



XXV ANNUAL EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

25 YEARS OF DIALOGUE: WHY DIALOGUE MATTERS

4- 5 DECEMBER 2023



XXV ANNUAL EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

In the holy city of Santiago de Compostela, the EPP Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Working Group proudly presented its annual event commemorating the remarkable 25th anniversary since its inception. This year's gathering bears the compelling theme, «Why Dialogue Matters,» echoing the fundamental significance of fostering understanding, cooperation, and unity in our diverse global landscape. Against the backdrop of Santiago's rich cultural heritage, the event has brought together Church and political leaders, scholars, religious representatives, and advocates committed to transcending boundaries through meaningful discourse.

Against a backdrop of increasing conflict around the world, from Ukraine to Palestine, we reflect on a quarter-century of the EPP Intercultural and Religious Dialogue fostering dialogue and cohesion between Europe's many religious groups. It becomes evident that the world is in constant flux, grappling with complex challenges that demand collaborative solutions.

«Why Dialogue Matters» serves as a poignant reminder that, in an era marked by cultural diversity and religious pluralism, dialogue becomes the linchpin for addressing contemporary issues. Santiago de Compostela, with its historic significance as a pilgrimage site, symbolizes the perfect location for this reflective journey, urging participants to traverse the intellectual and spiritual pathways of hope that lead to mutual respect and understanding.

At the heart of the EPP's mission lies a commitment to promoting values that transcend political and cultural divides. The annual Intercultural and Religious Dialogue event has emerged as a testament to this dedication, providing a platform for dignitaries, thought leaders, and grassroots advocates to engage in conversations that transcend borders and ideologies. In celebrating this 25th milestone, the EPP recognizes the enduring importance of dialogue as a catalyst for peace, inclusivity, and understanding.

The historic resonance of Santiago de Compostela intertwines seamlessly with the theme of «Why Dialogue Matters» emphasizing the need to appreciate diverse perspectives while finding common ground. This gathering, framed by the stunning architecture and cultural richness of the city, aims to explore the intersectionality of intercultural and religious dialogue, delving into its impact on policy-making, social cohesion, and the cultivation of a shared global ethos.

XXV. Annual EPP Group Intercultural Dialogue

25 Years of dialogue: Why dialogue matters?

4 - 5 December 2023 | Santiago de Compostela, Spain



XXV ANNUAL EPP GROUP INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

70 YEARS OF EPP GROUP
25 YEARS OF DIALOGUE: WHY DIALOGUE MATTERS

4- 5 DECEMBER 2023 **SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, SPAIN**

PROGRAMME

SUNDAY, 3 DECEMBER

20:00 HRS

WELCOME RECEPTION AT THE PARADOR DE SANTIAGO

20:30 HRS

WELCOME DINNER AT THE PARADOR DE SANTIAGO

WELCOME SPEECHES

- **Dolors MONTSERRAT MEP** Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament and Head of the Spanish Delegation of the EPP Group in the EP.
- **Francisco José MILLÁN MON MEP**, EPP Spanish Delegation Member representing the Region of Galicia and President of the Intergroup on European Cultural Heritage, Ways of Saint James and other European Cultural Routes.
- **Diego CALVO POUISO**, First Vice-President of the Regional Government of Galicia.

MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER

09:00 - 09:30 HRS

REGISTRATION AT THE PARADOR DE SANTIAGO - HOSTAL REIS CATOLICOS

09:30 - 10:00 HRS

OPENING SESSION

- **Rosa ESTARÀS FERRAGUT MEP**, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup on Disability and Regional President of the Partido Popular in the Balearic Islands.
- **Jan OLBRYCHT MEP**, Vice-Chair and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue.
- **György HÖLVÉNYI MEP**, Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue.

10:30 - 11:30 HRS

SESSION I. SPECIAL INTERVENTIONS ON “THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TODAY”

Chair: **Jan OLBRYCHT MEP**, Vice-Chair and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue

- **Othmar KARAS MEP**, First Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for implementation of Article 17 TFEU Dialogue with Churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations (via video connection).
- **Elder Metropolitan EMMANUEL OF CHALCEDON**, Ecumenical Patriarchate (via video connection).
- **Mons. Francisco José PRIETO**, Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela.
- **Mons. Mariano CROCIATA**, President of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the EU (COMECE).
- **Amb. Ismat JAHAN**, Permanent Observer of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the EU.
- **Rabbi Avi TAWIL**, Director, European Jewish Community Centre.

11:30 - 12:30 HRS DISCUSSION

12:30 - 14:00 HRS

LUNCH AT THE PARADOR DE SANTIAGO

14:00 - 15:30 HRS

SESSION II. “THE IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE OF DIALOGUE: “DIALOGUE IN ACTION”

Chair: **Željana ZOVKO MEP**, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament

- **Fr. Manuel Enrique BARRIOS**, General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the EU (COMECE) and former Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations at the Spanish Bishops’ Conference.
- **Fr. Olivier POQUILLON OP**, Director, École biblique of Jerusalem, Former Secretary General of COMECE (via video connection).
- **Dr Jørgen Skov SØRENSEN**, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC)
- **Mohamed AJANA EL OUAFI**, Islamic Commission of Spain.
- **Frédérique OHAYON**, Director of International Development, Jewish Foundation (Fundación HispanoJudía) and Director of the Friends of Tel Aviv University Association in Spain.

15:30 - 16:00 HRS DISCUSSION

16:30 - 19:30 HRS STUDY VISIT

19:30 HRS OPTIONAL PROGRAMME: PILGRIM’S MASS IN THE CATHEDRAL

21:00 HRS DINNER HOSTED BY THE EPP GROUP AT THE RESTAURANT HOTEL MONUMENTOS SAN FRANCISCO

DINNER SPEECHES:

- **Jan OLBRYCHT MEP**, Vice-Chair and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue.
- **Jesús GAMALLO ALLER**, Director-General for External Relations and Relations with the European Union, Region of Galicia.

TUESDAY, 5 DECEMBER

09:00 - 10:30 HRS SESSION III.

“THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN SOCIETY”

Chair: **György HÖLVÉNYI MEP**, Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue.

- **Fr Hyacinthe DESTIVELLE O.P.**, Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome.
- **Rabbi Levi MATUSOF**, Director of the European Jewish Public Affairs.
- **Dr. Timo Aytaç GÜZELMANSUR**, General-director of the Department of the German Bishops’ Conference for the dialogue with Muslims and research about Islam in Germany ‘CIBEDO’.
- **Fr Friedrich BECHINA**, Former Undersecretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education (via video connection).
- **Prof. Dr. Francisco RAMÍREZ FUEYO**, Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Comillas Pontifical University Madrid.

10:30 - 11:00 HRS DISCUSSION

11:00 - 11:15 HRS CLOSING REMARKS

11:15 HRS BRUNCH AT THE PARADOR DE SANTIAGO

SUNDAY, 3 DECEMBER

WELCOME SPEECHES

– **Dolors MONTSERRAT MEP** Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament and Head of the Spanish Delegation of the EPP Group in the EP.

– **Francisco José MILLÁN MON MEP**, EPP Spanish Delegation Member representing the Region of Galicia and President of the Intergroup on European Cultural Heritage, Ways of Saint James and other European Cultural Routes.

– **Diego CALVO POUISO**, First Vice-President of the Regional Government of Galicia.



Dolors MONTSERRAT MEP

Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament and Head of the Spanish Delegation of the EPP Group in the EP

Buenas tardes a todos,

Gracias a todos por acompañarnos hoy aquí en el evento del grupo interreligioso del EPP que este año celebramos en la ciudad de Santiago de Compostela.

Es para nosotros muy importante que se celebre en España y aquí, una de las ciudades santas del mundo.

Siempre lo digo cuando vengo a Galicia, que soy una catalana enamorada de esta tierra.

Una tierra que acoge a todo el mundo, una tierra rica en gastronomía, cultura, patrimonio e historia.

Una tierra que siempre han visitado mis padres y sus hijos hemos disfrutado desde pequeños.

Una tierra que une a personas de España y de todos los lugares del mundo y que con sus caminos nos llevan a disfrutar de ella.

Y hoy, como Vice-Presidenta del Grupo del PP Europeo, quiero compartir con vosotros qué significa para nosotros este encuentro, este importante evento y celebrarlo aquí.

Desde el PP Europeo defendemos la libertad religiosa en todos los rincones del mundo, no sólo en Europa. Y quiero destacarlo porque hay lugares del mundo, en el que los cristianos son perseguidos y masacrados por pensar, por creer, por tener fe. Y nosotros condenamos esos atroces hechos e instamos a las instituciones europeas a que garanticen la libertad religiosa. Como también defendemos el legado histórico de Europa. El humanismo cristiano, las raíces cristianas, de la Unión Europea.

Creemos en los valores de la paz y el respeto, en Europa y en todos los rincones del mundo. Defendemos este espacio de diálogo y entendimiento que celebramos hoy aquí para que sea extensible a todas las religiones. Desde el respeto y siempre con la defensa de la libertad.

La paz en el mundo es posible y debemos trabajar por ella, frente al fanatismo y el terrorismo que se esconden bajo la religión pero no es religión sino radicalismo, es violencia, es terror y odio. Y ante ello no se cede ni un paso, porque buscan acabar con la libertad.

Creemos y defendemos una Europa que trabaje como un solo cuerpo en defensa de la libertad frente a la barbarie y que no permita posturas unilaterales de ningún Estado miembro que abra la puerta a contentar al terrorismo, ni tampoco genere crisis diplomáticas con aquellos que luchan para que el terrorismo no gane.

Europa es ejemplo de defensa de la libertad y así debe seguir siendo. Y hoy lo reivindicamos aquí, en Galicia, en Santiago.

En estos caminos, en las rutas jacobeanas donde te encuentras eso que llamamos valores europeos. La convivencia, la paz, el encuentro entre distintos pero a la vez iguales ante las oportunidades.

Es un lugar de encuentro entre europeos, donde peregrinos de toda Europa se encuentran y comparten experiencias de vida.

Defendamos lo que nos une, lo que compartimos como ciudadanos libres de este gran proyecto de presente y futuro llamado Europa.

Si no han tenido la oportunidad de hacer el camino de Santiago, háganlo. Les cambia la vida, a mí me la cambió.

Quedan inauguradas estas jornadas.

Muchas gracias.



Francisco José MILLÁN MON MEP
EPP Spanish Delegation Member representing the Region of Galicia and President of the Intergroup on European Cultural Heritage, Ways of Saint James and other European Cultural Routes

Señor Vice-Presidente primero de la Xunta de Galicia, Vicepresidentes del EPP Group y Jefa de la Delegación Española del Partido

Popular en Europa, colegas, autoridades, señoras y señores, amigos. Buenas noches a todos y bienvenidos.

Es una gran satisfacción para mí pronunciar estas breves palabras de bienvenida.

Como eurodiputado gallego me llena de orgullo recibir en Santiago de Compostela - donde pasé tantos años como estudiante- a numerosos colegas del Parlamento, a numerosos colegas de mi grupo político.

Es difícil encontrar un lugar más idóneo que Compostela para albergar las XXV Jornadas de Diálogo Intercultural con Iglesias e Instituciones Religiosas. Santiago es una de las grandes capitales espirituales de Europa. Desde la Edad Media, Santiago ha sido uno de los grandes centros de peregrinación del mundo occidental, junto con Roma y Jerusalén.

Aquí convergen los Caminos de Santiago. Esos Caminos en los que desde el siglo X coinciden peregrinos de diversas partes de Europa y del mundo.

Esos Caminos que desde entonces son un espacio de encuentro, de diálogo, de tolerancia, de interacción.

Una auténtica ruta de civilización que ha contribuido a la creación de una cultura europea y a la formación de una identidad común. Por eso, me gustaría recordar lo que dijo Juan Pablo II: “los peregrinos fueron los primeros depositarios de la conciencia europea”.

Los Caminos de Santiago son caminos de Europa, de civilización, de encuentro, de diálogo y, también, caminos de esperanza. Hoy estamos conmovidos por el trágico regreso de la guerra a suelo europeo con la cruel e injusta agresión rusa a Ucrania. Por otro lado, los brutales atentados terroristas de Hamas han puesto en marcha la reacción de Israel y al final han desencadenado una grave crisis humanitaria en Gaza.

Pero el mundo tiene ante sí otros grandes retos: el cambio climático y la amenaza de nuevas pandemias, como el reciente COVID-19.

Vivimos también las incertidumbres que plantean el nuevo escenario geopolítico y los desafíos actuales de la globalización. Tenemos dudas sobre el crecimiento económico tras el endurecimiento generalizado de la política monetaria.

Aumentan además la polarización política y social, así como el populismo radical y las tendencias disgregadoras, como desgraciadamente está pasando en nuestro país, España.

Buena parte de la opinión pública europea tiene un sentimiento de incertidumbre. Tiene la sensación de que en el contexto actual se ha perdido el control de la situación económica ante la subida de los precios. El control de nuestra salud por la amenaza de nuevas pandemias. El control de nuestras fronteras con la problemática migratoria. El control de nuestra seguridad ante la persistente amenaza del terrorismo y el aumento de la inseguridad ciudadana. El control incluso de sus vidas privadas ante los retos y desafíos que presenta la digitalización.

Repito, muchos ciudadanos tienen una sensación de desorientación, inquietud, ante el presente y las incógnitas del futuro.

Sin embargo, no debemos caer en el desánimo ni en el pozo de pesimismo. Aquí en Santiago, quiero recordar, una vez más, que el Apóstol en la teología medieval es el símbolo de la esperanza.

Por eso, creo que los Caminos de Santiago son también Caminos de Esperanza. Los europeos tenemos que conservar la esperanza. El preámbulo de la fallida Constitución Europea identificaba a Europa como el continente de la esperanza. Como dijo hace unos días en Bruselas la Presidenta del Parlamento Europeo Roberta Metsola durante la inauguración del Nacimiento, “Europa es un faro de esperanza”.

Y aquí, en Santiago, me atrevería a decir que esta ciudad es también una capital de la esperanza, por esa vinculación tan especial con el Apóstol.

Confío en que los diálogos que tendrán lugar mañana y pasado-mañana serán muy fructíferos y contribuirán a mantener la esperanza en un futuro mejor, tan necesario para España, para Europa, para el Mediterráneo y para el mundo.



Diego CALVO POUSO
First Vice-President of the Regional Government of Galicia

Muy buenas noches a todos y muchas gracias por contar con la Xunta de Galicia en este encuentro.

Antes de nada, me gustaría disculpar la ausencia de Alfonso Rueda, nuestro presidente, que por motivos de agenda no puede estar hoy aquí pero que me hizo responsables de transmitirles a todos nuestra bienvenida a Galicia y que hayan elegido Santiago de Compostela, histórica meta de peregrinos desde el siglo IX, como punto de unión para este encuentro de diálogo interreligioso e intercultural.

Siempre es un honor recibir a representantes de los diferentes grupos religiosos y, por supuesto, a miembros del Partido Popular en el Parlamento Europeo en Galicia.

Pero quizá hoy cobra mayor importancia y mayor trascendencia debido a los momentos que estamos viviendo con una agenda “tristemente dominada” por la situación política que vivimos en España.

Tanto el Parlamento Europeo como el Comité de las Regiones han acogido un complejo debate sobre el Estado de Derecho en España, en el que se trató la aprobación de una ley que amenaza con dividir una sociedad pacífica. Una ley que diferencia a los españoles en

función de su lugar de residencia que perdona a aquellos que han prometido volver a delinquir y que solamente responde a los intereses personales de un líder de un partido político cuyo único fin es permanecer en el poder.

En definitiva, una ley hecha a medida para un sector que rechaza el diálogo como forma para solucionar los problemas, que utiliza la amenaza y la violencia como arma de negociación y que desafía la convivencia pacífica en nuestro Estado.

Una ley escrita al dictado del que ha sido condenado y ahora recibe el perdón a cambio de los votos para una investidura. Ante esta situación tan grave, como entenderán, desde Galicia agradecemos el desvelo y el interés de las instituciones europeas en este asunto, que es de nuestro máximo interés, pues todas las ayudas y todas las reclamaciones son pocas ante la propuesta de una ley que pone en grave riesgo unos valores tan básicos como la igualdad y el Estado de Derecho y una constitución tan democrática como la nuestra.

Por nuestra parte, desde Galicia seguimos de cerca todos los debates de la agenda europea en los que nuestro grupo nos representa. Prestamos gran atención a la ejecución del Mecanismo de Recuperación y Resiliencia, un fondo excepcional y temporal creado con motivo de la crisis del COVID; y permanecemos vigilantes para que se cumpla en tiempo y forma.

La convivencia de los tradicionales fondos de cohesión con este Mecanismo de Recuperación y Resiliencia plantea un debate con respecto al futuro una vez finalicen los programas operativos correspondientes al período 21-27. En este sentido, Galicia apuesta por un futuro de la política de cohesión basado en la gestión compartida y con una fuerte dimensión regional, que pueda aprovechar los elementos que hayan dado buenos resultados en el Mecanismo de Recuperación y Resiliencia para aligerar la carga burocrática.

Creemos también que es fundamental un adecuado ajuste de los mecanismos de reparto de fondos, valorando no solo el PIB, sino también otros criterios como el envejecimiento de la población o la tasa de paro; especialmente de cara a una futura Unión ampliada.

Respecto a esto, la Comisión Europea ya ha recomendado la apertura de negociaciones con Ucrania, que ha resistido con entereza la brutal e injustificada agresión de Rusia, y la Unión Europea debe permanecer a su lado.

En cuanto al Pacto Verde Europeo, Galicia apoya sin dudas el gran compromiso de la UE con la transición ecológica. Como saben, Europa tiene el ambicioso objetivo de reducir en un 55% las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero para 2030 y de conseguir la neutralidad climática para 2050. En este sentido, desde la Xunta trabajamos en la Ley Gallega por el Clima con el mismo objetivo, aunque nuestro compromiso político con la neutralidad climática es incluso anterior al europeo, pues ya en diciembre de 2019 aprobamos la Estrategia Gallega de Cambio Climático y Energía 2050.

Por ello, apoyamos tanto la implantación de industrias basadas en las energías verdes como la descarbonización, a pesar de que el nulo compromiso del Gobierno Central con los intereses de nuestra región ha supuesto que el tramo que debía unir Galicia con la red europea de transporte de hidrógeno verde haya quedado excluido de las prioridades de la Comisión Europea. Esto supone un gran escollo para que Galicia se pueda desarrollar en las mismas condiciones que otras Comunidades Autónomas y nuestros objetivos de neutralidad climática.

En el marco de la transición digital, Galicia acaba de aprobar el anteproyecto de ley para el desarrollo e impulso de la inteligencia artificial, que nos convertirá en la primera región europea en regular el uso de esta tecnología. Esta norma garantizará que los sistemas que se utilicen sean fiables y respetuosos con los derechos fundamentales de las personas.

Otro asunto que nos preocupa especialmente es el desafío demográfico. Hemos sido pioneros aprobando una ley de impulso demográfico y abogamos por ampliar el concepto de «zona escasamente poblada» tomando en consideración la evolución de la población en los territorios, la dispersión de la población, el envejecimiento o la baja natalidad.

En lo que respecta al sector del mar, somos partidarios de garantizar la sostenibilidad de las actividades pesqueras y acuícolas a largo

plazo, alcanzando el equilibrio desde un punto de vista medioambiental, económico y social. Por ello, hemos liderado en el Comité Europeo de las Regiones el dictamen “La política pesquera común sobre el terreno: hacia comunidades costeras sostenibles y resilientes en la Unión Europea”, en el que proponemos que la pesca tenga una cartera propia en la Comisión europea para la defensa de los intereses específicos de este sector.

Como ven, todas las prioridades de Galicia que he expuesto tienen algo en común: solo podremos alcanzarlas a través del diálogo y el consenso.

Por ello, no puede ser más pertinente el tema concreto que nos reúne hoy aquí: “70 años de Partido Popular Europeo. 25 años de diálogo: ¿Por qué el diálogo importa?”.

En pleno siglo XXI, en el momento en el que la humanidad ha alcanzado mayores logros científicos y técnicos, somos aún testigos de cómo la intolerancia y el odio hacia otras culturas y creencias son tristemente la causa de guerras y de pérdidas de vidas humanas.

El diálogo desde el respeto a los derechos humanos, entre los cuales ocupa un papel destacado la libertad religiosa, es el camino necesario para la paz y el desarrollo de nuestras sociedades.

No me cabe duda de que este Foro contribuirá con sus reflexiones a fomentar este diálogo abierto y fructífero.

Muchas gracias.



The high altar of Santiago Cathedral



From left to right: Dolors MONTSERRAT MEP, Francisco José MILLÁN MON MEP, Diego CALVO POUISO, Rosa Estaràs FERRAGUT MEP



MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER OPENING SESSION

- **Rosa ESTARÀS FERRAGUT MEP**, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup on Disability and Regional President of the Partido Popular in the Balearic Islands.
- **Jan OLBRYCHT MEP**, Vice-Chair and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue.
- **György HÖLVÉNYI MEP**, Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue.



Rosa ESTARÀS FERRAGUT MEP

Vice-Chair of the Intergroup on Disability and Regional President of the Partido Popular in the Balearic Islands

Good morning, welcome to the 25th years of dialogue on Intercultural dialogue and interreligious dialogue, welcome here to Santiago de Compostela.

First of all, greetings from the head of our Spanish delegation of the PP, Dolors Monserrat; she was with us yesterday but today she had an important commitment in Madrid. We do have a group of the Spanish delegation here; I would also like to greet Francisco Millan Mon who is our MEP of Galicia and he is here with us today.

The 25th anniversary of Intercultural and religious dialogue is very important work because religious institutions undoubtedly play a very important role in conflict resolution; they also contribute to everyone's overarching goal, which is social peace. We want to communicate and promote social values, we use this standing group because it helps us understand issues that we work with every day; education, immigration and social tensions and all crisis that we have been suffering. We are the only political group of the EP that engages with this dialogue with Orthodox, Christians, Protestants, Muslims, Jews and so on. It is in order to achieve our overarching goal of bringing people together.

This working group works very actively with its counter parts and we truly believe that dialogue is key to better understand and to take the necessary action that we need to achieve social cohesion. The objective of intercultural and interreligious dialogue with representatives and chairs here at the top table contribute significantly to an intercultural exchange of different people. It helps religious and political authorities bolster this cultural diversity and to promote European values and even to discover new European values. The path towards this 25th anniversary of intercultural and religious dialogue has been evolving over time and today and tomorrow we will hold very important debates looking at how all those involved can help find a solution that is necessary in order to solve crisis- the different wars that are going on. We want to look at how we can develop this dialogue so we can help citizens resolve all this conflicts and foster that.

As you know the last few years, we have held many meetings. In this respect, I would like to repeat what Roberta Metsola who is the current President of the European Parliament said " the EU and all of us are going through unprecedented crisis, the environmental crisis, the economic crisis the geopolitical and social crisis, wars, COVID, what COVID brought, as well as terrorist attacks and insecurity and all of this has to remind us of how urgent is to fight against extremism and how important is to counter radicalism". Therefore, intercultural dialogue bringing everyone together should help us come up with this common responsibility vis a vis European society and the future of Europe. It is key to peace social cohesion and the future of the world as well as the future of the European Union.

We have chosen the possible venue, in fact Paco Millan mentioned this yesterday. The capital of Santiago de Compostela, this is a holy city where pilgrims came seeking values very similar to European values, they came here seeking pace, responsibility and solidarity" , so we could not have chosen a better city as Mr Millan said "the paths that are part of the way St James are Paths of hope. They bring people together and they have helped create a European culture and forge a common identity." This is the cradle of the European values, when the pilgrims started the way of St James; they were hoping to find solidarity, peace, justice and freedom, so we are in the holy centre, it is a UNESCO world heritage site, it is not a coincidence

that we are here. This is a pilgrim's path and I am sure that we will have a fruitful dialogue that will enlighten us and will enlighten the authorities involved to come up with the best possible strategies that will help us find the best possible solutions to tackle the challenges that Europe has and that the whole world has to deal with. So, that we can come with an appropriate solution and work hand in hand with the European authorities religious to achieve our overarching goal, peace, dialogue, social cohesion.

We want to make sure that European values are values that are in the hearts and minds of everyone. Therefore, any contribution we make to conflict resolution and tackling this crisis is welcome. On behalf of the Spanish delegation EPP delegation and on behalf of Mr Millan Mon and Dolors Monserrat I would like to welcome you to this dialogue over the next few days.

Thank you very much.



Jan OLBRYCHT MEP, *Vice-Chairman and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chairman of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue*

Good Morning,

First of all I would like to thank my Spanish colleagues for organizing this event. I think it's symbolic and very important for all of us. For some of us this is a part of our pilgrimage path. For some of us it is the beginning, and for some of us it is probably the last time that we came here. Politically speaking it's also very important to be today in Spain because of its very complicated situation nowadays.

