’s uniqueness excludes the presence of any other divinity, in spite of the diversity of languages, exegesis, scriptures that describe God and relation with Him. Indeed, **universality** is a basic characteristic of the three religions.

Moreover, because the three of them consider religion as a spiritual matter which is not exclusive to a particular nation or a given social class, then one can speak about their second characteristic, i.e. **globalization**.

Furthermore, since they admit the possibility that God can engage a dialogue with those who could not get the message of one religion, confessing that God may use different means with them than those we know, one can distinguish their third characteristic, i.e. **plurality**.

This trinity of attributes of the three monotheistic religions, i.e. universality, globalization and plurality, is in fact the **secure factor** against the development of any kind of fundamentalism. It is the proper background for these religion where veracity and fertility can flourish, whereas their absence opens the way wide for religion to sink into the sterility of fundamentalism.

## 1- UNIVERSALITY

It is the belief that the true God is the Unique and the Creator. God has a purpose in creating the universe. He takes care of it, and He is the sole one to govern it. He leads the creation to its final end, which is salvation and communion with Him.

In the Old Testament, when Moses asked God about His name, he heard: “*I am who I am*” (*Exodus 3:14*). It is a sharp distinction between the true God who refuses any human appellation, and the different other divinities whom man named, even though they are illusory.

The very characteristic of universality is God's uniqueness, excluding the presence of any other divinity. In fact, despite that many religions proclaim to be the sole agent of believing in God, any how, altogether they designate the same God. "*All the religions are like different ropes that God holds in His hands in order to attract men to Him*", as says a Christian writer. On the other hand, as stated by the Apostle Paul: "*When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves*" (*Epistle to the Romans 2:14*). These will be judged according to their faith. In Athens, he will try to identify the "unknown God" to be the true and unique God (*Acts of the Apostles 17:22-28*).

## 2-GLOBALIZATION

It is the belief that divine providence, on the basis that God is unique and the creator, serves and includes all men without exceptions. Since God and the salvation that He offers are two universal principals, therefore they are at every man's disposition. The appeal to faith and the membership to a religion are a task that overcomes race, language and place.

During the three years of Jesus' preaching on earth, it seems that He, taking somehow the Jews into consideration, appeared to have come exclusively for the misled sheep of Israel and to have ordered His disciples to start preaching from Judea, without entering the cities of Samaria.

However, at the end of His life on earth, and especially after His resurrection, He ordered His disciples to go and preach in Jerusalem, Samaria and to the end of the earth, teaching them to baptize all the nations (*Matthew 28:19*). The Apostles, and especially Saint Paul, were conscious of that responsibility. From that time, Christianity expanded outside the Jewish world and reached progressively almost every man.

Saint Paul affirms solemnly and without ambiguity that Christianity can not be restricted to the Jews only, but is destined to all nations. If Saint Paul started his preaching from the Jewish synagogues, he was not restricted to them, a fact that led inevitably to his persecution. On the other hand, there are some divine revelations that urged the Apostle Peter, when Cornelius and his house got baptized, not to consider those from outside as impure, but to go forward and announce to them the Good News (*Acts of the Apostles 10:1-48*).

Simultaneously, Islam is a universal religion, even though universalism made its appearance gradually. In fact, one can see how God ordered the Prophet Mohamed to proclaim his message, first, to his closest tribe (*Sourat Al Shou'ara 26,214*), then go forward towards the queen of the cities, the Maqqeh, and its surroundings, and only afterwards to preach to all men: ("*يا ايها الناس اني رسول الله اليكم جميعا*"), "*All of you, I am God's messenger to you all*" (*Sourat Al Aaraf 7,158*). If Jesus sent His disciples to

proclaim the Gospel to all nations, by the same token, the Prophet of Islam was sent as a messenger of mercy towards all creation (*Sourat Al Anbiya* 21,107).

### 3- PLURALITY

It is the belief that God uses different manners considering man. There are, in fact, many ways through which men can have recourse to God.

It is natural that Christianity considers itself as the plenitude of divine revelation, because "*long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son*" (*Epistle to the Hebrews* 1:1-2). Any way, Christianity believes that those to whom the Good News of the New Testament or the prophetic proclamation of the Old Testament was unknown, would not be deprived from the willingness of the divine providence to perfect their salvation. Christianity considers itself as the shortest road, the clearest and the most guaranteed to reach the knowledge of God. Moreover, it considers that God uses many ways where the evangelic preaching could not be heard. In fact, God "*sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous*" (*Matthew* 5:45). Jesus came towards the Canaanite woman and spoke to her according to her 'faith' and not according to her religion.

