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THE GREATNESS AND MISERY OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: A HISTORICAL CRITIQUE OF AN UNPRECEDENTED EFFORT

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Abstract

The practice and theory of interreligious/interfaith dialogue as they emerge from the 21st century scholarship and its 20th century doctrinal references, the article deals with the real content of dialogue, its political implications, the toolbox of that unprecedented effort, and the role of the market surrounding dialogues. Peace among cultures and understanding among faiths is the core with some final considerations written from the point of view of the historian.

Keywords

Dialogue, Diplomacy, Culture, Consensus, Critique

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The purpose of this essay is to offer a critical overview of the contradictions and potential of a phenomenon which has been named using both different substantives (dialogue, encounter, fraternity) and different adjectives (interfaith, interreligious). It will use the paradigms and tools of the historian, and it will try to explain the long enduring, candid shallowness and dangerous superficiality, that may arise when the issue of religious difference and religious violence is *ex abrupto* removed from

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the domain of Scriptural hermeneutics and from the history of theological doctrines.

The overview, based on the scholarship of the 21st century and its 20th century doctrinal references, will deal with four issues:

1) the real content of what is called, even at the highest political level, interfaith or interreligious "dialogue" (*difinitio terminorum*);
2) how these dialogical ideas and practices interact with the status of multi-faith cohabitation in the shift between ethnicity and nations (*actio finium regundorum*);
3) the toolbox and the nature of an unprecedented effort to replace inter-religious and infra-religious violence with "dialogue" (the toolbox);
4) how some of the actors of dialogue compete in the public space as it has been created (the marketplace).

Some final considerations will offer three ideas (on cultures and faiths, on responsibility, on a non-Küngian of ethical consensus among cultures in the form of a *Parva Charta*) from the limited point of view of the historian.

1. *Definitio Terminorum*

Interfaith dialogue is a part of different diplomatic, academic, and international agendas, very diverse among themselves, belonging to different genealogies and oriented to different goals. However, they apparently share the view that this historical process can be used to demonstrate the beauty of idyllic truisms: peace is a "true" use of religion, violence is an "abuse" of religion. Such a noble approach is rewarded by public consensus and it collects the gentle applause of a worldwide audience: this ensures it is widespread.

Facts speak. Almost all religious communities have bodies and high officials committed to dialogue and a narrative of dialogue, one which aims to recover from past and present violence, and to praise peace, fraternity, and tolerance.[1] Almost all academic systems are more and more prepared to produce knowledge: they started specific teachings – in order to train lawyers, diplomats, theologians, historians, education practitioners and media experts – in disciplines starting with the Latin affix "inter-" or

[1] For a comparative approach, see *Understanding Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. by David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, David Thomas, Oxford-New York (Oxford UP) 2013.

"multi-".[2] Almost all international diplomatic actors and multilateral organizations are ready to invest in their own interfaith networks: institutes, offices, tables, fora, alliances, projects – even if dialogue between these networks is very scarce and the defense of competing trademarks is very strong.[3] The counter proof is that the great publishers have recently started to publish "companion" texts for a market which is growing.[4]

Even big multilaterals have accepted the trend: the United Nations is parent or part of the Alliance of Civilizations and Religions for Peace, UNESCO has a network of Chairs (the Unitwin) on Multicultural dialogue, OSCE, and even the G20 Summit, included an interfaith forum some years ago, named IF20 by Cole Durham Jr (and R20 by the Indonesian G20).[5] The privileged point of view that this author occupied during the last gathering of that organization, as Chair of the IF20 under an Italian presidency in Bologna in September 2021, confirmed that the entrance of "religion" (whatever it may mean) into the public debate has measurable consequences. Wherever these meeting are hosted, they are immersed in specific legislative contexts: e.g. in the 2021 case, it was a Union fostering the structured dialogue with religions and beliefs;[6] in

[2] Interfaith, multicultural, interreligious, etc.: see *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, ed. by Chad Meister, Oxford-New York (Oxford UP) 2013.

[3] See Karsten Lehmann, *Interreligious dialogue in international politics. From the margins of the religious field to the centre of civil society*, in *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society*, ed. by Jayeel Cornelio, François Gauthier, Thomas Martikainen, Linda Woodhead, New York-London (Routledge) 2020.

[4] See the previously quoted handbooks and, due to the article of Leo Swindler, also *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. by Catherine Cornille, Oxford (Blackwell) 2013.

[5] For the body's origins during the Obama Administration, see Lora Anne Viola, *"Systemically Significant States": Tracing the G20's Membership Category as a New Logic of Stratification in the International System*, in "Global Society" 34(2020)/3, pp. 335-352. In the G20 framework, an Interfaith Forum was launched by an association based in the US and governed by Cole W. Durham and Brett G. Scharffs of Brigham Young University, Provo, and Katherine Marshall of Georgetown University (see the website IF20.org for more details). The last European gathering of the G20 under Italian presidency was the occasion for the Fondazione per le scienze religiose (fscire.it) to prepare a IF20 forum with a very clear idea on how to involve scholars, diplomats and religious leaders at the same level.

[6] On the "structured dialogue" in accord with art. 17, see e.g. Kenneth Houston, *The Logic of Structured Dialogue between Religious Associations and the Institutions of the European Union*, in "Religion, State and Society" 37(2009), pp. 207-222. However, this is a minor aspect, because European history indicates that divergent constitutions and laws regarding the relationship between nation and religions share the same sensitivity about religious freedoms and sound the same alarm in the face of what violates them; furthermore, Europe's past of religious wars and colonial exploitation can offer moral warning; see a series of case studies in *Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission. From Decay to Recovery*, ed. by Michael Falser, Berlin (Springer) 2015.

other cases, it was States denying access to citizens of specific countries, like the countries discriminating against Israeli nationals. Whenever members of these fore meet, there is a *Zeitgeist* waiting for them: e.g. the Bologna IF20 came after one of the three scourges (that both old Jewish prayer and ancient Christian supplication ask God to avert: *a peste, fame, et bello libera nos, Domine* and not surprisingly even in the 21st century the same three catastrophes step in one after the other…).[7] More than all, religious experience involves by definition a community of peers and equals;[8] and their synchronic and diachronic experience must be represented not only by authorities of diverse ranking, usually called "religious leaders",[9] but at by a larger table resting on three pillars:[10] religious authorities,[11] political leaders, and scholars, open to all those who are demanding respect for the rights and dignity of every woman and every man who is the victim of unbearable injustice.[12]

[7] On the context of this prayer in the 14th-17th century, see the classic work Jean-Noel Biraben, *Les hommes et la peste en France et dans les pays européens et méditerranéens (Tome I: La peste dans l'histoire; Tome II: Les hommes face à la peste)*, Paris-La Haye (Mouton) 1976.

[8] Perceptive observations on this point are made by Ian Bremmer and Nouriel Roubini, *A G-Zero World. The New Economic Club Will Produce Conflict, Not Cooperation*, in "Foreign Affairs" March/April 2011, now on foreignaffairs.com *ad nomen*.