Allow me to look back a bit on our 25 years. 25 years is a lot. For some of us, it's the 19th year that we've been here together, since we joined after the EU enlargement in 2004.

The founding idea behind this dialogue was to create relations with the Orthodox Church. That's why my first visit in as part of this dialogue together with Othmar Karas and the other colleagues was to Constantinople. It was a symbolic way to show what is our idea is for establishing dialogue and cooperation.

I remember also some other very significant visits like the one in Kiev. It was back under Yushchenko's presidency. During the dialogue meeting, the representatives of Ukrainian church told us that

they want to become independent from Moscow. The young priest who represented the Moscow Church answered "Best wishes from Moscow. And I would just transfer the message - never". I think that this mixture of politics with the questions of religion and functioning of churches was a very good one for all of us. Step-by-step we were trying to enlarge this dialogue and started working very close with our Jewish friends. Simultaneously I'd like to express my gratitude for the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. We had together a number of very interesting meetings together.

Not very often those talks between partners in this dialogue were easy.

But let me remind you, what is the dialogue about, in 25 years what was the real goal of dialogue? Is it just exchange of views, is it just talking together or is it something more? From our point of view, what we are trying to organize is not just a meeting, it's not just a way to talk to someone, but it's first of all to create trust. This is the most important part. If you don't trust someone, you cannot enter into a dialogue. Of course, during the dialogue we can deepen the trust. We need to understand each other or at least to try to understand what our partner thinks, what is his idea. At the same time, he should understand what our approach is.

Because the dialogue means mutual openness. It means that we are open to listen to someone and that we're sure that they are also ready to listen to us. Perhaps not always accept their opinion but at least always try to understand, and try to find if we can solve any problems, can we show the path, can we create relations that are much more open with people who are willing to meet, willing to talk to each other. The general idea of dialogue is not only to meet and talk to each other, but also to listen to each other and try to find a common path to both political as well as very practical solutions.

The political solution concerns what should be the approach of the European Parliament, or at least of the Christian Democrats. Everyone sitting in this room knows very well that our party is complicated and complex. Not all of us are Christian democrats. When you look at our statute, and the other documents of our party you will find not only Christian democrats, but also centrist as well as

several other descriptions. We are pro-European, we are of course centrist, but some of us are Christian democrats and some of us are not. It is important for us, at least for the group of people who are here, to show what the approach of Christian democracy is today. That's why our approach to the dialogue is not technical. It's not a kind of social technique of manipulation.

For us Christian democrats, dialogue is central to how we function in politics. This is the specificity of Christian democrats, because we declare our commitment to the values we hold dear. If we lose it, we will not be Christian democrats at all. That's why for us dialogue is a part of our DNA. We try, when we meet someone, to tell them, listen, we come with our own values, we are believers, we are politicians with specific backgrounds. We are ready to talk to you, we respect your beliefs, and we can talk about many things. We won't talk about theology. We won't discuss who is right and who is wrong. We will not discuss which religion is correct and which is not correct. We will discuss what we can do together, and do we understand each other. We will talk about the main problems like freedom of religion, like the persecution, like the problem of migration and the consequences, like the economy and poverty. This is the way we intend to talk.

I think we can be proud of those 25 years. That we keep this dialogue. That we have our friends to whom we can talk, who can understand us and we declare that we will understand them, even if we don't always agree. I think this is a real achievement of the EPP in European politics. And let's keep it going and let's start in Santiago.

Thank you.



György HÖLVÉNYI MEP, *Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue*

Eminencies, Excellencies, dear Colleagues,
dear Guests, dear Friends!

Walk with the wise, and become wise.

Santiago is an inspiring and symbolic location. We in this room and beyond are on the road together, too.

Like pilgrims, together we are moving with our dialogue toward something great and often mysterious. This dialogue is a practical, but also a spiritual journey for us. We also carry our rucksack, filled with the issues, commitments, shared burdens and visions that are important to us.

After 25 years, we can feel deeply enriched by the wise persons that walked with us on this journey so far. Right before Christmas, a very warm welcome to our 25th Annual EPP Group Dialogue conference, a special anniversary edition in 2023, when we also celebrate the 70th anniversary of the EPP Group.

Dear Guests!

"It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching."

— St. Francis of Assisi.

Personally, for us Christian Democratic politicians it is important that we continue to be a sign in society and walk this beautiful path of dialogue.

It has been for 25 years, that we as EPP Group have been performing structured dialogue with religious communities in the European Parliament, this very special place. Dialogue is our conviction, it is our tradition.

Let me recall: we perform this work in a European Parliament, where political groups are mostly indifferent or even offensive, in the name of extreme secularism.

I still believe this dialogue is getting fundamentally important for the whole secular society of Europe in a way. We have been working to bring people together since the late 1990s. Societies change, so do topics. But, despite all the changes, the Christian Democratic commitment to religious communities is constant.

In the framework of the dialogue, we have been inviting religious representatives to enrich European politics with their social teachings and spiritual reflections.

Beyond social issues and the common good in Europe, we constantly draw attention to the issue of religious freedom in the world. As Europeans, we must express a special responsibility to help persecuted Christians.

We firmly represent these topics, even if we as Christian Democrats are mostly left alone on the scene of European politics. Our mission is to take these matters to the European decision-makers.

Dear Friends!

I think here with gratitude of all our religious partners with whom we worked together over the past decades. We are grateful to COMECE, CEC, CROCEU, the European Jewish Association, the OIC, as well as advocacy organizations such as ACN International, JRS or Open Doors, and many other religious associations.

You as religious representatives speak out for millions of people as spiritual leaders. My sincere thanks therefore to all our high-ranking

guests for your participation today or at our several exchanges that we had in the past.

We always gather to demonstrate for everyone that each of us takes responsibility beyond the own political or ecclesial community.

This responsibility should characterise us in these coming days in Santiago de Compostela.

I am personally proud to be able to assist your work as a politician. I am also proud to belong to a political group, the Christian Democrats where many fellow colleagues have well understood our common challenges throughout the years.

I look forward to starting the next quarter of a century working together with you!

Thank you.

MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER

SESSION I.

SPECIAL INTERVENTIONS ON THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TODAY

Chair: Jan OLBRYCHT MEP, Vice-Chair and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue

– **Othmar KARAS MEP**, First Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for implementation of Article 17 TFEU Dialogue with Churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations (via video connection).

– **Elder Metropolitan EMMANUEL OF CHALCEDON**, Ecumenical Patriarchate (via video connection).

– Mons. Francisco José PRIETO, Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela

– **Mons. Mariano CROCIATA**, President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE).

– **Amb. Ismat JAHAN**, Permanent Observer of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the EU.

– **Rabbi Avi TAWIL**, Director, European Jewish Community Centre.

SPECIAL INTERVENTIONS



Othmar KARAS MEP, First Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for implementation of Article 17 TFEU Dialogue with Churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations (via video connection)

Sehr geehrte Frau Vize-Vorsitzende, liebe Dolors MONTSERRAT, Sehr geehrte Herren Ko-Vorsitzende, lieber Jan OLBRYCHT und György HÖLVÉNYI,

Ihre Exzellenzen, meine Damen und Herren, Kolleginnen und Kollegen, Freundinnen und Freunde,

Vielen Dank für die Einladung. Es ist mir eine große Freude und Ehre, hier zu sein.

Ich spreche heute nicht nur in meiner Funktion als Erster Vizepräsident des Europäischen Parlaments, zuständig für den religiösen und nicht-konfessionellen

Dialog gemäß Artikel 17 des Vertrags von Lissabon, sondern auch in meiner Verantwortung als Christdemokrat.

1) Erstens: Ich bin felsenfest davon überzeugt:

Der religiöse und nicht-konfessionelle Dialog ist von entscheidender Bedeutung für den demokratischen Diskurs. Er ist essenziell für den Frieden, den sozialen Zusammenhalt und die politische Akzep-

tanz der notwendigen Vertiefung der Europäischen Union. Deshalb begrüße ich, dass die Fraktion der Europäischen Volkspartei diesen Dialog seit nunmehr 25 Jahren mit so viel Konsequenz, Engagement und Leidenschaft führt. Und ich freue mich, dass ich als langjähriger Vorsitzender dieser Arbeitsgruppe einen Beitrag dazu leisten konnte.

Europa ist viel mehr, als ein wirtschaftliches Projekt. Bei Europa geht es immer um die Menschen, ihre Würde und das Gemeinwohl.

Dies versinnbildlicht Artikel 17 des Vertrags von Lissabon, der zum ersten Mal eine Rechtsgrundlage geschaffen hat, für einen offenen, transparenten, regelmäßigen Dialog zwischen den EU-Institutionen und den Kirchen, religiösen Vereinigungen, weltanschaulichen und nicht-konfessionellen Organisationen.

Jede und jeder von Euch kann mir wahrscheinlich Beispiele nennen, wo Politiker mit dem Finger auf eine Religion zeigen, um politisches Kleingeld zu schlagen. Und jede und jeder kann mir sicherlich Beispiele nennen, wo es schwierig ist, diesen Dialog zu führen, weil einige sich als Gegner statt Mitbewerber begreifen.

Aber wie kann dann der soziale Zusammenhalt in unserer Gesellschaft und wie eine demokratische Mehrheit für unsere gemeinsamen Werte entstehen?

Gerade jetzt ist es wichtiger denn je, diesen Dialog zu stärken.

Wir dürfen ihn nicht den politischen Extremen überlassen.

2) Zweitens: Wir alle – die Kirchen und die Politik – tragen eine gemeinsame Verantwortung für unsere Gesellschaft und die Zukunft Europas.

Wir sitzen in einem Boot, und wir stehen vor den gleichen Herausforderungen:

Der Rückzug aus unseren Gemeinschaften und vom politischen Diskurs.

Der Vertrauensverlust unserer Mitglieder, der Bürgerinnen und Bürger. Und die Verletzung von gemeinsamen Recht und Werten.

Ohne die Werte des Christentums – das christlich-jüdische Erbe

– stünde Europa auf tönernen Füßen. Die große Vielfalt, die wir heute leben, – auch was Religionen betrifft – ist unsere Stärke!

Wir alle sind Europa. Europa, das ist jede einzelne Europäerin und jeder einzelne Europäer, die dazu beitragen, wie es um Europa gerade steht.

Wo also stehen Europa und wir alle heute?

Europa ist im Krisenmodus, und das nicht erst seit dem 24. Februar letzten Jahres, dem Tag, an dem Putin einen barbarischen Angriffskrieg auf europäischem Boden startete, und nicht erst seit dem 7. Oktober dieses Jahres, dem Tag, an dem die Hamas die abscheulichen Anschläge gegen Israel verübte – dem tödlichsten Tag für das jüdische Volk seit der Shoah.

Wir erleben bereits seit einigen Jahren so viele verschiedene Krisen und Herausforderungen gleichzeitig, wie seit 1945 nicht mehr. Ich glaube für einen klaren Blick auf die Gegenwart und die Zukunft braucht es zuallererst: Ehrlichkeit. Dazu gehört, offen zu sagen: Die Welt von heute ist komplex – es gibt keine einfachen Antworten.

Es ist unsere Aufgabe als Europäer – ganz gleich wo wir stehen – daher zuallererst: Verantwortung zu übernehmen, die Komplexitäten nicht zu ignorieren, sondern sie gemeinsam zu lösen.

Die Grundlage für die konkreten Antworten auf die vielfältigen Herausforderungen sind unsere gemeinsamen europäischen Werte: Frieden in Freiheit, liberale Demokratie, Rechtsstaatlichkeit, Respekt vor der Würde jedes Menschen und Toleranz, Solidarität und Subsidiarität.

Diese Errungenschaften, darunter auch die Charta der Grundrechte, schützen die Vielfalt, den Pluralismus und die Religions- und Glaubensfreiheit und ermöglichen Zusammenarbeit, sozialen Zusammenhalt und Einheit. Das sind keine leeren Phrasen – das können und dürfen sie auch niemals sein.

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3) Drittens: Leider sind diese Errungenschaften unter Druck geraten, nicht nur außerhalb, sondern auch innerhalb der Europäischen Union.

Unsere Gesellschaft ist zunehmend gespalten – durch politische Akteure

aber auch durch religiöse Führer, die die Polarisierung über die Suche nach gemeinsamen Lösungen stellen.

Krieg und Terror haben gezeigt: Es gibt Machthaber in Europa, die Politik, Kirchen und Gläubige für politische Spiele und die Spaltung der Gesellschaft missbrauchen.

Denken wir nur an Patriarch Kyrill, der ein Instrument von Putin ist. Die russisch-orthodoxe Kirche verfolgt die gleiche Politik wie er – die Expansion der Region und der Kirche. Blicken wir in den Nahen Osten: Es handelt sich nicht nur um einen Bürgerkrieg oder einen einfachen Konflikt. Für die Islamisten ist es DER Konflikt: Juden gegen Muslime, Heiliges Land, Jerusalem. Deutlicher wird es nicht.

Sehen wir die Rolle der sozialen Medien, die den Konflikt transportieren. Sie werden von Extremen missbraucht, um die Spaltung voranzutreiben.

Und das wirkt sich aus, auf die Grundsatzfrage „Demokratie-Autokratie“.

Setzen wir uns auseinander mit den Extremen und ihrer Instrumentalisierung von Islam, Terroranschlägen und Flüchtlingsströmen. Wenn unser Ordnungsmodell keine Antwort auf diese Herausforderungen findet, dann werden nur die Extremisten, Populisten und Nationalisten gewinnen!

Meine Damen und Herren!

Bei den kommenden Europawahlen – am 6. bis 9. Juni 2024 –

geht es genau um diese Richtungsentscheidung:

Liberale parlamentarische Demokratie oder nationale Autokratien Europa in der Welt oder Zerfall in Nationalismen

Verantwortung oder Populismus Ehrlichkeit oder Fake News

Daher bitte ich Sie alle, ganz inständig, um Ihre Unterstützung bei der Mobilisierung der Bürgerinnen und Bürger zur Teilnahme an diesen Wahlen!

In diesem Zusammenhang möchte ich auch das nächste Artikel-17-Dialogseminar im Europäischen Parlament ausrichten,

zum Thema: «Die Bedeutung des Artikel-17-Dialogs für die Sensibilisierung gegen Desinformation und ausländische Einmischung sowie für eine hohe Wahlbeteiligung bei den Europawahlen».

Wir planen, diese Veranstaltung am Dienstagnachmittag, den 13. Februar 2024

zu organisieren. Und ich hoffe, viele von Ihnen und Euch dort wiederzusehen.

In diesem Sinne freue ich mich auf Ihre Beiträge,

vielen Dank für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit.



Mons. Francisco José PRIETO, *Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela*

Es indudable que «el concepto de cultura supera en amplitud al concepto de religión. Existe una concepción según la cual la religión representa la dimensión trascendente de la cultura y, en cierto sentido, su alma. Las religiones, ciertamente, han contribuido al progreso de la cultura y a la edificación de una sociedad más humana». La religión se incultura y la cultura se hace terreno fértil para una humanidad más rica y que esté a la altura de su específica e íntima vocación de apertura a los demás y a Dios.

Por tanto, «es tiempo de comprender más profundamente que el núcleo generador de toda auténtica cultura está constituido por su orientación al misterio de Dios, en el cual solamente encuentra su fundamento inquebrantable un orden social centrado en la dignidad y responsabilidad personal».

La religión se ofrece en general como respuesta de sentido a las preguntas fundamentales del hombre y la mujer: «Los hombres esperan de las diversas religiones la respuesta a los enigmas recónditos de la condición humana, que hoy como ayer, conmueven íntimamente su corazón» (Nostra aetate 1). Esta exigencia pone necesariamente a las religiones no sólo en diálogo entre sí, sino también con las distintas formas de interpretación atea o no religiosa de la persona humana y de la historia, que han de confrontarse con las mismas preguntas

sobre el sentido. La exigencia del diálogo interreligioso, en la más amplia acepción de cotejo entre sujetos y comunidades portadores de distintas visiones, hoy se percibe como fundamental incluso por parte de los estados y de la sociedad civil. Con el fin de evitar, en este delicado ámbito de reflexión, fáciles reduccionismos e instrumentalizaciones, tengamos presentes algunas indicaciones.

El avance del proceso de secularización en la sociedad occidental, caracterizada cada vez más por el multiculturalismo, podría producir una fuerte marginación de la experiencia religiosa, admitiéndola como lícita solamente dentro de la esfera privada. Más en general, en la concepción dominante, se asiste hoy a un tácito descarte de la cuestión antropológica, o sea, de la cuestión relativa a la plena dignidad y al destino del ser humano. Se abre paso así la pretensión de arrancar totalmente de la cultura cualquier expresión religiosa. Con ello, se pierde la conciencia del valor precioso de la dimensión religiosa en orden a un fructífero e incitante diálogo intercultural.

Con su referencia a verdades últimas y definitivas y, por tanto, a verdades que dan sentido -verdades de las que la cultura occidental difundida parece alejarse-, la religión representa, en todo caso, un decisivo aporte a la construcción de la comunidad social en el respeto del bien común y en la búsqueda de la promoción de todo ser humano. Quienes detentan el poder político están, por tanto, llamados a un efectivo discernimiento de las posibilidades de liberación y de inclusión universal que toda cultura y toda religión manifiestan y realizan. Un criterio importante para esa valoración resulta ser la efectiva capacidad que éstas poseen para valorar todo el hombre y todos los hombres.

La religión puede contribuir al diálogo intercultural «solamente si Dios tiene un lugar en la esfera pública»:

«La negación del derecho a profesar públicamente la propia religión y a trabajar para que las verdades de la fe inspiren también la vida pública, tiene consecuencias negativas sobre el verdadero desarrollo. La exclusión de la religión del ámbito público, así como, el fundamentalismo religioso por otro lado, impiden el encuentro entre las personas y su colaboración para el progreso de la humanidad. [...].

En el laicismo y en el fundamentalismo se pierde la posibilidad de

un diálogo fecundo y de una provechosa colaboración entre la razón y la fe religiosa. La razón necesita siempre ser purificada por la fe, y esto vale también para la razón política, que no debe creerse omnipotente. A su vez, la religión tiene siempre necesidad de ser purificada por la razón para mostrar su auténtico rostro humano. La ruptura de este diálogo comporta un coste muy gravoso para el desarrollo de la humanidad» (CiV 56).

Fe y razón deben, por tanto, reconocerse recíprocamente, y recíprocamente fecundarse.

Una cuestión importante en el diálogo entre cultura y religiones atañe al debate entre la fe y las distintas formas de ateísmo o concepciones humanísticas no religiosas. Este debate requiere colocar en su centro la búsqueda de aquello que favorece el desarrollo integral de todo el hombre y de todos los hombres, evitando paralizarse en un estéril choque de partes contrarias. Requiere, asimismo, una sociedad que reconozca el derecho a la propia identidad.

Como afirmaba Juan Pablo II, «el hombre merece honor y amor para sí mismo y debe ser respetado en su dignidad. Así los hermanos deben volver a aprender a hablarse como hermanos, respetarse y comprenderse para que el hombre mismo pueda sobrevivir y crecer en la dignidad, la libertad, y el honor.

En la medida en que sofoca el diálogo con las culturas, el mundo moderno se precipita hacia conflictos que corren el riesgo de ser mortales para el porvenir de la civilización humana.

Más allá de los prejuicios y de las barreras culturales y de las diferencias raciales, lingüísticas, religiosas e ideológicas, los humanos deben reconocerse como hermanos y hermanas y aceptarse en su diversidad».

El diálogo entre las distintas religiones asume especial relieve. La globalización ha aumentado la interdependencia de los pueblos, con sus diferentes tradiciones y religiones. A este respecto, no falta quien afirma que las diferencias son necesariamente causa de división y, por tanto, al máximo, pueden ser toleradas; mientras que otros llegan a sostener que las religiones, simplemente, deben ser reducidas al silencio. «Por el contrario, [las diferencias] ofrecen a personas de

diversas religiones una espléndida oportunidad para convivir en profundo respeto, estima y aprecio, animándose unos a otros por los caminos de Dios».

A este respecto, la Iglesia católica siente cómo va siendo cada vez más importante la necesidad de un diálogo que, a partir de la conciencia de la identidad de la propia fe, pueda ayudar a las personas a entrar en contacto con las otras religiones. Diálogo indica no sólo el colquio, sino también el conjunto de las relaciones interreligiosas, positivas y constructivas, con personas y comunidades de otras creencias, para un conocimiento mutuo. El motivo del diálogo con personas y comunidades de otras religiones radica en el hecho de que todos somos criaturas de Dios, que actúa en toda persona humana, que, a través de la razón, percibe el misterio de Dios y reconoce los valores universales.

Además, el diálogo encuentra en la búsqueda del patrimonio de valores éticos comunes y presentes en las distintas tradiciones religiosas otra razón para contribuir como creyentes a la afirmación del bien común, de la justicia y de la paz.

Por tanto, «mientras que muchos están siempre dispuestos a subrayar las diferencias inmediatamente perceptibles entre las religiones, nosotros, como creyentes o personas religiosas, nos vemos puestos ante el reto de proclamar con claridad lo que tenemos en común».

Las modalidades del diálogo entre los creyentes pueden ser diversas: hay un diálogo de la vida, compartiendo alegrías y dolores; existe un diálogo de las obras, colaborando en orden a la promoción del desarrollo del hombre y la mujer; existe un diálogo teológico, cuando es posible, con el estudio de las respectivas herencias religiosas; existe el diálogo de la experiencia religiosa.

Este diálogo no es un acuerdo, sino un espacio para el testimonio recíproco entre creyentes que pertenecen a religiones distintas, para conocer más y mejor la religión del otro y los comportamientos éticos que ésta conlleva. Por el conocimiento directo y objetivo del otro y de las instancias religiosas y éticas que especifican su credo y praxis, se acrecientan el respeto y la estima recíprocos, la mutua comprensión, la confianza y la amistad. «Este diálogo, para ser auténtico, debe ser claro, evitando relativismos y sincretismos, pero animado

de un respeto sincero por los otros y de un espíritu de reconciliación y de fraternidad».

La claridad del diálogo comporta, ante todo, la fidelidad a la propia identidad. Para ello es importante afirmar la responsabilidad de la educación en «transmitir a los sujetos la conciencia de las propias raíces y ofrecerles puntos de referencia que les permitan encontrar su situación personal en el mundo». Todos los niños y los jóvenes, deben tener la misma posibilidad de acceder al conocimiento de la religión propia y de los elementos que caracterizan a las otras religiones. El conocimiento de otros modos de pensar y de creer disipa los miedos y enriquece a todos con los modos de pensar del otro y con sus tradiciones espirituales. Por eso, los profesores tienen la responsabilidad de respetar siempre a la persona humana que busca la verdad de su propio ser; de apreciar y difundir las grandes tradiciones culturales abiertas a la transcendencia y que expresan la aspiración a la libertad y a la verdad.

Este conocimiento no se agota en sí mismo, sino que se abre al diálogo. Cuanto más rico es el conocimiento, más capacitado está uno para realizar ese diálogo y para convivir con quien profesa otras religiones. Las diferentes religiones, en el contexto de un diálogo abierto entre las culturas, pueden y deben aportar una riqueza decisiva para la formación de la conciencia acerca de los valores comunes.

A su vez, el diálogo, fruto del conocimiento, debe ser cultivado para vivir juntos y construir una civilización del amor. No se trata de rebajar la verdad, sino de cumplir con la finalidad de la educación, la cual «tiene una función particular en la construcción de un mundo más solidario y pacífico. La educación puede contribuir a la consolidación del humanismo integral, abierto a la dimensión ética y religiosa, que atribuye la debida importancia al conocimiento y a la estima de las culturas y de los valores espirituales de las diversas civilizaciones».

Este diálogo tiene el objetivo «de eliminar las tensiones y conflictos, e incluso los posibles choques, para una mejor comprensión entre las distintas culturas religiosas existentes en una determinada región.

Podrá contribuir a purificar las culturas de todos los elementos

deshumanizadores, para, de este modo, ser agente de transformación. Podrá también ayudar a promover los valores culturales tradicionales amenazados por la modernidad y por la nivelación que una internacionalización indiscriminada puede comportar». «El diálogo es muy importante para la propia madurez, porque en la confrontación con otra persona, en la confrontación con las demás culturas, incluso en la confrontación con las demás religiones, uno crece: crece, madura. [...] Este diálogo es lo que construye la paz», ha afirmado el Papa Francisco.



Mons. Mariano CROCIATA, *President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE)*

Ringrazio dell'invito e saluto cordialmente i Parlamentari del Partito Popolare Europeo, le autorità politiche e religiose presenti e tutti gli intervenuti. Il fatto che questo sia il XXV incontro annuale del Gruppo di dialogo interculturale del Partito Popolare Europeo conferisce ad esso un carattere singolare.

L'esistenza di un tale Gruppo è il segno di una scelta lungimirante e di un impegno consapevole nell'abbracciare la prospettiva del dialogo interculturale e interreligioso come parte integrante dell'impegno politico dei parlamentari del Partito Popolare. Questo oggi viene in evidenza in maniera del tutto speciale.

