

JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND MUSLIM DIALOGUE (PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS)

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Abstract: The leitmotif of the submission (article) is the issue of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim dialogue. The methodological foundation for the study of this issue is the concept of axiological pluralism, which includes not only value pluralism, but also cultural and religious pluralism, and ultimately a plurality of interpretations of these historical and social phenomena as well. The basic foundations for this dialogue, as stated in the submission, are the common features of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam inferred from their monotheism. Among obstacles of this dialogue can be listed: intolerance, fanaticism, and extremist interpretation of holy texts. The goal of the dialogue should be substantiation of shared responsibility of the three aforementioned 'Abrahamic religions' for maintaining and cultivating conditions for life on our planet.

Keywords: axiology; dialogue; Christianity; Islam; Judaism; pluralism; religion.

"We must not (...) think that our religion alone represents the whole Truth, and all the others are false. A reverent study of the other religions of the world would show that they are equally true as our own"
(Mahatma Gandhi)

1 Conditions for Dialogue

The world of people, which comprises a dynamic system of diverse cultures, necessitates dialogue. However, as R. Girard aptly states: "in the present day, the more we speak of dialogue, the less often it occurs" (Girard 2011, p. 193).

It is clear that most problems in communication arise when the bases and approaches to searching for the answer to the question of common interest are distinctly different, or even contradictory. According to R. Rorty (1991, p. 170-171), one of the essential prerequisites of a dialogue is that its participants must at least minimally agree on the premises, i.e., starting theses and statements, with which they enter into dialogue. This is further proven by the following statement: "one can make any number of foolish, nonsensical or mad claims that are irrefutable. This is the consequence of the fact that terms such as argument, dispute, quarrel only make sense in situations where the participants of the dialogue are able to reach at least minimal agreement. We can only disprove the opinion of a person who acknowledges at least some of our premises. People who agree with too few generally accepted premises are not considered undefeatable opponents, but rather too childish to debate with at all. All discourse – moral, scientific, literary – has certain entry requirements, so to speak, and before one can be taken seriously within it, one must present one's credentials".

Based on the above we have formulated the following research hypothesis: If interreligious dialogue does not contain mutual respect for commensurability and incommensurability of the value orientation of the dialogue's participants, then the dialogue cannot be meaningful and it is doomed to fail.

Among basic requirements for a meaningful interreligious dialogue can be counted: respecting the principle of *full equality* of all participants, the principle of *freedom of thought, religion and expression*, the right to argue the reasoning and verification of one's own opinions including the option of *self-correction*, the right to cultural identity and value orientation inherent to it, etc. L. Pasternáková (2018) states: "In today's flood of stimuli and plurality of influences arising from dangers to society and associated risks, it is urgently necessary to learn to evaluate and to create and protect real values." In other words, for a dialogue to fulfil its purpose, it must be *democratic, informal, open, fair...* and especially, it must be realized within the boundaries of mutually accepted tolerance. Particularly relevant is the rule of *receiving respect in return for giving respect*.

This also fully applies to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim dialogue, which can, additionally, only fulfil its purpose when its participants acknowledge religious pluralism without surrendering their own cultural identity and the value orientation inherent to it. This is because interfaith dialogue is not (primarily) concerned with a particular participant being or not being *right*; it is instead concerned with reaching a state of mutual respect for one another's *right to be right* and the validity of that state within the boundaries of the system of values that the participant of the dialogue is anthropologically and generally anchored to.

Ultimately, individuals with contrasting value orientation are not able to agree on what is or what is not the *truth*. That is most likely the reason why even Pilate responded to Jesus' claim that he – meaning Jesus – was "born and (...) [has] come into the world—to bear witness to the truth" with the question "What is truth?" (Jn. 8:37-38, ESV). Of course, this statement does not refer to empirically verifiable truths of the natural sciences, the *universal* validity of which is not being questioned here.

At the same time, we should remember the wise *warning* of L. Wittgenstein (2001, p. 69), who states that it is not possible to communicate using false propositions.

In this context, we believe that the primary goal and purpose of interfaith dialogue does not lie in answeringgnoseological or metaphysical questions, but rather in the mutual search for conditions for humane and dignified coexistence of people with different value (cultural, moral, legal, and political) orientation.

It should also be kept in mind that the current interfaith dialogue is being realized within the atmosphere of value and religious pluralism. In other words: the purpose of interfaith dialogue is not (and cannot be) 'overcoming' or even 'cancelling' plurality of ideas which is, in a world of diverse cultures, civilizations, and value orientations – necessary. On the contrary! The purpose of dialogue is to convince its participants that this plurality is necessary and it must be tolerated, because all that is diverse or *different* can only coexist on the condition of mutual tolerance. In this respect, interfaith dialogue can be characterized as the most humanly natural and appropriate method of communication. Respecting and asserting the position of axiological pluralism also supports meaningful communication of not just religions, but also entire cultures and civilizations.

Considering the above, we would like to emphasize one more time that Jewish, Christian, and Muslim dialogue can only fulfil its purpose if it respects at least these (fundamental) conditions and criteria:

- the most equal status of all its participants,
- the guarantee of and respect for *freedom of thought*,
- the ability and willingness to listen to *the other party*,
- consensus regarding the content or thematic focus of the conversation,
- mutual helpfulness when dealing with acute existential problems,
- cultured manners and fairness in the manner and style of communication,
- mutual tolerance,
- mutual establishment of 'dialogue boundaries', i.e., an agreement stating what is 'not to be discussed', etc.

The 'boundaries' of interreligious dialogue must be set in relation to the 'boundaries' of freedom of speech. The freedom of one participant ends where another's begins. The right to 'abstain from speaking' should be part of freedom of speech in interfaith dialogue, especially if speaking one's mind would lead to increased tension, etc. Such situations demand adherence to the following *rule* of L. Wittgenstein (2001, p. 3): "what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence".

