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RELIGION. DIALOGUE AND  
CONFLICT

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## RELIGION. DIALOGUE AND CONFLICT

*Abstract:*

*Mediterranean Sea is Abraham's Sea because in this sea converges the three religions that share the Abraham figure. Religion is a polemological factor because it divides society into groups, those who are not and those who are. And, as a first requisite, there must be groups for the conflict to exist. But all is neither binding nor conflict. The meeting space paradoxically is conveyed from different positions and it can be found in many common values which can be transferred to the secularism that thus also serve to the religious encounter.*

*Keywords:*

*Religion, conflict, religious dialogue, Abraham.*

## 1.- THE PHILOSOPHY OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue is *“the miracle of the encounter with the Other”*, according to Gabriel Marcel. For his part, Albert Camus holds that *“the world needs real dialogue... falsehood is just as much the opposite of dialogue as is silence... the only possible dialogue is the kind between people who remain what they are and speak the truth”*.

The fact is that today the word ‘dialogue’ is used as a talisman, as a sort of touchstone, owing to the positive component contained in its meaning in the sense of appealing to reason, expressing otherness and placing oneself on the same level as those with whom one is engaging.

The word comes from the Greek; the preposition *“dia”* implying a sense of separation but also carrying with it a sense of transit, while the word *“logos”* means ‘word’. The Spanish Royal Academy of language refers to dialogue as talk between two or more people who alternately state their ideas or feelings. Accordingly, the term in either language reflects an interactive nature, one concerned with movement or passage.

Dialogue is only possible upon the acknowledgement of plurality. It involves the peaceful encounter between people, not necessarily between ideas, undertaken by way of a common language, intelligible for the parties involved and takes place in an alternating and two-way direction.

Therefore, a common framework is a prerequisite for dialogue to take place. Furthermore, dialogue is based on mutual respect for difference and on the right each party involved has not to lose their defining identity.

The problem with dialogue as a door-opening process (and the reason for its prohibition in times of war) is that it in some way involves the questioning of the established values and

mentality by each of the engaging parties; these are subject to the dictates of reason and to the arguments of the other.

When dialogue occurs against a religious background, an encounter of cosmic views, its undertaking becomes particularly difficult as a logical consequence of the elements involved and their unappealable nature.

For it to take place, each party must first seek to reconcile their faith and their discourse in order to then forego the assimilation of the other as a form of respect for their otherness. Only in this way can any such dialogue prove feasible and achieve results.

Religion is regarded as having been the cause of many conflicts. From this idea, which overlooks the fact that it is mankind and not gods who make war, there is but a short step to linking monotheist religions with intolerance, using the requirements imposed by serving a single God to argue to this effect.

Indeed, quite often, as happens in the case of Islam, the religious dimension is put forward as the explanatory key and driving force of its societies, overlooking other factors such as economic and sociological conditions, etc. In fact, on several occasions religious-type formulae have been used as vehicles for secular conflicts.

In such contexts, religion becomes, at the very least, the cornerstone that justifies any conflict or conflictive process of change, thus conditioning the requisite multi-causal analysis.

In any case, for any dialogue process to bear fruit a balance must be struck; on the one hand, it is advisable to particularly emphasise any common ground, though it is not possible to overlook that which separates the parties, because dialogue must not mean loss of any party's defining identity, but rather must aim at discovering the other party to the dialogue, and consequently, the points on which the parties agree and converge.

We must now proceed to define what the aim is of a process halfway between the peaceful and independent coexistence of religions and their complete symbiosis, but the permanence of which excludes general confrontation. As Feuerbach said, *“the true dialectic is not a soliloquy; it is a dialogue between the ‘I’ and the ‘You’”*.

## 2. ELEMENTS THAT CONSTITUTE THE DIALOGUE PROCESS

Jean Claude Basset defines interreligious dialogue as the *“exchange of words and reciprocal listening, engaging on an equal footing believers of different religious traditions”* such that the interreligious dimension can be understood as *“a place of encounter and reciprocity”*<sup>1</sup>.

