



FUNDAMENTALISM

AMID BEWILDERMENT, CONDEMNATION AND THE ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND

Jaume Flaquer

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In recent years, words like *fundamentalism*, *traditionalism*, *tolerance*, etc., have acquired such importance that we hear them on the lips of journalists, politicians, religious figures... Rarely do we fail to encounter them in one way or another during our daily routine. And this, although it reveals that tolerance as a value has come to be deeply absorbed by the democratic man, also shows that it is threatened by multiple dangers.

Why must we be tolerant? Why should we yield in the face of attitudes opposed to our own, especially when we are convinced of the truth of our position? More, how is it possible for us to be tolerant about subjects that touch us as profoundly as religion?

The men of the Crusades thought they could not be tolerant because what was at stake was nothing less than eternal life, the salvation of one's own soul and those of the *impious* Muslims.

Therefore, will not modern religious tolerance prove to be the fruit of resignation to an inability to dominate society any longer?

In relation to this, a Jesuit who lives among the Muslim community of Chad, commented one day that the Muslims had often surprised him with affirmations like this one: "*You Christians talk of dialogue now because you are weak. We do not need it, because we are strong.*"

This allegation is very serious because it questions the sincerity of our tolerance. But it is still more serious that that phrase should suggest the following principle of action: "be intolerant while you can". Some Catholics –not many, thank God– are guided by those principles when they dream of a return to the times of Christianity and theocracy. For these people, democratic values –such as tolerance, liberty, etc.– are secondary to the imposition and realisation of their own ideology.

These examples can pose for us such questions as the following: *why has fundamentalism been linked so many times with religious actions?* Do they form an inseparable marriage?

This present study aims to tackle these questions, study the other types of fundamentalism, together with their causes, and propose ways of solution and hope in the face of radicalism.

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1. AN OVERVIEW OF FUNDAMENTALISM

The words fundamentalism and traditionalism tend to be generally used in an indiscriminate way, and understood as synonyms of fanaticism, radicalism (in the pejorative sense), dogmatism... They are also linked with intransigence and mental inflexibility¹. In all these concepts there is the idea of excess, of matters without importance being taken too seriously. This is the attitude of the fanatic. '*Fanum*', in Latin, means 'sacred place'. The '*fanaticus*' was the servant of the shrine and, due to the impassioned attitude of some of these people, this word began to have a pejorative meaning. Thus, a fanatic is *a person who, in an uncompromising way, consecrates some aspect of reality*. And when something becomes so disproportionately essential, it imposes upon the individual a compulsive need to fight for that cause, a struggle which is often violent.

1.1. FUNDAMENTALISM: “IT IS SAID OF...”

What has been said up to now perhaps suggests that the solution to fundamentalism is relativism, this being the refusal to assume anything in life to be fundamental. Relativism is the opposite extreme to dogmatic radicalism. But the solution is to be found in well-understood tolerance. We will soon see further on that this is not about refusing to view anything as essential but about not justifying any method, though it may be to

achieve laudable ends, and always leaving dialogue and personal interpellation open.

1. When Darwin was condemned

Fundamentalist attitudes have always existed. However, the concept has only come into use quite recently. It did not begin as a denunciation of a method

of procedure that was considered negative, but as the self-appointed name of a group of American Protestants. At the beginning of this century –as R. Armengol observes²– there appeared a series of Protestant publications collected under the title: “*The Fundamentals. A Testimony to the Truth*”. These writings aimed to define and defend the fundamental aspects of Christianity. For this purpose, they used as a source the Bible interpreted in its most literal sense. With this they criticised Darwin harshly, because he was contradicting the story of the creation according to Genesis. If the scriptures are of revelatory origin, how to admit the possibility of error in any content of theirs?

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This attitude reached such an extreme that in some areas of the U. S. A. teachers were forbidden to teach the theories of Darwin³. All this extremism was caused by a harmful interpretation of the Bible. The fundamentalist is, therefore, the person who sets out to read the Bible *without taking into account either the symbols or literary genres it uses, or the historical time in which it was written*. And if it is always a mistake to extract a phrase from its context within a story, it is no less so to detach a text from its historical context.