On the other hand, among some of the most significant barriers to meaningful interfaith dialogue we can count, according to V. F. Birkenbihl (1999, p. 66): “the tendency of some participants of the dialogue to boss other participants around, indifference to the opinions of the other participants, inability to empathize, communication egoism, etc.”

Following the aforementioned conditions for interfaith dialogue, it can be observed that its main goal should be *consensus* on: solutions to contemporary issues of humanity, ways to preserve a sustainable level of life on Earth, as well as overall racial, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of humanity, respect for human dignity and the creation of conditions for tolerant coexistence of people with diverse value orientations... etc.

This prompts the question: when can representatives of different religions achieve consensus while solving the aforementioned problems, and when can they not? We suppose that, when solving these problems, consensus can be reached, provided that they apply identical or at least comparable (similar and related) criteria of evaluation based on an identical or comparable understanding of values. Consensus cannot be reached if, when solving the aforementioned problems, they apply distinctly different (incomparable, even clashing) criteria of evaluation based on a different understanding of values.

Once more it should be stated that a necessary condition for interfaith dialogue is mutual tolerance of participating religions, which is suggested through acknowledgement of religious pluralism.

The importance of tolerance within the context of religious pluralism was already emphasized in the middle of the 20th century by Mahatma Gandhi (1962, p. 1), who said: “We must not (...) think that our religion alone represents the whole *Truth*, and all the others are false. A reverent study of the other religions of the world would show that they are equally true as our own”. These words – spoken by one of the most significant apologists for interfaith dialogue – imply that God belongs to ‘all’ religions (not just one) and that there are multiple paths leading to religious *salvation* (‘salvation pluralism’), etc.

Kahlil Gibran (1932, p. 18) called attention to this in his work named *The Lightning Flash*, which describes the story of a bishop who perished due to a lightning strike after saying that salvation is only possible for those who are “baptized of water and of the spirit”.

Based on the subject of this work, at least the basic foundations, options, and limits of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim dialogue will be discussed.

But first, it should be emphasized that a dialogue is not a *competition* and that its outcome cannot be a *victory* of one party only. A dialogue is a tool for building relationships and this is especially true for interreligious dialogue, which is much more specific. It could be said that the success of this dialogue depends on mutual tolerance and mutual respect – to a much greater degree – than in other forms of dialogue. In this kind of dialogue it is also absolutely necessary to *refrain* from using any means of expression (words, gestures, actions, etc.) that could be perceived as an *insult* or *degradation* of the religious faith of the other party.

However, this does not mean that interfaith dialogue can be realized in a so-called ‘vacuum of values’. It is rather the opposite! Participants of this dialogue typically have a very clearly defined value stance (and orientation) and so some of the necessary requirements for a meaningful conversation must be mutual tolerance and respect. (This also refers to a quote by pope Francis (2015b): “Mutual respect is the condition and, at the same time, the aim of interreligious dialogue”. This also fully applies to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim dialogue, which is also interesting from the perspective of integration of immigrants in Europe (particularly the Muslims). ‘Future Europe’ would likely do well to start preparing for this dialogue today.

It is clear that said dialogue is objectively limited through *catechistic* (theological, or perhaps dogmatic) foundations of these religions, which are simply not open to discussion. This also concerns the understanding of God himself, his *transcendence* and *eminence*, his *uniqueness* and *hypostases*, etc. Martin Buber (2016, p. 65) expressed it through these words: “God is an existence that can be addressed, yet is unspeakable”. We should not forget the fact that God was God even before the religions of the Jews, Christians and Muslims appeared.

2 Jewish-Christian Dialogue

As far as the Jewish-Christian dialogue is concerned, it should be said that important foundations and limits of this dialogue can be tracked in history to the process of formation of Christianity, i.e., the life of Jesus Christ. Just as the attitude of the Jews towards Jesus was ambivalent, so was the attitude of Jesus towards the Jews. Some gnostic and heretical, in relation to early Christianity, movements had a negative attitude towards Judaism and the Old Testament. “Marcion was not a Gnostic, and the ecclesiastical authorities called him a heretic. He drew the consequences from the disputes between Paul and Peter, and in an effort to avoid Judaism he established the first great heresy. He claimed that the apostles outside Paul had inserted Jewish ideas into Paul’s letters, which he sought to eliminate” (Ambrozy 2021, p. 10).

One group of Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah, whose arrival had already been foretold by the *Old Testament*, and they faithfully followed him. Another group of Jews, who associated themselves with the Pharisees, rejected Jesus as the Messiah and had serious reservations about his influence. This was also demonstrated in several ‘dialogues’ of Jesus and the Pharisees, one of which, according to the Book of John, went as follows:

“So the Pharisees said to him, ‘You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.’ Jesus answered, ‘Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. (...) I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.’ They said to him therefore, ‘Where is your Father?’ Jesus answered, ‘You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.’ (...)”

They answered him, ‘We are offspring of Abraham (...)’

‘I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.’ (...)

They said to him, ‘We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. (...) But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. (...)’

‘Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me (...) Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ So the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple” (Jn 8:13-59, ESV).

For the sake of completeness, it should be added that Jesus – according to the cited gospel – also speaks to the Jews who came to believe in him, and this is what he says:

“‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ (...) ‘51 Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death’” (Jn 8:31-51, ESV).

I suppose that this conversation between Jesus and the Jews already hinted at the basic foundations and limitations of the later Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Both of these religions ‘spring’ from the same *spiritual source*. They have the same *forefather* in Abraham, they also share a prophetic tradition, etc. In spite of this, their interpretations of the most important question of catechism, i.e., the question of God, differ.