[9] Here, I have consciously replaced this wording with the expression "religious authorities" in order to emphasize that they do not pertain to a bureaucratic-hierarchical conception with a function in faith communities, but to the inner stature of those who possess such authority. (As Hillesum wrote, "as one disposes inwardly towards the cases of life – this determines your destiny, this is your life", see Isabella Adinolfi, *Etty Hillesum. La fortezza inespugnabile*, Genova (il Melangolo) 2011, p. 61). Religious illiteracy, then, explains and allows the reduction of religious experience to rudimentary dimensions and makes the vulnerability of crude and fragile souls a religious pornography produced via the web, which obsessively hammers on about details of identity, captures its consumers, makes them addicted, and compensates for their addiction by exaggerating the product supplied; see Neil Shortland, Elias Nader, Lisa Thompson and Marek Palasinski, *Is Extreme in the Eye of the Beholder? An Experimental Assessment of Extremist Cognitions*, in "Journal of Interpersonal Violence", September 22, 2020, pp. 1-24; on a national scale, see Mehmet F. Bastug, *Exploring the "Demand Side" of Online Radicalization: Evidence from the Canadian Context*, in "Studies in Conflict & Terrorism" 43(2020)/7, pp. 616-637; a naiver approach in *Religion online. Finding faith on the Internet*, ed. by Lorne L. Dawson, Douglas E. Cowan, New York-London (Routledge) 2004.

[10] The "pillars" is an expression common to different traditions: e.g. in *PirkeAvot* 1:2 "Shimon HaTzakik was of the remnants (last members) of the Great Assembly. He used to say: On three things the world stands. On Torah, on Service of G-d, and on deeds of kindness"; I thank Y. Mascetti for this reference.

[11] The preference for this wording is grounded in the theory of Roman Law, see *Auctoritas a Rome: Une notion constitutive de la culture politique*, ed. by Jean-Michel David, Frédéric Hurlet, Paris (Ausonius) 2020.

[12] One must explore the use of the euphemism "vulnerable" adopted for the people deprived of their rights or life. Concerning the fight for universal rights – rooted for believers and non-believers in the same domain of innermost decision – see how Pope Francis started this quest beginning from the "right to peace" defined during his visit to Bologna 2017; see Donna J. Perry, Christian Guillermet Fernández, David Fernández Puyana, *The right to life in peace: An essential condition for realizing the right to health*, in "Health and Human Rights Journal" 17(2015)/1, pp. 148-158, and the UN Declaration on the Human right to peace (A/C.3/71/L.29); on November 18, 2016; on the same right defined by pope Francis in Bologna in 2017, see Thomas Massaro, *The Peace Advocacy of Pope Francis: Jesuit Perspectives*, in "Journal of Jesuit Studies" 8(2021), pp. 523-546 and *"He Drinks from His Own Wells": The Jesuit Roots of the Ethical Teachings of Pope Francis*, in "Journal of Catholic Social Thought" 15(2018)/2, pp. 1-21 (republished in *Pope Francis: A Voice for Mercy, Justice, Love, and Care for the Earth*, ed. by Barbara E. Wall and Massimo Faggioli, *Pope Francis: A Voice for Mercy, Justice, Love, and Care for the Earth*, Maryknoll NY (Orbis Books) 2019, pp. 81-101.

2. *Actio Finium Regundorum*

Whatever it means, wherever it is hosted, interfaith dialogue is, in fact, taking place in a context where there is much discussion among leaders about the necessity and means of a new economic agenda that draws up the needs of an "ecological transition".[13] The Ecumenical Patriarchate gave a theological foundation to the environmental emergency alert – long before the onset of political consciousness – when in 1989 the European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel achieved a consensus on the "conciliar process on justice, peace, and the *integrity of creation*",[14] linking eschatology and ecology in an original, radical, and prophetic way. Today, it seems that only the third proposition of that triad is pressing. And instead of questioning the connections between the exploitation of resources and individual persons, of the environment and peoples, there has been an uncritical exaltation[15] of an energy transition – understood as a passage from heavy carbon exploitation to a green exploitation – supported by technologies that can reestablish the subordination of those countries that are unable to bear the costs of independent

[13] This expression, from anthropologist John W. Bennett, dates from 1976; in 2008, Rob Hopkins, who spent two and a half years at the Buddhist monastery in Pomaia, Tuscany, published a *Transition Handbook. From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience*, which seems to be the moment in which the vocabulary of ecological "transition" became more common.

[14] Maria G. Sereti, *The Contribution of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Configuration of an Ecumenical "Integral Ecology"*, in "The Ecumenical Review" 70 (2018)/4, pp. 617-626.

[15] The linguistic acting out in the vocabulary of "neutrality" is very interesting, both for its political resonances, see Richard J. Arneson, *Liberal neutrality on the good: An autopsy*, in *Perfectionism and Neutrality: Essays in Liberal Theory*, ed. by George Klosko, Steven Wall, Lanham MD (Rowman & Littlefield) 2003, pp. 191-218, and, as a more radical critique, Martin Lenz, *Neutralität: Ein hartnäckiger Mythos (nicht nur) in der Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung*, in "praefaktisch.de" *ad vocem*.

research[16] and whose younger generations, without political outlets, more easily engage in social rebellion and religious-based violence. This is the reason why the environmental emergency does not need religious leaders asking "to be heard",[17] but credible persons capable of defending the theological complexity of the primacy of justice (צדק צדק תרדף, Dt 16:20[18]). As demonstrated by the continuous theological fertility of thought of John Zizioulas, who was able to put the defense of creation in an eschatological perspective.[19] What he says for Christianity can be said for the great religious traditions: the point is to think of the planet as a place shared by the same human family and to distrust the mythologies of "nature"[20] that leave intact the gap between those who have had two hundred years for intense, polluting development and those countries that have had no way to engage in such abuse.

However, what affects the natural environment today is not only ongoing environmental climate change. There is a change at work in the intimate "ecosystem of faiths" and a change in the temperature of the religious atmosphere. Metaphorically, it can be described as a "religious climate change" and a "religious global warming".[21] Historical and also sociological observations confirm that the global temperature of religion is rising, not only in countries where political cynicism has financed and

[16] See the research project of the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) in partnership with the NGO Oxfam, on the distribution of consumption-related emissions in 117 countries between 1990 and 2005: Sivan Kartha, Eric Kemp-Benedict, Emily Ghosh, Anisha Nazareth, Tim Gore, *The Carbon Inequality Era. An assessment of the global distribution of consumption emissions among individuals from 1990 to 2015 and beyond*, Stockholm (SEI-Oxfam) 2020; see also Laura Brimont, Mathieu Saujot, *Ecological transition and inequalities, a democratic challenge*, in "Innovations for sustainable development – IDDRI Blog" 2020, *ad nomen auctoris*.

[17] See a flood of examples e.g. in Lauren Giella, *World's Religious Leaders Call on Nations to Set Larger Targets to Reduce Climate Change*, in "Newsweek" October 4, 2021 or the declaration *People of Faith Are Allies to Generation Equality*, in "actalliance.org", June 20, 2021.

[18] See Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book within the Book, Writing in Deuteronomy*, Leiden (Brill) 1997 and Massimo Giuliani, *La giustizia seguirai*, Firenze (Giuntina) 2017 on the connection between ethics and *halakah*.

[19] On the main inspirer of this approach see Robert Turner, *Eschatology and Truth*, New York-London (Routledge) 2007 and Jaroslav Skira, *The Ecological Bishop: John Zizioulas' Theology of Creation*, in "Toronto Journal of Theology" 19(2003)/2, pp. 199-214.