Che un partito politico si occupi di dialogo interculturale e interreligioso è l'espressione di una responsabilità volta a cogliere e a rappresentare anche le istanze sociali attivate dalla dimensione religiosa. Del resto, un partito attento alle dinamiche sociali e capace di guardare alla ricerca di un bene comune il più possibile integrale non può fare a meno di aprirsi a tale dimensione anche religiosa. L'esperienza religiosa è, non da ora, di fatto e di diritto un fenomeno plurale nelle nostre società occidentali, sia per l'evoluzione interna della storia della cultura sia per l'inserimento di nuove presenze religiose a causa dei flussi immigratori. Per queste ragioni diventa necessario seguire e accompagnare la convivenza tra diverse fedi e differenti culti, affinché la loro pacifica coesistenza e la loro positiva interazione prevengano tentazioni di conflitto ma al contrario diventino una risorsa per la collettività tutta.

La presenza di fenomeni di fondamentalismo e di radicalizzazione viene avvertita giustamente come un segnale di allarme che chiede di prevenire derive pericolose, prima che la compresenza delle differenze e il confronto si trasformino in aperto contrasto o ostilità da parte di qualcuno o di gruppi. Sarebbe illusorio pensare che per prevenire in radice simili derive basti cercare di reprimere o emarginare la dimensione religiosa, poiché essa, al di là di deviazioni sperimentate e possibili, è comun-que una energia incompressibile dentro le profondità della condizione umana, fonte di ispirazione per le culture e i loro valori. E là dove le religioni non riescono a trovare spazi di espressione o vengono rimosse, allora è la forza oscura del sacro a muovere singoli e collettività nella ricerca di un senso dell'esistenza umana, ma in direzioni non sempre prevedibili specialmente nel tempo del dominio della tecnica.

In questo senso è essenziale riaffermare che la via per una serena convivenza fra le tradizioni religiose non è quella della rimozione o anche solo della emarginazione della religione dalla discussione e dallo scambio nello spazio pubblico, ma di una sua valorizzazione nella tutela e nella promozione del principio di libertà di religione e di libertà di coscienza nel quadro degli ordinamenti che una società democraticamente sceglie di darsi. Da qui soltanto può scaturire una convivenza feconda nell'incontro di diversità nelle quali le correnti profonde della religione trovano spazio e vengono incanalate. Per questo è necessario incoraggiare il dialogo interculturale e interreligioso se si vuole vedere crescere una società più giusta e solidale.

Ciò che vorrei aggiungere alla prospettiva così accennata è una riflessione ulteriore svolta dal punto di vista religioso, più esattamente cattolico, circa il dialogo interreligioso. Naturalmente è necessario evitare confusioni al riguardo, poiché è imprescindibile tenere ferma la distinzione tra il dialogo proprio delle religioni tra loro e quello istituzionale, previsto dall'articolo 17 del Testo Fondamentale dell'Unione Europea, tra le religioni e gli organismi della stessa Unione.

La traiettoria che va dalla Nostra Aetate del Vaticano II al magistero di papa Francesco disegna uno sviluppo coerente verso una esplicita e positiva comprensione del valore e della necessità del dialogo interreligioso per le stesse religioni. Se all'inizio l'atteggiamento della Chiesa è stato dettato dal riconoscimento dei semina Verbi (i semi del Verbo) disseminati in tutte le religioni e le culture, il successivo insegnamento ha visto sviluppare una riflessione articolata che è giunta a distinguere, in un crescendo di intensità, quattro livelli o forme di dialogo che abbracciano tutte le dimensioni dell'esperienza religiosa e umana: il dialogo della vita e quello dell'azione, il dialogo spirituale e quello teologico. Il momento più maturo viene, soprattutto nel magistero più recente, quando sarà riconosciuta una azione esplicita dello Spirito nelle culture e nelle tradizioni religiose altre rispetto al cristianesimo, così che quanti vivono dentro di esse la loro esperienza religiosa come l'unica e la vera, trovano attraverso di esse la via della salvezza.

Oggi, con il magistero di papa Francesco, in particolare nella Fratelli tutti, e con la più recente riflessione teologica, raccogliamo i frutti di tale percorso. L'esistenza di diverse tradizioni religiose rientra misteriosamente nel disegno di Dio, il quale vuole condurre tutti a un fine di salvezza. Perciò la loro coesistenza e il loro incontro sono una opportunità e anzi una chiamata alla stima reciproca e alla conoscenza gli uni degli altri. Solo da questo cammino di condivisione può venire un'ulteriore crescita delle singole tradizioni religiose. Per esse non si tratta di annacquare o addirittura smarrire l'identità propria di ciascuna e i contenuti della fede che le caratterizza, ma di rafforzarla non nel contrasto con le altre, bensì attraverso il dialogo e il confronto con esse. La forza della identità di ciascuna tradizione religiosa non viene dalla chiusura o dalla opposizione alle altre, ma dipende dalla capacità di riconoscimento e di accoglienza delle ricchezze altrui, eventualmente sviluppando, grazie a questo

incontro, dimensioni nascoste o implicite della propria stessa identità. Con l'auspicio che lo stesso avvenga anche nell'altro, in una reciprocità di relazioni sempre più intense. Una coscienza più matura porta sempre più comunità religiose a riconoscere senza riserve la legittimità delle altre tradizioni religiose, anche se per alcune il cammino da fare è ancora lungo. La difficoltà dipende non tanto dalla configurazione dottrinale della singola tradizione religiosa, ma dalla coniugazione storica e culturale concreta dentro determinate situazioni ambientali, e ancora di più dall'intreccio strumentale della religione con la politica, come purtroppo anche il nostro passato occidentale ci ha fatto sperimentare. L'unico modo per superare questi ritardi è ancora una volta il dialogo paziente e tenace.

Il genere di relazione di dialogo che dovrebbe vigere tra le religioni diventa in tal modo un modello e un fermento per la vita sociale quando esso si realizza autenticamente. Il dialogo è infatti il modo per rappresentare il rapporto costruttivo, proprio di una società democratica, che deve svolgersi tra i vari soggetti e le forze sociali che la compongono. Ma le religioni, quando dialogano autenticamente in una società democratica, svolgono un ulteriore importante servizio. Ricordano infatti che senza risorse ideali e orizzonti più vasti di quelli meramente materiali non c'è società umana che possa reggere.

Su questo punto dobbiamo rilevare la fase critica che la cultura occidentale attraversa, per la persistenza di orientamenti di opinioni e gruppi di pressione che ritengono che la società e il cammino del progresso procederebbero meglio se ci si potesse sbarazzare delle religioni. Queste invece conservano una riserva di valori, di esperienze, soprattutto di motivazioni a trazione spirituale e morale tali, da rappresentare una risorsa insostituibile per il bene della collettività intera. L'obiezione che si scaglia, non senza motivi, contro tutte le malefatte di uomini e donne delle religioni non può pesare al punto di annullare il valore di gran lunga superiore che l'esperienza religiosa possiede e trasmette, se non altro perché l'infedeltà dei singoli non può inficiare la natura profonda di ciascuna religione e il valore della coerenza dei più.

Assicurare anche in sede politica, nazionale ed europea, il riconoscimento delle istituzioni che rappresentano le religioni e un dialogo

sistematico e strutturato con esse, è una garanzia di futuro per le stesse istituzioni civili oltre che per la comunità umana tutta intera. L'esperienza religiosa detiene infatti, come suo patrimonio inalienabile, il senso della dignità di ogni essere umano e delle condizioni che ne consentono la salvaguardia nelle relazioni tra le persone e nella società tutta intera.

Come ha detto papa Francesco in occasione del suo viaggio in Kenya nel 2015: «le religioni interpretano un ruolo essenziale nel formare le coscienze, nell'instillare nei giovani i profondi valori spirituali delle rispettive tradizioni e nel preparare buoni cittadini, capaci di infondere nella società civile onestà, integrità e una visione del mondo che valorizzi la persona umana rispetto al potere e al guadagno materiale». Da questo insieme viene soprattutto la spinta a coltivare relazioni autentiche, a intendere la vita nella sua costitutiva dimensione sociale, alla cui radice stanno la solidarietà, l'amicizia, la fraternità.



Amb. Ismat JAHAN, *Permanent Observer of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the EU*

Hon'ble MEP Jan Olbrycht, Distinguished co-panelists, Ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning !

I am deeply honoured to be part of this important and timely discussions. The OIC has always welcomed opportunities to engage with the EPP Group in the critical area of intercultural relations and inter-religious dialogue, which has gained even more urgency, today. I thank the EPP group for inviting me.

In all frankness, I must admit that I do not qualify to speak as an expert in theology. As many of you are aware, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) with a membership of 57 states is an intergovernmental body, and not a religious organization. One of the key priorities of the Organization however, is the promotion of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in developing a culture of peace, tolerance and moderation, as well as for combating racism, discrimination and extremism. I will speak on the importance of such dialogues in fostering peace, trust and social harmony in the context of our times, mainly from the perspective of a diplomat.

We now live in a world, both integrated and divided. While we are tied together by fast evolving communications and transportation technologies but also polarized along political, ideological, cultural, religious and other fault lines. It is almost impossible to turn on the news today without witnessing scenes of hatred, violence and intolerance often perpetrated in the name of religion, faith or belief. Today, more than ever, we need conversations, dialogues, sharing of perspectives among religious communities urging respect for diverse voices. This would mean, consciously and effectively, building an environment which replaces the collective notion of “us” vs. “them”, to an inclusive readiness of living in a shared space, with shared concerns and interests. And yes, even shared values, because living together means abiding by certain ground rules. There is more that “unites us than which divides us”. Ethnic and religious diversities can coexist in peace and harmony, IF we are able to transform prejudices and fear into mutual understanding and respect. The social teachings of all religions are in essence guiding principles for an individual or a group to show kindness and respects towards others. To repeat, interreligious dialogue is the very essence of promoting social harmony, human solidarity and mutual respect among diverse communities. It can in fact foster a climate of understanding and cooperation both within a nation and between nations, at large.

Religious communities can and they often do play a vital role in influencing positive changes in society; in shaping perspectives on social, economic and moral issues through collaboration on shared concerns such as poverty, human rights and issues of ethical importance. Yes, we meet here, global leaders are meeting in Dubai for COP 28. The religious communities can indeed serve as important catalysts for environmental action by leveraging their values, teachings and influence to address the challenges of climate change. Furthermore, dialogue among the religious communities can make impressive contributions in addressing humanitarian crises both through their advocacy as well as direct involvement in charitable work and humanitarian aid.

In many cases, religious leaders and institutions by building bridges between people of different faiths, can be influential in reducing conflicts, also in peacebuilding efforts by mitigating tensions, promoting peace and reconciliation in societies affected by religious or

ethnic strife. Dialogue between religious leaders and policymakers, as well as law makers, can help shape policies that are more inclusive, respecting religious freedoms without discriminations or persecution while ensuring the well-being of all citizens. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, including in Europe, we are witnessing a new kind of nationalism, be it “ultra-nationalism/ aggressive nationalism” or “narrow populism”. Far-right extreme political parties are seen to capitalize on the infamous principle of “divide and rule” often making religious minorities as scapegoats for the existing socio-economic failings and insecurities in the society. Obviously, such politicking is either causing new conflicts to arise or to revive old conflicts. Some of these have far-reaching ramifications not only at local, national, regional levels but sometimes even becoming a threat to international peace and security.

Furthermore, what is more worrisome is that religion is being used as a political tool. Politicization of religion through deployment of religious rhetoric sometimes, even by invoking non-contextual references to passages in religious books or scriptures, drawing a line between the so-called forces of civilization and the forces of barbarism, may serve short-lived self-serving political interests of a few, having a cynical appeal to extreme right wing base. Such narratives are however, extremely dangerous, enflaming suspicion, tension and further distrust between and among diverse groups. Much to our regret, Islamophobic rhetoric can be seen in political discourse of ultra-right wing parties who unfortunately pursue an agenda of irrational hatred of Islam and Muslims. Depiction of Muslims as alien to, and incompatible with European culture and values leads to further stigmatization and exclusion. Unfortunately, such way of thinking is not only manifested in individual attitudes and actions, but in many cases also structurally ingrained in policy initiatives or institutional arrangements, as well as sometimes in the media, using tactics of pure deception and deliberate rumour-mongering.

In parallel with the growing trend of Islamophobia, there is anti-Semitism and other forms of racism and discrimination, not only in the so-called West, but also beyond. What is often forgotten is that Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a common belief in the oneness of God, sacred history and biblical prophets. Peace is central to all three faiths.

Understandably, there could be natural reasons for people having trouble trusting those who are different from them. To my mind, hatred and discrimination based on religion, race and ethnicity as well as defamation of one’s religion or faith unless effectively addressed by the political authorities can only lead to erosion of the affected people’s trust in public institutions. I believe we have a broad agreement that activities of bigoted individuals and groups who incite hatred and violence, insult or ridicule sacred symbols and beliefs and defame religions must never be condoned. Like many, we may also believe that freedom of expression or speech is not an absolute right; it is subject to special obligations and responsibilities”. To give an example, Europe, the recent and not so recent incidents of burning or mutilation of copies of Holy Quran are provocative acts that exemplify hatred and incitement to violence in addition to being a manifestation of Islamophobia. Such actions cannot and must not take cover under any legitimate expression of the right to freedom of expression or opinion. On the other hand, in contrast, it is equally reprehensible to see today, that voices in support of just and legitimate causes are getting stifled and peaceful assemblies are curtailed in countries which normally take pride in democracy and freedom of speech. Interfaith dialogues in rapprochement have enabled notable collaboration within national and global civil society around shared agendas. But we must ponder how effective these have been in forging global solidarity or in making global governance more just and inclusive, in ensuring social harmony and peaceful coexistence at the global level?

The signing of the Human Fraternity document in Abu Dhabi, in February 2019 with the participation of His Eminence Ahmad Al Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and His Holiness Pope Francis is not a means in itself. The two leaders advocated: “the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.” Such convergence of minds within two major religions is very important, especially at a time when societies tend to get polarized along religious divide. A draft MoU between the OIC and the Vatican’s is presently under consideration.

The OIC has also been part of networks along with religious leaders to create conditions of peace at the grassroots level in areas of conflict. Notably, it has undertaken some projects to support peacebuilding and peaceful coexistence e.g in Southern Philippines, Myanmar, Central African Republic, Mali, and Nigeria, thereby helping communities to use dialogue to foster cooperation and reconciliation. Needless to emphasize the OIC’s priority focus remains on the cause of Palestine. It has consistently urged for a comprehensive and just solution for lasting peace and stability, based on relevant UNSC resolutions and Arab Peace Initiative. We are following the situation in the Middle East with grave concern. What is happening in the Middle East is not a religious war, although some might like to portray. We must remain united in confronting any such attempts that try to cause a rift between Judaism and Islam and their respective followers. Both Judaism and Islam are not a threat to each other’s existence but are guarantors of universal brotherhood and peaceful coexistence. This must be stressed. Here I would like to recall, in mid-October, I attended an event in Seville, Spain of the European Muslim and Jewish Leadership Council (MJLC). The Council in a statement reiterated that “the violence occurring in the Middle East which also impacts communities in Europe is not religious in nature”. The MJLC called upon Muslim and Jewish communities in Europe alike to keep an open mind and act in a spirit of cooperation in these dark times. Similarly the R20 International summit of Religious Authorities (ISORA) on 27th November in Jakarta underlined the moral and spiritual responsibility of religious authorities to ensure that their respective faiths serve as vehicles of mutual understanding and reconciliation rather than perpetuate the primordial cycle of identity –based hatred, tyranny and violence.

Most recently on 29 November, a joint statement of EU coordinators, Special envoys and Special representatives noted that in the current geopolitical context, hatred and discriminations against Muslims and those perceived against Muslims have risen. They encouraged governments, civil society representatives and religious leaders to promote mutual respect, dialogue and understanding for peaceful coexistence in Europe’s diverse societies. Notably, they had issued similar statement on combatting anti-semitism earlier on 7 November.

The positive impact of inter-religious approaches to dialogue both at societal and global levels, is being recognized in the discourses on mediation, conflict resolution, peace-making and peace building. Here I would like to stress on a point on the important role that religious leaders and communities can play in influencing governmental policies on disarmament, especially by raising societal awareness about the moral and humanitarian consequences of excessive arms production, arms trade and proliferation of weapons. It is a sad commentary on our collective conscience that today, a disproportionate amount of fund is spent on armament which IF released could have been used for poverty alleviation, promotion of multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence of humanity.

Admittedly, it is not always enough to confine the efforts of religious communities to traditional appeals alone; they must be complemented by long-term strategy to mobilize the collective power of religion, including the support from the people from all faiths. For such dialogues to be effective and to have deeper impact these must be structured and conducted in a way in which it can reach the grass roots of society underlying the message that combating religious discriminations and promoting peaceful coexistence is responsibility is a societal imperative. This would require a collaborative approach involving religious actors, faith-based organizations, community leaders, the civil society organizations, including women’s groups, politicians, parliamentarians and policy makers in fighting prejudice, building trust and promoting social inclusivity.

Engaging the youth, our future generation in the process is extremely crucial in promoting their collective ability to cultivate change through fighting prejudice and promoting moderate voice. The role of education, starting from very early in one’s life is very important, so is the important role that media can play through unbiased reporting in promoting mutual respect and inclusivity. In my long experience as a diplomat, I found that building trust among diverse communities and nations is an investment in harmonious coexistence. “Cultural diplomacy”, as a soft power, can be a tool to foster trust and understanding by bridging gaps between cultures. This is not only through dialogue and literature, but more effectively through exchanges in the fields of music, theatre, sports, cuisine and so forth.

Allow me to digress a little. I was involved in a project of the Georgetown University on Pope Francis’ notion on culture of encounter as an imperative for a divided world. I found the experience extremely rewarding. The notion as underlined by His Holiness suggests that the very word “encounter” points to the interplay of diplomacy, global governance and the search of peace. He has stated and I quote, “There is always movement in an encounter. If we all stand still, we will never meet. ‘Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter’” (Fratelli Tutti, 215). The lesson that I took away from this project is that through sincere and honest engagements in dialogues and diplomacy it is possible to iron out differences and reach win-win solutions! However, the task is not easy always. It must be admitted that in the ultimate international relations are guided by realpolitik and strict national interests, and not necessarily by moral, humanitarian, theological, or ideological considerations.

Whether as religious leaders or as diplomats we must not falter in our pursuit for societal and global peace, security and interfaith understanding and harmonious coexistence. What I believe, would be more important for us is to urge our leaders for that genuine political will to prevail! The path to a societal “modus vivendi” is far from a simple task. But it is worth a try. This is why we are here, this morning to dialogue, to listen and to learn from each other.

I thank you for your kind attention. I will be happy to take in your questions or comments.



Rabbi Avi TAWIL, *Director, European Jewish Community Centre*

It is with great honor that I stand before you today in the inspiring city of Santiago de Compostela. This city has a unique way of urging individuals towards personal betterment. As a person of Jewish faith, I feel a deep connection to Spain, a nation that has significantly enriched Jewish philosophy. In many ways, I feel right at home here.

Visit to Pope Francis:

On the 5th of June 2023, representing my organization, we had the privilege of forming a committee to visit the Pope. We presented our initiative focused on fostering dialogue and celebrating diversity. The Pope's words about 'El Camino de Paz', the path to peace, left a profound impact on us. He described peace as a construct built incrementally, drop by drop, much like the way trust is cultivated.

Rabbi Akiva's Lesson:

This imagery of 'drop by drop' resonated with me, bringing to mind the story of the Jewish sage Rabbi Akiva. A man who, despite being illiterate at 40, embarked on a journey to conquer the vast sea of Torah knowledge. His epiphany, sparked by witnessing water drops piercing a stone, is a powerful testament to the strength of persistent effort.

The Power of Ideas:

These stories parallel the work of the EPP Intercultural Dialogue Group. Through its steady, drop-by-drop efforts, it has created a stream of coexistence and peace. They remind us that significant changes in life often don't come through radical shifts, but through the persistence of work and a steadfast belief in a better future.

The Candle Metaphor:

Lastly, I'd like to evoke the image of a candle. The flame, representing the fire of ideas and dialogue, can only burn brightly if there is sufficient oil. This oil symbolizes the fundamental rights essential for our society's well being. Children should grow up free from fear and persecution. In a Europe where antisemitism is unfortunately rising, ensuring these fundamental rights is crucial for sustaining the flame of understanding and dialogue.

Therefore I am deeply honored to be part of this gathering, a collective effort to sustain dialogue and understanding. It is our collective duty to nurture this flame, ensuring a future marked by tolerance, peace, and respect for all.

Jacob and Esau's Embrace:

Today, we find ourselves in a world torn by conflict and misunderstanding. Therefore, our coming together here is not just symbolic; it is a necessary step towards a future of peace and cooperation. In the Torah and the Bible, we find a story that resonates profoundly with our purpose today. It is the story of Jacob and Esau, twin brothers who, despite a lifetime of struggle and competition, find their way back to each other in a profound moment of embrace. This story is not just a tale from the past; it is a timeless representation of reconciliation and unity. It teaches us that, despite life's circumstances leading us to opposite poles, our essential connection, our shared humanity, remains unbroken. This narrative is particularly poignant in the context of Santiago de Compostela, a city with a rich tapestry of religious history, including the Jewish heritage that I represent.

Santiago once had a Jewish quarter, or *Judería*, which was a common feature in many Spanish cities. The *Judería* was located near what is now the Mercado de Abastos. This community, like many others in Spain, was involved in various trades and professions, in-

cluding medicine, commerce, and craftsmanship. However, it came to an end, as did all Jewish communities in Spain, with the expulsion of Jews in 1492. Yet, 500 years later, we are witnessing a revival of Jewish communities in Spain.

History is marked by periods of coexistence and conflict. It reminds us that the alternative to dialogue is often violence, and that dialogue can prevent the tragedy of civil unrest. The story of Jacob and Esau is a beacon of hope. It shows us that unity and love can prevail over division and conflict. In their embrace, we see the power of forgiveness, a force strong enough to illuminate the darkest corners of human instinct. Their story is a testament to the fact that even the deepest divides can be breached, that understanding can replace estrangement, and that compassion can triumph over animosity. Today, we come together not just to talk, but to listen, to truly hear each other, and to find common ground. Our differences are well-marked, but they are also the source of our strengths. Like Jacob and Esau, we may have traveled different paths, but our destination is shared: a world of peace, understanding, and mutual respect.

We all share the responsibility to maintain peace, tranquility, and harmony in this European house. Literally like a house, the hygiene, spirit, and ambiance depend on all those who live in it. We are all equal partners in this mission.

Let us take inspiration from Jacob and Esau. Let us embrace in our hearts and minds. Let us strengthen each other, for it is together that we will shine the brightest. In our unity, in our dialogue, in our shared humanity, lies the hope for a world free from the shadows of conflict and division.

May our time together here in Santiago de Compostela be a step forward towards a future where, like these brothers, Europe will find unity and peace in our coexistence of biblical proportions.

Thank you very much.



From left to right: Rabbi Avi TAWIL, Rabbi Levi MATUSOF



From left to right: Mons. Francisco José PRIETO, Mons. Mariano CROCIATA



From left to right: Fr Hyacinthe DESTIVELLE O.P., Mohamed AJANA EL OUAFI, Mons. Mariano CROCIATA



From left to right: Jan OLBRYCHT MEP, Francisco José MILLÁN MON MEP, Sandra KALNIETE MEP, Karlo RESSLER MEP, Ivan Stefanec MEP, Tomas ZDECHOVSKY MEP, Antonio LÓPEZ ISTURIZ MEP



From left to right: Franc BOGOVIC MEP, Ljudmila NOVAK MEP, Tomislav SOKOL MEP, Željana ZOVKO MEP, Jesús GAMALLO, Francisco José MILLÁN MON MEP, Diego CALVO POUISO, Dolors MONTSERRAT MEP, Antonio LÓPEZ ISTURIZ MEP, Jan OLBRYCHT MEP, Ivan STEFANEK MEP, Rosa ESTARÁS FERRAGUT MEP, Leopoldo LÓPEZ GIL MEP, Karlo RESSLER MEP

SESSION II.

“THE IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE OF DIALOGUE: “DIALOGUE IN ACTION”

Chair: Željana ZOVKO MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament

- **Fr. Manuel Enrique BARRIOS**, General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the EU (COMECE) and former Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations at the Spanish Bishops’ Conference.
- **Fr. Olivier POQUILLON OP**, Director, École biblique of Jerusalem, Former Secretary General of COMECE (via video connection).
- **Dr Jørgen Skov SØRENSEN**, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC)
- **Mohamed AJANA EL OUAFI**, Islamic Commission of Spain.
- **Frédérique OHAYON**, Director of International Development, Jewish Foundation (Fundación HispanoJudía) and Director of the Friends of Tel Aviv University Association in Spain.