However, this does not mean that Jewish-Christian dialogue loses its meaning. Present-day Christianity and Judaism are characterized by a considerable degree of tolerance for diverse interpretations, which is an irreplaceable requirement for their ‘contemplating together’ not only the global danger to life on Earth, but also specific issues relating to the peaceful coexistence of people of diverse religions.

This requirement for meaningful conversation between present-day Judaism and the world of other religions is also discussed by the famous teacher of *Jewish thought*, R. Cohen (2002, p. 104), when he states: “the Talmud speaks of many scholars who live according to their own *Halakha*, not caring that their actions are different from what the general rules dictate. A man acting according to his own idea of truth will not be spurned. Abiding by the rules that apply to all must not lead to suppression of one’s perspective, which is based on a different understanding than the understanding of a larger number of people”.

The above statement represents not just a more acceptable position for a meaningful dialogue, but also one of the requirements for overcoming fanaticism, which is unacceptable in and incongruous with any and all dialogue. This issue is also discussed by P. Dancák (2016) in his thought-provoking study named *Regarding symptoms of religiously motivated xenophobia within the bounds of tolerance and unclear pluralism*.

R. Cohen (2002, p. 83) answers the question “what method does the *Talmud* use to argue?” with: “The *Talmud* contains long chains of arguments which contradict each other. As soon as a thought is declared and often supported using verses, different, contradicting thoughts are declared in turn and the previously stated evidence shatters. Therefore, no truth is gained (...) *Talmud* encourages us to debate and especially to continue doing so (...) This dialogue acknowledges all perspectives. An argument does not lose value if it is disproven. On the contrary, although it will be brushed aside for the following centuries, perhaps it reflects the future to a much greater degree than the accepted conclusions that the world considered reasonable at the time”.

R. Cohen (2002, p. 114) also states that the basic *catechistic* and ethical conditions for a dialogue with Judaism are as follows: monotheism, prohibitions of blasphemy, theft, murder, incest, adultery, eating a part of an animal that yet lives, and acknowledgement of the local court of law, etc.

Present-day Jewish thought – in interreligious dialogue – also proposes the idea of a so-called “non-universal identity”. This idea was also publicized by the famous rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who, within the given context, states that Judaism is based on a “dual covenant”, which includes the *covenant* of God with all of humanity, but also his *covenant* with a specific people on Mount Sinai. “Judaism,” writes J. Sacks (2003, p. viii), “attempts to balance concern with the universal (the duties and rights we share as human beings) and respect for the particular (...) giving us our singular, non-universal identity”.

In relation to his understanding of the *Old Testament*, Sacks (2003, p. 51) even states that it already suggests the direction

“from the universal to the particular”, that “universalism is the first, not the last, phase in the growth of the moral imagination”

J. Sacks (2003, p. 51) believes that God first entered into a *covenant* with all of humanity, and only consequently did he do the same with individual peoples. In relation to this, Sacks wrote: “The world of the first eleven chapters of Genesis is global, a monoculture (‘the whole world had one language and a common speech’). It is important to add that the very same Yahweh transformed the original (“global”) unity into diversity when he “descended” when the tower of Babel was being built and caused the “confusion” of the language of the people. He was also the reason why the people – who initially inhabited one city – dispersed all over the world (Gn 11:5-9, ESV).

I believe that J. Sacks, through his understanding of the Bible and Judaism, is creating a real space for dialogue with other religions, because he ‘dismantles’ what was and still is a nearly insurmountable obstacle: a fundamentalistic *monopoly* (of respective religions) *on salvation*. J. Sacks (2003, pp. 52-53) describes this as follows: “[Judaism] believes in one God but not in one exclusive path to salvation. *The God of the Israelites is the God of all mankind, but the demands made of the Israelites are not asked of all mankind*. There is no equivalent in Judaism to the doctrine that *extra ecclesiam non est salus*, ‘outside the Church there is no salvation’. On the contrary, Judaism’s ancient sages maintained that ‘the pious of the nations have a share in the world to come’”.

This stance regarding salvation being possible through the worship of any monotheistic religion represents a truly feasible platform for their mutual dialogue as well.

The rabbi Sacks (2003, p. 55) declares this unambiguously: “As Jews we believe that God has made a covenant with a singular people, but that does not exclude the possibility of other peoples, cultures and faiths finding their own relationship with God within the shared frame of the Noahide laws. (...) God is God of all humanity, but between Babel and the end of days no single faith is the faith of all humanity”.

This stance is – in our opinion – in accord with the position of axiological pluralism, which implies not only respect for value pluralism in general, but also respect for religious pluralism and multiple *paths to salvation*. However, this presupposes the ability and willingness to *hear* ‘the voice of God’ in a language different from one’s own and to *see* manifestations of ‘His will’ in ideas, customs, traditions, rituals, symbols different from those making up the heart of our own spiritual culture or religion.

It is this willingness and ability that makes interfaith dialogue a tool for mutual understanding as well as a *cure* to stop outbreaks of violence stemming from fanaticism. This belief is also expressed by Sacks (2003, p. 56): “Just as a loving parent is pained by sibling rivalry, so God asks us, his children, not to fight or seek to dominate one another. God, author of diversity, is the unifying presence within diversity”.

We fully agree with this viewpoint and we express hope that it will be applied not only within the present-day Jewish-Christian dialogue, but also Muslim-Christian dialogue, the results of which can significantly influence the process of integration of Muslim immigrants in the ‘future Europe’.

3 Muslim-Christian Dialogue

Similarly to Jewish-Christian dialogue, what connects or catechistically ‘bridges’ these religions should also become the base that Muslim-Christian dialogue is to be built on.