[20] On the origins and references of "deep ecology", see Catherine Larrère, *La question de l'écologie ou la querelle des naturalismes*, in "Cahiers philosophiques" no. 127, (2011)/4, pp. 63–79.

[21] See *Agree to differ*, UNESCO, Paris-London 2013, the UNESCO-Tudor Rose joint publication on the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022).

continues to finance militias and armies that blasphemously fight in the name of God, killing, torturing, and destroying,[22] but everywhere.

Religious climate change has defeated the illusion of mid-20th century sociology that saw secularization as an inescapable event, a blessed or cursed product of "*le magnifiche sorti e progressive*" (Giacomo Leopardi's "magnificent and progressive fate"). Religious climate change has shown that, without a new historical and theological way of thinking the burdens of the past and of the future, the post-secular West[23] has been unable to keep democratic cultures and rights in balance: after that what Gilles Kepel's best book named *La revanche de Dieu*. This is particularly true ever since said change began at the end of the 1970s, with the almost simultaneous rise to power of Menahem Begin, Jimmy Carter, Ruḥollāh Khomeynī, and Karol Wojtyła. Religious climate change has taught us that tending the dragon of "sacralized" war – as was done in the Iraq-Iranian war all long the *fitna* or in the mobilization of *Salafi* militias in the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s – produces epochal damage.[24] Religious climate change has accompanied the increase of religious "extreme events", which are multiplying across the planet, within and among families of faith. They are fueling the idolatry of those who worship violence[25] and making the hunger for peace and the thirst for justice ever sharper.

There is an indicator of this violence, which accompanies a religious global warming and which deserves to be underlined because of its nature and its link with the etiological narrative of Abel and Cain. I refer to acts of murder of unarmed individuals inside places of prayer. The list of such assaults, bombings, suicide attacks – where the murderers try to extort admiration, glory or Heaven from that type of cruel and bloody desecration – is nearly endless.[26] A research program started by the Foundation for Religious Studies (based in Bologna, Palermo and Venice) put together

[22] The five volumes of *The Fundamentalism Project*, ed. by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, Chicago (the University of Chicago Press) 1991-1995 opened the way for further research, as did *Encyclopaedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. by Brenda E. Brasher, New York-London (Routledge) 2001.

[23] On Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, see David Lyon, *Being Post-secular in the Social Sciences: Taylor's Social Imaginaries*, in "New Blackfriars" 91(2010), no. 1036, pp. 648-664.

[24] Gilles Kepel, *La revanche de Dieu. Chrétiens, Juifs et musulmans à la reconquête du monde*, Paris (Seuil) ²2003.

[25] See the review article by Henry Munson, *Religion and violence*, in "Religion" 35 (2005)/4, pp. 223-246.

[26] In the volume *Il martirio volontario. Una storia condivisa nell'ebraismo, nel cristianesimo e nell'islam*, "Cristianesimo nella storia" 27(2006)/1, a review article, pp. 335-351,

a list of these crimes from the past forty years, starting with the murder of little Stefano Taché in front of the Synagogue of Rome on October 9th, 1982, up to the massacres of 2022. In forty years, two thousand deadly attacks have been perpetrated in front of or inside places of worship; and many thousands of people have been killed, because they were there to pray, study, sing, or meditate. The list includes an endless sequence of murders that are not important for the historian if or when the victims are considered as martyrs, but as a case of caste crimes.[27] There are some activists who have indecently tried to divide up these crimes by noting the faith professed by the killers or the victims,[28] as if it were "useful" to demonstrate that some religions are more inclined to abuse God, while other faiths are more innocent, perhaps because they have been subject to more torture than others. But this approach is not only repugnant, it is false: what the victims ask from all those who have a ministry is only "to cry together" (a poetic image of Joel 2:17) and not to profit from it, committing a sin of the same magnitude as the perpetrators. In the desecration of prayer lies a unique and archetypal intentionality that demands not only a cumulative execration but also a shared memory by all those who are brothers and sisters of Cain and Abel, paying respect together to "the voice of thy brothers' blood" and trying to become "the builder of cities", as Genesis 4:17 myth defines the murderer.[29]

and introduction, pp. 9-15 and the essay *Il "martirio manufatto" nel Novecento*, in "Cristianesimo nella storia" 27(2006)/1, pp. 301-318.

[27] I am borrowing the definition from an essay by Giuseppe Dossetti on the Monte Sole massacre, perpetrated by the SS in September 1944 that took place a few kilometers from Bologna. On the theological work that Dossetti wrote see Enrico Galavotti, *La diaconia memoriale di Dossetti e Gherardi*, in *Luciano Gherardi. Un presbitero della Chiesa bolognese negli snodi civili ed ecclesiali del Novecento*, ed. by Simone Marchesani, Marzabotto (Zikkaron) 2020, pp. 275-288.

[28] The term, extended from the "Christophobia" adopted in 2003 in *A Christian Europe: An Exploratory Essay*, by Joseph H.H. Weiler and adopted since 2004 by the UN declaration, comes to the public debate through René Guitton, *Ces Chrétiens qu'on assassine*, Paris (Flammarion) 2009 translated as *Cristianofobia, La nuova persecuzione*, Torino (Lindau) 2010 – and later through conservative Catholicism, Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: A Faith under Attack*, London (Rider) 2012.

[29] I do not know of research on Abel named as "righteous", not as martyr, in the Latin liturgy; in a more general perspective, among the immense literature, I am indebted to *Caïn et Abel*, ed. Claude Birman, Chaires Mopsik, Jean Zacklad, Paris (Grasset) 1980; Johanna Erzberger, *Kain, Abel und Israel: Die Rezeption Von Gen 4,1–16 in Rabbinischen Midraschim*, Stuttgart (Kohlhammer Verlag) 2010; Pierre Gibert, *L'Espérance de Caïn*, Bayard, Paris 2002; for the anti-Semitic turn see Dominique Cerbelaud, *Cain et Abel: le renversement*, in "Recherches des sciences religieuses" 85(1997)/2, pp. 167175; Gilbert Dahan, *Exégèse chrétienne de la Bible au Moyen Âge et antijudaïsme?*, in "Le Genre humain" 56-57 (2016)/1–2, pp. 57-76; on the Augustinian interpretation see Philippe

The perverse mechanisms that lead to acts where religious delusions and/or political rage play a fundamental role in a killer's motivation need a scholarly approach to be dismantled. This can be considered as part of a double "redemption": i) The first redemption – if we want to take the word in accordance with Jewish hermeneutic – comes from the One who could give "a place and a name" (Is 56:5) to the victims or, as one may say in more secular wording, to offer a rigorous historical account in order to understand and to judge what exactly happened. ii) A second subordinate redemption comes when those who bear everyone in prayer can join the bruised silence of the Almighty with their own silence.[30] Violence against those at prayer, and violence in general, is a demanding object to understand: to classify it as an abuse of religion, it is easy and useless; much better to return to an old category of Ivan Illich who called it perversion of faith, in the light of the principle *corruptio optimi pessima*.[31] It is this move that should be studied historically and theologically in order to understand the apparently innocuous inattention (as we have learned from Christian anti-Semitism[32]) that hides an idolatry of the Self, denying the Other and preventing access to the Other *par excellence*.[33]

3. Toolbox

In fact, it is in response to the return of religious-based violence in recent decades that an unprecedented effort has been made to generate or regenerate peaceful coexistence between different faiths. This shared living

Cournault, *Commencements, fondations et origines des deux cités dans La Cité de Dieu de Saint Augustin*, in "Cahiers d'études du religieux. Recherches interdisciplinaires" 20(2018), "CIER" open edition; for more recent references, see André Wénin, *Caïn et Abel: Un recit des lectures*, in Jean-Marc Vercruysse, *Caïn et Abel*, Arras (Artois) 2020, pp. 15-40.