Chair: Željana ZOVKO MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, distinguished speakers and guests,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all today in beautiful Santiago de Compostela at our 25th Intercultural dialogue with churches and religious institutions.

As we mark a significant milestone of 25 years of fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue within the EPP Group, we stand at the forefront of an extraordinary journey that has brought faiths together.

Before we start the panel, I would like to thank our Spanish hosts and the entire EPP Intercultural and Religious Unit for the organisation of this event that takes place during the same year that our EPP Group celebrates its 70th birthday.

The EPP Group has been steadfast in its commitment to fostering interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Over the years, our group has evolved through testimonies of shared experiences, demonstrating a deep-rooted dedication to mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. I am proud to have been an active part in our events and missions.

Allow me to introduce our speakers:

– Fr. Manuel Enrique Barrios, General Secretary of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the EU (COMECE) and former Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations at the Spanish Bishops’ Conference, brings profound experience in fostering interfaith collaboration.

– Fr. Olivier Poquillon OP, Director of École biblique of Jerusalem, and Former Secretary General of COMECE, shares a global perspective on interreligious relations, joining us virtually for this enlightening discussion.

– Mohamed Ajana El Ouafi, from the Islamic Commission of Spain, offers invaluable insights into the Islamic perspective on interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

– Frédérique Ohayon, Director of the Hispanic Jewish Foundation and Director of the Friends of Tel Aviv University Association in Spain, actively fosters understanding between Hispanic and Jewish communities.

Churches and religious communities play an indispensable role in advancing European Integration. Their contributions extend beyond spiritual guidance; they act as conduits for dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. Today’s discussion focuses on the evolution of dialogue and the invaluable contributions of Churches and religious communities to European Integration. Set against the backdrop of Santiago de Compostela, these conversations also embody the spirit of the Way of St. James—celebrating solidarity, fostering cooperation, and nurturing deeper understanding.

I am glad that we can also honor the Way of St. James—a path that transcends borders, nurturing unity, and fostering intercultural dialogue.

This sacred pilgrimage has served as a melting pot where encounters bridge religious, linguistic, and social divides—a testament to our collective pursuit of harmony and unity.

As a Member of the European Parliament Intergroup on European Cultural Heritage, Ways of St James and other cultural routes, I have been very active on this topic in the last years. Recently, I organised



From left to right: Frédérique OHAYON, Mohamed AJANA EL OUAFI, Željana ZOVKO MEP, Fr. Manuel Enrique BARRIOS, Dr Jørgen Skov SØRENSEN

a roundtable that focused on the Camino de Santiago, highlighting its cultural and historical significance, and promoting its values to a broader European audience with an emphasis on cultural routes in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina for which I advocated strongly to be included in the network of Camino routes.

Talking about interreligious dialogue, as a Croat from Bosnia and Herzegovina which is home to multiple religious communities, I know the importance of meaningful dialogues between religions. In 2019, I led a mission of EPP colleagues to Bosnia and Herzegovina to engage in dialogues with religious and community leaders, aiming to foster religious harmony and political compromise.

Furthermore, last year I organised a conference on the socio-political challenges faced by Croats and other Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This initiative highlighted the necessity of dialogue and understanding among diverse communities to address pressing issues. Dialogue serves as a potent tool in addressing tensions in society. It transcends differences, facilitates understanding, and nurtures mutual respect among conflicting ideologies.

As the Vice-Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I am aware how crucial dialogue can be in laying coexistence in multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities. It serves as a powerful instrument for reconciliation, fostering peace and understanding among nations. In conclusion, our commitment to interreligious dialogue stands as a beacon, guiding us toward a future where understanding, respect, and cooperation prevail.

I will pass the floor now to our dear speakers.

I express my gratitude to our distinguished panelists, Fr. Manuel Enrique Barrios, Fr. Olivier Poquillon OP, Mohamed Ajana El Ouafi, and Frédérique Ohayon, for their invaluable insights and commitment to fostering interfaith understanding. Your contributions are highly valued in shaping a more inclusive and cohesive society.

Thank you



Fr. Manuel Enrique BARRIOS, General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE) and former Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations at the Spanish Bishops' Conference

Dear friends and distinguished guests,

I am really honoured to be here today sharing this event with all of you. With some of you who are here, I have been engaged in personal, ecumenical, interreligious and even political dialogue for some time and I am very happy to meet you again in Santiago de Compostela, in this event organized by the EPP group in the European Parliament, that also celebrates its 70th anniversary. I will not be what I am today if it were not for you, for the encounters we have had and the dialogue we have maintained during these years. I want to share with you in this short intervention why this event is so significant for me, why dialogue really matters for our world today and what are the obstacles and challenges we have to overcome to make it fruitful.

First of all, with this event we celebrate 25 years of this dialogue. I really have to congratulate the EPP group for having created the Unit for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, which might seem to some quite a peculiar thing for a political Party, taking into account that there is a clear tendency in the European institutions to marginalize or ignore the presence and contribution of religion to

our society. The creation of this Working Group for Interreligious Dialogue witnesses to the foresight and outreach of the European People's Party. With its roots in the Christian democratic tradition, this Party shows that it wants to maintain a close connection with civil society and to have a real dialogue with the different Churches, religious traditions and worldviews that are present in it. The existence of this Working Group also witnesses to the importance this political Party gives to religion for the present and future of Europe, a thing that testifies to its healthiness and closeness to reality. I have to say also, as Secretary General of COMECE, that the existence of this Working Group has been of paramount importance for the Catholic Church in the EU, facilitating its relations with the European Parliament and with some MEPs. On a more personal level, I also want to share with you that my first contact with the European institutions was through an event organized by this Working Group for Interreligious Dialogue in Strasbourg many years ago, when I was still working in the Spanish Bishops' Conference. That is why this event has a special significance for me today. Possibly, I would not be now Secretary General of COMECE if it were not for this Working Group and the kind of event we are sharing today in Santiago.

Secondly, I would like to underline the significance of celebrating this event here in Santiago de Compostela. This city, where tradition says lies the tomb of the apostle James, close to the "finis terrae", the "end of the earth" as it was known in former times, was the destination of millions of pilgrims during many centuries, who, following the different paths that crossed the whole of Europe, arrived here, contributing strongly to the cultural and spiritual unity of Europe, to its identity as we also know it today. Saint John Paul II, in a famous speech delivered here in Santiago de Compostela, the 9th November 1982, said: Here they gathered from France, Italy, Central Europe, the Nordic countries, the Slavic nations, Christians of all social conditions, from rulers to the humblest villagers; Christians of all spiritual levels, from saints, such as Francis of Assisi and Bridget of Sweden ... to public sinners seeking penance. The whole of Europe gathered around the «memory» of James in those same centuries in which it was building itself as a homogeneous and spiritually united continent. For this reason, Goethe himself will affirm that the conscience of Europe was born through pilgrimage.

In that same speech, Pope John Paul II uttered a strong call, asking Europe to find itself again:

[I quote]

For this reason, I, John Paul, son of the Polish nation, which has always considered itself European, due to its origins, traditions, culture and vital relationships, Slavic among the Latins and Latin among the Slavs; I, successor of Peter in the See of Rome, the See that Christ wanted to place in Europe and that Europe loves for his effort in spreading Christianity throughout the world; I, Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the universal Church, from Santiago, cry out with love to you, ancient Europe: “Find yourself again. Be yourself». Rediscover your origins. Revive your roots. Come back to live the authentic values that have made your history glorious and your presence on other continents beneficial. Rebuild your spiritual unity, in a climate of full respect towards other religions and genuine freedoms.

[end of quote]

Today the “Way of St. James” still attracts many people from all parts of Europe and the world, that come to Santiago, some looking for a spiritual and Christian renewal of their lives, others looking for something that might bring light and healing to their torn existences.

The way of St. James has become today like the courtyard of the Gentiles, that was in the Temple of Jerusalem, where people of different origins gathered searching for transcendence and meaning for their lives. This has to be also a reminder for the European Union that its unity has to be more than an economic or political unity.

The spiritual and religious dimensions are part of the identity of Europe and it will never be united neglecting them.

Dear friends and distinguished guests, we live in very challenging moments. The war in our continent and the war in the Holy land affect all of us deeply and in many ways. These wars are not far from us; they touch are daily lives, our beliefs, our emotions, our hopes for humankind and the world. These two wars have also a religious dimension: the one in Ukraine is a war in which Christians fight each other; the war in the Holy Land is a war that involves Muslims and Jews. Though we can discuss the way religion is a factor in these and other wars, it is obvious that ecumenical and interreligious dia-

logue can help both to understand these conflicts and to find a way out of them.

Another important challenge we face today is multiculturalism. Today in our cities and in our countries people of different Churches, religious traditions and worldviews live together. This living together and sharing the common public space is not easy and we have to give it form together. A clear example of how this is difficult is the Judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union that was made public last week– the 28th November- on the wearing of religious symbols in the workplace. The Judgement establishes that a public administration may decide to prohibit all of its employees from wearing such signs. The Judgement tries to avoid discrimination but ¿is it fair with the right to religious freedom? Obviously, interreligious and intercultural dialogue can help very much to understand each other and share our common spaces in an enriching and respectful way for all.

In the European Union we are also approaching new elections for the European Parliament and in the actual context of what some call “polycrisis”, of fear and uncertainty, of distrust in institutions, of perceived growing migration, certain populist ideas and simplistic solutions tend to flourish. Interreligious dialogue can vaccinate us against populist tendencies.

But why can interreligious help in our context today? Why is it so important for us to engage in interreligious dialogue, personally but also as a political Party? My answer is that interreligious dialogue changes the ones the engage in it. It is not only an activity or an isolated event, it becomes a way of relating to others, a way of being-in-relation- A person or institution that engages in interreligious dialogue does not think and act according to labels, etiquette or stereotypes. It or he/she is used to encounter the person behind the ideas or the religious tradition to which the person belongs. Interreligious dialogue makes us discover the common humanity we share and our common human fraternity, it makes us aware that are all brothers and sisters. In this I think that the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber can help us. His distinction between two basic kinds of relation, the I-it, which is the relation we have with objects, and the I-thou, that is the relation we should have with persons. The

problem we frequently have in our world marked by the technocratic paradigm is that we live our relations with persons, according to the I-it scheme, treating the others as objects, using them, manipulating them, etc. Authentic dialogue instead is characterised by immediacy, mutuality, sincerity, equality and spiritual closeness of souls. It takes place in the context of the relation of two persons that acknowledge each other as such. This is also the case for true interreligious dialogue. To make this kind of dialogue possible we have to overcome self-centredness, prejudices, and the concern for our image. True human and interreligious dialogue can cure us of many of the diseases that are present and spreading in our modern world and vaccinate us against them.

Thank you very much!



Dr Jørgen Skov SØRENSEN, *General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC)*

I have a confession to make. I am a Lutheran – by tradition and by conviction. And as you may know, traditionally, Lutherans have been regarded as having an issue with dialogue. It is not ecumenical or interfaith dialogue I have in mind, albeit, the reformer Martin Luther had what I guess must be characterised as a – shall we say - confrontative attitude to people with religious opinions opposing his. More generously, I think it is fair to say that he was “passionate” about his mission in life.

What I have in mind is the dialogue between church and state, between the spiritual and the secular. Or – in our particular case this morning – between the religions and the EPP Group.

So, why have Lutherans been regarded as having an issue with dialogue between church and state? Well, at least partly because of Martin Luther’s teaching of the two regiments, which unfortunately by many people has been totally misinterpreted. Let me explain what I mean...

The doctrine of the two regiments is a Lutheran teaching which, with its distinct dualism, has its roots with Saint Paul. Paul’s notorious opening of Chapter 13 of his letter to the Romans leaves little

space for interpretation: “All of you must obey those who rule over you. There are no authorities except the ones God has chosen. Those who now rule have been chosen by God”.

However, also the Gospel according to Mark is renowned for its fierce distinction between God and Emperor: “Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s”, we read in Mark 12:17. Quite to the surprise of his audience at the time who were “utterly amazed at him”, the evangelist Mark phrases it.

So, with his teaching on the two regiments, Martin Luther certainly distinguishes between the worldly and the spiritual governments (or “regiments”). It is, however, crucial to remember, that both are important for Luther. Neither has a preference as the two are intertwined and interdependent. In “the hands of God” - so to speak – both are needed to fight evil and to establish, or restore, God’s Kingdom.

The worldly – or secular - regiment includes the basic arrangements of human life (state, people, family, vocation, status, etc.). God rules – according to Luther - in this regiment by secular law to protect these basic arrangements which he finds pivotal and irreplaceable in an orderly society.

The spiritual regiment, on the other hand, includes everything that serves the redemption and reconciliation of human beings and the world. This is done by means of the gospel and its promise of forgiveness of sins and of grace. To Luther, both similarly pivotal and irreplaceable in an orderly society.

Now, important to note is, that both Saint Paul and Martin Luther have been criticized over time for their positive relationship with worldly authorities. Criticism has mainly come from theologians and church leaders who either have believed that they had more to offer than just obeying, or simply felt marginalised by secular powers. But is this a fair criticism? Are neither Saint Paul nor Martin Luther on track with their teaching of two regiments? Or, have critics totally misunderstood these two central figures in church history? Or has the world simply moved on, so that we need to interpret and

understand their words, their teachings, in light of today’s European political and religious context?

I will opt for an answer lying somewhere between the two. More about that later. For the next few moments, I will try to leave my Lutheran identity behind and put on my identity as General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, an ecumenical position, where my Lutheran heritage comes second.

Let’s travel together to Tallinn, Estonia. The Conference of European Churches conducted its General Assembly this year in Tallinn. As an event, our General Assembly is not just business sessions over a few hours. It is an opportunity to discuss the situation of all 114 member churches, all positioned in very diverse contexts of Europe. The overarching theme was “Under God’s blessing – shaping the future”. Please be aware that we are not speaking exclusively of the future of our member churches. We are speaking of the future of Europe. The future of our secular societies. The future of our lives, lived together, in all aspects of it.

To kick off our discussions, we had invited European top-level politicians and theologians to speak from their perspective and to inform and advice in the best possible way the exchanges among the crowd of church leaders on how to be church in 21st century European societies.

One full week of deliberations on the topic lead to a statement which is now the guiding principle for the Conference of European Churches, our mission statement, for the years to come. Our statement says: “CEC’s mission is to claim and shape a space for faith, while affirming Freedom of Religion and Belief, as a legitimate element in the European social and political context, and to support churches navigating as faith-based actors in this environment”.

I like this mission statement. It says a lot about what the Conference of European Churches is trying to achieve in Europe and in Brussels in particular: Claiming our space as European Christian believers in a highly politicised, secular, environment.

However, does it also indicate a mixture of the religious and the secular? I guess it can be read like that. Looking again at the the-

me of our assembly “Under God’s blessing – shaping the future” the few words in fact keep the two regiments closely together. As people of faith we do not only obey – we aim to shape – actively. However, have I compromised my heritage as a stern (some would say stubborn) Lutheran? Have I sacrificed my theological adoration for Saint Paul on the altar of ecumenism? Not at all. I highly appreciate our mission statement which I find of great importance in today’s European political context. It is my steadfast opinion that as Christians, what is close to our hearts is to be shared with and within wider society. “For the benefit of our continent and beyond, creating hope for a shared future of renewed trust and just peace”, again quoting from our Assembly in Tallinn.

I now put on again my Lutheran identity and raise the question: What has been misinterpreted when Saint Paul speaks on merely obeying the powers and principalities of this world? What has not been understood when Martin Luther speaks on the two regiments and not merely one?

We live today in Europe in secular and plural societies. Let me make it very clear that not only do I fully acknowledge this, I also thoroughly appreciate it. Looking at theocratic societies in other parts of the world does not encourage a walk down that ally at all. However, what I do not appreciate is a trend towards marginalisation of religion as irrelevant, inappropriate and untimely. As a meaningless phenomenon that should be over and done in history. A thing of the past. This is not the voice of the secular. It is the voice of secularism – an ideology that wishes to get rid of religion - the sooner, the better. Religion has its place - even in secular societies. Or rather: Indeed in secular societies. Luther spoke of a teaching of “two regiments”. Not of one regiment exclusively – be it a secular or a religious. And herein lies the point I wish to highlight this morning: Using a term from political science, what we need is “checks and balances”. We need both the secular and the religious.

Obviously, I don’t need to convince you on that. As we are gathered these days, we celebrate 25 years of dialogue between the EPP and religious groups in Europe. This witness to a healthy understanding of the need for both regiments. However, sometimes even the obvious must be stated. Sometimes again and again.

And sometimes, repetition even for the convinced (including myself) can reveal new layers of an old truth. As I was working on this intervention, I came to think of my former university professor of church history, Jakob Balling.

One of the biggest connoisseurs of European cultural history I have come across, he maintained that what has decisively shaped the history of Europe is not the secular, neither is it the religious. It is that two powers have kept each other in “checks and balances”, namely the church and the state.

Checks and balances. Secular and religious. From below and from above. And right in the middle are we, human beings who also try to balance our lived lives – shaping our common future.

In a few weeks’ time, I will leave my office at the Conference of European Churches for the last time. I step down as general secretary after four intense years in the heart of European decision making, shaping our common future with – among others – the EPP. Thank you, friends and colleagues. It has been a pleasure. And as I step down, I do so with trust in the future of dialogue between the secular and the religious. With the mission statement of the Conference of European Churches, the outcome of our Assembly in Tallinn this year, our fellowship of churches is well suited to take on the task given to it: To balance the secular in dialogue with the decision makers of Europe and this world. A dialogue of appreciation for what you do. But also – like any genuine dialogue between friends – an honest and critical dialogue when we see things moving in a direction we as believers cannot accept: A direction of secular fanaticism, political self-righteousness and ideological fundamentalism.

But as a dialogue is a give and take for both parties, before I leave, I urge you also to play your part of the two regiments, namely being a secular counterbalance to the religious. The religious which at times – let’s face it – takes shapes and forms that are not helpful at all in shaping a common future.

Therefore, I call upon all decision makers to react without delay when you encounter religious fanaticism, theological self-righteousness and dogmatic fundamentalism. These are religious develop-

ments as toxic and revolting as their political counterparts and must be detected, questioned and made extinct before they grow too powerful.

Yes, Martin Luther was indeed passionate. And very religious. I think he knew the harmful and destructive potential of both passion and religion, both lying within him. So did Saint Paul when in his letter to the Romans he says: “I don’t understand what I do. I don’t do what I want to do. Instead, I do what I hate to do”.

Did Paul and Luther in fact call upon the authorities to avoid the religious fanaticism, theological self-righteousness and dogmatic fundamentalism which they recognised within themselves? If so, and I believe so, we own our common future to let the two serve as our largest role models today.

Be it in church.
Be it in society.

Thank you for your attention.



Mohamed AJANA EL OUAFI, *Islamic Commission of Spain*

El pluralismo religioso y cultural es una característica común en la mayoría de las sociedades contemporáneas, incluyendo la sociedad europea.

En la actualidad, en Europa, nos encontramos con una diversidad religiosa y cultural innegable. Este pluralismo es el resultado natural de la propia historia de Europa pero se ha acentuado por la globalización y la revolución tecnológica en los medios de comunicación y en transporte que han facilitado la circulación de personas, ideas y creencias religiosas en todas las direcciones.

A nivel de Estados Europeos, aunque la mayoría se autodefinen como laicos o aconfesionales, sin embargo, en la sociedad la religión sigue desempeñando un papel importante en la vida de muchos ciudadanos, y el resultado, es que tenemos personas que practican diferentes religiones como el cristianismo, el islam, el judaísmo y el hinduismo, ...etc.

En este contexto de pluralismo religioso, el diálogo se presenta como una obligación moral y social, siendo un puente que conecta los diversos elementos de la sociedad y promueve la comprensión y el respeto mutuo. Integrando de manera eficiente las confesiones, entre sí y demás organizaciones de la sociedad civil.

Voy a exponer brevemente el punto de vista religioso islámico sobre el diálogo y sobre el pluralismo religioso

Para los musulmanes, el primer diálogo registrado en el Corán es aquel que tuvo lugar entre Alá e Iblis. En este relato, se solicitó a Iblis que mostrara reverencia hacia Adán, pero él se negó debido a su orgullo y argumentando la superioridad de su propia creación. Sin embargo, Allah demostró con sabiduría que la grandeza no reside únicamente en la materia, sino en la sumisión y humildad, alertándonos desde aquel momento que la arrogancia representa un obstáculo en el camino hacia la iluminación.

En cuanto al pluralismo religioso el principal libro del islam, el Corán, enfatizar una idea central que en muchos pasajes se ha repetido y es que la unicidad es reservada solo al CREADOR, y en todo lo demás, hay diversidad y diferencia. Asimismo el Corán subraya que esta diversidad existente en la humanidad es una ley y una realidad natural e inevitable, en el capítulo (hud, 118-119) “ Si tu Señor hubiera querido, habría hecho que los hombres fueran una única comunidad. Sin embargo no dejarán de ser contrarios unos a otros, A excepción de aquel a quien tu Señor le conceda misericordia, Y para eso los creó...” en esta aleya nos recuerda que si Allah hubiera querido nos hubiera hecho una sola comunidad o nación con una sola religión, de una sola costumbre, ...etc. pero eso no es así.

En otro versículo el Corán invita a reflexionar sobre el propósito de esta diversidad entre los hombres, en esta línea se lee en el Corán en el capítulo (las habitaciones, 13)“!Hombres! Os hemos creado de un varón y de una mujer y hemos hecho de vosotros pueblos y tribus, para que os conozcáis unos a otros...” el conocimiento mutuo para construir puentes de convivencia es una de las razones de esta diversidad.

La primera es la visita de la delegación de cristianos de narran que vivían en esa época en la isla arábica, el diálogo que intercambiaron con el profeta, la visita que le hicieron dentro de su propia mezquita, indica un alto grado de entendimiento.

Estos fundamentos jurídicos islámicos y otros prueban que no hay impedimentos religiosos islámicos que impidan el diálogo y la convivencia entre los musulmanes y los otros creyentes o no creyentes en un contexto donde priman valores como la justicia, el respeto recíproco, el amor hacia el prójimo.

Antes de establecer los objetivos de este diálogo interreligioso, conviene aclarar aquello que consideramos que no lo es.

El dialogo interreligioso no es:

1. Una forma diluir o fusionar las religiones en una sola.
2. No es una renuncia a nuestra identidad o a nuestra religión.

El objetivo o lo que entendemos por diálogo interreligioso es la interacción positiva entre los fieles y seguidores de las religiones y tiene entre otros estos propósitos:

Fomentar el entendimiento mutuo y promover una cultura de encuentro: esto se consigue mediante la presentación recíproca de creencias y prácticas religiosas, identificando valores compartidos que puedan servir como base para la convivencia, disminuyendo estereotipos y prejuicios, y construyendo puentes para superar las diferencias imaginarias.

Fomentar la convivencia: El diálogo interreligioso busca fortalecer la convivencia entre los ciudadanos, independientemente de sus diferencias culturales y religiosas. Esto se logra a través del diálogo, la cooperación y la solidaridad.

Otro de los propósitos es fomentar la cooperación y la colaboración:

La cooperación es una condición necesaria para una convivencia positiva entre los miembros de las distintas religiones. No basta con coexistir pacíficamente; es necesario que trabajemos juntos para afrontar los desafíos comunes, aunando esfuerzos. En el contexto actual, vivimos en una sociedad de creciente complejidad y fragilidad, donde el pluralismo religioso enfrenta múltiples desafíos que requieren estrategias específicas.

A continuación, enumeraremos algunos de estos desafíos.

1. La persistencia de algunas personas obsesionadas con el choque entre religiones o civilizaciones, y su afán por buscar y resaltar momentos históricos y sociales conflictivos, así como áreas geográficas en las que existan tensiones políticas, sociales o económicas, y presentar estas situaciones anómalas como la norma que debe regir el destino de nuestra sociedad actual.

2. Otra de las dificultades radica en que, al hablar acerca del fenómeno religioso, en ciertos aspectos el debate sobre este tema se desvía al introducir elementos ajenos a él. Por ejemplo, en algunos países, se tiende a reducir el pluralismo religioso a un simple debate acerca de procedimientos de inmigración, cuya resolución corresponde a las autoridades policiales y los servicios sociales.

3. Otro de los desafíos es la proliferación en los medios sociales de profesionales de la palabra, que se autodenominan seguidores o representantes de una religión específica. Estos individuos hacen declaraciones impactantes con el objetivo de lograr repercusión social y ganar más seguidores virtuales para fortalecer su presencia en los medios. Todo esto se ve acentuado por la profesionalización y sofisticación de campañas basadas en rumores y noticias falsas, utilizadas con fines oscuros y sin ética ni moral.