It must be emphasised that this dialogue proposal is closely related to ecumenical and cultural dialogue. Ecumenical dialogue seeks the union of the different Christian Churches. In any such context interreligious dialogue would be an extension of the idea. Interreligious dialogue would in turn form part of cultural dialogue, given the importance of religion in the forming of cultures and civilisations. Nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that any genuine understanding between religions necessarily involves a moral rapprochement, in terms of value systems, and not merely a theological one.

All dialogue process undertakings contain different elements the analysis of which, *ceteris paribus*, can be done separately: a framework, the participants, a means of interlocution that includes a common language and a subject.

The Mediterranean basin is the physical framework set for the study of the dialogue process; understanding its area in a cultural and supra-geographical sense. The shores of this sea are an area of friction in which the three great monotheist religions arising out of the house of Abraham come together: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

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<sup>1</sup> Basset, Jean Claude *“El diálogo interreligioso”* EGO Comunicación, Bilbao, 1999.

The latter two will be treated differently owing to their majority position. Having said which, we should not of course overlook the global character of both Christianity and Islam, which stretch way beyond the Mediterranean context and have come to form part of other cultures.

Defining the participants is a basic problem in analysing any dialogue process. The representativeness that they must have ensures the legitimacy of the process undertaken and, consequently, its acceptance by the communities to which the dialogue is addressed.

The problem lies in the fact that the Islamic world is not a homogeneous and monolithic whole simply because its members profess the same faith; the reality is that 1,200 million people from the five continents and of different races are Muslims, not to mention the fact that there are different tendencies within the religion.

Indeed, Islam promotes difference because its sacred book admits of different interpretations and at the same time different approaches to the religious experience. And this diversity is also caused by the different cultures associated with the religion as a result of the extensive geographical area that falls under its influence.

Moreover, the different branches of Islam do not have an organised structure, which makes it even more difficult to define the participants for the dialogue. The Christian community also lacks clear participants, though the relatively organised character of many of its confessions and the predominance of the Catholic Church (one of the clearest examples of a polyarchy in terms of political organisation) does provide us with some references. Consequently, the first question to be addressed is who is Christian and who is Muslim.

Thus, for the dialogue to be effective, it must be structured in a dual process in accordance with the reference participants: the elite and the grass roots. Accordingly, on the one hand we have a high level dialogue, by way of meetings between the most representative spiritual leaders, which lends legitimacy and sets out the main lines of the sphere of convergence.

On the other hand, we have the intercommunity dialogue, which is implicit, and is aimed at encouraging mutual awareness and doing away with biases and prejudices, but which must not be aimed at acculturation, or even give the impression of being so aimed, the nature of which is perceived as hostile by religions. It must be pointed out that this dialogue is essential to the real materialisation of a space of encounter and, furthermore, serves as feedback for the dialogue of the elites.

The media and language for the dialogue is another important aspect to be considered. Many of the concepts developed in the western world have no equivalent in Islam, or are construed on the basis of inherently Christian values, so a biunivocal relationship cannot be established as regards their meaning.

Other concepts, which in Islam belong to the religious sphere, have been subject to the laicising process that has come about in western societies. Nor should the fact be overlooked that on the basis of historical experience, in large parts of the Muslim world laicisation is associated with colonialism.

This leads beyond the religious sphere and may necessitate an enlargement of the framework for dialogue, while at the same time opening up, at least in the western world, an area of conflict between religious and civil society.

The teleological component of the religious dialogue is all important, because the whole dialogue process must have a goal. Of course the aim is not to achieve religious syncretism but rather to accept plurality. The problem lies in the fact that, if the starting positions, which are dogmatic, coincide, dialogue becomes irrelevant, and if they do not coincide, it is apparently an absurd process.

Paradoxically, this meeting space, arising from different dogmatic positions, can be found among the many common values proposed by them and which can be transferred into a lay

framework which, accordingly, would also serve for the religious encounter. This fact is extremely important.

Consequently, the success of the religious dialogue would be linked to giving up the search for truth. Indeed, it is from this starting point that it becomes possible to encounter the tolerance and acknowledgment that, beyond serving peaceful coexistence, contribute to overcoming conflicts that are not inherently religious in character. As a result, it can be concluded that maintaining a channel of dialogue open is a good thing in itself.

Obviously, the aforementioned approach has centripetal forces, which advocate it, as well as centrifugal ones that weaken it.