[30] A Paris conference offers a good introduction to *Rosenzweig aujourd'hui – "Nous et les autres"*, dir. by Myriam Bienenstock, Paris (Éditions de l'Éclat) 2011.

[31] See Fabio Milana, *Ivan Illich, Breaking the Silence*, published in English on the blog "New Scare City" and published as afterword to Ivan Illich, *Pervertimento del Cristianesimo, Conversazioni con David Cayley su vangelo, chiesa, modernità*, Macerata (Quodlibet) 2011.

[32] See Nina Valbousquet, *Tradition catholique et matrice de l'antisémitisme a l'époque contemporaine*, in "Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine" 62(2015)/2-3, pp. 63-88 and Giovanni Miccoli, *Antisemitismo e cattolicesimo*, Brescia (Morcelliana) 2013.

[33] For the role of that notion, see Lucie Hervieux, *Une theologie de l'alterite: Michel de Certeau*, in "Théologiques" 25(2017)/1, pp. 177-195; for a survey on Levinas' issues see Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics*, Ithaca (Cornell UP) 2005.

is not made possible only through juridical systems regulating inequality (*dhimmitude*, "tolerance"[34]) nor just through a Westernized idea of "religious freedom"[35], but also by means of the above-mentioned interreligious or interfaith "dialogue".

Instrumenta – Needless to say that these dialogues have had, or do have, enormous merits. There are among them countless variants, nuances, and differences: however, the historian of doctrines perceives that they work with just two typical intellectual tools. The first one is the prophetic tension of seeking what unites as opposed to what divides.[36] This tendency, having very ancient roots, has had important variations over the last century: the effort to think of our common descent from Abraham as a shared ground of encounter,[37] the commitment to peace as

[34] At the end of the 20th century the historical interest in the topic was very strong: for Western Europe after the *Glaubenspaltung*, see Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme*, Paris (Albin Michel) 1994: *Tolérance, pluralisme et histoire*, dir. by P. Dumouchel and B. Melkevik, Paris (L'Harmattan) 1998; a more general view may be found in Georges Corm, *Histoire du pluralisme religieux dans le bassin méditerranéen*, Paris (Geuthner) 1998; on the Andalou myth, see Maria Rosa Menocal, *L'Andalousie arabe. Une culture de la tolérance, VIII^e-XV^e siècle*, Paris (Autrement) 2003, and the issue raised a long time ago by Míkel de Epalza, *Le modèle andalou: une tolérance intolerable?*, in *L'heritage andalou*, dir. by T. Fabre, Paris (L'Aube) 1995, pp. 117-122. For the present social debate see the review of Makram Annes, *La question de la tolérance en Occident et en islam à travers le livre de Yves-Charles Zarka et Cynthia Fleury "Difficile tolerance"*, "Asterion" 3(2005) online.

[35] See the juridical and historical panorama offered by *Constitutions and Religion*, ed. by Susanna Mancini, Cheltenham-Northampton (Elgar) 2020 and *Freedom of Religion or Belief. An International Law Commentary*, ed. by Heiner Bielefeldt, Nazila Ghanea, Michael Wiener, Oxford (Oxford UP) 2016.

[36] See Giuseppe Alberigo, *Dalla laguna al Tevere. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli da S. Marco a San Pietro*, Bologna (Il Mulino) 2000, and Alberto Melloni, *Persino la luna. 11 ottobre 1962: Come papa Giovanni XXIII aprì il Concilio*, Milano (UTET), 2022.

[37] See for instance the research around Massignon, studied by Jacquest Keryell, from *Jardin donné: Louis Massignon à la recherche de l'Absolu*, Paris (Saint-Paul) 1993 and *Louis Massignon et ses contemporains*, Paris (Karthala) 1997; more recent literature in Christian S. Krokus, *Louis Massignon's influence on the teaching of Vatican II on Muslims and Islam*, in "Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations" 23(2012)/3, pp. 329-345. Within Pius XI's magisterium and Card. Eugène Tisserant's activities around 1931 (see Étienne Fouilloux, *Eugène cardinal Tisserant 1884-1972. Une biographie*, Paris (Desclee de Brouwer) 2011), the first attempt in the Roman-Catholic Church at what can only be roughly defined as "dialogue" with Islam was born, in the conviction that all those who "at least believe in God" were called to an alliance against Bolshevik atheism. It was a conceptual watermark that was not clear (amidst the flowering of anti-Semitism), and not neutral, but lasting. This approach was not extraneous to John Paul II's decision to convene people of faith in Assisi in 1986, during the year of peace called by the UN, to pray together (or side by side, as some would have it) for peace and to give proof of their own prowess with that spiritual and visible instrument, both at the time, and then in its continuation by Andrea Riccardi who saved the intuition from withering away as it was

the ground of all religious and non-religious spiritual traditions;[38] adherence to a global agenda of safeguarding the planet;[39] or the shared militancy for justice that unmasks ideological opposition between transcendent and secular "values" ("values", indeed).[40] This intellectual and spiritual effort originates from Kant's attempt to trace a shared constitutional foundation (the republicanism of *Zum ewigen Frieden*[41]) in the search for an "ethical" foundation of "shared values". It often looks for common "commandments" or ethical rules coming from different roots. The position coming to the most sophisticated consequences is the effort to build a fundamental ethic, in the cultivated synthesis launched by Hans Küng with the *Stiftung Weltethos*: it does not ignore the distinctions of identity, and focuses on the foundation instead of the history of different traditions.[42]

Another tool, less used and more subtle, comes from the studies of theologians and historians who have reflected on the plurality of paths[43] as

destined to. Neverthless, that way of inhabiting dialogue has returned with a very important function (see e.g. Andrea Riccardi, *La pace preventiva. Speranze e ragioni in un mondo di conflitti*, Cinisello Balsamo (San Paolo) 2004).

[38] See Thomas Scheffler, *Interreligious Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, in "Die Friedens-Warte" 82(2007)/2-3, pp. 173-187 or more recently see Sara Markiewicz, *World Peace Through Christian-Muslim Understanding*, Göttingen (V&R Unipress) 2016.

[39] See Paul F. Knitter, *A Common Creation Story? Interreligious Dialogue and Ecology*, in "Journal of Ecumenical Studies" 37(2000)/3-4, pp. 285-300.

[40] See Christoph Schönberger, *Werte als Gefahr für das Recht? Carl Schmitt und die Karlsruher Republik*, commentary to Carl Schmitt, *Die Tyrannei der Werte. Vierte, unveränderte Auflage. Mit einem Nachwort van Christoph Schönberge*, Berlin (Duncker & Humblot) 2020, pp. 52-91.