4. Otro de desafíos es el creciente discurso del odio anti religioso y sus consecuencias, el 16 de noviembre de 2021. La eurodiputada de Ciudadanos y vicepresidenta de la Comisión de Libertades Civiles del Parlamento Europeo, Maite Pagazaurtundúa, ha presentado en Madrid el libro ‘Cartografía del odio’, (cartografiadelodio.com), este libro fue el resultado de dos años de investigación sobre los delitos de odio que se producen en Europa, en este informe que cubre una época del 2015 a la mitad del 2020 en la que señala lo siguiente: “... Si sumamos los datos de incidentes de baja intensidad por intolerancia religiosa hacia cristianismo, judaísmo e islamismo y otras religiones suponen el 52 por ciento de estos datos.”

No debemos tomar a la ligera términos como baja intensidad, porque es verdad que muchos de estos incidentes no llegan a suponer víctimas mortales pero las consecuencias sobre la convivencia son fatales.

5. Otro desafío es la percepción generalizada de que el diálogo interreligioso y el compromiso con los valores se limitan a líderes religiosos, intelectuales o académicos, sin tener en cuenta a los creyentes en su vida cotidiana. Por ello, es fundamental realizar un esfuerzo adicional para destacar los beneficios y el impacto social del diálogo a nivel cotidiano.

Si bien estas dificultades pueden ralentizar el progreso del diálogo interreligioso, estos desafíos nos invitan a ser conscientes de su alcance y a trabajar en colaboración para enfrentarlos.

Cabe resaltar que el diálogo no se concibe como un objetivo en sí mismo, sino como el medio para propiciar una acción transformadora ha-

cia una sociedad en la que se pueda convivir en paz y armonía; este planteamiento constituye el punto de partida clave para el progreso en áreas económicas, sociales y en todas las dimensiones de la vida comunitaria.

1. Este objetivo, rebajar las tensiones en la sociedad, ha sido mencionado en el informe del director general de la UNESCO del 5 de abril de 2007, sobre el lugar que corresponde a la religión en el programa relativo al diálogo interconfesional y entre religiones y subraya también que la falta de enseñanza de este fenómeno religioso en su dimensión histórica y sociológica puede suscitar malentendidos y a una falta de sensibilidad a las expresiones o manifestaciones religiosas que pueden avivar las tensiones en la sociedad.

2. Otra forma en la que el diálogo interreligioso puede abordar las tensiones en la sociedad es cuando puede ayudar a identificar y abordar las causas subyacentes de las tensiones sociales. Estas causas pueden incluir factores, sociales, políticos, religiosos o económicos. Al identificar y abordar estas causas, el diálogo puede ayudar a prevenir que las tensiones se conviertan en conflictos violentos.

3. Otra manera, el diálogo puede jugar un papel relevante como mediador para resolver conflictos de manera pacífica, esto puede ayudar a evitar que los conflictos se conviertan en violencia.

En conclusión, el pluralismo religioso en Europa es un fenómeno que ha estado presente durante siglos y que sigue siendo relevante en la sociedad actual. Este pluralismo es un reflejo de la diversidad y la libertad de pensamiento que caracterizan a nuestra sociedad contemporánea. El diálogo interreligioso es un proceso complejo que requiere tiempo y esfuerzo. Y es una herramienta poderosa para abordar las tensiones en la sociedad y construir puentes de confianza y esperanza para una sociedad más pacífica y armoniosa, este esfuerzo es esencial para la prevención contra las amenazas actuales que utilizan los últimos avances en tecnología para incitar al odio y al miedo en la población.

En última instancia, es responsabilidad de todos promover el respeto mutuo y la convivencia pacífica en la sociedad.



Frédérique OHAYON, *Director of International Development, Jewish Foundation (Fundación HispanoJudía) and Director of the Friends of Tel Aviv University Association in Spain*

Promoviendo el entendimiento mutuo: el diálogo es un medio poderoso que fomenta el entendimiento entre grupos religiosos y políticos diversos. Crea un espacio para que voces diversas sean escuchadas y comprendidas, derribando las barreras de la ignorancia y la desinformación. Cuando los líderes religiosos y los políticos participan en un diálogo abierto, crean un camino de empatía y comprensión para sus seguidores.

Resolución de conflictos: El diálogo ha mostrado ser efectivo en la resolución de conflictos. Permite que los agravios se expresen y se comprendan en un entorno controlado.

Intercambio y enriquecimiento cultural: Los diálogos interreligiosos y políticos también son vías para el intercambio cultural. Este intercambio mejora el respeto y la apreciación mutuos, fomentando una cultura global que celebra la diversidad en lugar de temerla.

En una sociedad moderna la religión y la política están entrelazadas e influyen en la vida comunitaria, en el gobierno y en las interacciones globales. El concepto de diálogo entre religiones y políticos no es un solo intercambio de ideas, sino una herramienta crucial para el entendimiento. La FHJ se constituyó en el año 2016, tras la aprobación de la ley que permitió a los descendientes de sefardíes a obtener la nacionalidad española.

En la Fundación HispanoJudía queremos dar a conocer la historia de los más de 2000 años de presencia judía en España y poner en valor el legado de la cultura hispanojudía en todo el mundo.

El principal proyecto de la FHJ es el Museo HispanoJudío en Madrid. Será un espacio en el que se dará a conocer lo mucho que tienen en común la cultura hispana y judía. Pretende ser un punto de encuentro cultural y educativo que propiciará el diálogo y promoverá la educación en valores, especialmente entre los jóvenes, garantizando un futuro en paz y armonía entre las diferentes culturas.

La Fundación HispanoJudía es consciente del profundo impacto que pueden tener los diálogos interreligiosos e inter-políticos en la creación de un mundo más armonioso. No solo se trata de fomentar conversaciones entre personas con los mismos valores básicos, sino de participar activamente en la creación a través del Museo HispanoJudío, de una plataforma donde las voces de diferentes orígenes religiosos y políticos puedan converger, interactuar y aprender unos de otros.

Premisa: “El conocimiento mutuo es la mejor forma de propiciar el diálogo”.

Sabemos que el diálogo es una herramienta poderosa para la reconciliación, el intercambio cultural y la promoción de la paz y el entendimiento en un mundo cada vez más interconectado. La alianza de valores, el respeto por los derechos humanos y el libre albedrío son los ejes imprescindibles para un diálogo efectivo. Los valores compartidos son un punto de encuentro para guiar las políticas.

Tikun Olam / Respeto / Diversidad / Tradición / Solidaridad / Esfuerzo / Comunidad / Innovación

La educación en valores es de suma importancia para preservar esa voluntad de diálogo entre culturas, religiones y personas con orientaciones políticas diferentes. Para que haya diálogo, debe haber educación, voluntad y predisposición.

Existen muchos ejemplos del mundo real donde líderes religiosos y políticos se han unido con éxito para abordar problemas sociales.

Un ejemplo es el diálogo interreligioso iniciado en respuesta a la crisis de refugiados en Europa. Líderes religiosos de varias religiones, en colaboración con entidades políticas, jugaron un papel clave en los esfuerzos humanitarios y en la promoción de políticas para los refugiados, mostrando

cómo la compasión y la cooperación pueden triunfar en tiempos de crisis. El papel de organizaciones como la Fundación HispanoJudía es importante. Se convierten en instrumentos facilitadores de los diálogos críticos.

¿Cómo? Al no tratarse de instituciones ni religiosas ni políticas, pueden actuar como convocantes y proporcionar plataformas neutrales para discusiones abiertas y respetuosas. Su papel va más allá de la mera facilitación; trabajan activamente para traer voces diversas a la mesa, asegurando que se escuchen y valoren las perspectivas de las minorías. Al organizar conferencias, talleres y eventos culturales, crean entornos propicios para el entendimiento y la colaboración. Sus esfuerzos en educación y divulgación ayudan a desmantelar estereotipos y prejuicios, allanando el camino para diálogos más significativos y efectivos.

La composición diversa del patronato y del consejo asesor de la FHJ son un claro ejemplo de la voluntad de establecer un diálogo en la sociedad.

El Patronato y el consejo asesor de la FHJ lo componen personalidades internacionales de todas las religiones e ideologías políticas que se caracterizan por su diversidad y todos comparten unos valores comunes. Contamos con personalidades de diferentes perspectivas religiosas judías como Rab. Bergman (presidente de la Unión Mundial del Judaísmo Progresista) o Rab.Sacca (Gran Rabino Sefardí de Buenos Aires) y figuras como Nabil Baraka, líder sufi de Marruecos. Tenemos la suerte de contar con D. Carlos Osorio (arzobispo emérito de Madrid y cardenal) entre los amigos de la fundación.

Establecer un diálogo entre religiones y políticos está lleno de desafíos. Incluyen una desconfianza arraigada, conflictos históricos y diferencias en ideologías y creencias. El papel de los futuros líderes: Los programas educativos y talleres centrados en la comunicación intercultural e interreligiosa, habilidades de negociación y resolución de conflictos deben ser una parte integral de la capacitación de los futuros líderes. Estas habilidades los equiparán para navegar y abordar los complejos desafíos del futuro, fomentando un mundo donde las diferencias no solo sean toleradas, sino celebradas.

Para asegurar una armonía de futuro, debemos apostar por una educación que predisponga al diálogo y lo torne efectivo.



From left to right: Francisco José MILLÁN MON MEP, Zeljana ZOVKO MEP, Leopoldo LÓPEZ GIL MEP



From left to right: Jan OLBRYCHT MEP, György HÖLVÉNYI MEP



Cathedral Santiago de Compostela



Dinner speeches and participants

DINNER SPEECHES

– **Jan OLBRYCHT MEP**, Vice-Chair and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue.

– **Jesús GAMALLO ALLER**, Director-General for External Relations and Relations with the European Union, Region of Galicia.



Jan OLBRYCHT MEP



Jesús GAMALLO Director-General for External Relations and Relations with the European Union, Region of Galicia

Dear members of the EPP in the European Parliament, representatives of other religious institutions, friends, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a pleasure to represent tonight the Government of Galicia and to thank you once again for choosing our capital, Santiago, to hold this meeting. It has been repeated many times, because it is an expression of enormous depth and meaning: “Europe was made on the pilgrimage to Santiago”. This phrase, attributed as you know to Goethe, reflects perfectly what Santiago represents: a symbol of the identity that unites us and of the values that we share; those which the EPP group defends so energetically in the European Parliament, in the European Committee of the Regions and in all the areas in that it works. That is why it is no coincidence that you have gathered here to deepen on the inter-religious dialogue, because dialogue, acceptance of those who think differently, compassion, understanding, and empathy, are part of our heritage.

My friend Paco Millán, one of the greater workers in favour of the Pilgrims’ Roads to Santiago, said these days in a magnificent article in El Debate: «The pilgrimage to Compostela is not only a reflection of our Christian and medieval heritage, but also, to some extent, a

symbol of the values we share as Europeans». Forgiveness and reconciliation, unity, solidarity and hope are values, if I may say so, of an ecumenical nature. They are, therefore, a meeting point between religions and different ways of understanding the world.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your work in the European Parliament.

The difficult situation we are experiencing in Spain, where the rule of law is under attack, is being addressed by the Institution you represent and will undeniably continue to be, as long as there are no doubts about respect for the separation of powers and the Constitution that enshrines it, of which we are celebrating its 45th (forty-fifth) birthday tomorrow.

The future of our Union, the green and digital transitions and their translation into our specific realities, the demographic situation that threatens to jeopardise our future, a Cohesion Policy that must continue to fulfil its objective of bringing the regions closer to the average income levels of the EU, the need to turn our eyes towards industry, the commitment to sustainable and profitable fishing... these are some of the challenges that lie ahead of us from the Galician perspective.

In a world that is no longer Eurocentric, Europe must find its place, both in the day-to-day challenges that move us forward and in the great global challenges. The EPP group in the European Parliament and in the Committee of the Regions, of which I am a member, we are aware of our responsibility. We must seek answers to defend our values, keeping with Europe’s enormous historical dimension and always in order to improve the lives of Europeans.

In this sense, it is worth recalling the legacy of our founding fathers, three of them – Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi and Robert Schuman – have been decisive and had in common being men of faith and frontier. So much so, that Adenauer took refuge in the Benedictine monastery of Maria Laach near Cologne when he was harassed by the Gestapo, as his son Paul, who was to become a priest, testified, and whose diaries bear witness to the Chancellor’s faith

and integrity in the face of Nazi paganism. Values largely shared by another great resister to this paganism, the Lion of Münster, Bishop Clemens von Galen, who alerted Germans to the barbarity of the genocidal Aktion T-4 programme to eliminate all disabled people in the Reich, and who had to be stopped due to the uproar generated.

As for de Gasperi, what can we say, except that he spent more than a decade in the Vatican as a refugee, because of the fascist determination to eliminate him after his integrity as a member of the Trentino People’s Party in the Vienna Parliament and his radical opposition to fascism.

Finally, Robert Schuman, recently declared venerable by Pope Francis, the true political architect of this Europe at peace. Three fathers of Europe who are at the genesis of the EPP itself, a documented and irrefutable reality that other political formations want to hide with their ethical and moral anomie.

These are the foundations of Europe, solid as the Pantheon in Rome, begun by Agrippa and completed under Emperor Hadrian. A Pantheon that, according to its Greek etymology, was meant to be the temple of all the deities, being Christianised after the fall of the Empire as the Basilica of Saint Mary and the Martyrs. Here, next to our Cathedral, recalling these foundations seems redundant, but human memory is more fragile than granite, so it is worth refreshing them. Thank you very much again for your work in favour of coexistence and keep in mind that the EPP has pillars as solid as the Pantheon and this Cathedral, where all good people are always welcome. Thank you, again, for your work in favour of coexistence and thank you for being here.



From left to right: Gabor TOROK, Frédérique OHAYON, Mohamed AJANA EL OUAFI, Zeljana ZOVKO MEP, Fr. Manuel Enrique BARRIOS, Dr Jørgen Skov SØRENSEN.



From left to right: Prof. Dr. Francisco RAMÍREZ FUEYO, Dr. Timo Aytac GÜZELMANSUR, György HÖLVÉNYI MEP, Fr. Hyacinthe DESTIVELLE O.P., Rabbi Levi MATUSOF

TUESDAY, 5 DECEMBER

SESSION III. "THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN SOCIETY"

Chair: György HÖLVÉNYI MEP, Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue.

- Fr Hyacinthe DESTIVELLE O.P., Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome.
- Rabbi Levi MATUSOF, Director of the European Jewish Public Affairs.
- Dr. Timo Aytac GÜZELMANSUR, General-director of the Department of the German Bishops' Conference for the dialogue with Muslims and research about Islam in Germany 'CIBEDO'.
- Fr Friedrich BECHINA, Former Undersecretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education (via video connection).
- Prof. Dr. Francisco RAMÍREZ FUEYO, Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Comillas Pontifical University Madrid.



Chair: György HÖLVÉNYI MEP,
Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue



Fr Hyacinthe DESTIVELLE O.P., Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome

Le titre de cette session, « L'influence de la religion sur la société », mériterait à lui seul une réflexion terminologique.

Qu'appelle-t-on « religion » : parle-t-on d'un sentiment d'appartenance, ou au contraire d'un « believing without belonging », de religiosité, d'institutions ? Qu'appelle-t-on « société » : s'agit-il de l'opinion publique, de l'Etat, de la société dite « civile » ? Et qu'appelle-t-on « influence » : s'agit-il d'un contexte culturel, d'un conditionnement psychologique, d'un statut social, d'un soft-power, d'un lobbying ? Questions que l'on peut aborder de différents points de vue : sociologique, philosophique, voire théologique. Il est clair qu'on ne peut en quelques minutes, ne serait-ce que présenter ces problématiques, encore moins y répondre. Nous nous limiterons ici à quelques constats généraux puis à quelques distinctions, d'un point de vue essentiellement œcuménique, c'est-à-dire du dialogue entre chrétiens.

Quelques constats généraux : Depuis la naissance de la chrétienté jusqu'au milieu du XXe siècle, la culture dominante de l'Europe était chrétienne, et la culture dominante de l'Église était européenne. Pendant des siècles, christianisme et culture européenne se sont tellement interpénétrés qu'on avait

pu croire qu'ils s'identifiaient. Aujourd'hui, le christianisme reste de loin la marque religieuse dominante de la population européenne, puisque les trois quarts des Européens se disent chrétiens. Mais on assiste à deux évolutions parallèles : le christianisme est de moins en moins européen, et l'Europe de moins en moins chrétienne.

Le christianisme est de moins en moins européen. Seul un quart des chrétiens vit aujourd'hui en Europe, contre deux tiers il y a un siècle. Certes, ce phénomène de déeuropéanisation doit être nuancé selon les confessions. Il touche surtout l'Église catholique : les catholiques européens représentent désormais moins du quart de la population catholique mondiale. Ce phénomène est encore plus vrai pour les protestants européens qui ne représentent plus que 10% de la population protestante mondiale. En revanche l'orthodoxie reste en grande partie européenne, puisque les trois quarts des orthodoxes dans le monde vivent sur le continent européen.

Par ailleurs, si le christianisme est de moins en moins européen, l'Europe – en tout cas l'Europe occidentale – semble de moins en moins chrétienne. Ce constat n'est pas dû d'abord aux progrès de l'islam, même si ce phénomène est notable depuis les années 1960, mais à l'augmentation du nombre de personnes se disant sans affiliation religieuse – ce qui ne signifie pas athées –, soit 20% de la population de l'Union européenne.

Ces deux constats ont pour corollaire une modification des relations entre christianisme et culture en Europe. On assiste en fait à deux processus contradictoires : d'un côté, à une déconnection entre christianisme et culture, d'un autre côté, au contraire, à la réduction du christianisme à un phénomène culturel.

Le premier phénomène est la rupture entre le christianisme et la culture occidentale européenne. Pour la première fois, l'Église vit une disjonction historique avec la culture dominante qui fut la sienne pendant des siècles. Cette évolution est due au phénomène que l'on peut désigner du terme de sécularisation et que certains sociologues appellent même une « exculturation » du christianisme. Le philosophe français Marcel Gauchet, dans son essai de 1985 sur Le désenchantement du monde, explique que le christianisme est précisément la « religion de la sortie de la religion » c'est-à-dire une

religion qui contient potentiellement en elle la dynamique de sécularisation. Cette sécularisation ne signifie pas que la société n'est plus chrétienne dans ses concepts fondateurs, mais que la religion ne structure plus la société. Selon cette thèse, la sécularisation n'est pas donc nécessairement une déchristianisation, mais plutôt un christianisme sécularisé.

Cette rupture semble être liée à un phénomène qui ne concerne pas seulement le monde chrétien, mais l'ensemble des religions, et que le sociologue Olivier Roy, dans son livre intitulé La sainte ignorance, a pu appeler l'apparition du « religieux pur », c'est-à-dire « la religion sans culture » . Cette évolution favoriserait la diffusion de formes de religiosité déconnectées d'un ancrage culturel, comme certains courants évangéliques ou salafistes, proposant des biens universalisables et « purement » spirituels, ne nécessitant pas la connaissance de langues ou de traditions particulières. La rupture entre christianisme et culture européenne semblerait donc relever en fait, plus généralement, d'une rupture entre religion et culture.

Mais parallèlement à cette rupture, on assiste paradoxalement au phénomène inverse de réduction de la foi à la culture. Dans les pays occidentaux, sont appelés « chrétiens culturels », par distinction avec les « chrétiens culturels », tous ceux qui ont reçu une éducation chrétienne, et prétendent en avoir gardé des valeurs fondatrices . Les pouvoirs publics promeuvent cette assimilation de la religion à la culture. Un bon exemple de cette « culturalisation du religieux » est le procès « Lautsi contre Italie » en 2009 : pour défendre la présence du crucifix dans les écoles, les avocats de l'État italien l'ont défini comme un élément de la culture italienne. L'identification du christianisme à la culture occidentale s'applique aussi au contexte des relations entre christianisme et islam : on ne sait plus toujours si les mots chrétiens ou musulmans définissent une croyance ou une identité culturelle. L'extrémisme musulman identifie volontiers Occident et christianisme, tandis qu'en Occident le terme « musulman » sert souvent, dans le langage courant, à désigner les immigrants arabes.

Des spécificités :

Au-delà de ces constats généraux, de nombreuses nuances doivent être apportées selon le contexte des divers pays européens, essentiel-

lement entre l'Europe occidentale et l'Europe centrale et orientale.

En Occident, il faut non seulement distinguer entre sécularisation et déchristianisation, mais aussi entre sécularisation et laïcité. Des sociétés comme celle de la Grande-Bretagne ou du Danemark sont profondément sécularisées mais ne sont pas laïques, au sens que la religion n'est pas séparée de l'État – et que les Églises jouissent même d'un statut social et légal privilégié, inconnu hors d'Europe. Au contraire il existe des sociétés laïques mais profondément religieuses, comme l'Italie (mais on pourrait, hors d'Europe, mentionner les États-Unis). Il faut aussi mentionner la particularité de la laïcité « à la française », souvent mal comprise. Alors que la loi de 1905 visait à la séparation de l'Église et de l'État, à l'organisation des cultes dans l'espace public, elle est aujourd'hui comprise comme une privatisation de la religion : la laïcité se transforme alors en un « laïcisme », une idéologie qui vise à l'exclusion de la religion de l'espace public, ce qui n'était pas le but de la loi de 1905. A cet égard, nous partageons volontiers le constat d'Olivier Roy qui estime que « Dans une société sécularisée en quête de valeurs, chasser le religieux revient à en faire la proie des braconniers du fondamentalisme » et que « Le problème de l'Europe est aujourd'hui de promouvoir non pas l'expulsion du religieux vers la sphère privée, mais au contraire la resocialisation et la reculturation du religieux ».

Une réflexion doit être faite sur la situation particulière des pays d'Europe centrale et orientale. Les membres fondateurs de la Communauté européenne, qui étaient de tradition catholique et protestante ont été rejoints par des pays majoritairement orthodoxes, ayant souvent une autre tradition des relations entre Église et État, voire entre Église et société. Dans beaucoup de ces pays, issus de l'éclatement de l'URSS et de la Yougoslavie, la constitution d'Églises nationales est apparue comme la conséquence de l'indépendance politique. Les autorités politiques de ces nouveaux États n'ont pas hésité à s'immiscer dans les affaires religieuses pour encourager la création d'Églises locales pourvoyeuses d'identité nationale. Parallèlement à ce processus de « nationalisation », ces pays durent faire face à la question des relations entre Église et État, et cela de façon d'autant plus impérieuse que certains n'avaient jamais connu de véritable régime de séparation et que devaient être résolues des

questions importantes comme la dévolution des biens confisqués à l'époque communiste, l'enseignement de la religion à l'école, ou encore la présence d'aumôneries dans les armées et les hôpitaux. La question s'est posée de façon singulière pour les Églises de tradition byzantine, souvent tiraillées entre l'aspiration à la liberté et l'idéal byzantin traditionnel de « symphonie des pouvoirs ». C'est aussi dans ce contexte que se pose la question du projet européen. Si la chute du Rideau de fer a permis la reprise des contacts entre les deux univers culturels et spirituels de la grande Europe « de l'Atlantique à l'Oural » célébrée par le général de Gaulle, permettant une respiration de l'Église, mais aussi de l'Europe, « à deux poumons », pour reprendre une expression chère au pape Jean-Paul II, les préjugés de certains pays d'Europe centrale et orientale à l'égard du projet européen restent forts. Dans les facteurs expliquant ce clivage, on n'a pas toujours pris suffisamment en compte le poids de la religion. Bien des croyants d'Europe de l'Est estiment que la sécularisation discrédite le christianisme occidental, contre lequel ils font valoir une religiosité traditionnelle qui leur a permis de résister à l'athéisme d'État. Les Églises de ces pays ont pu considérer l'adhésion à l'Union comme un péril pour l'identité culturelle dont elles se présentent comme les garantes, comme un risque de dilution dans une Europe matérialiste. Les croyants de l'Est européen ont pu se rapprocher dans une forme d'« œcuménisme conservateur », un « œcuménisme des valeurs » eurosceptique, né du sentiment que le processus d'élargissement européen leur était imposé par l'Occident sans reconnaître leurs spécificités culturelles et leur identité : ils étaient en quelque sorte « intégrés », mais pas « inclus » .

Au terme de ces réflexions, évidemment trop rapides, je voudrais répéter la double nécessité que m'inspire le thème de cette session : celle de resocialiser le religieux au lieu de le chasser dans la sphère privée, celle aussi, dans le processus européen, de mieux prendre en compte le facteur religieux dans sa diversité.