For example, albeit implicitly, a joint action of the big religions could be proposed against the advance of laicism, the loss of moral references in the western world and Protagorean relativism in opinions, which act as an ideological framework for religious dialogue today.

However, any cohesive action such as the one proposed, would suffer from the inherent defect of all cartels: the tendency of the parties to break the agreements to make away with greater gain, measured in this case by the number of followers.

### **3. THE CENTRIPETAL FORCES INVOLVED IN THE DIALOGUE PROCESS: THEOLOGICAL GROUNDS FOR DIALOGUE**

#### **3.1. The theological grounds for the peaceful coexistence of religions**

The Old Testament is the common reference point for Jews and Christians, though it is read by Christians from the perspective of the Gospels.

The Koran does not annul any of the revelations prior to it, but rather presents itself as the Platonic memory of timeless truth, a recapitulation of all the revelations in their true

meaning and the conclusion of the universal revelation. *“We sent the Book the Quran in truth confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety”* (5:48).

*“To each of the prophets among you We have prescribed a law as in the Torah and Gospel and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you all a single People, but His plan is to test you in what He has given you. So work hard as if you are in a race in all the good deeds. The goal for you all is Allah: It is He Who will show you the truth of the matters in which you disagree”* (5:48).

The Koran also reads *“People of the Book! You have no ground to stand on unless you truly stand by the Torah, the Gospel, and all of the Message that has come to you from your Lord”* (5:68) and overcoming all exclusivity it ends up by stating *“Our God Allah and your God is One”* (29:46)

Of course each one of the religions especially emphasises particular theological virtues: the Jews focus on hope, Christians on love and Muslims on faith<sup>2</sup>.

Muslims believe that Islam was revealed to peoples through their respective prophets, thus each had its own; the last and seal of all those who have gone before is Mohammed (33:40): *“And the messengers we have already told you before, and others We have not told you”* (4:164). Mohammed was familiar with Jewish and Christian traditions.

The prophets mentioned in the Koran normally correspond to biblical prophets and in essence the stories told about them do not differ significantly from those related in the Bible. However, all of them, according to the Koran, explicitly spoke out for Islam.

Thus mention is made of Adam (who is freed from original sin), Joseph, Solomon (capable of communicating with spirits and animals), Jonah, Moses, etc. Mary is presented as a model

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<sup>2</sup> Du Pasquie, Roger. El despertar del Islam. Editorial Descleé de Brouwer, S.A. Bilbao, 1992



for all women and the prophetic character of Jesus, whose second coming is expected, is particularly acknowledged.

Genesis, which is accepted by all, refers to Noah as *"the patriarch of all the peoples of the earth"* to whom seven laws were given: six negative and one positive. For Judaism, adherence to them makes it possible to be righteous, thus opening a door to eternal life for Gentiles, without any need to observe the 613 precepts of the Torah (Mitzvá – מצוה- a Hebrew word meaning "commandment", 248 positive, obligations and 365 negative) prohibitions that are obligatory for the people of Israel.

After the II Vatican Council, the Catholic Church overcame the exclusivity of the famous adage *"extra Ecclesiam nulla salus"* ("outside the Church there is no salvation") and spoke out in favour of interreligious understanding with Jews and Muslims.

*"The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. ....The Church, therefore, exhorts her children, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, to recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among them" and "urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom."*

For Islam, Jews and Christians have received the true light through the Torah and the Gospels *"Say to them: "Will you dispute with us about Allah, after seeing that he is our Lord and your Lord? We are responsible for our doings and you for yours; And that we are sincere in our faith to Him?"* (2:139). There are numerous religious documents that advocate likewise.

Along similar lines the Koran states:*"You say to them: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Ibrahim Abraham, Ismail Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes,*

*and given to Musa Moses and Isa Jesus, and that given to all prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between one and another of them and we bow to Allah in Islam” (2:136). Or even more clearly on claiming, “And this is in the pages of the Books of the very early Revelations. The Books of Abraham and Moses” (87:18-19).*

Many Muslim names refer to biblical characters Yusuf (Joseph), Isa (Jesus), Suleimán (Solomon), Musa (Moses) Yahya (John), Hawwa (Eva), Mariam (Mary), etc.<sup>3</sup>