2. Traditionalist Catholics

Let us not think that only Protestants fall into this type of error. The term traditionalism was used by Catholics of the century and the beginnings of the twentieth with the intention of keeping their faith and their traditions *intact*. The problem, then, was not that of the interpretation of texts, but it was similar. If Protestant fundamentalism read *the texts* of the past without taking their context into account, traditionalism assumed *tradition* “literally”, detaching it from its historical context.

Besides, the traditionalists rejected the incipient human sciences, and set out to look in faith for the answers to all problems of private and public life. From an uncompromising fidelity to the directives set down by Rome, a war was declared against modernity, naturalism, laicism and communism. Let us remember that Pius IX⁴ condemned modernity and that, only a few decades ago, theology professors were obliged to sign an undertaking never to support its ideas⁵. In Spain, traditionalism was constituted as a political party at the end of the nineteenth century.

But we must not call all those people *traditionalists* if they take seriously to themselves some determined ethical norms which seem strange to us; instead, we call them traditionalist if they are not open to any type of dialogue and interpellation.

It is now the moment to analyse whether these terms are reduced to religious matters or whether or not they can be found in other realities.

1.2. ONLY RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM?

After having described what fundamentalist beliefs are, there arises a second question: where do they manifest themselves? What is the extent of this term? Following on from this question, two more queries are posed for us. The first consists of finding out if fundamentalism is something inherent in religious actions. The second, in seeing if we value this behaviour in other areas of life.

We are stormed by the first question as soon as we study a little of the history of religions. The wars of religion quickly confront us. We remember the crusades of the past, the predestinative radicalism of the Calvinists and the anti-liberalism of the nineteenth-century Church. We see the conflicts between Palestinians and Jews, between Shi'ites and Sunnis in Pakistan and in Irak, between Hindus and Muslims in India, the war in Bosnia and the difficult Algerian situation, in this past few years, among many other existing problems. The list could be infinitely longer. We would have reasons for pessimism.

However, this radicalism is not essential to religious actions, but their most radical perversion ("corruptio optimi pessima"). The Catholic Church has been intransigent for a long time; it has needed outside criticism to advocate tolerance, and yet it is not difficult to perceive that this "new" value was something intrinsic to the message of Jesus Christ. In this way Christianity

could, at the present time, contribute tellingly to an education for tolerance.

The existence, in all religions, of profound believers with minds open to other positions and of great tolerance (often in spite of persecution) shows that intransigence is not essential to religious actions. But we must say still more: not only is it non-essential, but *contrary* to them. The encounter with a forgiving and merciful God, lover of all His creatures, cannot lead to the attitude of an implacable judge. When a fundamentalist says that he bases his beliefs on revelatory texts, he must be asked whether, in interpreting them, he seeks obedience to God or his own security. We will return later to this subject.

It is easy also to see how intransigent attitudes overwhelm religious actions. We encounter intolerance in politics, in the confrontations between opposing ideologies, in what has come to be called "market fundamentalism", in the crimes of Nazism and other extreme nationalist movements, like those of the former Yugoslavia or ETA, in the present-day "skinheads"... Also in racism and in the confrontations between fans of different football teams. Why does every team have its "extreme fans"? Finally, we encounter intolerance even in the scientific community. How many times has a revolutionary theory been harshly criticised by other scientists, with arguments that are also scientific? T. Kuhn⁶ describes with great accuracy the scientific conservatism which re-

jects the new discoveries of other scientists –which contradicts its own theories– through its inability to discount a lifetime's research. This would leave it having to begin again. And if this happens in science..

Therefore it is the human being (not religion or culture or homeland) that is profoundly exposed to the fundamentalist temptation.

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1. Intolerance as insecurity

We are approaching the causes of intolerance: there is a profound insecurity which impedes the openness to change,

to the others, to what is different. It is certain that the word “fundamentalism” adapts itself better to certain ways of living religion. However, often, political parties, institutions, movements, etc., also need to interpret their traditions or founding ideologies in a way that renews them while maintaining their identity. Thus there is room for a literal interpretation or an adaptation to the new times.