It would appear that a common trait of these religions is the spiritual connection to the *Old Testament*. From it can be inferred – at least generally speaking – both Christian and Islamic *monotheism* (the belief in ‘one God’ – *Tawhid* in Islam), *prophetism* (teachings of the prophets – *Anbiya* in Islam),

angelology (teachings about angels – *Malaikah* in Islam), *eschatology* (teachings about judgement day – *Yaum al-Qiyamah* in Islam), *predestination* (teachings about predestination – *Al-Qada Wa Al-Qadar* in Islam), *messianism* (teachings about the coming of the Messiah – *Mahdi* in Islam, also known as teachings about the so-called ‘Hidden *Imam*’), etc.

Among the concepts catechistically ‘bridging’ Christianity and Islam, as well as one of the conditions for their dialogue, is the fact that Islam includes both the Jews and Christians among the people who received ‘God’s word’, calling them ‘People of the Book’ or ‘Possessors of the Scripture’ (*Ahl al-Kitab* in Arabic). This fact should not be overestimated, however, because similarly to Jews, Christians have also already been described as ‘idolaters’ against whom – assuming they do not submit to Islam in accord with the radical interpretation of the *Sharia* – violence may be used. The standing of Christians in Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, etc. can serve as an examples of this.

It seems that the Muslim-Christian dialogue will likely depend mainly on its actual participants and their ability to respect the fact that both of these religions are equally valuable and true to their faithful.

Although to Muslims Islam means ‘submitting to the will of Allah’, the faith of individual Muslims does not represent an ‘equally deep’ layer of their psyche or their personal spiritual identity, etc. L. Kropáček (2002, p. 78) states: “Differences appear and manifest in the real selection of offered values. The common foundation of all Muslims is made up of the *Quran* and the five pillars of Islam (profession of faith, prayer, alms, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca), but beyond it lies a vast selection of diverse and even contradictory orientations (...) Muslim writers engaging in polemic do not openly speak of multiple *Islams*, but they do concede that there are deep internal disputes relating to the understanding of the Quranic faith (...) There are no doubts in regards to the authenticity of the Quranic text, but there are many issues with interpreting it, especially in matters of the law”.

It is clear that so-called ‘moderate’ interpretations of the *Quran* have a greater chance of success in Muslim-Christian dialogue, and this is also true in relation to interpretations of the *Bible*. To put it simply: without mutual respect, every dialogue is – sooner or later – doomed to fail.

Arguments in favour of Muslim-Christian dialogue can also be found in the *Quran* itself, specifically in the verses referring to a common source of all three above mentioned religions. For example, as stated in *The Clear Quran* (translated by Dr. Mustafa Khattab, 2015): “O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know one another” (The *Quran*, 49:13).

The result of knowing one another should be – according to the *Quran* – the conviction that: “We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us; and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and his descendants; and what was given to Moses, Jesus, and other prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them. And to Allah we all submit.” (The *Quran*, 2:136).

The strongest argument in favour of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim dialogue could be – according to the *Quran* – the fact that all these religions have one (*common*) God. The verse 139 from the second chapter of the *Quran* demonstrates this: “Would you dispute with us about Allah, while He is our Lord and your Lord?” (The *Quran*, 2:139).

A significant requirement for dialogue between Muslims and other citizens can be found in the third chapter of the *Quran* (verse 159), where Allah literally commands the Prophet to *consult with others* before making his decision and this command is even accompanied by a call to forgive. The *Quran* reads: “It is out of Allah’s mercy that you O Prophet have been lenient with them. (...) So pardon them, ask Allah’s forgiveness

for them, and consult with them in conducting matters. Once you make a decision, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust in Him” (The *Quran*, 3:159).

In Arabic, a consultation or acquainting oneself with a different opinion is called “*Ash-Shura*”. The purpose of this consultation is: “1. to find the correct solution to the problem, 2. to have the people participate in this solution 3. to have the people participate in exercising power. This is one of the methods of Islamic democracy. Consulting others and obtaining a better perspective means that despotism of the ruler and his government cannot manifest. However, rulers often ignore this” (Bahboub et al. 2008, p. 285).

The *Quran*, however, also includes arguments against peaceful coexistence of devotees of these three religions, and therefore also against their *dialogue*. This can be seen in the following verse: “Even if you were to bring every proof to the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], they would not accept your direction of prayer, nor would you accept theirs; nor would any of them accept the direction of prayer of another. And if you were to follow their desires after all the knowledge that has come to you, then you would certainly be one of the wrongdoers” (The *Quran*, 2:145).

Among obstacles preventing interreligious dialogue of Islam and other religions could be counted the following verses of the *Quran*: “He [God] is the One Who has sent His Messenger [Muhammad] with right guidance and the religion of truth, making it prevail over all others. And sufficient is Allah as a Witness” (The *Quran*, 48:28). Or: “He [God] is the One Who sent down serenity upon the hearts of the believers (...) So He may admit believing men and women into Gardens under which rivers flow [Paradise] (...) Also so that He may punish hypocrite men and women and polytheistic men and women, who harbour evil thoughts of Allah. May ill-fate befall them! Allah is displeased with them. He has condemned them and prepared for them Hell” (The *Quran*, 48:4-6).

Further obstructions to dialogue of Islam and other religions are included in these verses of the *Quran*, cited in both Arabic and English for accuracy:

لَعَلَّم بَعْضًا إِنْ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمْ أَلَمْ يَكُنْ اللَّهُ سَرِيعَ الْحِسَابِ بَيْنَهُمْ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِنَيْتِ اللَّهِ

“Certainly, Allah’s only Way is Islam. Those who were given the Scripture did not dispute among themselves’ out of mutual envy until knowledge came to them. Whoever denies Allah’s signs, then surely Allah is swift in reckoning.” (The *Quran*, 3:19).”

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي آلاءِ آخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

“Whoever seeks a way other than Islam, it will never be accepted from them, and in the Hereafter they will be among the losers.” (The *Quran*, 3:85).