The diverse nature of the Muslim community also serves the purposes of the dialogue *“...and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another” (49:13), likewise, on claiming that “Mankind was only one nation, but differed later.” (10:19), or when stating “And if Allah had so willed, He could have made them all one people and one nation” (42:8).*

It must be pointed out, and indeed not lightly, that, in spite of appearances and the interpretative broadsides of fundamentalists, it can be deduced from Koranic exegesis that Islam is a religion of dialogue and compromise that materialises in several different ways in the sacred book: dialogue between Allah and the angels, between Allah and Adam, between the angels and the Prophet, etc. And even between Allah and the devil himself, Iblis. Something similar also happens in the Old and New Testaments.

What is more, one can speak of a marked tendency of the Prophet Mohammed towards appeasement and advantageous compromise as a conflict resolution method, which is in keeping with his training as a merchant.

Theological differences between religions are seen as postponed until the Day of Judgement, a belief shared with both Jews and Christians: *“The Jews say: ‘The Christians have nothing firm to stand on;’ and the Christians say: ‘The Jews have nothing firm to stand on’....Allah will judge between them in their dispute on the Day of Judgement” (2:113); what is more, salvation is promised to those “who believe in Allah and the Last Day” (2:62) and especially*

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<sup>3</sup> Du Pasquier, Roger. *El despertar del Islam*. Editorial Descleé de Brouwer, S.A..Bilbao, 1991

to Christians, Jews and Sabaeans; and by the same token to other religions. Accordingly, the paths to salvation prior to Islam are acknowledged.

The fact is that these matters form part of the so-called “*Allah’s Rights*”, the resolution of which has been put off for the life hereafter, given that they are a matter for Allah and the Individual, as is provided for in the maxims “*To be your Way and to be mine*” (109:6) and “*responsible for our doings and you for yours*” (2:139).

The Abrahamic ecumene can be expressed in accordance with Surah (3:64): “*O People of the Book! Come to agreement between us and you; That we worship none other than Allah*”.

### **3.2. The house of Abraham as the meeting place.**

One of the soundest grounds for dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims lies in a common source, in an essential person, Abraham, the man from Ur, the just and self-sacrificing man called by God to be a father to the nations of the earth. He, along with Hagar and Sarah unquestionably form a source trilogy, accepted by the three major Mediterranean religions.

The fact is that Abraham is the, “*first fighter for the monotheistic faith*”, the exemplary man who trusts in and obeys his God, who lies at the origin of the history of the Jewish people, proudly identifying themselves as “*descendants of Abraham*”. In this way is his Semitic origin confirmed.

Abraham is very present in Muslim piety, both effectively and specifically: “*... I will make you an Imam guide or example to the Nations*” (2:124) by virtue of which Allah will order “*Follow the religion of Ibrahim Abraham, the one truthful in faith; He was not of the pagans or the idolaters*” (3:95) and will come to affirm of Mohammed “*My Lord has guided me to a Way that is Straight - A religion of the right - The Path walked by Ibrahim Abraham, the true faith*” (6:161).

His monotheistic character is highlighted on numerous occasions *“Surely, for me, I have set my face, firmly and truly towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allah”* (6:79). Islam is defined by Mohammed as *“Millet Ibrahim”*, the religion of Abraham, a primordial religion forgotten by man after him and taken up anew by Mohammed.

The rabbinic tradition also confirms the key figure of Abraham: *“Rabbi Levi said: The great man among the giants is Abraham. Why is it said he is the greatest? Because he deserved to have been created before Adam. But God said that perhaps Adam will commit a transgression and then there will be nobody to remedy for it him.....if a man has a straight beam and polishes it, where will he put it? Surely, in the middle of the dining room to support the other beams that are before and after it. Likewise, God created Abraham between two eras to hold them up”*<sup>4</sup>

Abraham is, therefore, the one chosen by God, none other than his friend (Isaiah, 41.8), his servant, with whom he freely and munificently enters into a covenant for which his name serves as a reference and guarantee; he is the first Jew, the Patriarch.

Islam basically accepts the events of the life of Abraham such as the sacrifice of Isaac, one of the great feasts in the Islamic calendar, thus acknowledging him, in the light of the Jewish tradition, as the man who trusts in God. The Koran affords him a particularly distinguished role in the fight against polytheism and idolatry which it advocates with such force in its message.