We see extremism present throughout history, especially in the religious sphere as all of ancient culture was impregnated with references to the transcendent. Afterwards, the space left open by the retreat of religious presence from the public sphere compelled certain individuals of a fundamentalist personality to cling to other spheres of potential “fundamentality”. Such is the case with some ideologies.

We can conclude, therefore, that fundamentalist attitudes move beyond the religious sphere, although, as we shall see, they find very fertile soil there. What concerns us now is to study the reasons why they appear, to note down afterwards ways of hope.

2. WHY?

As men and women we need a certain “basic trustfulness”⁷, that permits us to accept and assume the risk inherent in a mature life which confronts the new and different as a possibility of growth. When this basic trustfulness is lacking, or destroyed, we become rigid and intolerant.

We build this fundamental trustfulness from our first experiences of family life. In human groups we live and develop it when we live in communal atmosphere of which we feel ourselves to be members, because we share their values and they offer us a shared sense of life. When social processes destroy these communal experiences, society creates, without realising it, the breeding ground where “fundamentalist personalities” will develop, looking for their security in rigid and intolerant groups. For this reason neo-liberalism, in advocating an individualist and competitive society, is unconsciously setting the social conditions from which arise the extreme right wing, the sects and groups of traditionalism and fundamentalism.

2.1. POSTMODERN CULTURE: A BREEDING GROUND

1. Fear of technological progress

There has always been fundamentalism, because man has always had reasons to fearing change. Still, today, in a world of such technology, and such ra-

pid transformations, some people feel the fear and cling to their securities. We find one interesting example in some sects in the USA, which have decided to anchor themselves in the nineteenth century.

The film *Witness* (Dir. Peter Weir. Paramount Pictures, 1985) describes one of these for us. Why are the ways of life of the previous century better than our own? Perhaps because they are more natural? But in that case, why not anchor ourselves in times still more remote and close to nature? Would we have to return to the Stone Age, since a grotto is more natural than a house?

Let us take it that “artificial” means “made with art”, that is to say, *to mould something natural with our hands*. Man, for as long as he has existed, has modelled and built objects. To refuse to use artificial things is to deny man himself. However, we can criticise the technological advancement of society because it often depersonalises the human being and treats him like a mere object or a production machine: the state recognises us better by D. N. A. than by our names, and at work we are valued according to how much we produce, and how. It seems that other aspects of the person are not taken into consideration. The quantifying of all things eventually makes us ourselves into objects.

Moulding nature does not mean supplanting or destroying it, as is being done, for example, in Amazonia, against the will of its inhabitants and with the danger of making a lung of the planet disappear.

Through this type of excess, the world has become inhospitable for many people. The impact that the “stressful” and “depersonalising” life of the city has on the inhabitants of small towns is significant. It is not surprising, therefore, that numerous people look for an identity in totalitarian groups.

2. “It has always been done like this...”

Security comes to human being through the culture in which he or she lives. Culture provides the individual with a certain answer to the most essential questions of life (where we are going to, where we come from, what we must do . . .) Tradition and customs permit us not to have to ask constant questions about the why of all things. It is a way of saving energy. No-one could bear to call all customs into question: why do we celebrate some feasts and not others, why do we wear these clothes and not others... In the last analysis we can only reply: “it has always been done like this”.

However, what happens when a society, like our own, realises the awesome passage of time, that history exists, that things have not always been done like this? Daily life becomes problematic and it is recognised that things could be different. But when our own culture is called into question, the very foundations, the structure of our securities, sway. Whoever is capable of leaving behind this state of adolescent crisis, reaches an adult age. But whoever is most psychologically weak closes in on himself or herself and denies the evidence. He or she regresses to childhood, to the world of simple certainties. It will be impossible to reason with such a person.