The reasoning that Islam is *universally valid* for all can be considered another obvious obstacle in interreligious dialogue. This reasoning can be found in the chapter 3 verse 3 of the *Quran*. Abdulwahab Al-Sbernaty (2008) presents this verse in his translation of the *Quran* into Slovak (with annotations) as follows: “Today I finished your (*people*) religion (*the base of your religion*), I concluded my gift to you and I allowed Islam to be your religion (*I allowed Islam to become a religion for all in its final form*)”

For the sake of completeness we must add that Abdulwahab Al-Sbernaty (2016, p. 14), who translated the *Quran* into Slovak, remarks – in our opinion, correctly – in one of his works about Islam, that: “the messages and texts of Heaven are only a kind of lead, an instruction manual that describes how to believe in God and worship Him without doing wrong”.

Indeed, this is how the *holy texts* of all three religions discussed in this text should be perceived: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. God should be worshipped in such a way that his believers do no wrong to other people, whether they *be faithful* or *not*. Within the context of one group of believers doing harm to another group of believers, the following quote should be kept in mind: *there will be no peace nor understanding between people so long as there is no peace nor understanding between religions*.

The previously cited verses of the *Quran* imply that explicitly religious questions or topics are likely to generate conflict; it would be better to replace them with issues of *common interest*, e.g.: the ecological threat of the global crisis, conditions for maintaining life on earth (through accessibility of food and water for everyone), etc. A suitable topic for the dialogue of three 'Abrahamic religions' could be the encyclical of Pope Francis (2015a), *Laudato si'*, the leitmotif of which comprises environmental issues. The Roman Pope here – besides other topics – also “invites” all people of *good will* to engage in “dialogue on the environment”, he requests “educating for the covenant between humanity and the environment”, initiates “ecological education and spirituality”, presents “a Christian prayer in union with creation” for our earth... etc. Initiatives such as this often spark dialogue in general, but also specifically Jewish, Christian, and Muslim dialogue.

On the other hand – as was previously stated – the greatest obstacle to meaningful interreligious dialogue is *intolerance*, which in this case manifests through one of the participants usurping the right to declare another religion ‘idolatry’ while refusing a similar label for their own religion. There are records of past cases where respective religions considered any critical remark whatsoever an insult and in order to defend themselves, they were willing to resort to violence.

Intolerance, as an *obstacle* to Jewish-Muslim dialogue, is already mentioned in the so-called ‘*Sirah*’, i.e., the work of Ibn Ishaq named *The Biography of the Prophet of Allah (Sirah Rasul Allah* in Arabic). As a reminder, this work, along with the *Quran* and collections of so-called ‘*Hadith*’ together make up the “holy trilogy” of Islam.

Ján Pauliny (1967, p. 13), who translated the above mentioned work into Slovak, emphasizes its historical and catechistic significance: “This text is canonical to Muslims. In their eyes, it is not just a biography, but a text that is true, nigh on holy, in its faithful depiction of Muhammad’s life. This is why Islamic historians, theologians, as well as lawyers, and various religious teachers have relied on it in the past and still continue to do so today”.

The aforementioned text, the contents of which significantly influence relations between Islam and Judaism, including their attempts at dialogue, even today, comprises two motifs. The first is Muhammad’s opposition to all Gods other than Allah. The other is his distrust, even open intolerance, towards Jews.

Before discussing this topic, it should first be acknowledged that the relationship between the prophet Muhammad and the Jews changed over time.

After a forced departure from Mecca in the year 622 CE (*Hijrah*), Muhammad settled in Medina and searched for a way to connect with the local people, a part of whom were three Jewish tribes. Muhammad drew up the *Constitution* (agreement, contract) of the newly created religious community into which he wanted to include the Jews as well. Ibn Ishaq (2004, p. 231) writes, that Muhammad “made a friendly agreement with the Jews and established them in their religion and their property”. According to Ishaq (2004, p. 233), the *Constitution* also includes the following: “The Jews of B. Auf are one community with the believers (the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs) (...) The Jews must bear their expenses and the Muslims their expenses. Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document. (...) The Jews must pay

with the believers so long as war lasts. (...) If any dispute or controversy likely to cause trouble should arise it must be referred to God and to Muhammad the apostle of God”.

Although the *Constitution* declares friendship between individual classes and groups of Medinan society, not all of them accepted the fact that Muhammad – as *God’s Prophet* – had a dominant position within the *Constitution* (as well as in Medinan society). For example, the inhabitants of Medina were only allowed to fight in wars with his ‘permission’, etc. Ibn Ishaq’s (2004, p. 239) comment on this situation follows: “About this time the Jewish rabbis showed hostility to the apostle in envy (...) because God had chosen His apostle from the Arabs. They were joined by men from al-Aus and al-Khazraj who had obstinately clung to their heathen religion”.

It could thus be said that Muhammad was also trying to convert Medinan Jews to his religion, yet when they refused to submit to his will, he reconsidered his initial view. As soon as he had won the *Battle of Badr* (624 CE), he aimed his wrath at his past *allies*, i.e., the Jews of Medina and its vicinity, whom he also suspected of collaborating with the Meccan enemies of the Muslims.

A tragic fate then befell the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayzah. Muhammad and his army laid siege to their compound until they surrendered. Afterwards, he bid them one more time to accept Islam. When they refused to convert, all men of this tribe were sentenced to death and executed one by one.