Indeed, it is precisely Abraham who founds the *Ka’ba* and institutes the pilgrimage rite: *“...purify and cleanse My House for those who go round it in the ceremonial act of Tawaf, and those who stand up for prayer, and those who bow and those who prostrate themselves*

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<sup>4</sup> Kuschel, Karl-Josef. Streit um Abraham (Discordia en la casa de Abraham) Editorial Verbo Divina, Pamplona, 1996.

*while being in the House. "And proclaim the duties of pilgrimage among men: They will come to you...." (22.26-27).*

*Abraham is Jalil Allah, God's close friend. "And who can be better in religion than the one who submits his whole self to Allah, the doer of good deeds; And follows the way of Ibrahim Abraham, the one true in faith? And Allah did take Ibrahim Abraham for a true friend" (4:125).*

Abraham is such an important reference for Islam that Mohammed on his ascent to heaven claims to have met him and to resemble him physically. In his agony Mohammed refers to Allah as the *"Sublime Friend"* thus harking back to the title of the Patriarch.

Nevertheless, Abraham is a Chaldean by birth, today just one of many Arab peoples, moreover, his father Terah was a polytheist. And this is a particularly important fact, by virtue of which Judaism cannot close the door on the inclusion of other peoples among the chosen ones. Consequently, the covenant sealed by the circumcision of Abraham at an advanced age (99 years) is open to other peoples.

This is so because Abraham is the connecting link of all the nations on earth: *"...you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham and I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you"* (Genesis, 17.5-6)

Or as is also said: *"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you will I curse. And by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves"* (Genesis, 12.2-3) *"And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant"* (Genesis,

17.7), *“Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you: for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many”* (Isaiah 51.2).

Abraham emigrated to Canaan when he was 75 years old, where he was a stranger and sojourner (Genesis, 23.4), but did not mix with the local people; he begat his son Ishmael at 86, was circumcised at 99 and was 100 years old when he begat his son Isaac. After Sarah died, he married Keturah with whom he had six children. He finally died at the age of 175 and was buried in Hebron.

By means of these statements Genesis reveals a universalist feature that transcends the specific exclusiveness of the people of Israel. An eternal covenant that transcends the will of men and their sins, Abraham as a foundational reference, the nations of the earth committed through him, among them the Arabs by way of their relationship with Hagar and Ishmael and the Jews by way of the patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob.

Christianity and Islam fully take on board the overflow from this approach to Abraham. Accordingly, the Koran states: *“You People of the Book! Why do you dispute about Ibrahim Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not disclosed until after him? Do you have no understanding?... Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian; But he was true in Faith, and surrendered his will to Allah...and did not join gods with Allah”* (3:65-67).

According to this reasoning, exclusiveness has no place with respect to what is really a shared legacy which, albeit first transmitted to Isaac and then Jacob, no descendant of Abraham was excluded by virtue of the first promise. Muslims pray five times a day *“for Abraham and his descendants.”*

Something that is quite logical and consistent, given that if God can punish Abraham’s descendants and the nations for their transgressions, as indeed he did with Israel, he can equally forgive them and keep his promise (which is a promise to Abraham and not Isaac or

Jacob) in its most universal dimension. This explains why God manifests himself on numerous occasions as *“the God of Abraham”*.

Christianity will endow the character of the son of Abraham with a universal dimension, but will fully take on board the Jewish legacy and the covenant made: *“it is not you that support the root but the root that supports you”* (Romans 11.18).

The figure of Ishmael, somewhat obscured in the Bible, will be boosted in the Koran and treated as a Prophet for the Arabs and Abraham’s preferred son. The fact is that Ishmael is the first-born, circumcised at the same time as Abraham and, therefore, carries the mark of the first covenant.

Moreover, he suffers faithfully and blamelessly the divine decision to have him separated from Abraham’s side (though he will be present at the latter’s death, Genesis, 25.7) and will be the guarantor of the promise made to his mother *“I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude”* (Genesis, 16.10). Indeed God intervenes on two occasions to save his life. His rescue in the desert of Negueb is transferred in the Koran to the Beqaa valley.