[41] *See the commentary to Immanuel Kant, Zum ewigen Frieden und Auszge aus der Rechtslehre*, ed. by Oliver Eberl in the edition published in Berlin (Suhrkamp) 2011, pp. 89-391.

[42] E.g. see the famous quotation in *exergo* to the series *Wesen und Geschichte* of Hans Küng, as *Christianity: Essence, History, Future*, New York (Continuum) 1995 (or German Piper (München) 1994): "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions". The Weltethos Stiftung declared since its origins that basic consensus on values and norms that apply regardless of culture, religion, or nationality must be the basis for the vast literature before and after the World Parliament of Religion of 1993, see Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethics*, New York (Continuum) 1993; and later Hans Küng, *Towards a Planetary Code of Ethics: Ethical Foundations of a Culture of Peace*, UNESCO 1996; on "universal ethics", "global morality", "universal values", "common morality", or "universal ethics" a re-election was offered in a volume edited by Karl-Josef Kuschel and Dietmar Mieth, *In search of universal values*, in "Concilium" (2001)/4 (available in German, French, Italian, Spanish).

[43] See Pier Cesare Bori, *Per un consenso etico tra le culture. Tesi sulla lettura secolare delle Scritture ebraico-cristiane*, Genova (Marietti) 1995 (²2009); on his work see Ingrid Heindorf, *The Bibliography of Pier Cesare Bori*, in Alberto Melloni, Riccardo Saccenti (eds.), *In The Image of God. Foundations and Objections within the Discourse on Human Dignity*, Berlin (LIT Verlag) 2010, pp. 25-38; on his approach Francesco Borghesi, *"Al posto*

a pluralism of love[44] and who have grasped the gaps in "commonality". The most brilliant exploration of this paradigm came from Pier Cesare Bori. Bori came to this belief from the study of Pico's *Oratio*, commonly named "On the Dignity of Man" (*De dignitate hominum*). Pico della Mirandola composed it in 1486 on the premise of an imaginary dispute/conclave of Jews, Christians and Muslims.[45] The *Oratio* is one of the pearls of early modern humanism. Instead of linking religious traditions by a selection of "common commandments" to be observed – a selection that loses the dimension of the journey of time in religions and reduces them to "values" – or by the study of the *Oratio*'s biblical, classic and patristic sources, Bori came to the conclusion that a person's dignity does not constitute a "value" or the demonstration of an indistinct entity, but the verifiable proof that each person who walks with love makes the same *via una*, even though they walk it their own way.[46] As Simone Weil says: "Each religion alone is true, that is to say, that at the moment we are thinking on it we must bring as much attention to bear on it as if there were nothing else; in the same way, each landscape, each picture, each poem, etc. is alone beautiful. A 'synthesis' of religions implies a lower quality of attention".[47] This is because in the path each person travels there is all the truth that others find by taking another route in the *via una* of a peaceful truth.[48]

First mile – From these two tools, which at times cannot be distinguished, a multifaceted pragmatics of interfaith dialogue has developed, that has borrowed some models from ecumenical dialogue and some skills from diplomatic negotiation.[49] Such a dialogue is usually performed

della morte c'era la luce": l'etica della lettura di Pier Cesare Bori, in *In the Image of God*, ed. by Melloni, Saccenti, pp. 9-24. An obituary Amina Crisma, *Il silenzio e le parole: in memoria di Pier Cesare Bori*, in "Inchiesta" 42(2012), no. 178, pp. 40-44.

[44] See Anselm K. Min, *Loving without understanding: Raimon Panikkar's ontological pluralism*, in "International Journal for Philosophy of Religion" 68(2010)/1-3, pp. 59-75 for the standard literature on Panikkar; a more detailed study is found in Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Leiden (Brill) 2005.

[45] See Pier Cesare Bori, *Universalismo come pluralità delle vie*, Genova-Milano (Marietti) 2004.

[46] See Pier Cesare Bori, *Ogni religione è l'unica vera. L'universalismo religioso di Simone Weil*, in "Filosofia e teologia" 8(1994), pp. 393-403.

[47] Simone Weil, *Cahiers*, 11, nouvelle édition, Paris (Pion) 1972, p. 118; on this view's radical implementation see Hans-Christoph Askani, *"Chaque religion est seule vraie". Paul Tillich et Simone Weil sur la possibilité d'un dialogue interreligieux*, in "Laval théologique et philosophique" 58(2002)/1, pp. 77-87.

[48] See Giuseppe Ruggieri, *De pace fidei. Per una rilettura del testo di Cusano*, in "Cristianesimo nella storia" 36(2016) pp. 323-342.

[49] See A *History of the Desire for Christian Unity, Volume 1: Dawn of Ecumenism*, ed. by Alberto Melloni, Luca Ferracci, Leiden (Brill) 2021.

by professionals in dialogue who work for decades. Struggling with instruments that are overloaded with policies and too submissive in terms of politics, these *virtuoso* players of dialogue have sadly retraced again and again the very same first mile of dialogue,[50] returning to the starting point after having achieved a platform in media or in theology from which they pretend to exhibit the non-inevitability of conflict between or inside faiths, and the clash of civilizations coming from them.[51] Forced to walk the same mile together over and over again, faith communities can do something more. And if we want to use the Gospel parable (Mt 5:41), they can ask themselves what is the second mile in which to find convergence, not on ethical principles, but on stances and engagement towards the "demanding commitment" constituted by otherness.[52]

4. The Market of Dialogue

Nobody can underestimate the ethical and sometimes political value of this fact: a large number of men and women of prayer act, and they do serve to delegitimize the perversion of faith, pitting an aspiration to "holy war" against the observation that "only peace is holy". Disassociating oneself from believers or co-religionists who kill in God's name, is actually a legitimate act of self-defense in the face of the malice of those who start demanding condemnation and end by saying that it is too little or too late.[53]

[50] Alberto Melloni, *The Second Mile*, in *Agree to Differ. A publication of UNESCO – Tudor Rose*, London (Tudor) 2015, pp. 148-151.

[51] The expression is not from Samuel Huntington, but instead was the theme of the Semaines Sociales de France in Versailles of 1936, *Les conflits de civilisations. Semaines sociales de France, XXVIII[e]. Compte rendu in extenso des Cours et Confèrences*, Lyon (Vitte) 1938, later revived by Bernard Lewis in a speech at Johns Hopkins University in 1957; on the impact of the article and book of Samuel Huntington see *The "Clash of Civilization" 25 Years On: A Multidisciplinary Appraisal*, ed. by Davide Orsi, E-international Relations, e-ir.info, 2018.

[52] On a central concept of Emmanuel Lévinas, Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, Paris (Martinus Nijhoff) 1961. ("The Other is not an object of knowledge nor of representation. The Other is neither a concept nor a substance, they are not defined by elusive properties, they are not a member of a species, be it humanity. They are not defined by their character, nor by their social position, nor by their place in history. The Other is face, not like that of an ID photo or a family photograph whose memory can be fixed in a precise image, but an expressive presence, a demanding call, at the same time a word, a request, a supplication, a teaching, and even a commandment that demands an answer, help, solicitude, compassion".) See, now, Dominique Janicaud, *La phénoménologie dans taus ses états*, Paris (Gallimard) 2009.