Dr. Timo Aytas GÜZELMANSUR, *General-director of the Department of the German Bishops' Conference for the dialogue with Muslims and research about Islam in Germany 'CIBEDO'*

Good morning distinguished guests, today I am speaking to you about the role of religions in society. As we all know, this can be both positive and negative. Let me give you a few thoughts and examples. Let's start with the negative to end on an optimistic note: since October 7th, it has once again become clear how religions bring conflicts into society.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is not a religious conflict per se, but one about the distribution of land between Palestinians and Israelis. But here - and unfortunately this is often the case - religious narratives and motives are transferred to a conflict and used to legitimize violence. We are currently experiencing this in the trouble region itself, but also in European societies. In Germany, violence is sometimes legitimized by religion, religious voices reinforce stereotypes, anti-Semitism, etc. But - and this is important to emphasize - there are also religious voices opposing these narratives and calling for peacefulness from the same tradition. They deconstruct the false motives and narratives from their own religion and thus invalidate them. Religions are therefore also part of the solution to these problems, which - as already mentioned - are often not primarily of religious nature, but are only secondarily legitimized and promoted by religious narratives and thereby develop their own dynamics.

It is important that the citizens immunize themselves against false religious manipulation. This means that they must be mature, use reason and have to be well versed in their own religious tradition, provided they see themselves as religious. The relationship between the state and religious communities is always a balancing act, because neither does the state want to be taken over by too much by religion if it sees itself as secular in some way, nor can a religious community allow itself to be taken over by the state for state purposes.

Nevertheless, there can be a very productive interplay between the two. In Germany, the relationship between state and religion is complex and one that has grown through the shared history of churches and different forms of government. It is, of course, not a perfect system, but it currently offers many opportunities for mutual enrichment. To take one example that can illustrate the formation of maturity, I will mention religious education.

In Germany, this is offered to pupils even at state schools if enough students come together for the lessons and if they belong to a religious community that meets the criteria for cooperation. In the past, this only applied to the Protestant and Catholic churches; for pupils of other religious communities, there were alternative lessons, mainly with an ethical focus. For some years now, however, there have also been Muslim religious education classes in the state of Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia and Bavaria. Like Christian religious education, this is not just about teaching religious content, but about religious competence. Students reflect on their own values and ideas and learn both to consolidate their faith and to take a critical look at it. It goes without saying that such teaching is not aimed at combating religious extremism or generating loyalty to the state, otherwise it would be called something else.

Nevertheless, as a by-product, religious education helps to combat the above-mentioned dangers of religious influence by arming young people against false rhetoric and enabling them to deal with their religion in a self-confident and reflective manner. This also arms them against religiously motivated restrictions on freedom, behaviour that goes against the Basic Law and the like. It is good that the German state is cooperating with the religious communities here, because both benefit from religious education in schools. The cooperation is

much more complex and varies in each state in German. I cannot go into the details here as I would rather develop other perspectives than get lost in the details of cooperation.

However, it is important to point out another form of cooperation in the German context. The German Islam Conference met again a few days ago. The Ministry of the Interior has been organizing it for 17 years. In 2006 and the following years, the main focus was on security issues. But the perspective has broadened: Most recently, the focus has been on religious education in schools, Islamic welfare, pastoral care in prisons and the military, the problem of imams sent by other states - and, most recently, hostility towards Muslims. These issues are important and they need to be discussed properly and publicly so that solutions can be implemented. This demonstrates the strength of the German system, which is not completely secular and is therefore able to establish cooperation and initiatives such as the German Islam Conference and is currently addressing issues of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

But the relationship between society and religions is not limited to attempts to find solutions for the negative influences of religions. If that were the case, the relationship between religion and society would only be negative and would try to limit the influence of religions as much as possible. But this is not even remotely the case! If we look around any city in the world, we will see how much religions have given to society: Be it churches, mosques, synagogues, temples; everywhere religions give society places that create community. They enable regular meetings and cohesion. In addition, they create a moral code that drives them to do good in society. Just think of Caritas, Diakonie, the Red Cross or the Red Crescent, etc. In many ways, religions complement the state. Wolfgang Böckenförde once said - in what became known as the Böckenförde dictum: «The liberal, secularized state lives from conditions that it cannot guarantee itself.» The modern liberal state gives freedom and must hope that the citizens themselves will regulate it morally, because it can only intervene to a limited extent. Otherwise it might become totalitarian. This is where religion and society complement each other. The fact that the state and society would lack something without religious communities can also be seen, for example, during catastrophes: prayers are inconceivable without religions. Religious services, but also increasingly multi-faith prayers for victims, for peace

and much more, not only give strength, but also create a cohesion that society cannot achieve without religions.

Moreover, religions give a lot to society culturally and intellectually. Religions are an integral part of society. I can't even list all the artistic contributions of religions; the history of art and music cannot be written without them. But you don't have to look to the past, even today in cities like or Berlin it is noticeable how much different religious communities help to shape urban societies, making them more colourful, diverse and vibrant.

In Germany, the cultural and intellectual scene is shaped by the religious communities through academies, among others. In Germany, there is a Catholic and a Protestant academy in every major city, providing impetus for the entire urban society with a varied program. Gradually, Islamic academies are also emerging, for example in Heidelberg and Berlin, where the first Muslim academies are being built soon. But they are already providing important impulses through events. In Frankfurt, a Jewish academy is also being established, which will have an impact on urban society with its own program. This means that religious communities are not just observers of social developments, but are actively involved in them. And this seems to me to be crucial for vibrant democracies.

The necessary debates on important ethical issues such as euthanasia, dealing with new technologies such as AI, biotechnology, etc. thrive on arguments and exchange. Here, it is good if the religious communities can contribute their expertise to the discourse and, if necessary, act as a critical corrective. I could only mention a few points here in which society and religions have a good and necessary relationship with each other. I look forward to the further contributions and the discussion. Thank you very much!



Fr. Friedrich BECHINA
Former Undersecretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education
P. Friedrich Bechina

First of all, I want to thank our kind hosts from the Spanish Delegation of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, represented by Ms. Dolors Montserrat MEP, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament and Head of the Spanish Delegation of the EPP Group in the EP. It is my heartfelt intention and pleasure to acknowledge both the leadership and inspirational work of Jan Olbrycht MEP and György Hölvényi MEP, Co-Chairmen of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural and Religious Dialogue during this very occasion but also for an ongoing attempt to foster dialogue, by bringing together “politicians, experts, church representatives and religious institutions [...] to discuss this crucial and timely topic” and to “provide an excellent opportunity to send a message to European citizens, namely that cooperation between politicians and religious representatives can provide us all with constructive solutions to the difficult challenges we are facing in the European Union today.”

The influence of Religion in Society – seen through the lens of political parties.

What really impresses me is not only this very meeting to which I have been honoured to be invited, but more generally what the representatives and leaders of the European Popular parties and others are

doing as politicians for their countries, the people and citizens and the common good in Europe. Despite all forms of critique and a certain political tiredness of a number of people in our days, which seems to be also part of the game in modern democracies, I know how much dedication, passion and often also sacrifice is needed when someone finds his or her career in serving the common good in a political office and position. I appreciate very much what I have heard during this meeting from both sides, the representatives of the EPP group as well as from leaders and experts of different churches and religions. As it has been said in the opening session, some political parties, represented here would consider themselves “Christian democratic parties”. In times of secular liberal democratic societies one could argue that politics and religion should be clearly separated from each other and thus may consider it anachronistic to have political parties characterized by the adjective “Christian”. I am convinced that the opposite is true, obviously under certain conditions.

I definitely do not argue in favour of mixing religion with politics and thus creating an insane confusion. But I appreciate the conviction of men and women who – as politicians – want to do their jobs not in a religious vacuum. I see a greater risk to be biased not by faith, beliefs and convictions, but rather by one's own religious illiteracy and indifference. And considering oneself Christian or believer of other religions both in the case of individuals as well as even parties, can bring additional motivation and responsibility to dedicate oneself for the common good and the welfare of fellow-men and women. Based on their respect and knowledge with regard to religions, their tradition, wisdom and values, they demonstrate the possibility and willingness to engage in a fruitful dialogue with religions and their leaders and representatives for the benefit of society. It is important to add that Christian Parties may obviously have members and will have voters who would not consider themselves Christians. I see this fact in a certain analogy to catholic schools of which in many places, even in some areas in Europe, a majority of students are not members of the Church.

Before addressing the main question of this session, namely the influence of Religion in Society, and my task to examine the evolving relationship between politics and religion in Europe, let me make as preliminary remark an important and fundamental distinction: there

is direct, explicit and transparent influence of religion in society, but there may also be all kinds of an indirect and not always clear, implicit influence. I shall limit my considerations to the first, the explicit and transparent forms typically exercised by dialogue and any kind of orderly cooperation between State, religions and civil society for the common good and the benefit of the citizens and other inhabitants of a country. With regard to the initial question of this session as first and spontaneous answer I could just refer to what the EPP-group says about itself on its website: “We value human dignity, freedom and responsibility, equality and justice, solidarity and subsidiarity. We acknowledge Christian-Judeo values as our foundation and are committed to defending freedom of religion all over the world.”

But is such an affirmation something particular or could we not even claim generally, that it simply reflects what we call ethical reasoning, which must be necessarily part of any serious political debate? We all well know that there are countries where political and cultural traditions and an open transparent and fruitful dialogue between religion and politics are on the public agenda, meanwhile, according to other traditions, such an open public discussions about religious matters is largely avoided. But can it be really avoided, or does it just take place in other areas and in a less transparent way? There may be legitimate objections against “drawing judgements from one specific faith as in such a way it would be difficult to claim to speak also on behalf of those who do not share this faith”. But with the words of Pope Benedict XVI. it is worthwhile to further differentiate that even “while denying that comprehensive religious doctrines have the character of public reason” one can “nonetheless at least see their non-public reason as one which cannot simply be dismissed by those who maintain a rigidly secularized rationality.”

Thus referring to John Rawls Pope Benedict “perceives a criterion of this reasonableness among other things in the fact that such doctrines derive from a responsible and well thought-out tradition in which, over lengthy periods, satisfactory arguments have been developed in support of the doctrines concerned. The important thing in this assertion [...] is the acknowledgment that down through the centuries, experience and demonstration – the historical source of human wisdom – are also a sign of its reasonableness and enduring significance. Faced with a-historical form of

reason that seeks to establish itself exclusively in terms of a-historical rationality, humanity's wisdom – the wisdom of the great religious traditions – should be valued as a heritage that cannot be cast with impunity into the dustbin of the history of ideas.

As many of the other speakers have referred to this wonderful place, Santiago de Compostela, and especially to the Camino which, as we all know, has been recognised as UNESC world heritage since 1993, I want to remind us of the meaning of the word “Camino” which – imported into Roman language and culture by Celtic immigrants – derives presumably from “camminare” or “camminus” with the significance of “move on foot”, “proceed”, “function”, or in other terms: “walking”, “moving forward” and “functioning”. When I was recently blocked by an impressive snow storm at Munich Airport, the natural event, which made it impossible for me to be physically present at this meeting, I wondered if it would not be more appropriate – as friends had observed to me earlier – to walk to Santiago rather than to fly. I guess it would have been easier to steadily “moving forward”. During such days and under the present conditions here, probably walking is the only really “functioning” means of transport. In addition, walking would be in line with political measures against climate change, and walking with others in the same direction and towards a common goal reminds us of being together on a way – hopefully forward and in the right direction. To be on a way together, in Greek words called “synodality” could serve to explain a way of religion and political parties, which consider religion as positive resource for their work and service to society. Besides of the more humorous character of these remarks, let us keep the image of the Camino in our minds as helpful principles with symbolic and metaphorical meaning for my further reflections and probably also during the rest of the discussions within this meeting.

Religion as part of problems – or rather a resource for solutions. As a second attempt to provide an answer to the question about the influence of religion in society and my task to examine the evolving relationship between politics and religion in Europe, let me start with my own professional experience during the last twenty years: Initially I had been hired as a German speaking desk-officer by the Congregation for catholic Education Apostolic See – in other words, the Ministry of education and science within the central administration of the worldwide catholic Church in Rome.

Caused by a number of unpredictable developments within our office, I rather soon ended up with the responsibility of coordinating the Churches activities related to the Bologna Process and the ambitious project to set up a unique European Higher Education Area, which – as it was underlined by many colleagues during the Ministerial meeting in Berlin 2003 – should equally unite such different players as EU-members, Russia and other ex-soviet countries, small states like Liechtenstein or Andorra and the Holy See.

Due to the modest size of our central administration with a total staff number around thirty, I also had to take over other international responsibilities in the same area: dealing with recognition of studies and degrees in all Continental UNESCO Conventions, developing and publicly presenting the higher-education-policy of the Apostolic See and working for any kind of cooperation with International Organisations all over the world, like the Council of Europe, UNESCO and other continental, international, national or regional initiatives concerning schools and universities.

Just when I started my work for higher education policy on behalf of the Holy See, during the Ministerial meeting of the European Higher Education Area in 2005 in Bergen, Norway, I was deeply impressed by the speech of the then Prime Minister of the host country and leader of the Norwegian Kristelig Folkeparti, i.e. the Christian Democratic party of Norway, Kjell Magne Bondevik, who stated: “... although religion seems to be part of the problem in many conflicts, we should take every opportunity to make it a part of the solution. Co-operation between religious leaders and religious communities can be a powerful force for peace. Greater harmony between religions will not in itself resolve conflicts, but it can pave the way for peaceful, durable political solutions. It can foster greater understanding and co-operation within a country and between countries and peoples.”

Let us not forget that these words had been said nearly twenty years ago, not long after the terrorist attacks against the Twin Towers in New York on “nine eleven” in the year 2001. And listening to Bondevik’s speech, many may have mainly identified the above mentioned “conflicts” with such or similar terroristic attacks, which unfortunately followed also in

Europe some years later – and which cannot be seen and understood without a religious and ideological context, even if we have to be very careful, not to take too simplistic conclusions about such connections. Still, I would argue that in more recent times we are challenged with a greater number and also more pressing political and societal issues, where religion should be considered as a possible, even promising part of solutions, even if the connection of the underlying problems with religion may not be as obvious as in cases in which religion at least within the (wrong) perception of criminals pretends to legitimate their committed crimes.

Russia’s President Vladimir Putin, in an article published on 12th July 2021 made it very clear that according to his opinion there are strong religious reasons for his political position, which lead to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, by way of euphemism called “Special military operation” by the Russian government. In the context of other challenging signs of our time the connections between them and religious beliefs and convictions may be not as obvious. Nevertheless it could be not just worthwhile but rather necessary to address them in cooperation between politicians and religious representatives, as we are still quite far away from finding long-term and permanent solutions to these and other problems which we are facing in the European Union today. With such problems, I mean – to give you some examples – phenomena connected with the COVID pandemic crisis, a growing social and political instability, signs of polarization and a more visible lack of cohesion between and within European countries, belonging or on the way to becoming member of the European Union.

I am obviously not suggesting that COVID is a religious phenomenon or that a certain type of growing political populism in quite a few European countries is fuelled by religious sources. In my view, the problem lies precisely in the fact that institutionalized religion, i.e. churches and recognized religious communities, have lost importance in the public debate.

On the other hand, there are – probably also for this reason – other institutions and individuals who are not qualified to do so and who certainly cannot refer to divine revelation, but who nevertheless use increasingly religious language and symbolism and, with an apparently messianic claim and appearance, are perhaps in the process of

filling a vacuum that arises where religion is not sufficiently present and taken seriously in public discourse.

At least among us, discussing these issues here, I guess, a great majority would agree that Bondevik’s analysis is correct and even more pertinent in our days. But he was definitely not stating anything new, especially in the context of the development of a united European Community, which has its roots in the post-world-war-II project to promote real reconciliation and paving new ways of working together based on a Christian view represented and explicitly invoked by the founding fathers of the united Europe like Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi and Conrad Adenauer. And in a similar way Christian values came prominently back onto the political agenda in important and decisive moments of crisis and reform of the EU, as, for example in the late 1990ies and early 2000s, when Jacques Delors promoted a “dialogue, focused on issues upon the European agenda, [which] can be traced back to earlier initiatives, such as that launched in 1994 [...] – ‘A Soul for Europe’ – which opened the way to encompass ethical and spiritual aspects of European integration. The draft Constitutional Treaty of 2004 included provisions on regular, open and transparent dialogue between EU institutions, representatives of churches and religious communities, and of non-confessional or philosophical communities. Although the Constitutional Treaty was rejected in French and Dutch referenda, its successor, the Lisbon Treaty adopted in 2007 and in force since December 2009, preserved the same provisions in Article 17 TFEU.”

Jaques Delors’ project to ‘give Europe a soul’ is based on the philosophical idea that the soul is the formative principle of a body (anima - forma corporis) and that Europe therefore needs a soul if it wants to exist and appear as a common «body» in the long term. This is linked to the realisation that merely hoping for economic growth, prosperity and a more successful policy in international competition and rivalry between different states and communities of states in the world is not enough to ensure cohesion, justice and peace in the aforementioned «body». The question remains open as to «how many different souls» and what plurality of occasionally conflicting values the unity of Europe can tolerate. In the further development of the European “Soul-Finding-project”, and more specifically in the newly introduced dialogue mechanisms associated with it, an attempt has been

made to implement a very broad approach, i.e. the dialogue should be conducted with all religions and ideologically positioned groups as far as possible. And the necessary distinction between churches, religions, ideological groups and the civil society at large has not been sufficiently regarded.

In my opinion, however, the question of what kind of religion-based or «ideological» world view has the capacity of giving a soul to Europe or to providing a meaningful input in such a project should still be addressed as by now it has not been answered satisfactorily.

Today, looking back on more than 25 years after the announcement that Europe needs a soul and a heart to survive and flourish, one may critically ask: Did this happen? Did Europe receive or find a heart and a soul by drawing on spiritual resources of the present and the past?.

When Jacques Delors passed away last year (2023) on the 27th December, a major German Newspaper remembered him as the “most influential Chief of the European Commission” who led Europe out of the crisis and into a new common market, based on the EURO currency”, but at the same time critically remarked that he failed with his dream to manage to give a soul to Europe, to give it spirituality and meaning. By asking this critical question I do not want to paint a bleak picture, but rather emphasise the importance of our time, of this moment and the event we are all allowed to take part in here. We have arrived at a turning point or a crossroad at which we must decide whether we want to confirm that Delors’ dream was and shall remain just a dream, or if it is time now to awake, not by offering simplistic answers in one or the other direction but by a new and ever more pressing engagement to make this dream reality, or at least make one step after the other and thus to begin a way, a “camino”. A camino i.e. moving on foot, by walking may probably slow, but it can be a steady walk or even a pilgrimage “by bringing together politicians, experts, church representatives and religious institutions [...] to discuss this crucial and timely topic” and to “provide an excellent opportunity to send a message to European citizens, namely that cooperation between politicians and religious representatives can provide us all with constructive solutions to the difficult challenges we are facing in the European Union today.” The influence of Religion in Society – some more concrete examples

and possibilities.

After these more fundamental considerations about religion seen as solution rather than cause of today’s challenges and problems, as a third attempt to answer the key question of this session I want to focus on “real life” and politics, presenting some examples of what may be a significant contribution and positive influence of religion to modern societies. Again, the context is my own personal experience of working as representative of the catholic Church in education and higher education policy at the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the European higher Education Area and other Organizations and initiatives. Education may most likely be a good model for other areas of influence and cooperation.

When I was (and am still) working together with colleagues and friends representing other countries and organization some of them are personally believers of different religions others not. If I ask them, what they appreciate as influence and contribution of the catholic Church according to their own experience and opinion, they may spontaneously mention catholic Schools. This is not at all surprising, as there are 220.000 catholic schools with around 70.000.000 enrolled students today, and a majority of students in most countries of the world are not Catholics, often not even Christians. To those figures we have to add many other faith based non catholic and even non Christian schools. There is definitely an influence into politics of these schools as a significant number of politicians worldwide have studied at catholic and other faith based schools and universities. Despite the large number and diversity of these schools, one can generalize some typical positive experiences, often reported with regard to catholic and other faith-based schools. This may be a fruitful plurality of educational projects, often linked to specific charisms and traditions of religious Orders, specialised in education. Needless to say how important such plurality and the possibility that parents may enrol their kids also in non-state schools are for modern liberal societies and democratic states.

At the same time such different educational projects often have an alternative focus and method by concentrating on disadvantaged groups and individuals. In many European countries the members of one church or religion are often coming from different linguistic and ethnic and cultural contexts as well as from various societal

segments and more than by anything else, united by their belief and religious praxis, which helps them to better integrate and feel at home in cultures, different from the one of their origin or historical roots. A certain number of catholic schools have also a long history which is interwoven with the history of countries and part of the cultural and intellectual heritage of a nation. They are by their history and reputation strongly related to values on which States have been founded or re-founded after periods of war, occupation, or the fall of ideologies and totalitarian regimes.

However, it would not be enough to focus only on what is directly useful and immediately applicable. The contribution of churches and religions to the state and society today is not limited to their social and educational institutions and activities, but in my opinion also extends to a fundamental level that affects the foundations of the state order and modern democracy. Thus as a meaningful contribution of the catholic Church to the political discourses today, which – according to my own international experience – was typically appreciated by others, is our “global view” on different issues, (especially in Higher education) and at the same time, in most parts of the world, religions are quite strongly connected with the people at the grass-root and local communities and communalities. In this context “global” does not mean exclusively “worldwide” but rather “embracing the whole ...”, which is – by the way – the original meaning of “catholic”. It is typical also for many other religions to think beyond time and geographical borders. They are drawing from ancient traditions and wisdom of the past, but at the same time preparing and educating for the future, the “day after”, even after the end of this world. It is often an essential part of religion to cultivate the memory of those who had lived in this world before us and to promote as well solidarity with people who are not yet living. In short: Religions offer a different perception of time, and tend to prefer a long term perspective.

As a consequence of European history, which has been marked by fierce wars between Christian countries and caused by rivalry between denominations and reigns or political systems based on religious confessions, there is a more sceptical approach towards religion in Europa, than one may find on other continents and within other cultures. And this may explain, why secularization has deve-

loped more speedily and profoundly in (western) Europe. But as European societies become more and more global, one can find also a substantial change in attitude towards religion at large; i.e. the influence from new incoming people from other regions. Such an experience was already made after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Wall of Berlin, when Countries of orthodox majorities joined the European Union. For other countries and their population, as a result of historic developments, their faith and exercising religion was far more present in personal but also in the public life.

In our days churches in general, but especially local congregations and communities in some areas of western European countries have a quite high percentage of actively participating members with a migrant background. Within catholic parishes one meets often Filipinos, Vietnamese, Latin Americans and descendants from several African countries, and for many of them religion is a natural and organic part of their lives. They simply do not understand if for others this is not the case and why they should not express their faith publicly. They may be searching for an answer regarding the tension between integration in their new home-countries and continuing to live what for them is important and holy. They need good answers, both from political side as well as from religious leaders and it is in the interest of the state to promote religious literacy, and a positive religious freedom, which allows to live and celebrate a religious conviction also on the public sphere. What scandalizes them most, is not any other religion, but religious indifference and illiteracy which provokes stereotypes and sometimes even mockery, hate and violence against religions and those who confess them.

As politics has to do with citizens of a country or more generally with persons who may be believers of different faiths and religions, this dimension of life cannot be totally excluded from the public and political agenda, but I would even go further and argue that – again according to my own experience – religion may even be inspirational to good politics. There is a necessary complementarity between religion and politics. Both of them want to serve the development of human persons, society and the common good but with different methods and respecting these differences. We too well know that troubles arise immediately if religious leaders act rather as politicians

and politicians would begin to confuse their party programs with religious doctrine and ideology. And based on the recognition of this difference, I quite often experienced that as a representative of the catholic Church (or of another religion) one can say what many others for political reasons cannot say. This may be – to give some examples – the proposal of a qualified person for a special task in a meeting whom – for reasons of political alliances – no other country representative may propose; often it may be easier to take the floor in favour of unpopular or discriminated persons, groups and people. And in some occasions, the special reasoning of believers may help all others to think and speak out of the box and thus enlarging horizons within discussion or helping to find creative solutions of tricky problems in a more and more complex world.

Today's complex challenges, which can be a pandemic disease, war, social tensions, societal disintegration, polarisation etc. may have religious aspects and reasons or not (and we have to be careful not to immediately judge in that regard). But often a key for a solution or at least a small but still important element that enables to make one modest step forward in such challenges may also be found in religious concepts like sin, conversion and forgiveness (which is different from any attempt of “excuse” or “apology”) or the believe, that there is also something like grace, which goes beyond any human competence, virtue and perfection. And definitely hope and the believe in a final judgement and thus also justice, can become a strong motivation for engagement in favour of the public good and the wellbeing of persons and societies.

Finally, I would say that religions within society can help to “allow God to remain God and humans to remain human”. Accepting God as almighty and caring for his creation and creatures protects us from the risk and tendency to believe to may redeem people ourselves and create a paradise on earth. Totalitarian regimes often start with ideology and a somehow messianic promise and unfortunately one may find similar attitudes on a lower level even within those groups whom we are used to call populists.