#### **4. CENTRIFUGAL FORCES THAT UPSET THE DIALOGUE PROCESS**

##### **4.1. Theological differences**

Firstly, it is advisable, after having underlined how much common ground exists, not to lose sight of the profound structural differences between the three religions both as regards content, as well as with respect to relations with other faiths.

For example, Islam does not allow for the holding of ecumenical acts in mosques, even though Mohammed himself allowed Christian practices to be held in his own mosque. Nor is

it possible to overstate the role of Abraham in religions whose main theological reference figures are Moses, Jesus Christ and Mohammed.

There are considerable differences between the Koran and the Bible as regards how the same events and figures are dealt with. Mohammed accuses Jews and Christians of having distorted his message and concealed part of the revelation: *"...they change the words from their right places and gave up a good part of the Message that was sent to them.... O People of the Book! Our Messenger Mohammed has come to you now, making it known to you much what you used to hide in the Book, and bypassing much that... Truly, in blasphemy are those who say that 'Allah is Messiah Christ, the son of Mary'"* (5: 13-17).

Accordingly, the treatment given Jesus in the Koran is considerably different to that afforded him in the Bible: *"Allah has set the seal on their hearts for their blasphemy, and it is little that they believe...And they talked against Mary a seriously false charge: 'We killed the Messiah, Isa Christ, Jesus the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah'. But they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them....For sure they did not kill him:- But! Allah raised him up to Himself "* (4: 155-158) or when it is claimed *"They surely lie against Allah, those who say 'Allah is Messiah Christ, the son of Mary'"* (5:72) *"Messiah Isa Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than a messenger of Allah, and His Word....Do not say 'Trinity'. Allah is One!"*(4:171).

Islam condemns the dogma of the Trinity as follows: *"They surely lie against Allah, those who say 'Allah is one of three in a Trinity'. There is no god except One Allah. If they do not stop themselves from their word of lies, a painful penalty will surely fall upon the liars among them"* (5:73).

Nor does Islam acknowledge original sin. Even though Adam's transgression is described in the Koran, the merciful nature of Allah forgave him, which explains why there is no need for the redemption of mankind through the death of Jesus Christ.



The Mohammed of the revelation at Mecca brought about a certain rapprochement with Jewish culture which materialised in taking up customs such as fasting on the day of reconciliation, resting on the Sabbath, prayer times and facing towards Jerusalem. These relations would later be embodied in the document known as the Constitution of Medina.

Nevertheless, it gave rise to a distancing caused by the Jewish community's not accepting his message: *"What do we need a new prophet for? There came to us no bringer of glad things and no warner from evil"* (5:19), which materialises in a change of the aforementioned customs, thus further underlining the differences.

Another of the theological differences lies in the Jews taking over the legacy of Abraham from which their condition of the chosen people derives; thus, the dying Abraham conveys his legacy through Jacob, and consequently, exclusively to Israel *"For Ishmael and his sons and his brothers and Esau, the Lord did not cause to approach Him, and choose them not because they are children of Abraham, because He knew them..."* (Book of Jubilees 15:30).

For their part, Christians tried to make Abraham's legacy their own to distinguish themselves from others *"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians, 3.29), accusing the Jews of having separated themselves from him, which materialises doctrinally by highlighting some Gospel passages (John, 8.39 and 8.42, among others) for this purpose.

In the Muslim world, the harking back to Abraham smacks of a return to the sources, to the initial purity lost as a result of the distortion caused by the passing of time since the first message. Accordingly, it becomes possible to make a leap back in time thus getting around Jews and Christians: *"the nearest of kin to Ibrahim Abraham are those who follow him and this prophet and those who believe: And Allah is the Protector of those who have faith"* (3:68)

The fact is that, for Mohammed, Islam is man's natural religion and one which has always existed and which some have ignored; in this sense the famous hadith of the Prophet reads

*'No babe is born but upon Fitra. It is his parents who make him a Jew, a Christian or a Polytheist'* , to which one of his companions retorted: 'Or Muslim'. And the Prophet answered: *'No, given that Islam is the Fitra'*.

#### 4.2. Confrontational elements

In February 1994, Baruch Goldstein murdered 29 Muslims and injured 150 more as they prayed in the Hebron mosque. By doing so he was striking at the point of convergence along the fault lines of the three monotheistic religions born of the House of Abraham.