[53] Against history as self-absolution of the *Ubertribunalisierung* see Odo Marquard, *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen. Philosophische Studien*, Stuttgart (Reclam) 1981, and the essay translated in Odo Marquard, Alberto Melloni, *La storia che giudica, la storia che*

However, the historian must look very carefully into the places and the meaning of the virtual, political, and spiritual milieu of which this defense is a part, because the latter has been and still is also a matrix of self-absolution in respect to the (un/bearable) weight of recognizing oneself as a member of the same family of the murderer, even if one remains hostile to their crime.[54]

I mentioned *places*, because it is historically evident that this spiritual effort of many occurs in a "marketplace of dialogue".[55] A space of unregulated interests where it may happen that the quality or the offer of the merchandise-dialogue decreases, in the hope that demand will either arise, grow, or stay stable. In this marketplace of dialogue, there are more brands than thoughts;[56] more organizations needing visibility than communities that may benefit from them; more national *apparatchnik* in search of beneficiaries than moral passion.[57] There are too many politicians seeking consensus, too many intellectuals seeking the spotlight, too many theologies in search of a role in the public space.[58] Thus, due to the lack of an intellectual and spiritual foundation (οὐκ ἔχει δὲ ῥίζαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ, Mt 13:21), the sacrosanct delegitimization of violence appropriate to religious grammar has slipped into a form of self-absolving trivialism, which, instead of urging a collective and objective co-responsibility with those who do evil, hides the latter's nature.[59]

assolve, Roma-Bari (Laterza) 2008. The role of history is simply to describe that the murder and the one who denies its right to kill are actually immersed in an inadequacy; and it should be looked at in light of the supposition that it is an inadequacy of faith and not ethics that pushes one to emulate Cain; on the provocative thesis of Saramago, see Silvia Amorim, *La violence au nom de Dieu: "In Nomine Dei", "L'Évangile selon Jésus-Christ et Caïn", de José Saramago*, in *Violence et sacré*, ed. by Ana Maria Binet, Gérard Peylet, Pessac (Press Univ. Bordeaux) 2012, pp. 283-295; from a different perspective Catherine Cornille, *The im-possibility of interreligious dialogue*, New York (Crossroad) 2008.

[54] Sally Beatrix Swanson, *Interreligious dialogue in the religious styles perspective: a qualitative analysis of instrumental cases*, MoS Thesis, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga 2019, refers to William S. Bainbridge, *A Prophet's Reward: Dynamics of Religious Exchange*, Lanham (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers) 2003.

[55] An interesting panorama in the EU is offered by the extremely important research of Karsten Lehman, *Interreligious Dialogue in Context Towards a Systematic Comparison of IRD-Activities in Europe*, in "Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society" 6(2020), pp. 237-254.

[56] See Karsten Lehman, *Religiously affiliated NGOs*, in *Routledge Handbook of NGOs and International Relations*, ed. by Thomas Davies, London-New York (Routledge) 2019, pp. 397-412.

[57] See the case study in Alexander-Kenneth Nagel, *Religious Pluralization and Interfaith Activism in Germany*, in "Interreligious Dialogue" 25(2016), pp. 199-220.

[58] An Asian interesting case study is Simone Sinn, *Religiöser Pluralismus im Werden. Religionspolitische Kontroversen und theologische Perspektiven von Christen und Muslimen in Indonesien*, Tübingen (Mohr Siebeck) 2014.

[59] For a theological perspective, see François Euvé, *Ambivalence de la culpabilité*, in "Études" (2011)/12, no. 415, pp. 629-640.

In such a crowded market, religious and non-religious actors have thus positioned themselves with all their weight and their *pesanteur institutionnelle*, but with conspicuous historical and theological inconsistency. This immaturity is revealed by different symptoms. One is the attempt to draw paradigms and models from democratic political philosophy (as was the case regarding the World's Parliament of Religion in 1893[60]). Another one may be detected whenever "religious leaders" close off dialogue among their "peers" in order to lend symmetry (e.g. the Pope and Imams) which can elevate some to the apical level of some other ones; or when they agree to beg for recognition from secular political fora – sometimes just appealing to the confession the supreme political authority belongs to – as if political behaviour did not respond to a specific agenda.

All that winds up attesting to the fact that the religious voice has "value" if or when it sings in unison with good and just actions (defense of the environment, getting vaccinated, the universality of education).[61] On the contrary, whenever the ideas that originate in religious experience or spirituality touch upon harsher topics (indifference for inequalities, death by starvation, drugs, and educational issues) or take a prophetic tone against war and rearmament – they are treated like a useless utopia, a candid dream or a dangerous intruder.[62]

So, the marketplace of dialogue has witnessed a trivialization of its own product, reduced to rosy rhetoric. These stereotypes call to mind, to use an irreverent image, a sermon in which an imaginary lion declares that "authentic lions are vegetarians", that "non-vegetarian lions are not true lions", and that "the Supreme Lion" will chase them from the herd or perhaps even eat them. This caricature is unfair: but it may suggest

[60] Richard H. Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions. The East/West Encounter*, Bloomington (Indiana UP) 1995 and *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893*, ed. by Richard Hughes Seager, ass. Ronald R. Kidd, Chicago-La Salle (Open Court) 1993.

[61] For example, Pope Francis's position against nuclear deterrence, which is the strongest aspect of his *Fratelli tutti*, is silenced in the public debate. There is another wonderful set of examples to be found in *Engaging Religious Leaders in Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Policy Brief*, ESCWA, United Nations House, Beirut (ESCWA) 2021.

[62] The condemnation of atomic weapons is one of most important messages of Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, however its reception remains very prudent, as in section three of the collective article *Five theologians on the biggest takeaways from "Fratelli Tutti"* by Drew Christiansen, in "America", October 8, 2020, or as in saying that the just war theory is not discarded by the pope, in the same scholar's lecture, *Fratelli Tutti and the Responsibility to Protect*, October 14, 2020, in https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/fratelli-tutti-and-the-responsibility-to-protect, [accessed: 27/09/2022]; a statement of mgr. Gabriele Caccia at the UN Commission on October 13, 2021 in https://holyseemission.org/contents//statements/6167527bd8e72.php [accessed 27/09/2022].

that the line is not between vegetarians and carnivores, but between cannibals and non-cannibals…

Out of the metaphor, the historian may see that this is the very register that has inspired many speeches, quite a few of which have had a laudable function, good intentions, and some effect. That approach forgets (1) that history has always known the nexus between religion and violence – not only in the old anthropology of René Girard's origin of religion from mimetic violence,[63] but beginning with the biblical tale of Cain and Abel itself, where, in front of the altar, fraternity and fratricide coincide – and it also forgets (2) that the problem is to live in the same human family as it is and not, as John Lennon's invited us to imagine, in a world where there is nothing to kill or be killed for, because there is "no religion too".[64]

Conclusions

The abovementioned aporias do result from chance or from an unfortunate coincidence. The encounter between cultures and faiths, the devices of dialogue, and theologies of pluralism, suffer from a huge, growing religious illiteracy that runs through this post-post-secular time and that, above all, manifests itself in the approximation of languages,[65]

[63] On this, see Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetische Theorie: Im Kontext Kulturtheorethischer und Gesellschaftspolitischer Fragen, Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie*, Münster (LIT) 1998 and Chris Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis*, Cambridge-Malte (Polity) 2004.