Ibn Ishaq (2004, pp. 461-466) describes this event as follows: “When the apostle approached their forts he said, ‘You brothers of monkeys, has God disgraced you and brought His vengeance upon you?’ (...) Then they surrendered, and the apostle confined them in Medina in the quarter of d. al-Harith, a woman of B. al-Najjar. Then the apostle went out to the market of Medina (which is still its market today) and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for them and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought to him in batches. (...) There were 600 or 700 in all (...) Aisha said: ‘Only one of their women was killed. She was actually with me and was talking with me and laughing immoderately as the apostle was killing her men in the market (...) She was taken away and beheaded. I shall never forget my wonder at her good spirits and her loud laughter when all the time she knew that she would be killed.’ (...) Then the apostle divided the property, wives, and children of B. Qurayzah among the Muslims, and he made known on that day the shares of horse and men, and took out the fifth”. The famous theologian Hans Küng (2006, p. 152), whose sympathies towards Islam are undeniable, also observed that Muhammad’s “settling of accounts” with the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayzah amounted to an “ethnic cleansing”, etc. It should at least be touched on that there are two interpretations of this event. One of them, so-called ‘apologetic’, states that Muhammad was not responsible for the aforementioned tragic fate of Medinan Jews. On the contrary, he reportedly signed ‘the first peace treaty in history’ with them, etc. The other, so-called ‘critical’, interpretation considers Muhammad responsible for the deportation and slaughter of Medinan Jews. Both of them explain his conduct as motivated by the collaboration of Medinan Jews and Meccan enemies of the Muslims.

It is surely not by accident that Muhammad’s last injunction as he lies on his deathbed is “Let not two religions be left in the Arabian peninsula” (Ishaq 2004, p. 689).

In spite of these obstacles to interreligious dialogue, it should be said that said dialogue is necessary simply because it has no (positive and constructive) alternative.

This also fully applies to Muslim-Christian dialogue, the ideological and ‘methodological’ basis of which can be neither *Islamophobia* nor *Islamotrivialization*.

While the supporters of *Islamophobia* cast doubt on the significance of this dialogue, supporters of *Islamotrivialization* consider it a ‘successful’ tool for overcoming any negative

consequences of immigration from the countries of Islamic civilization. In the present-day Europe, supporters of *Islamotrivialization* appear to be winning. They give credit for the success of the Muslim-Christian dialogue to the 'common origin' of these religions, as well as the assumed shared identity of Allah, Yahweh, and the 'trine' Christian God. Another argument that is often used is that Islam acknowledges Jesus (as a prophet) and shows his mother, Mary, respect, etc.

However, the above mentioned arguments find themselves greatly opposed by both Muslim and Christian writers. To illustrate objections from the perspective of Islamic exegetists of the *Quran*, here is a statement expressed by Ali Dashti at the end of the 20th century. In his work titled *23 Years: A Study of the Prophetic Career of Muhammad*, Dashti (1985, p. 113), at least diplomatically, refuses the claim that Islam emerged – just as Christianity – from 'the religion of Abraham', as well as the claim of Allah's shared identity with the biblical God of the Jews and Christians. A similar objection – from the perspective of Christianity – was expressed by Lukáš Lhoťan (2015, p. 39), who completely refuses any arguments for an analogy or even identification of Jesus with Muhammad.

Both the arguments of supporters of *Islamophobia* and those of supporters of *Islamotrivialization* sound like pseudo-arguments that in the (tense) present-day climate act more as obstructions to meaningful Muslim-Christian dialogue than as guides for their mutual getting to know one another and eventually developing a truly tolerant form of coexistence. This fact should not be forgotten by the present and 'future Europe' either.

It had already been stated that religious dialogue can only fulfil its function assuming that it is realized on the basis of a certain 'cognitive preparation'. The participants of the dialogue should know, or they should at least have elementary information about, one another. In other words, the Muslim representatives should have an undistorted view of the causes of the present-day wave of Islamophobia in some non-Muslims. The representatives of non-Muslims should have some conception of the causes of entire groups of Muslims turning to a fundamentalistic interpretation of Islam, or to extremist practices of its enforcement, also in the non-Muslim world, even if it results in 'suicide attacks'.

According to the results of research conducted by J. L. Esposito and D. Mogahed (2008, p. 69) in 2007, "only" 7% of the world's Muslim population considers the Al Qaeda attacks committed on 11th September 2001 "justifiable", while 93% of Muslims reject terrorism – even when "motivated by religion". It is unfortunate that sociological research of this type is only sporadic and partial.

This is probably one of the reasons why this goal was chosen in 2007 by the representatives of the Muslim world with the intention to develop interreligious dialogue. More than three hundred intellectuals (academics, writers, artists, scientists and religious activists) signed a document (*open letter*) named *A Common Word between Us and You*, which encourages representatives of Christianity to engage in dialogue. The basic (content and thematic) outline of the dialogue is comprised of "love of God" and "love of the neighbour". On 4th to 6th November 2008, the signatories of this document met with the pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican and together they established conditions for the conception of a "Catholic-Muslim forum". These are all 'signs of hope', which in the current relations between Christians and Muslims allow for overcoming tension and creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding, respect and acknowledgement of 'differences that do not cause conflict'.

In relation to disputes between Catholics and Muslims, it should be said that Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) was one of the first to suggest dialogue as a way of resolving these disputes. It is a well-known fact that this saint took part in the fifth Crusade as a missionary. After the particularly bloody Battle of Damietta (at the mouth of the river Nile), St. Francis – at his own risk – visited the camp of the leader of Muslim forces, the sultan of

Egypt Malik al-Kamil, and preached to the sultan about the teachings of Jesus Christ. Partially thanks to the agreeable nature of the Sultan, St. Francis' mission developed into what was – most likely – the first 'peace dialogue' of a Catholic and a Muslim. He was treated as an honoured guest and the sultan, deeply moved by his words, offered him lavish gifts before his departure. All along, it had been Francis' intention to stop the fighting altogether, but unfortunately, the main representative of the Catholics on this crusade, Cardinal Pelagius, ultimately refused the sultan's peace proposal (Moses 2009). Similarly to this, the Christian Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194 – 1250) led the sixth Crusade and won Jerusalem without bloodshed (through parley) on the condition that the Muslims be allowed free access to their holy places in Jerusalem.