That place, the Cave of Macpelah, was the first land acquired by Abraham in the Promised Land. It is traditionally considered to house the Tomb of the Patriarchs, along with those of Adam and Eve. Consequently, it is a holy place for the three religions, and as such, an ecumenical and interreligious site. Goldstein was attempting to emulate Joshua; he was buried in the Israeli colony of Kiryat Arba. His grave became a place of pilgrimage for Israeli religious extremists. Indeed, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin was inspired by Goldstein.

The fact is that along with these theological differences there are other more profound ones that lead to confrontation. *"The Lord is a man of war"* (Exodus, 15.3), among others.

On the other hand, the Koran contains exhortations such as: *"O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as friends and protectors! They are only friends and protectors to each other. And he from yourselves who turns to them for friendship is one of them."* (5:51) *"The only wish that you should reject Faith, as they do, and therefore become like them: But do not take friends from their groups until they flee to the way of Allah away from what is forbidden. But if they become those who deny Faith, catch them by force and kill them wherever you find them; And do not take friends or helpers from their groups"* (4:89).

Therefore, though the Koran advocates religious freedom *"Let there be no force or compulsion in religion. Surely-Truth stands out clear from error"* (2:256), it is no less certain

that in the Koran there are commands that are at odds with this liberty, “And keep fighting them until there is no more persecution and injustice. And just and faith in Allah continues” (2:193).

Furthermore, this fundamentalist line of thought holds that religious freedom was annulled in the verse that reads “*Struggle hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them*” (9:73); along the same lines the Prophet forced the conversion of some Arab tribes and stated with respect to the prisoners captured after a conflict and reduced to slavery: “*your Lord has been amazed to see how a people were led, chained, to Paradise*” (Al-Bukhari).

“*Surely those who reject Our Signs, We shall soon throw them into the Fire: As often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the Penalty*” (4:56) “*If anyone desires a religion other than Islam submission to Allah, it will never be accepted from him; In the Hereafter, he will be with those who have lost all spiritual award*” (3:85)

However the confrontation of Islam with the Jews is greater than that with the Christians: “*Verily you will find the Jews and polytheists among the strongest men in opposition to the Believers; and you will find nearest in love to the believers those who say: ‘We are Christians’*” (5:82).

Notwithstanding, Christians and Jews are *Ahl al-Kitab*, people of the book and as such have the status of “dhimmis”, protected, with respect to whom some verses preach tolerance (e.g., Surah 2:62). However, in the Koran it is expressly commanded the subjection to humiliation until they pay the tax, the *jizyah* (9:29); reciprocal treatment would, nonetheless, be an unacceptable imposition for Muslims, given that “*oppression is more serious than killing*”.

Notwithstanding, it is against the apostates against whom the conflict becomes most virulent, given that the Muslim, in his obligation to do good and avoid evil, must fight against them without respite. Even greater force must be employed against the unbelievers, *kafir*.

Apostates are held to be not only those who expressly forswear their faith, but those who being Muslim, fail to live in accordance with all the Sharia rules or those governing who do not apply them. The jihad is justified against them. Indeed, and something very much in vogue (cases of Iran, Egypt and Bin Laden's terrorism serve as good examples), it has historically been the reason that has legitimated uprisings and wars.

*Tawhid*, oneness, is an extremely important concept in Islam, involving as it does the confluence of everything around its axis, Allah; its core is to be found in Surah 112: “*He is Allah, The One, and Only One; Allah the Eternal the Absolute. He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him*”.

Therefore, by offering an integrated solution, Islam aspires to the harmonic inclusion of man in the universe; in this holistic logic, the religious domain covers the whole spectrum of life, shaping both individual lives as well as the social order.

Accordingly, it offers a style of life as well as a society, which goes beyond the religious framework. This means that Islam can come into conflict not only with other religions, but even with civil society.

Proselytism is a source of confrontation between Christianity and Islam to the extent that it obliges a contest between beliefs and forces the protection of believers against interferences from other faiths.

Thus, by preaching or “*da’wah*”, the Muslim makes a call to Islam “*by means of wisdom and beautiful exhortation. It argues with them in the most convenient fashion. Surely your Lord*

*knows well who wanders away from His Way: He also knows well those who receive His guidance”.*

Christianity with its good news (the Gospel) also finds itself in this terrain.