[64] In fact, history remembers that those who boasted of having eradicated religious sentiment have shed blood with the same fervor as those who bled and taught that sentiment, with weapons clutched in their fists; but it also shows that within religious universes overheated by religious global warming come the claims that to ask tolerance for intolerance as a proof of "countercultural" vigor (see e.g. the address of Joseph Ratzinger of April 1, 2005 for the St. Benedict prize, claiming that the "Church magisterium on homosexuality" would have been prohibited by the legislation on rights, and Alberto Melloni, *L'inizio di papa Ratzinger*, Torino (Einaudi) 2006) and irreverence for respect is exhibited as measure of authenticity (see the metaphor used by pope Francis on abortion as hiring a "hit man" – a *sicario*, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/10/pope-francis-compares-abortion-hiring-hitman [Accessed: 27/10/2022]).

[65] See *European Religious Illiteracy. The Historical Framework of an Issue Removed*, in *Report on European Religious Illiteracy*, ed. by Francesca Cadeddu, Alberto Melloni, New York-London (Routledge) 2019, pp. 3-16. Think, for example, of the damage done by honoring assassins and terrorists with the license of "radicals" – a very noble expression in political and spiritual language (see the optimistic pragmatism of Astrid Bötticher, *Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism*, in "Perspectives on Terrorism" 11(2017)/4, pp. 73-77; the complexity of the question and its history, ignored by Bötticher, is illuminated in Paul McLaughlin, *Radicalism: A Philosophical Study*, New York (Palgrave) 2012, pp. 40-133). The expression preserves for spiritual persons that grey "moderation", which Montesquieu considered the duty of governments and American journalism of the early 20th century, a form of self-regulation for inebriates (See Paulo Carrese, *Democracy in Moderation: Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Sustainable Liberalism*, Cambridge (Cambridge UP) 2016, pp. 22-49).

which cannot be treated by offering religious literacy *ad usum Delphini* (as it was said in Latin for "facilitated for the use of the Crown Prince" or *for Dummies* in modern terms) among the grassroots but only by fostering high level research.

Dialogue between Cultures – This is why I suggest the category of interreligious dialogue with a subtitle that distinguishes between religions and cultures. What is actually brought into dialogue are not *religions* in an abstract, timeless sense, but the cultures that believers bring with them into the concrete mix of history. "Religions" do not exist in abstract,[66] but only where and when individuals and communities bring them to life by offering their free allegiance to a superior dutifulness.[67] Such an experience of freedom and observance does not happen in a vacuum: but inside a very complex and specific culture which elaborates, interprest, and transforms doctrines, spirituality, mysticism, customs, beliefs, attitudes, and mentalities.[68] It is a variable geometric arrangement of texts, doctrines, norms, cults, and practices, in a dynamic that feeds on hermeneutics that move "in history"[69] every time a person enters, wanders from, or leaves a "religion". Dialogue, in all its meanings – from treaty to conviviality[70] – activates a path that is the comprehension and self-understanding of relationships with the other: dialogue between cultures.[71] It is understanding

[66] See Giovanni Filoramo, *Che cos'è la religione. Temi, metodi, problemi*, Torino (Einaudi) 2004, which is much more profound than the celebrated *New Approaches to the Study of Religion: Regional, Critical, and Historical Approaches*, ed. by Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, Randi R. Warne, 2 vol., Berlin-New York (De Gruyter) 2004.

[67] This is the definition of religion I adopted in my class, see also my column *Il global warming della fede*, in "La Repubblica", March 4, 2018 and *L'analfabetismo religioso genera superstizioni dogmatiche*, "il Domani", November 21, 2020.

[68] See Roger I. Lohmann *Culture*, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. by L. Lindsay Jones, vol. 3, Detroit (Macmillan) ²2005, pp. 2086-2090.

[69] The intrinsic connection between Christianity and history is one of the major contributions of Giuseppe Alberigo, who between 1953 and 2007 was the force of the Fondazione per le scienze religiose, see Alberto Melloni, *Giuseppe Alberigo. Appunti per un profilo biografico*, in "Cristianesimo nella storia" 29(2008), pp. 665-702.

[70] See Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, New York (Harper and Row) 1973 and Fabio Milana, *Introduzione*, in *Celebrare la consapevolezza, Opere complete di Ivan Illich, I*, Vicenza (Neri Pozza) 2020.

[71] In 1986-1988 Giuseppe Dossetti named *Pace fra le culture* an association oriented to reflect on dialogue, which ended without results.

one's own history as a path in which there is more evil (more hatred, more war, more fear, more violence, more passion) than each singular person can bring and more good (more love, more compassion, more mercy, more detachment) than each single person can produce. It means seeing oneself restored and imbued with different pasts, accessible to both believers and non-believers, without membership being considered a bias or a requirement. Among these pasts, the dialogue of cultures allows for distance, and choice, separating two subjects.[72]

Havdalah – In Jewish tradition, there is a rite that *separates* Shabbat from weekday time.[73] The rite and its name (*havdalah*) evoke the first verses of Genesis in which the Eternal One separates (בדל) created light from uncreated darkness, the fresh waters from the salty ones, and, in between, separates the waters above from those below. Talmudic tradition and patristic exegesis have questioned the meaning of this verse, which does not serve to tell us about the origins of the world, but which etiologically narrates that which governs and explains it. Jewish hermeneutics has thus wondered what keeps the waters above from the waters below. Is it an inclination? A "natural" law binding them? The intrinsic constraint that descends from God's command? This is not given in the text, which speaks neither of essences nor of obsequiousness. What keeps them distinct, according to one suggestive interpretation, is the *responsibility* each "water" has assumed.[74] What separates believers and non-believers, the faithful of one tradition from another, is an identical responsibility. The faith or religion of those who believe they are believers (as well as the faith or religion of those who distance themselves from what they believe to be belief) thus imparts a responsibility.

A time to heal – "Interfaith" or "interreligious" dialogue, therefore, cannot be an abstract relationship between countable subjects, and at the same time be capable of expressing the depth of the faiths it should commit. It can be its best if it is a sincere search for harmonious coexistence,[75]

[72] See Catherine Chalier, *Pureté et impureté*, in "Revue de Science Religieuse" 92 (2018)/1, pp. 63-77.

[73] An old but still valuable explanation is that of Hayim Donin, *Havdalah: The Ritual and the Concept*, in "Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought" 3(1960)/1, pp. 60-73.

[74] See Daniel H. Weiss, *Tsimtsum between the Bible and Philosophy: Levinas, Luria, and Genesis 1*, in *Tsimtsum and Modernity Lurianic Heritage in Modern Philosophy and Theology*, ed. by Agata Bielik-Robson, Daniel H. Weiss, Berlin-New York (De Gruyter) 2021, pp. 61-82.

[75] An introduction in Chenyang Li, *The Confucian Ideal of Harmony*, in "Philosophy East and West" 56(2006)/4, pp. 583-603.

for those responsibilities expressed within cultures and hermeneutics, which – by proclaiming that what accompanies them and grows alongside them is binding – grows (*crescunt*)[76] in specific, historically determined times.