The Roman pope Francis derives the meaning of dialogue, as a form of communication between people, from the ability (and Christian duty) of a person to "build bridges of understanding and peace". In a homily given on 24th January 2014 in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, he also stated that "dialogue is difficult, yet compared to attempting to build a bridge with an enemy, it is far worse to build a wall and to allow resentment to grow in one's heart. To humble oneself means to build a bridge. It is not easy. Yet Jesus did so, humbling himself to the outmost, he showed us the way. It is important to strive for reconciliation as soon as possible, whether through word or action. Better a bridge than a wall! One such as that which divided Berlin for many years (...) Even in our hearts, the Berlin wall can grow in our relationships with others (...) It is necessary to engage in dialogue, because over time, the wall grows higher just as weed grows that impedes the growth of wheat" (TKKBS 2014).

We concur with the opinion of Vladimír Tarasovič (2010, pp. 8-9), who states that: "dialogue of cultures (...) and religions (...) should be a key tool for the prevention of conflict, as well as for post-conflict reconciliation. Without intercultural, but also interreligious and interethnic dialogue, tensions could reach the point where one side could choose to solve existing problems through violence". This solution would be the worst and perhaps the most 'self-destructive' in relation to all parties involved.

4 When Does Interreligious Dialogue Stand a Chance of Succeeding?

In his time, Raymond Aron (1962, p. 200) wrote that "Politicians have not yet discovered the secret of avoiding violence". We suspect that this 'secret' can – under certain circumstances – be hidden within dialogue of rival parties. (Regardless of what the cause of their enmity may be.) Violence should not be the 'solution', not even when it is perpetrated in the name of some 'historical' or even 'absolute' truth.

The famous French humanist, lawyer, philosopher, and politician Jean Bodin (2008) was well aware of this when he, at the end of 16th century, i.e., in the atmosphere of religious intolerance, violence, and war, wrote – as if it were his *spiritual testament* – the dialogue *Heptaplomeres*, also known as *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime*. The participants of the discussion are a Catholic, a Jew, a Muslim, a Lutheran, a Calvinist, a Sceptic, and a philosophical naturalist. The discussion is conducted in a calm and tolerant manner because its participants – on the basis of 'rejecting' fanaticism – search for (and find) what connects them (in spite of their differences) together.

The connections between interreligious dialogue and results of natural sciences research (M. Planck, S. Hawking, A. Vilenkin, J. Krempaský etc.) are discussed by the Slovak philosopher Marián Ambrozy (2015) in his thought-provoking study, *Foundations of Natural Sciences and Their Significance for the Dialogue of Cultures in the World*.

Taking into consideration all of the aforementioned facts, once more we would like to express the conviction that a meaningful, just and effective interreligious dialogue of the above stated

religions is possible simply because it is necessary. As it stands, its chances of success depend on it:

- being led from the position of (and within the bounds of) mutual acknowledgement, respect, and tolerance,
- being a joint effort to search for answers to questions which are important to all parties involved (i.e., present-day issues such as war conflicts, the environmental crisis, and the looming global – *social* and *natural* – catastrophe),
- being a joint effort to search for what *connects* the participants of the dialogue (as it is not possible to convince one whose belief is the polar opposite of one's own),
- guaranteeing freedom of thought and therefore right to one's own opinion, while – just as one side is *free to express* it, so is the other *free to reject* it,
- being a *space* for mutual consideration, providing evidence, verifying, and based on that also accepting or refusing the presented opinions and stances,
- being realized in a cultured manner,
- respecting the previously established – content and thematic – 'boundaries',
- not being *formal*,
- fulfilling the so-called "preventive function", i.e., preventing conflicts between religions, etc.

We would like to express the belief that all three 'Abrahamic religions' contain *forces* or groups of *devotees* (followers) capable of and willing to hold such a dialogue. It should be taken into consideration that the verses of holy texts can be – in a world of plurality of interpretation – subjected to diverse translations and readings, such as: historic-contextual, literal, metaphorical, etc.

A good example of this is the conception of dialogue of civilizations and religions, the author of which is a representative of Christian thought named Hans Köchler. This conception is supported primarily by his pioneering work *Force or Dialogue: Conflicting Paradigms of World Order*. Especially significant – in our opinion – are two parts of this work called *Philosophy and the Meaning of Interfaith Dialogue* and *Dialogue among Civilizations and Religions* (Köchler 2015).

In a similar way, the options for dialogue between 'Abrahamic religions' are discussed, at least tangentially, by some representatives of Islam in Europe, such as Ahmad M. Hemaya. In his work *Islam: A Profound Insight*, this imam and main official adjudicator for Muslim family matters in Germany states, that: "Islam considers differences between people an opportunity for getting to know one another and becoming closer (...) maintaining religious freedom is a strong principle in Islam (...) a Muslim must not punish a heterodox person for not being Muslim (...) people are not forced to believe (...) all people are equal – regardless of skin colour and nationality (...) murder is one of the most serious crimes (...)" etc. (Hemaya 2012, pp. 308, 309, 310, 341).

Muhammad Shahrour (2018) holds an analogous opinion about this issue. This can be seen mainly in his work named *Islam and Humanity: Consequences of a Contemporary Reading*, which includes 'dialogic chapters', such as: *The Citizen and Loyalty to Islam*, *The Meaning of Community, People and Nation*, and *Loyalty to Islam is Loyalty to Human Values*.

All these are signs of hope and reasons in favour of a tolerant coexistence of people with different religious and value orientations. A requirement for fulfilling this hope is mutual communication, willingness, and ability to engage in dialogue. In relation to this, it should be emphasized that a discussion that is not also comprised of 'freely resonating' dissenting opinions is not (and cannot be) seen as a part of meaningful dialogue. This fully applies to interfaith dialogue as well. Every human, as a being who is *thinking, free, and responsible*, has the option as well as responsibility to be the creator and participant of such a dialogue, which is ultimately nothing but their most intrinsic *cultural* creation and performance.