Judaism is founded on its *“people chosen by God”* character and as such is self-referencing and has no desire for proselytism. The model of religious interrelations proposed by this belief would be, except for the issue of the State of Israel, peaceful coexistence.

Moreover, for a sizeable sector of Rabbis, the integration of Jewish communities into western societies (and thus, its coming out of the ghetto), which came about for the most part in the Age of Enlightenment, was not a satisfactory experience because, in addition to having paid the price for cultural assimilation, the greatest persecution of Jewish settlements occurred in those countries in Central Europe where integration had reached its highest level.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Some sociologists believe that the ideas of totem and God share the same origin. Accordingly, Durkheim<sup>5</sup> claims that *“gods are societies symbolically conceived”*, that *“religious interests are nothing more than the symbolic form of moral and material interests”*, providing a confused vision of the adoration that society pays to itself and in which solidarity is what is really important.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, if for example, the Book of Genesis says that God made man in his own image and likeness, the contrary may be true.

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, if for example, the Book of Genesis says that God made man in his own image and likeness, the contrary may be true. [Las etapas del pensamiento sociológico](#). Ediciones siglo XX, Buenos Aires, pp. 54 and ff.

<sup>6</sup> González Noriega, Santiago en *Introducción a Durkheim*, Émile. [Las formas elementales de la vida religiosa](#) Alianza Editorial, Madrid 2003, p. 7.

What is more, he holds that fear of the sacred symbolically expressed dependence on society.<sup>7</sup> The idea of God is only a sort of cult to society that converts the religious experience into group ecstasy, a collective effervescence with identity forming and social cohesion producing functions.<sup>8</sup>

García Caneiro on taking up Girard's idea suggests that the function of religion is to keep violence out of community, to sublimate it, to make it sacred, to transcendentalize it.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, the transcendent also has a social dimension; group identity, the "we", is reinforced with religion to the extent that, sociologically speaking, the concept of "the sacred" becomes more important than that of God.<sup>10</sup>

Houari Bumedienne said in a famous speech given during the Second Islamic Summit in February 1974: *"human experiences in numerous regions around the world have shown that spiritual bonds, whether Islamic or Christian, have been unable to resist the onslaught of poverty and ignorance for the simple reason that mankind does not want to enter Paradise on an empty stomach. That is the basic issue. A starving nation does not need to hear verses. I say so with all the respect I have for the Koran that I learnt when I was ten years old. Starving nations need bread, ignorant nations knowledge, sick nations hospitals."*<sup>11</sup>

Not everything is union or conflict. The Jews consider both Christianity and Islam irrelevant to their faith, the Christians that Judaism has been surpassed and that Islam is heretical, while Muslims think that Christianity and Judaism have been surmounted.

However, the fact is that among the most noteworthy spiritual leaders of our time there are those who have promoted socio-political change, such as, for example: Mahatma Gandhi,

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, if for example, the Book of Genesis says that God made man in his own image and likeness, the contrary may be true. *Las etapas del pensamiento sociológico*. Ediciones siglo XX, Buenos Aires, pp.

<sup>8</sup> Joas, Hans. *Guerra y modernidad*. Opus cit., p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> García Caneiro, José. *La racionalidad de la guerra*. Opus cit., p. 124.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, if for example, the Book of Genesis says that God made man in his own image and likeness, the contrary may be true. *Las etapas del pensamiento sociológico*. Opus cit., p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Balta, Paul. *El gran Magreb. Desde su independencia hasta el año 2000*. Siglo XXI de España Editores, S.A. Madrid, 1994.

Martin Luther King and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.<sup>12</sup> Religion does not always have to be a negative factor in conflict resolution.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, people of the political stature of Robert Schumann are awaiting canonization by the Catholic Church. As Jesus Christ said

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? ...You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5. 43-48).*

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<sup>12</sup> Johnston D. y Sampson, C. La religión el factor olvidado de las Relaciones Internacionales. PPC, Madrid 2000, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> Sánchez Jiménez, José. *“El factor olvidado...”* en Revista Utopía y Sociedad núm.19/2002, p. 261.

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