To make a specific example I cite the years 2020-2021: for the reasons explained above, the marketplace of dialogue after the Covid-19 pandemic enthusiastically welcomed religious commitment for "a time to heal", a quotation from Qohelet adopted also by political leaders like Joe Biden.[77] The biblical text, however, does not say that there is a time to get sick and a time to be healed; it says that there is "a time to kill and a time to heal" (Qoelet 3:3). What religious authority, political leaders and intellectuals should accept as their task is to heal what Card. Matteo Zuppi defined the "pandemic of war"[78] which is ignored or instrumentalized for political purposes.[79] The pandemic of war has no vaccine. It does, however, have a cure, which is not a call "for peace" repeated as a declamatory refrain (repeated in Jer 6:14), but is instead an essential aim of those who – by spiritual grace, by professional role, or by intellectual sensibility – are able to understand a *potentia oboedientialis*[80] within the demands of justice that the planet and human family cries out for.

Parva charta – An effort in this direction comes from a *parva charta* submitted to the G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) in 2021. It depended on Pier Cesare Bori's research and was based on the idea that responsibility

[76] On the sentence "*Divina eloquia cum legente crescent*" (Gregory the Great, Homilies on Ezekiel, I.VII.8), see Pier Cesare Bori, *L'interpretazione infinita. L'ermeneutica cristiana antica e le sue trasformazioni*, Bologna (Il Mulino) 1987; more recent literature in Pol Vandevelde, *"Diuina eloquia cum legente crescent": Does Gregory the Great mean a subjective or an objective growth?*, in "Rivista di Storia della Filosofia" 58 (1984)/4, pp. 611-636.

[77] The victory address, on November 8, 2020 is reported by many media as having quoted the verse from the Jewish and Christian Bible: https://time.com/5908983/president-elect-joe-biden-vows-to-usher-in-a-time-to-heal-in-america/ [accessed: 27/09/2022].

[78] This is the expression that Card. Matteo M. Zuppi adopted in the handover from Saudi Arabia to Italy of the IF20 and repeated at the closing ceremony on September 14, 2021, https://www.vaticannews.va/it/mondo/news/2021-09/zuppi-bologna-g20-mondo.html [accessed: 27/09/2022].

[79] Card. Zuppi mentioned the pandemic of war welcoming the IF20 in the handover from Saudi Arabia to Italy in December 2020, and in its opening address, available in the site of IF20.org. In the final declaration of the G20 under Italian Presidency the word "peace" did not appear at all, even if it is one of the 5 P's summarizing the 17 sustainable development goals and 169 indicators.

[80] Karl Rahner, *Potentia Oboedientialis*, in *Sacramentum Mundi Online*, ed. Karl Rahner, 2016, on paper, Frankfurt a.M. (Herder) 1968-1970, since 2016 in English by Brill, dx.doi.org/10.1163/2468-483X_smuo_COM_003370.

(not "values") can be rooted in religious or non-religious persons as one of their deepest convictions. Such a responsibility does not derive from the search for a distillation of ethical commonalities among religious traditions. It is not, in fact, a matter of reducing the number of the commandments of God or of conscience, nor of finding commonalities among faiths on the basis of what they share, but a search for what each of them has that is specific and irreplaceable.[81] This common path is not designed by a series of shared "you must", but by a common adherence to a "we" can. Not through illusions about an "us" that totalitarianisms have taught to handle suspiciously; but by common effort to make three commitments. Not the yearning to root them in a "shared ethic": but the effort to postulate that each one can take root in what one holds with all of one's soul.

The proposal coming from Bori's discovery can be rephrased and reduced the three points into a small paper: a *parva charta* of just three propositions: "We will not kill one another, we will help one another, and we will forgive one another".[82] Commitments that require specific conditions: there is no forgiveness without truth, no succor without generosity, and no disarmament without justice.

In fine – If interreligious dialogue is the place in which religious leaders repeat standard opinions "in their own words" its destiny will be a useless ancillarity. If theologies are asked to endorse too easy an analysis of macroscopic critical issues (no faith is needed to reject inequality, racism, or criminal economies; a newspaper is enough) they will be weaker than calls to violence, which can, at least, ignite social rebellion. If religious pluralism is an easy sermon on fraternity to be kindly preached, it will never become a reality. If faiths only serve to give motivational support to what is good for everyone, they demonstrate that somebody else is giving to these good deeds a "value" in exchange for "values". If faith-based ethics and ethos enter the stage bringing only ideological relics of a past, passing them off as "tradition", the consequences will not be unpredictable: the constitutive dimension of every religious experience, determined from within its existence, will become empty.

[81] Another quote of the *Cahiers* of Simon Weil again, p. 225 says "those who proclaim that such and such a faith alone is true and beautiful, although they are wrong, are in a certain sense righter than those who are right, for they have looked at it with their whole soul".

[82] A source is a 1948 essay by Simone A. Weil, *L'Enracinement: Prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l'être humain*, Paris (Folio) 2010.

If faith and belief want to have a credibility that endures, they must begin from the postulate that they "count" only when they are not assimilated by the vulgarity of power nor anxious to prove their "usefulness",[83] when they persevere and restore the costly dimension of generosity, freedom, vigilance, and interiority. Interfaith or interreligious dialogue can be a place where religious leaders (in this case I adopt the common superficial description of what is the mechanism of authority into a religious community!) seek a place on the stage where power is artificially "represented" on a cosmic screen (σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου 1Cor 7:31).[84] Or it can do the opposite: people who are able to embed dialogue at the heart of their faith can refuse to cower at the steps of the throne (even the democratic throne); they can address all powers, including religious ones, with a verse from the Italian poet Pier Paolo Pasolini: "You knew it, sinning doesn't mean to do evil: / not doing good, that is what it means to sin",[85] and later rest with the admonition offered to those who have "done all what has been commanded" (Luke 17:10).[86]

[83] This is one of the typical aspects of a Western apologetic, whose aim is to show the capacity of faith to make life easier or more meaningful; it may also affect other traditions like the theory of the Buddha as psychotherapist, e.g. Tapas Kumar Aich, *Buddha philosophy and western psychology*, in "Indian Journal of Psychiatry", 55(2013)/2, pp. 165-170.

[84] The idea that reflecting on the content is knowledge and reflecting on the communication is power, is discussed by Søren Kierkegaard, *Den ethiske og den ethisk-religieuse Meddelelses Dialektik* (1847), [Pap. VIII 2 B 78-79], in SKS 27. Known to me through the Italian translation of Cornelio Fabro as *La dialettica della comunicazione etica ed etico-religiosa*, in S. Kierkegaard, *Scritti sulla comunicazione*, vol. I, Roma (Logos) 1979.

[85] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *A un Papa* (1958); it is part of the section *Umiliato e offeso. Epigrammi* which was republished in the collection *La religione del mio tempo*, 1960 (English version in *The Selected Poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini*, A Bilingual Edition, ed. Stephen Sartarelli, preface, James Ivory, Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 2014.

[86] On Lk 17:10: οὕτως καὶ ὑμες, ὅταν ποιήσητε πάντα τὰ διαταχθέντα ὑμυ λέγετε ὅτι Δο λοι ἀχρε οί ἐσμεν, ὅ ὠφείλμεν ποι σαι πεποιήκαμεν ("when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'"), see Jacques Dupont, *Le maître et son serviteur (Luc 17,7-10)*, in "Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses" 60(1984), pp. 233-251.