5 Present-Day Religious Dialogue and So-Called 'Global Ethic'

In present-day interfaith dialogue, the topic of 'universal' or 'global ethic' is becoming more and more popular. It is concerned with determining what could become the collective *spiritual dimension* of all the world's religions. In relation to this, it should be remembered that at the end of the last century, the *Parliament of the World's Religions* issued an official declaration called *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration*.

It would seem that the main reason for this act was the conviction of its participants that conflicts were dangerously escalating around the world, a problem in which some devotees of world's religions play their part. The aforementioned declaration states: "Time and again we see leaders and members of religions incite aggression, fanaticism, hate, and xenophobia—even inspire and legitimize violent and bloody conflicts. Religion often is misused for purely power-political goals, including war. We are filled with disgust" (PWR 2020, p. 3).

In our opinion, the *Declaration* is a vision that could not only inspire interreligious dialogue but also suggest common ground for its participants, which is inferred from the value and spiritual commensurability of their catechistic beliefs and their attitudes in practice.

Interfaith dialogue can effectively contribute to a meaningful search for 'universal' or 'global ethic'. The first condition for the success of this dialogue lies in the representatives of world's religions relinquishing their belief in the *superiority* of their religion. In short: it is unacceptable and impolite to 'force' one's value system (including one's own form of faith) upon those who prefer different value systems and other forms of faith. In the search for 'universal ethic', the representatives of world's religions should always keep in mind that the *heart* of a person, where – according to Kant – 'moral law' lies, is (a priori) neither Christian, nor Jewish, nor Buddhist, nor Muslim, nor Confucian, nor Taoist... it is *human*. Although the 'world of people' may be comprised of a plurality of cultural and religious perspectives, this heart represents an anthropologically specific *unity*.

In relation to what was previously stated, one possible topic for interfaith dialogue could be a vision of so-called "universal religion" or "religion of the spirit", which had already been introduced in the middle of the 20th century by the *philosopher president*, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (he was appointed Spalding Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethic at University of Oxford in 1936, which made him the first Indian professor in Oxford (Murty and Vohra 1990, p. 81); additionally, in the years 1962-1967, he was the president of the Republic of India).

Ideological-methodological foundations of the vision of "religion of the spirit" can be inferred even from Radhakrishnan's understanding of the history of philosophy and religion: "the history of Indian thought illustrates the endless quest of the mind, ever old, ever new", while "the problems of religion stimulate the philosophic spirit (...) the supremacy of religion and of social tradition in life does not hamper the free pursuit of philosophy..." etc. (Radhakrishnan 1923, pp. 25-27).

The logical as well as spiritual consequence of his religious-idealistic monism is "a cordial harmony between God and man", which is characteristic of the relationship between God and the whole world, because: just as man was made by God, so was the world, they both exist within his embrace and they are revitalized through the spirit of God, "who alone is independent (svatantra)" (Radhakrishnan 1923, pp. 40-41).

The leitmotif of his vision of "religion of the spirit" is the conviction that *global unity of humanity with a spiritual* (religious and philosophical) *basis* is necessary. The Slovak philosopher and interpreter of Radhakrishnan's vision, Dalimír Hajko (2008, p. 191), states that it is: "an interesting contribution to solving global issues regarding the present and future of

humanity”, and “a magnificent attempt at unifying all poles of human existence – from mystic perceptions though morality to solving concrete problems of social life”.

The vision of “religion of the spirit” had the potential to become a *universal* conception that would contribute to unification of humanity based on a reinterpreted *spiritual* (and moral) *principle*. This *principle*, however, cannot have the character of traditional religious dogmatism. Radhakrishnan was convinced that dogmatic religions are divorced from the real social and spiritual life of the people. His vision of a ‘new religion’ is linked to tolerant *spirituality* and not intolerant *dogmatism*.

With regard to what was mentioned above, the “religion of the spirit” could be presented as a *new* idea platform for dialogue not only of respective religions, but also of entire cultures, with the purpose and goal of this dialogue being prevention of conflict. “Religion of the spirit” respects the need for faith, freedom, justice, and happiness of each person, regardless of which *cultural sphere* their existence is anchored in. In other words: “religion of the spirit” respects all forms and aspects of humanism. People are – according to it – *equal* not just before law, but also before God, they are extended *equal* human nature and respect... etc.

In his vision of the “religion of spirit”, S. Radhakrishnan does not try to avoid the sensitive question of comprehending God, including comprehending God in his ‘human form’. In this context, the following passage from his work, *Recovery of Faith*, is often cited: “by God-men we mean persons like Gautama the Buddha, Jesus the Christ (...) God-men are the precursors of the truly human. What is possible for a Gautama or a Jesus is possible for every human being. The nature of man receives its fulfilment in them. They are our elder brothers. They show us what humanity is capable of” (Radhakrishnan 1956, pp. 178-179).

This understanding of God logically overcomes antagonism resulting from one-sided absolutization of God’s transcendence or immanence; however, this does not necessarily lead to universal religious convergence, or even integration. Quite the opposite! It can further deepen existing differences between dogmatic religions. It should also be kept in mind that, in interfaith dialogue, *concrete* understanding of God should be considered a *topic* (or *matter*) not up for discussion!!!

In any case, it holds true that all initiatives (including the previously discussed vision of S. Radhakrishnan) concerned with searching for what unites respective religions have their place in present-day dialogue of religions and cultures. The purpose of this dialogue is perfecting the capabilities of their mutual communication. Mutual communication is what the level of their knowledge about one another is dependent on, and this knowledge is in turn the basis for their mutual respect and beneficial cooperation. Without mutual cooperation of respective cultures and civilizations (including cooperation of respective religions of the world), the fate of humanity – on our ‘blue planet’ – remains uncertain.

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