Conclusion

Our time is certainly not blind and deaf to religious symbols, language, teachings, all forms of «faith» and even to gods and idols;

and there is a danger that diffuse religious elements will also creep into politics and public discourse, in a way that things and areas that are actually better assigned to the exact sciences will suddenly take on a transcendental character and that rationality will increasingly threaten to disappear from the corresponding discussion in competition with purely personal feelings and subjective beliefs. When artificial intelligence and other technologies, a pandemic or politically and historically explainable contexts are discussed in almost metaphysical categories; when conspiracy theories and end-time and messianic promises are spread with religious fervour and individuals stylise themselves as saviours and redeemers of a group, a society or a country that they want to bring back to its rightful greatness, then one response to this could be to expose all kinds of merely apparent religion as superstition and to give a place in public life to genuine religious traditions that supports people in their development. This requires two things, as Pope Benedict XVI pointed out in his Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*. First of all, we need criteria and the ability to differentiate, also in a political context:

„For this reason, while it may be true that development needs the religions and cultures of different peoples, it is equally true that adequate discernment is needed. Religious freedom does not mean religious indifferentism, nor does it imply that all religions are equal. Discernment is needed regarding the contribution of cultures and religions, especially on the part of those who wield political power, if the social community is to be built up in a spirit of respect for the common good. Such discernment has to be based on the criterion of charity and truth. Since the development of persons and peoples is at stake, this discernment will have to take account of the need for emancipation and inclusivity, in the context of a truly universal human community. The whole man and all men is also the criterion for evaluating cultures and religions. Christianity, the religion of the ‘God who has a human face’, contains this very criterion within itself.”

Equally important, however, is the prerequisite that religion can also find the space in politics and public life on the basis of this differentiation in order to be able to develop and make its positive contribution to the well-being of people and society:

“The Christian religion and other religions can offer their contri-

bution to development only if God has a place in the public realm, specifically in regard to its cultural, social, economic, and particularly its political dimensions. [...] Denying the right to profess one's religion in public and the right to bring the truths of faith to bear upon public life has negative consequences for true development. The exclusion of religion from the public square — and, at the other extreme, religious fundamentalism — hinders an encounter between persons and their collaboration for the progress of humanity. Public life is sapped of its motivation and politics takes on a domineering and aggressive character. Human rights risk being ignored either because they are robbed of their transcendent foundation or because personal freedom is not acknowledged. Secularism and fundamentalism exclude the possibility of fruitful dialogue and effective cooperation between reason and religious faith. Reason always stands in need of being purified by faith: this also holds true for political reason, which must not consider itself omnipotent. For its part, religion always needs to be purified by reason in order to show its authentically human face. Any breach in this dialogue comes only at an enormous price to human development.”

Finally, let's return for a last time back to the initial question of my contribution, the influence of Religion in Society and to my attempts to examining the evolving relationship between politics and religion in Europe. The challenges seem great, almost overwhelming, but these days and the open dialogue here give us hope. Hope not in being able to find immediately solutions and answers to all questions and problems here and now, but rather the conviction of having taken a seemingly small but not insignificant step. A step that - we hope - could soon be followed by others; one step forward on a common path, a pilgrimage, a “camino” that you have begun or continued at this important place, Santiago de Compostela. And so, I would like to conclude with a word from Pope Francis from his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, which is both my thanks for your commitment and my wish for your future activities in the service of people and societies in Europe:

“Time is greater than space ... This principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans. It invites us to accept the tension between fullness and limitation, and to give a priority to time.

One of the faults which we occasionally observe in sociopolitical activity is that spaces and power are preferred to time and processes. Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces.

Time governs spaces, illumines them and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return. What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity. [...] (224).

Sometimes I wonder if there are people in today's world who are really concerned about generating processes of people-building, as opposed to obtaining immediate results which yield easy, quick short-term political gains, but do not enhance human fullness.”



Prof. Dr. Francisco RAMÍREZ FUEYO, *Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Comillas Pontifical University Madrid*

Gracias por la invitación a participar en este encuentro, en este diálogo. El papa Francisco ha insistido mucho en el diálogo como núcleo fundamental de la evangelización, en una cultura del encuentro. Es convicción profunda suya, que aparece en muchos de sus escritos y conversaciones.

Es evidente en nuestro mundo la necesidad de un diálogo religioso y social que busque el encuentro, no solo físico, sino también encuentro auténtico de valores, de creencias, y de decisiones compartidas. Este mismo jueves y viernes pasado, la Facultad de Teología de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas acogió un encuentro en colaboración con el Comité Científico (Les écrits de Tibhirine), que edita los escritos de los mártires de Tibhirine en Argelia: aquellos monjes trapenses, que, junto con otras religiosas y laicos, decidieron permanecer en un contexto de amenaza islamista, se han convertido en icono de un modelo de presencia dialogante, humilde, no proselitista, comprometida socialmente.

Primera parte: la presencia de lo religioso en la sociedad.

En la mañana de hoy se nos ha invitado a la reflexión sobre la relación entre religión y política, más específicamente cómo la primera,

la religión, condiciona, o es el marco de la segunda, la política. En esta misma sala, ayer se planteaba la necesaria pregunta de en qué sentido podemos decir que Europa es cristiana. Es obvio que, en Europa, venimos de una tradición cultural mayoritariamente cristiana; no creo que sea necesario insistir en ello cuando nos estamos reuniendo en Santiago de Compostela, meta final de un camino de peregrinación que desde hace más de un milenio atraviesa Europa, y que ha sido recorrido por millones de europeos en una peregrinación física y espiritual; una Europa, por otra parte, sembrada de iglesias y catedrales, de universidades cristianas, de pensadores cristianos, de ideas muchas de ellas inspiradas o nacidas en el seno de la fe judeocristiana. La misma idea de la Unión Europea, sus padres fundadores, incluso su bandera, tiene claras raíces religiosas, y más específicamente cristianas.

Por otro lado, la política se ejerce en una sociedad que tiene unos valores, unas opiniones, unas sensibilidades, unos lenguajes, unas creencias, unas formas de ver el mundo y de entenderlo. Por ello, la acción política necesita conocer ese ámbito, para que su mensaje llegue y sea entendido, para que sus propuestas y programas se adapten a lo que la sociedad espera y percibe como bueno y deseable. Simplificando mucho, la política debe conocer a su “cliente”, también en su dimensión religiosa/espiritual. No se trata solo de acomodar el discurso político a las creencias y sensibilidades de la sociedad: se trata también de tomar en serio que la dimensión religiosa es un elemento muy relevante, explícita o implícitamente, en la vida de las personas, incluyendo la de bastantes de aquellas que se declaran no creyentes, agnósticas o ateas. Sí, además de “religión”, hablamos de dimensión espiritual, entendida como búsqueda de sentido en la vida, de creer que eres parte de algo mayor o superior a ti; o como recurso para afrontar el dolor, la frustración, el fracaso o la muerte; entonces podemos decir que la dimensión espiritual es parte ineludible de todo ser humano. Esta afirmación, que podría sostenerse sin debate en Europa hace cien años, o en España hace 40 años, debe ser revisada y sustentada con estudios sociológicos. ¿Qué nos dicen dichos estudios?

Secularización.

Es verdad que Europa ha sufrido un proceso muy intenso de secularización en el siglo XX y en los inicios del XXI. Las encuestas han ido reflejando una tendencia clara al descenso en la confesión religiosa y en su práctica, al menos en el ámbito de las confesiones cristianas. En el actual año 2023, las encuestas disponibles apuntan a que, en lo referente a España, entre el 54% y el 60% de los encuestados se declaran religiosos, de los cuales se autoidentifican como católicos entre el 45% y el 56%. Por tanto, la cifra de los que se declaran ateos, agnósticos o indiferentes en España estaría en torno al 39%-45%. En cuanto a la práctica, diríamos que solo uno de cada tres católicos, o menos, se declara “practicante”. En el caso de los jóvenes españoles, baja significativamente: en el año 2020, los jóvenes españoles que se declaraban católicos no llegaban al tercio del total (31,6%).

Desde el punto de vista político, se nota claramente una distribución política de la autoidentificación de los jóvenes españoles: sube la confesión y la práctica religiosa cuando nos movemos hacia el ámbito de la tendencia política de derechas, y baja claramente hacia la izquierda. La secularización se nota también en la relevancia concreta que lo religioso tiene en la vida concreta. La importancia media que en 2018 los españoles daban a la religión era, sobre 10, de 4,01, a bastante distancia del resto de cosas sobre las que se les preguntó: se daba mucha más importancia a la salud (9,55), la familia (9,49), la educación (8,25), el bienestar económico (8,57), los amigos (8,30) o, incluso, la política (5,99). Cuando la pregunta versa sobre cuánto influyen las creencias religiosas en las decisiones concretas y relevantes de la vida (elección de pareja, trabajo, etc.), la respuesta suele ser llamativamente baja. Sin embargo, en 2018 todavía un 75,2% de los españoles estaba dispuesto a reconocer que, más allá de sentirse más o menos religiosos, sus valores fundamentales tienen una raíz cristiana en gran o bastante medida. El resultado es algo paradójico: los españoles reconocen que los valores que les llevan a vivir o actuar de algún modo son de raíz religiosa, pero no consideran que la religión sea muy relevante en su vida o en sus decisiones. Podríamos preguntarnos si, detrás de estos resultados, no está el que cada vez son menos los europeos

que se mueven por valores, y cada vez más las decisiones se toman siguiendo otros intereses más ligados al bienestar inmediato, a lo útil, a lo económico, al deseo. Algunos hablan hoy de una “moral sin principios de secularización.

Junto al proceso evidente de secularización, también parece cierto que en las últimas décadas se están dando procesos inversos. Un autor, Peter Berger, que fue uno de los grandes estudiosos de la secularización, en 1999 editó un libro, junto con otros autores, que lleva el significativo título, *The desecularization of the world: resurgent religion and world politics*, en el que se describe el resurgimiento de lo religioso en el mundo de finales del siglo XX. Se percibe en Europa un aumento de nuevas formas de creencia y de “espiritualidad”. Nos encontramos por todas partes la popularización de prácticas tan variadas como el mindfulness, el yoga, el focusing, los baños de bosque, etc.

Más llamativo es el surgimiento, especialmente entre los jóvenes, de otros tipos de fenómenos religiosos extraños a las que podríamos llamar “religiones abrahámicas”. Son fenómenos religiosos más o menos nuevos, con creencias ajenas, creo, al espíritu de la modernidad y de la Ilustración europea. Si se pregunta a los jóvenes españoles si creen en un “Dios como padre bondadoso que nos cuida y nos ama”, solo un 27% responde afirmativamente. Si preguntamos, en cambio, si se cree en que hay vida después de la muerte, lo creen el 45% de los jóvenes, y un 32% de ellos creen en la reencarnación. Uno de cada cuatro jóvenes que se confiesan ateos y uno de cada tres de los agnósticos creen en la “vida después de la muerte”, al igual que en la “reencarnación”. Y nada menos que el 68% de los jóvenes españoles cree en el “Karma”.

Además de estas, tienen también importancia otras creencias alternativas: el 23 % de los jóvenes creen en energías curativas como el reiki y las piedras energéticas, e, incluso, hay cierta difusión de creencia en el chamanismo (personas con poderes especiales), y en la brujería. Sobre las prácticas adivinatorias, el 26 % de los jóvenes españoles cree que es posible predecir el futuro mediante horóscopos, astrología, leer las manos, tarot, etc. Podríamos mencionar otras prácticas y creencias, quizás menos extendidas, como la ufología.

Frente a las religiones tradicionales, que parten del reconocimiento de que su fe es “revelada”, como nos recordaba en su intervención Olivier Poquillon, es decir, que no puede probarse científicamente (aunque tampoco negarse científicamente), para, a partir de ahí, construir un pensamiento coherente (teo-logía), estas prácticas espirituales difusas con frecuencia se presentan como “científicas”, como la “aromaterapia” o el uso de piedras semipreciosas: afirman estar basadas en experiencias y comprobaciones científicas, cuando, en realidad, son pseudociencias, normalmente sin ningún aval científico serio.

¿Qué decir a la luz de estos datos?

En primer lugar, que la religión, y más lo “espiritual”, sigue siendo un elemento relevante en nuestras sociedades, aunque, ciertamente, de un modo distinto que hace décadas. Se habla en algunos foros de “devotio postmoderna” (jugando con la “devotio moderna” que se extendió por Europa en los siglos XIV y XV). La política se ejerce desde y en una sociedad donde más de la mitad de la población aún se confiesa creyente, aunque poco “practicante” y poco identificada con una institución y sus líderes. Una sociedad donde otra parte importante de la sociedad ya no se declara creyente. Y una sociedad donde, en creyentes y no creyentes, la aspiración a lo espiritual, que está arraigada en las personas, facilita el surgimiento de nuevas formas de religiosidad llamémosla “posmoderna”. Prima, en todo caso, una gran “fluidéz”, donde las personas adoptan con facilidad nuevas creencias y prácticas, sin renuncia a otras, en un movimiento de hibridación o sincretismo que recuerda otras épocas de Europa (como los siglos que preceden al cristianismo en el Imperio Romano, o la época del Renacimiento).

Esta cultura de la modernidad líquida (Bauman, 2015) en la que estamos insertos, favorece creencias irracionales, privadas de cualquier intento de confrontarse con la razón, con la verdad, y con la ciencia, creencias sin comunidad, sin coherencia, sin compromiso social. Dentro de la lógica de la sociedad de consumo, como si estuviéramos en un mercado de creencias y ritos, se adopta lo que el individuo percibe como útil o atrayente, en la búsqueda de un “misticismo difuso” con pretensiones terapéuticas, sanadoras del cuerpo y del es-

píritu. Sin negar que estos movimientos tienen elementos positivos, la pérdida de las creencias tradicionales y de su práctica no son buena noticia, por supuesto para las instituciones religiosas, pero tampoco lo son para la sociedad europea. En una cultura que promueve solo verdades subjetivas, como dice el papa Francisco, “se vuelve difícil que los ciudadanos deseen integrar un proyecto común más allá de los beneficios y deseos personales” (*Evangelium Gaudium* 61)”. La vivencia de lo religioso como algo meramente subjetivo, sin capacidad crítica sobre las propias creencias y sin contraste con otros, hace muy difícil también el diálogo y la movilización cívica en favor de la paz y de la justicia.

Die Gedanken sind Frei, proclamaban los románticos y liberales alemanas del siglo XVIII-XIX, pero los pensamientos, si bien son libres, no son inocuos. De la creencia en que “Dios es padre...” puede nacer una cierta forma de relación y de presencia en la sociedad. De la creencia en el “Karma”, en el Tarot y en que la posición de los astros determina nuestras vidas y el futuro, nace otra forma de situarse ante el compromiso político y social. El “karma” (según cómo se entienda, dado que es un concepto más bien poco definido), nos puede estar transmitiendo que el pobre está pagando por un mal cometido en el pasado, o en una vida anterior, si añadimos la idea de “reencarnación”. Si es así, el pobre quizás no debería merecer nuestra compasión, o, sí, pero no más que eso. Sin embargo, la auténtica caridad tiene que ver con la justicia y con la dignidad del ser humano, y es restauradora, no solo compasiva, sentimental, filantrópica. De la creencia en que Dios es bueno, que ama a ser humano, y no soporta la humillación y la carencia del pobre, nace o debería nacer un tipo de compromiso humano y político que mira a reparar las injusticias estructurales.

Segunda parte: Las fuerzas políticas como garantes de la libertad religiosa

Una cierta visión de la Modernidad ha querido reducir lo religioso al ámbito de los valores privados (Max Weber), dejando que la intervención religiosa aflore en público, como mucho, en su acción social-caritativa, eliminando de lo público cualquier otra manifestación religiosa. Por contraste, se suele citar al filósofo alemán Jürgen

Habermas, quien, siendo él mismo no creyente, avisa de no caer en el “primitivismo ciudadano”, y de reconocer la necesidad de religiones, y cosmovisiones para alentar a la participación ciudadana, sin la cual no se garantiza la libertad y la justicia. Es evidente que prohibir lo religioso en el espacio público entra fácilmente en conflicto con la sensibilidad espontánea de los ciudadanos ¡vayan ustedes a prohibir las procesiones en Sevilla!, por poner un ejemplo; pero sí parece más aceptable cuando, por ejemplo, se quieren eliminar ciertos símbolos religiosos del espacio público, o cuando algunos representantes políticos declinan participar en actos religiosos porque, dicen, no quieren mezclar política y religión.

El error aquí es confundir la laicidad del estado, en un país, como España, cuya Constitución afirma la a-confesionalidad, con un Estado que activamente promueva y busque una sociedad laica, es decir, a-religiosa. Se trataría de un gran error confundir la aconfesionalidad con una laicidad exclusiva o negativa, que pretenda eliminar lo religioso de lo público.

Al contrario, el estado aconfesional (o laico) es precisamente garante de la libertad, incluida la libertad religiosa. El Estado es garante y facilitador de que se pueda vivir la fe o las creencias precisamente en su dimensión pública. Y esto es importante, porque, en retorno, la vivencia pública de la fe repercute en las creencias de las personas y de los grupos sociales, y en los valores cívicos que de ellas brotan. Nuestra Constitución española es muy clara en todo esto, tanto en la a-confesionalidad, como en la libertad y la cooperación del Estado con las confesiones. Otra cosa es cómo este marco jurídico fundamental se concreta.

A diferencia de lo que algunos proclaman, el espacio público ni es neutro ni lo debe ser, porque los ciudadanos que lo habitan no son neutros. Lo que el espacio público debe ser es lugar de encuentro, de diálogo, de consenso, y lo religioso, como dimensión relevante de muchos, puede ser facilitador, o puede ser obstáculo. Y esto depende sin duda de las diversas confesiones e instituciones religiosas, pero también del soporte ciudadano y político de nuestras democracias. Si en lugar de colaboración, lo que se fomenta es la hostilidad entre instituciones civiles y confesiones religiosas, quien sale perdiendo es

el individuo y la sociedad democrática moderna. Por ello, la política debe favorecer aquellas confesiones que promuevan una sana vivencia de la religión. Deberían las instituciones políticas alentar tanto a nivel personal como institucional aquellas creencias y religiones que fomentan el diálogo, la tolerancia cívica, el compromiso por una ciudadanía y sociedad justa, equilibrada, acogedora. Y la vida política debe estar atenta y cuidar de que no se favorezca otro tipo de religiosidad o creencias sectarias, intolerantes, fanáticas, cuyos fines sean disgregadores o dañinos para la sociedad. Necesitamos pues de una colaboración entre los agentes políticos y las instituciones religiosas para evitar que la conciencia religiosa de los ciudadanos europeos se llene de supersticiones, pseudociencias, ideas y creencias confusas, que lejos de construir al sujeto político, al ciudadano maduro y comprometido con la sociedad, le preparan para ser atraído por cualquier forma de populismo, de ideas políticas tan irracionales como algunas creencias religiosas, de chamanes políticos que, como los chamanes religiosos, se presentan investidos de poderes sobrenaturales, mágicos, con remedios mágicos y simples para cuestiones complejas.

Tercera parte: el papel de las instituciones religiosas en la vida política y ciudadana

La auténtica política consiste en la búsqueda del “bien común”. Este es un concepto fundamental, que, por cierto, nació de la mano del arzobispo de Canterbury, William Temple, y ha sido desarrollado por pensadores muchos de ellos teólogos moralistas cristianos. La búsqueda del “bien común” debe ser, pues, el objetivo de la colaboración entre las instituciones políticas y sus representantes, y las instituciones religiosas. Las confesiones religiosas, participan y colaboran, en Europa, y en concreto en España, en al menos tres aspectos fundamentales de cara al “bien común”:

1. En primer lugar, las instituciones religiosas cuidan de muchísimas organizaciones que están al servicio de la sociedad, especialmente al servicio de la caridad. Creo que no es necesario insistir mucho en ello. De hecho, es aquí donde las iglesias y confesiones religiosas son más reconocidas y valoradas por la sociedad, en concreto la española. Cuando, en las encuestas, se pregunta por la valoración de

las instituciones de acción social de la Iglesia católica y otras confesiones (muy activas, por cierto, muchas de ellas, en el campo social), el resultado es que éstas cuentan con una altísima valoración en el imaginario de los españoles, con un grado de aprobación que se sitúa cerca del 80%. Este es un fenómeno común en toda Europa, pero en España es más acusado que en otros países de características católicas similares, estando más cerca España de países del ámbito nórdico como Finlandia, Suecia y Noruega. Es evidente que la política, en España, no puede dejar de apoyar, de alabar y de proteger esta labor social que las confesiones religiosas prestan.

2. En segundo lugar, la educación.

Se debe recordar que la práctica mayoría de los centros privados de educación primaria y secundaria en España, donde estudia un alto porcentaje de niños, son centros concertados, muchos de ellos con un alumnado socialmente humilde, y, de nuevo, con una labor de formación para la ciudadanía encomiable, además de ofrecer una educación de calidad que al estado le sale, en términos económicos, barata.

3. En tercer lugar, pero no menos importante, la reflexión y el diálogo ético y cultural. Pero, como teólogo, y decano de una Facultad de teología, en una Universidad Pontificia, no puedo dejar de recordar lo que a mi juicio es otra contribución política fundamental de las confesiones religiosas: su aportación al conocimiento, a la investigación, especialmente en el campo de la ética y de la antropología. Las iglesias no son partidos políticos, y sus representantes religiosos no se sitúan en el ámbito del debate político, sino pre-político, defendiendo los valores que hacen posible la convivencia, la libertad, la justicia, el bien común. Pongo algunos ejemplos de esta presencia pública de las confesiones religiosas en el diálogo ético y cultural:

a. En primer lugar, en la defensa de la justicia, el reparto justo de los bienes, la defensa de los necesitados, no sólo mediante las instituciones caritativas. La Iglesia católica, a la que pertenezco, tiene un bagaje espiritual que proviene de Jesús de Nazaret y que habla de

i. La primacía de la dignidad de la persona (Mc 2,27), junto con la dignidad e igualdad esencial de todos los seres humanos.
ii. La atención particular al pobre, al vulnerable, al oprimido (Mt

25,40) y el destino universal de los bienes (1Jn 3,17)

iii. El poder como servicio (Mt 20,28)

iv. El respeto al diferente e incluso el amor al enemigo (Mt 5,44-45), la encíclica del Papa Francisco, Fratelli Tutti, es un bellissimo canto y llamada a vivir desde esta hermandad fundamental entre todos los seres humanos.

v. El universalismo (Hch 10,34-35)

vi. La esperanza de que la historia camina hacia un futuro de salvación, el Reino de Dios. Esta es una de las grandes aportaciones del pensamiento judeocristiano al mundo grecorromano: lo que algunos llaman la “des-fatalización” del mundo, es decir, la historia no está regida por un fatum, la ananké o “necesidad” griega; en la tragedia griega los héroes caen casi siempre prisioneros de ese destino (Aquiles, Héctor, Edipo, Antígona). El cristianismo aportó la confianza o fe en que este mundo, acompañado por su Creador, camina hacia un futuro mejor de plenitud. Sin esta fe “escatológica”, nuestras sociedades podrán toda la esperanza en la tecnología, el transhumanismo, en una carrera hacia una meta poco clara en la que será más difícil justificar las restricciones y los criterios de salvaguarda éticos.

vii. La renuncia al sectarismo: “todo lo que haya de verdadero, de noble, de justo, de puro, de amable, de honorable, todo cuanto sea virtud y cosa digna de elogio, todo eso tenedlo en cuanta” (Flp 4,8)

viii. Estos fundamentos religiosos se plasman en lo que conocemos como “Doctrina (o mejor, Enseñanza) social de la Iglesia”, que no es un programa político, sino el deseo de traducir en un lenguaje social, económico y político esas creencias religiosas fundamentales.

b. Un ejemplo de este diálogo ha sido la Laudato Si del papa Francisco, con la segunda parte más reciente Laudate Deum. Aquí vemos cómo una inquietud que nació de la sociedad civil y de la investigación científica, la lucha contra el cambio climático y el cuidado de la casa común ha sido recogido por la Iglesia, que ha valorado tanto la cuestión científica como la ética, y ha producido un texto que tuvo una enorme acogida -obviamente, no por todos-, y que ha contribuido, creo, a alentar el debate y las decisiones -aunque éstas últimas no vayan al ritmo que muchos esperaríamos. El que en la COP28 haya estado presente un “pabellón de la fe” expresa bien esta

sinergia de instituciones religiosas y sociedad civil en la búsqueda del bien común.

c. Otros ejemplos de este diálogo necesario son las grandes cuestiones de ética de la vida, por ejemplo, los debates recientes sobre la Ley de Eutanasia en España (en el que el mismo Comité Nacional de Ética fue poco atendido por el Ejecutivo), o los enormes retos que la ciencia y la tecnología presentan. En Comillas contamos con la Cátedra de Bioética más antigua de España, la primera que se creó, con varias colecciones de libros sobre estas cuestiones.

d. Contamos también con la Cátedra de Ciencia, Tecnología y Religión, dedicada al diálogo y la reflexión sobre estas cuestiones. La sociedad civil y la política necesita estos foros, porque vamos a tener que tomar decisiones a veces muy concretas (pensemos por ejemplo en el impacto de la Inteligencia Artificial Generativa en la educación, en el mundo laboral, en la creación de opinión social y política, en la medicina, en la investigación científica), son decisiones en las que la pregunta por qué es el ser humano, qué tipo de sociedades queremos, etc. Las confesiones religiosas tienen mucho que aportar.