The great Fathers of the Church, especially those of the first three centuries A.D., have developed a teaching about 'the spermatic logos'. According to this teaching, God sows his 'verb' among men and in all the civilizations. Therefore, someone can find in each civilization, in each religion, a germ of God's truth sown here and there. Even Philosophy contains some germ of the truth that God sew. In this regard, the truths proclaimed by Philosophies and by the Philosophers are the result of the fecundation of the divine verb in the midst of human history, until time reached Christ, preparing this way humanity to His coming. If Christianity considers itself as the vessel where rested all the plenitude of divine truth and revelation, it stands listening carefully to the divine echoes and messages from other religions and cultures, since they are potential carriers of divine and salutary truths.

On the other hand, Islam believes in the diversity of divine apostleship, whose end and seal is reached in Islam. The Koran did not suppress the other religions, but established the criteria that lead to the identification of the truthfulness of the other religions, which are the belief in one unique God, the last day, and good work. On the other hand, the Koran considers that the truth proclaimed by the different religions is the same, in the perspective that any dispute among men will vanish on the day of the resurrection. In fact it is written: "*God is your recourse, He will show you what your dispute was about*" (*Sourat Al Ma'idat* 5,48). Generally, the Koran sees in the cultural, ethnic and religious diversities, one of God's magnificence in His creation (*Sourat Al Roum* 30,22), since God could have made humanity one whole nation, if this was His will.

On the other hand, all the religions, Islam as well as Christianity, those who accept the presence of another belief, claim to have the place of honor. In this regard, one can observe a teaching that admits and tolerates the presence of the other, but also a teaching about the imperative to join this same religion and not any other. In this sense, if Christ says: "*I am the way and the truth and the life*" (John 14:6), then the Koran affirms: "*To God, religion is Islam*". If the Christian thought sees that the Word of God, i.e. Christ, has been sown within religions and philosophies, then the Muslim teachers explain this fact in two different ways; the first consists of the 'canonical Islam', whose messenger was the prophet Mohamed sent by God, whereas the second consists of the 'eternal Islam' which is the lot of all. Consequently, the Koran, accepting the divine origin of the Torah and of the Gospel, orders their believers respectively to follow exactly what God announced in their scriptures (Cf. *Sourat AL Ma'idat* 5:46-47, 68), considering itself as the seal of every scripture (*Sourat Al Ma'idat* 5,48).

## CONCLUSION

The sincere believer belonging to any religion, when considering other believes and their respective practice can not but confess that God did not speak to the ones and neglected the others. God embraces all the creation under His divine care and providence, and considers that His paternity exclude no one, despite the multitude of human languages which men address to their creator, the One who possesses the unique language, that of 'love'.

Moreover, the responsibility of religions has increased nowadays, much more than before. Unfortunately, fundamentalism has developed these days in many places; problems of public order are being discussed with a religious spirit that reflects the refuse of the other. All the non religious and non divine movements are based on the principal that gives liberty to the violation of the man's life and potentials, whereas the religions, especially the monotheistic ones, are called to spread the faith in a unique philanthropic God, who gets in the History in the favor of all without discrimination.

The Universal, Global and Pluralistic vision of the monotheistic religions is the solution of the world to come. Such a solution excludes any hypocrisy, since any inherit hypocrisy to a religion spoils the religion itself, and makes the language of human violation stronger than that of divine love, a fact that gives liberty to different political, racial and consuming movements to run the world instead of spiritual and human values.

The future of the world greatly depends on the openness of religions after a period of seclusion. An occasion like the one we are experiencing here is indeed a good initiative towards clearing any reserve between one another. Is not intellectual and racial confinement to one's self a good reason not to meet each other? Here, we would like to express our congratulations and thanks to Saint Egidio Community for organizing such meetings, hoping that this initiative will succeed and stimulate further developments in this

direction. We believe that these meetings are efficiently serving both religions and participants to these meetings.

In summery, hell in Christian perspective is the confinement to one’s self. It resembles somehow to a solitary man in a dark room decorated with many mirrors that reflect only his singular person deprived from every human presence.

On the other hand, on a larger scale, we can observe that the three monotheistic religions have the same origin, Abraham, the father of the believers and the friend of God. It is a important factor that keeps away fundamentalism from the bosom of these religions, stimulating not only a verbal dialogue, but even more an existential and live one, based on love and the freedom of man to follow the religion of his choice.

In conclusion, if the ‘other’ to the Existentialists is ‘my hell’, then, to Saint Seraphim Sarov, he is ‘my joy’. Only under the aegis of dialogue and of meeting could the true language of faith be achieved.