Resumen y reflexión final.

Un autor, José Casanova, propone que, cuando se habla de “secularización”, se distingan tres cuestiones. Señalo su distinción y añado un comentario a cada una:

1. En primer lugar, la secularización como separación de “Iglesia” y “Estado”, esto es bueno, y es un gran avance de las sociedades europeas (aunque dicha separación tiene matices según los países). Hemos de evitar tanto la “sacralización de la política” como la “politización de lo religioso”; pero la tarea actual en Europa no es la separación Iglesia-Estado, que ya está fundamentalmente hecha, sino cómo se “reúne” (no reunifica), el Estado y las confesiones, cómo dialogan y colaboran.

2. En segundo lugar, la secularización entendida como declive del sentimiento, de la creencia o de la práctica religiosa en las sociedades: he intentado mostrar la ambigüedad de este fenómeno, y cómo la pérdida de terreno de las grandes confesiones puede ir acompañada

por la pérdida de una riqueza cultural y social, a la vez que se crea un vacío espiritual que es llenado, a veces, por supersticiones y creencias con menor valor social y político.

3. Secularización entendida como marginación de lo religioso, relegando éste al ámbito puramente privado.

Al contrario, he querido mostrar que las confesiones y sus instituciones tienen no solo una tradición histórica, sino una riqueza actual (caritativa, de reflexión intelectual, y educativa). Las confesiones religiosas deben estar en el espacio público, y lo están, no solo para defender sus derechos, sino para defender todas las libertades y derechos de la sociedad, para ser una voz ética que sirva de apoyo o de control al ejercicio del poder político y legislativo, y para proteger a los más débiles de los excesos del mercado capitalista.



From left to right: Dr. Timo Aytas GÜZELMANSUR, György HÖLVÉNYI MEP, Fr. Hyacinthe DESTILVELLE O.P., Fr. Friederich BECHINA



From left to right: Karlo RESSLER MEP, Tomislav SOKOL MEP, Rabbi Levi MATUSOF



From left to right: Dr. Timo Aytas GÜZELMANSUR, György HÖLVÉNYI MEP



From left to right: Franc BOGOVIC MEP, Ljudmila NOVAK MEP

VADEMECUM OF THE SPEAKERS



Dolors Montserrat MEP

Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament and Head of the Spanish Delegation of the EPP Group in the EP

Dolors Montserrat Montserrat was born in 1973 in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, a village near Barcelona. She holds a Degree in Law from the University of Barcelona Abad Oliva-CEU, a Master's Degree from the School of Legal Practice of the Barcelona Bar Association and a Postgraduate Degree in Town Planning and Real Estate Law from the University of Pompeu Fabra. From 1997 to 2011, she worked as a lawyer in her own law firm, specialising in town planning, real estate and environmental law. Motivated by her education and the political situation in Catalonia, she became involved in politics very early on - first, at the municipal level, in her hometown, where she combined her professional activity with being a councillor and spokesperson for Partido Popular from May 2003 to May 2015. In 2008, she entered national politics and was elected to the Congress of Deputies, where she remained until 2019. Since 2011, she has been the third Vice-President of the Congress of Deputies. Then, in 2016, she was sworn in as Minister of Health, Social Services and Equality in the Mariano Rajoy government, a post she held until 2018 when she was appointed spokeswoman for the PP in the Congress of Deputies. In 2019, she led the PP's European Parliament candidacy. Since then, she has been an MEP and leader of the Spanish delegation of the European People's Party Group in the European Parliament. She is also Chair of the Committee on Petitions and a Member of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. Since 2023, she is also Vice-President of the European People's Party Group. MEP since 2019.



Francisco José Millán Mon MEP
EPP Spanish Delegation Member representing the Region of Galicia and President of the Intergroup on European Cultural Heritage, Ways of Saint James and other European Cultural Routes

Born in 1955. Pontevedra. Degree in Law, University of Santiago de Compostela. Joined the diplomatic service, 1980. Different posts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Director of the Cabinet of the Secretary-General in charge of the European Community, 1991-1993 and of Foreign Policy and for the EU, 1996-1998. Spanish Embassy Bonn 1984-1987; Spanish Embassy Rabat, 1993-1996. Former Director General for Europe, 1999-2000. Advisor on international and European matters, cabinet of the first Vice-president of the Government, Mariano Rajoy, 2000-2003. MEP since 2004.



Diego Calvo Pouso
First Vice-President of the Regional Government of Galicia

Bachelor's degree in Economics (specializing in Public Finance and Tax System). Master's degree in Local and Regional Development. In 2009, he became the first sole territorial delegate of the Xunta de Galicia in the province of A Coruña. During the period 2009-2013, he served as the president of the Board of Directors of Gestur in A Coruña. In 2011, he was elected president of the Provincial Council of A Coruña, a position he held until 2015. In February 2003, he entered the Galician Parliament and remained an opposition member between 2005 and 2009. He served as the spokesperson for the PP in the Youth, CRTVG Company, and Housing committees, and as a member in the Economy, Fishing and Shellfishing, and Council of Accounts committees. From 2006 to 2009, he was the deputy general secretary of the PP of Galicia. He is currently the provincial president of the People's Party in A Coruña. He was the 1st vice president of the Galician Parliament in the X and XI legislatures until his appointment as 2nd vice president and counselor of Presidency, Justice, and Sports of the Xunta de Galicia in May 2022.



Rosa Estaràs Ferragut MEP
Vice-Chair of the Intergroup on Disability and Regional President of the Partido Popular in the Balearic Islands

Born in 1965 Valldemossa (Mallorca). Graduated in Law. Regional President of the PP in the Balearic Islands since 2007, she is also member of the National Executive Committee of the PP since 1999. She has been MP in the Balearic Regional Parliament (2000-2003), municipal counsellor in Valldemossa (since 1991), member of the Balearic Regional Government in 1993 and from 1996 to 1999. MEP since 2009.



Othmar Karas MEP
First Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for the implementation of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty TFEU, Dialogue with Churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations

Othmar Karas was born on the 24th of December of 1957. He is an Austrian politician (ÖVP) who has been serving as the First Vice-President of the European Parliament since

January 2022, having been an MEP since 1999. He held the position of EP Vice-President from 2019 to 2021 and from 2012 to 2014. Karas is also Vice-Chair of the FISC Subcommittee and a Member of the ECON, ITRE and AFCO Committees. In 2017, Karas received his Doctorate Degree in Political Science from the University of Vienna. In addition to his activities as President of the Austrian «Hilfswerk», Karas founded the non-party association «Citizens' Forum Europe» in 2010 of which he is still the spokesman today. In the EP, he is a Member of the EPP Group, where he held the Vice-Presidency from 2004 to 2011.



Jan Olbrycht MEP
Vice-Chair and Chief Whip of the EPP Group in the EP and Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue

PhD in Sociology. Lecturer, expert, politician. Former mayor and president of one of the Polish regions, active in many European local and regional government organisations. Regional policy and urban development expert.

Speaker at international conferences on interreligious related issues. Member of the European Parliament since 2004. Vice-president of the European Peoples Party Group at the European Parliament and Chief Whip in charge of the Parliamentary work of the EPP Group. Currently Member of the Parliamentary Committees on Budgetary Control and substitute member of the Committee of Budgets and of the Regional Development Committee. Standing rapporteur on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. Member of the Delegation for relations with Canada. Similarly, to last terms, co-chair of the European People's Party in the EP working group on intercultural and religious dialogue and president of the European Parliament's URBAN Intergroup.



György Hölvényi MEP
Co-Chair of the EPP Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue

György Hölvényi is a Member of the European Parliament, Co-Chair of the Working Group for Interreligious Dialogue of the European People's Party Group at the European Parliament. Since 2014, he has been serving as

Member of the Committees on Development and further on Human Rights, among others. Currently he acts as Coordinator for the EPP Group for international development, supervising his political group's line for this policy area. Since 2019, Mr Hölvényi has been Goodwill Ambassador of the Hungary Helps Programme. Between 2012 and 2014, Mr Hölvényi has been active as the Secretary of State for the Relations with Churches, Civil Society and National Minorities of the Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary. From the late 1990s, Mr Hölvényi acted as deputy state secretary at the Hungarian Ministry for Youth and Sports. Currently, he also serves as Vice-President for International Affairs of the Christian Democrat People's Party of Hungary.



H.E. Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon Ecumenical Patriarchate

His Eminence Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon (Adamakis) was born December 19, 1958, in Crete. He received his secondary education in France, attending the Sorbonne in Paris, before continuing his studies at the Catholic University of Paris and at the Saint Serge Orthodox Theological Institute. He was ordained a deacon and priest in 1985. He later enrolled in Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Boston, Massachusetts and received his Masters in 1987. Upon completion of his studies, he was appointed chancellor of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Benelux, while serving as Dean of the parish of the Archangels in Brussels and teaching Orthodox Religion in European Schools. In 1995, he was appointed by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew director of the Liaison Office of the Orthodox Church to the European Union in Brussels, Belgium. On November 11, 1996, he was consecrated as auxiliary bishop of the Benelux diocese. On January 20, 2003, he was unanimously elected Metropolitan of France by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. On February 16, 2021, he was unanimously elected Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon. Metropolitan Emmanuel is Vice President of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). He was President of the CEC from 2009 until 2013. In addition, His Eminence was appointed by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Orthodox and Ancient Oriental Churches dialogue, as well as to diverse inter-religious and ecumenical meetings and ministries. Additionally, his Eminence represents the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the academic dialogues with Judaism and Islam. He is Co-President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). He has also been honored to serve as a member of the Board of Directors of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue. Metropolitan Emmanuel has been named "Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur" in France and granted the "Order of Honor" in Greece.

Member of the Committees on Development and further on Human Rights, among others. Currently he acts as Coordinator for the EPP Group for international development, supervising his political group's line for this policy area. Since 2019, Mr Hölvényi has been Goodwill Ambassador of the Hungary Helps Programme. Between 2012 and 2014, Mr Hölvényi has been active as the Secretary of State for the Relations with Churches, Civil Society and National Minorities of the Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary. From the late 1990s, Mr Hölvényi acted as deputy state secretary at the Hungarian Ministry for Youth and Sports. Currently, he also serves as Vice-President for International Affairs of the Christian Democrat People's Party of Hungary.



Mons. Francisco José Prieto
Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela

His Excellence Francisco José Prieto Fernández was born in Ourense on 18th August 1968. He was ordained priest in 1993. Appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago de Compostela in 2021, he has been Archbishop of this see since 3rd June 2023. He holds a degree in Patristic Theology from the Faculty of Theology of the Gregorian

University in Rome and a doctorate in Biblical Theology from the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of Salamanca. In the Spanish Conference of Bishops, he is a member of the Permanent Commission, the Episcopal Commission for Social Communications, and the Episcopal Subcommittee for Cultural Heritage



Mons. Mariano Crociata
President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE)

Born in Castelvetrano, Province of Trapani, Sicily, Mariano Crociata was ordained as a priest in 1979. He studied philosophy and theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome, where he was awarded a doctorate in theology in 1984. He ran the theology

of religions department at Palermo's Theological School. From 2003 he was Vicar General of the Diocese of Mazara del Vallo. On 16 July 2007 Pope Benedict XVI appointed him Bishop of Noto. He was consecrated on 6 October 2007. Between 2008 and 2013 he was General Secretary of the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI). He is the Bishop of the Diocese of Latina-Terracina-Sezze-Priverno since 19 November 2013. He is the Delegate of the Italian Bishops' Conference to COMECE since 2017. He served as First Vice-President of COMECE in the period 2018-2023. In March 2023, Mgr. Crociata was elected President of COMECE.



Amb. Ismat Jahan
Permanent Observer of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the EU

Ambassador Ismat Jahan has been serving as Permanent Observer of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the European Union since September 2016. As a career diplomat she served as: Bangladesh's Ambassador to Belgium and the European Union with concurrent accreditation to

Luxembourg (August 2009-August 2016). First woman Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, New York (2007-2009). Ambassador to the Netherlands (2005-2007), concurrently accredited to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Poland. Specialized in multilateral diplomacy with focus on human rights, particularly women's rights and empowerment, she also served with the Bangladesh Mission to UN, Geneva. Elected member of the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) served (2011-2018). Ambassador Jahan retired from the Bangladesh Foreign Service as Senior Secretary to the Government. Master's in Economics (University of Dhaka); Master's from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Boston. Fellow in the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.



Rabbi Avi Tawil
Director, European Jewish Community Centre

Rabbi Avi Tawil is currently Director of the European Jewish Community Centre (EJCC) a Brussels based non-profit organisation that promotes Jewish Culture in Europe. He was born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He studied Rabbinical studies, Jewish Philosophy, and Kabbalah in the Rab-

binical College of Canada, Montreal, Seminar of Jewish studies in Manchester, UK and at the Yeshivah Gedolah in Safed, Israel. He was ordained as Rabbi in the headquarters of Chabad in Brooklyn, NY, and taught Jewish Philosophy in the Yeshivah Gedolah of Buenos Aires. During 2001-2003 He was responsible for educational and humanitarian programmes with the Jewish community of Cuba and Patagonia. Since 2004, he lives in Brussels, Belgium with his wife and four young children, where he has developed a number of projects to raise awareness of Jewish Culture and intercultural dialogue in Europe. Since 2006, the EJCC organizes at the European Commission an annual event called EUROCHANUKAH with the presence and under the patronage of Commissioners. In 2017 he launched the project «Dialogue & Diversity» to advance social inclusion in the EU capital through dialogue meetings and sport events engaging people from diverse religious and social background to have a common human experience.



Željana Zovko MEP
Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament

Željana Zovko is a Croatian diplomat and politician. Since 2016, she has been serving as a Member of the European Parliament. Zovko is EPP Vice-Chair, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and EPP foreign affairs vice-coordinator. She is Vice-Chair of the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herze-

govina and Kosovo and Member in the Delegation for relations with the United States. She is a Member of the Committee on Culture and Education and the Subcommittee on Security and Defence. Before her election to the European Parliament, Zovko had an extensive diplomatic career as ambassador.



Fr. Manuel Enrique Barrios
General Secretary, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE) and former Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations at the Spanish Bishops' Conference

Fr Manuel was born in Madrid (Spain) in November 1962 and was ordained priest in Rome in 1988. He studied philosophy and theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University obtaining the

degree of Doctor in Theology with a thesis on theological anthropology based on the works of the Anglican theologian John Macquarrie. He also has a degree in Clinical Psychology from a Spanish civil university and an official European recognition as a psychotherapist. Fr Manuel has been parish priest for 20 years in the Archdiocese of Madrid and Episcopal delegate for the Pastoral Care of the Family for 10 years. He was also responsible for the Secretariat of the Spanish Bishops' Conference for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue for 9 years. He was elected by the Bishops of COMECE as General Secretary in the Plenary Assembly celebrated in March 2019 and took office on 1st September 2019. In November 2023, the Plenary Assembly re-elected him as General Secretary for another 4-year mandate. Fr. Manuel speaks Spanish, Italian, English and French.



Fr. Olivier Poquillon O.P.
Director, École biblique of Jerusalem, Former Secretary General of COMECE

Fr. Olivier Poquillon arrives from Mosul, where, since 2019, he has been overseeing, as part of UNESCO's flagship program «Reviving the Spirit of Mosul,» the restoration of the Dominican convent of Notre-Dame de l'Heure, severely damaged by Daesh. At 56 years old, Fr. Olivier is a jurist specializing in

public international law and an auditor at IHEDN. As an expert for the Holy See at the Council of Europe, he served from 2008 to 2013 as the Permanent Delegate of the Dominican Order to the United Nations. After being the prior of the convent in Strasbourg and chaplain of the ENA, he was appointed Secretary-General of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union in 2016. He concurrently engages in various pastoral ministries, particularly with the military diocese, the Scouts and Guides of France, Caritas, or the diocese of Strasbourg. The École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem is pleased to welcome a director committed to teamwork, possessing extensive international experience, familiarity with the Middle East, and a track record in managing projects in complex environments.



Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen
General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC)

Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen is the general secretary of CEC since January 2020. Born in Kolding, Denmark, Skov Sørensen comes to CEC with a vast experience in theology, mission, ecumenism, leadership, communication and management. Skov Sørensen has a PhD in Missiology, Ecumenics and

Systematic Theology from the University of Birmingham, UK, and M. Phil in Ecumenical Theology from Aarhus University in Denmark. He has served as general secretary at Danmission and led the department of ecumenical and international affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD). He carried out several academic assignments at Aarhus University and United College of the Ascension, UK, and held positions at the Danish Missionary Society and Danish Church Abroad – Hong Kong. Skov Sørensen has served on various Danish and international councils and boards of directors, including Dan Church Aid, the Endowment Fund of the Lutheran World Federation, Centre for the Study of Religion and Society, Aarhus University, Danish Church Abroad, Eksistensen Christian Think Tank, the Amphlett Scholarship Fund, UK, and Areopagos Foundation. Skov Sørensen is an author of various publications on international and ecumenical affairs. He is proficient in Scandinavian languages and English, with good knowledge of German, French and Mandarin Chinese.



Mohamed Ajana El Ouafi
Islamic Commission of Spain

Since 2016, he has served as the Secretary of the Islamic Commission of Spain, a role that involves representing the Muslim community in the country. Prior to his relocation to Spain, he received religious training in Tånger. His academic accomplishments include a Diploma of University Extension in Religion and Law in Democratic Society, focusing on the challenges of coexistence in a plural context, from the University of Zaragoza. Additionally, he holds a Diploma from the Autonomous University of Madrid in «Direction and Management of Religious Entities.» Notably, he is a co-author of the first book, «Islamic Religious Education,» within the «Discover Islam» project implemented in public schools, a collaboration with Riay Tatary. Beyond his contributions to literature, he actively engages in activities fostering interreligious dialogue at both national and international levels. Al-Wafi has not only demonstrated commitment to his role as a representative of the Muslim community but has also made significant contributions to religious education and dialogue initiatives.

charge of the portfolio of the Jewish school of Madrid. Member of the Steering Committee of the Maccabi International Organization in Spain. Co-Founder and member of the Creative Community for Peace organization in Spain.



Frédérique Ohayon
Director of International Development, Jewish Foundation (Fundación Hispano-Judía) and Director of the Friends of Tel Aviv University Association in Spain

Parallel to her professional career in the technology sector and as a businesswoman, she has held different positions as a volunteer in different organizations: Member of the Steering Committee of the Jewish Community of Madrid, in

charge of the portfolio of the Jewish school of Madrid. Member of the Steering Committee of the Maccabi International Organization in Spain. Co-Founder and member of the Creative Community for Peace organization in Spain.



Jesús Gamallo Aller
Director-General for External Relations and Relations with the European Union, Region of Galicia

Holds a degree in Law from the University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain), 1985. Researcher at the European University Institute, Florence (Italy). 1990 Associate Professor at the National Institute of Public Administration (INAP). Since 1993: Civil servant of Xunta de

Galicia (Galicia's Autonomous Government). 1999 – 2005: Secretary-General EU and Foreign Affairs (Xunta de Galicia). 2007 – 2009: Municipal Councillor of Tourism, Foreign Cooperation and Migration, Santiago de Compostela. Since 2009 holds the following positions: General Director, EU and Foreign Affairs (Xunta de Galicia), Director of Fundación Galicia Europa, Coordinator of Working Community Galicia-North Portugal. Deputy Member; substitute for Galician government President at the Committee of the Regions. Member of the Executive Committee of the AEBR. Furthermore, as member of the European People's Party (EPP) in CoR: Coordinator and spokesman CIVEX Commission as well as NAT Commission Member. 2011 – present: Representative of the Executive Committee of the European Centre for the Independence and World-Wide solidarity, Council of Europe (Centre North South, CNS). Speaks fluently: Spanish, Galician, English, French, Italian, and Portuguese.



Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle O.P.
Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome

Hyacinthe Destivelle is a French priest of the Dominican order. He holds a doctorate in Theology (Institut Catholique de Paris) and in Slavic studies (Université de Paris-Sorbonne). Director of the Centre for ecumenical studies and of the journal *Istina* in Paris (2005-2010), he was pastor at Saint Catherine's parish in Saint Petersburg, Russia (2010-2013). Since 2013, he has been an Official of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (Vatican), in charge of relations with the Slavic Orthodox Churches (2013-2018), then with the Oriental Orthodox Churches (since 2018). Since 2019, he has also been Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He is the author of numerous publications on ecumenism and ecclesiology.

binical Centre of Europe and in 2004 he became Director of the European Jewish Community Centre and later of the European Jewish Public Affairs. For the past 20 years, he also serves as the focal point and liaison with the European Institutions in Brussels, thereby promoting Jewish interests, tradition and culture in the EU Headquarters. He is consulted and lectures as a leading expert on issues of education, inter-religious dialogue, integration, identity, values, social welfare and issues related to the Middle East. Since 2020 Rabbi Matusof also serves at the EU representative of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine. A father of 3 children, he is fluent in six languages.



Rabbi Levi Matusof
Director of the European Jewish Public Affairs

Rabbi Levi Matusof was born in 1979 in Nancy, France. After studying in Rabbinical schools Brunoy (Paris), London and New York, in 1998 he became assistant Rabbi to his father in Cannes, France. Levi Matusof moved to Brussels in 2000 to serve as Program Director of the newly established Rab-

binical Centre of Europe and in 2004 he became Director of the European Jewish Community Centre and later of the European Jewish Public Affairs. For the past 20 years, he also serves as the focal point and liaison with the European Institutions in Brussels, thereby promoting Jewish interests, tradition and culture in the EU Headquarters. He is consulted and lectures as a leading expert on issues of education, inter-religious dialogue, integration, identity, values, social welfare and issues related to the Middle East. Since 2020 Rabbi Matusof also serves at the EU representative of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine. A father of 3 children, he is fluent in six languages.



Dr. Timo Aytaç Güzelmansur
General-director of the Department of the German Bishops' Conference for the dialogue with Muslims and research about Islam in Germany 'CIBEDO'

Dr. Timo Güzelmansur was born in Antioch on the Orontes, today's Antakya in Turkey, in 1977. After graduation, he completed the military service in his homeland. He came to Germany in 1999 to get to know the country and learn the language. From 2000 onwards, he studied Philosophy and Catholic Theology in Augsburg. In the course of his studies, he spent a year at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and completed his studies in Augsburg with the degree Diplom-Theologe in 2005. He then worked in Turkey as a personal advisor to the Bishop of Anatolia until 2006. After his studies at the Philosophical-Theological College Sankt Georgen in Frankfurt/Main from 2006 to 2011, he was promoted to the Doctorate of Theology in Dogmatics. Since October 2006 he had been working as a consultant for Islam in its Turkish form for the Centre for Christian-Muslim Encounter and Documentation (CIBEDO), the German Catholic Bishops' Conference's Office for Christian-Islamic relations. Dr. Güzelmansur was appointed Director of CIBEDO in 2012. Among other things, he is a member of the Sub-Commission on Religious Relations of the Catholic Church with Muslims, which is part of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (DID), since February 2020.



Fr. Friedrich Bechina
Former Undersecretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education P. Friedrich Bechina

* 1966 in Vienna (Austria).
(Higher) Education Expert - Former Undersecretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education of the Holy See
Doctor in Dogmatic Theology (Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome; 1996). 1996 ordained Priest and Pastoral Service and teaching in schools in Feldkirch (Austria) till 2001. From 2001-2022 in the Service of the Holy See (Congregation for Catholic Education). 2005-2015 in charge for international relations of the Holy See in the field of Higher Education; Representative of the Holy See in the Bologna Process, the Council of Europe, the UNESCO Recognition Conventions and in various international organizations and initiatives regarding Education and Higher Education; 2013-2022 Undersecretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education – Rome/Vatican; From 2022/2023: Personal Advisor to the Archbishop of Salzburg and the Austrian Bishops Conference for international higher education and educational matters; Research Associate of Boston College Centre for Higher Education Studies; freelance international higher education expert and consultant in educational matters; Member of various Boards and Advisory Councils of catholic Higher Education Institutions around the world.



Prof. Dr. Francisco Ramírez Fueyo
Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Comillas Pontifical University Madrid

Dr. Ramírez studied Hispanic Philology at the University of Salamanca and Biblical Sciences at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. He later received a doctorate in Theology from Comillas Pontifical University. He has also taken courses in biblical history and archaeology in Jerusalem. His field of research is the Epistles of St. Paul and Ignatian spirituality. He is currently a professor of Sacred Scripture and Biblical Spirituality in the Faculty of Theology at Comillas. He also teaches in various formation programs on the Spiritual Exercises and Ignatian spirituality and ministering the Exercises. Until he was appointed Dean, he held the position of vice-dean of the faculty.



Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela

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