How to explain to a traditionalist that a fixed ritual could or perhaps should be adapted for the sake of the needs of the present times? It is not about change for change's sake. This is an adolescent attitude. We cannot deny that tradition creates jurisprudence and

that the human being has need of a certain stability of culture (the values, traditions, beliefs, rituals, etc). *This is why all value systems tend to present themselves as eternal, universal and valid forever.* But it is necessary to have an open mind to be capable of tackling whatever modifications may be necessary to remain faithful to the original spirit.

This is the fundamentalist: the individual who, faced with the fear of a void of values and meaning of life, clings irrationally to certain “prefabricated” securities. In our time, named by many as the *postmodern age*, everything has already been made problematic. The lack of something eternal and absolute produces panic and insecurity. Therefore, we have the foundations of the present fundamentalist movements already in place.

Culture as adaptation to the environment

Culture is man's particular way of adapting himself to his environment⁸. The animal makes use of its instincts to survive. Its changes are very slow because it can only adapt itself to its environment through genetic mutations. The mutation that will endure is the one that allows the animal to confront its predators with greatest success. But the human being adapts through cultural conventions. These make it possible for man to adapt himself without having to wait for a genetic mutation. If he wants to have wings, he invents the aeroplane, and if he wants to be more intelligent, he invents the computer.

The cultural conventions of a country are, generally, the best way that has been found for meeting needs. This is why *the culture of a people must not be totally annihilated.* Permanency in time is what grants legitimacy⁹. However, it is essential that those people do not stagnate, and that it seeks new ways of living, more ways of tackling the new challenges. The two extremes, of total destruction and stagnation, are equally pernicious. Each one fears and fights the other without imagining the possibility of a compromise or an overcoming synthesis.

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In our postmodern age (it is symptomatic that we now name our time in contrast to the previous one) traditional culture is entering into a more profound crisis and the ideological certainties of modernity are also collapsing. If culture serves us as a form of adaptation, when this enters a state of crisis our own foundations tremble. It was difficult for the Church to take on the necessary change of Vatican II because it had allo-

wed the authoritarian methods that had served it so well in the times of the absolutist kings to stagnate.

Fear of pluralism

Little by little, we see that the fundamentalism of which we are speaking *is essentially reactive*. If we were talking up to now of the fear of change, we can also say that there is a panic in the face of pluralism. Pluralism appears to be the place of uncertainty. The mere existence of other opinions questions my certainties. It is therefore necessary to close the doors that connect me to the outside world.

Only the mature man can live in pluralism. The child becomes lost. The adult knows how to see the positive and negative aspects of everything and everyone. For the child, on the other hand, only good and evil exist. There is no compromise. Do children not ask, when faced with a film, who are the “goodies” and who are the “baddies”?

When these two groups cannot be easily delimited, they find it difficult to understand the film. In this way, they are educated in values. In the same childish, slowly way, however, fundamentalists dichotomise reality.

They are afraid to lose identity. To define means to see where one thing ends and another begins. Thus the fundamentalist, in his need for personal definition, dichotomises reality, and clearly marks the separation of 'I' from 'not I', of good from evil, of what is to be praised from what is to be obliterated. From this, we can say that all that teaching that seeks points of intersection between people and cultures, all that makes us see that I do not end within myself but open and unfold in others, will be the teaching of peace-making. I do not rely exclusively on myself¹⁰. I have need of the other, of he who is different from me, because he has something that I do not have. And this *at every* level: personal, group level, professional, national, ecclesiastical...

2.2. RACISM

Faced with a massive immigration of Maghribians, who would not fear the loss, not only of jobs but of the identity of our country, of its traditions...? Who has not thought sometimes that if the number of immigrants were considerable, they would begin to claim the rights to live their culture socially? Democra-

cy, out of respect for plurality, would have to allow it as long as they too were tolerant.

The “skinheads” of National Socialist ideology (or the followers of Le Pen in France) see in this a loss of Spanish cultural identity. And so they see themselves obliged to fight a crusade against

the immigrant, and to scorn a democracy which lacks weapons for this. Faced with this attitude, the person who is psychologically adult asks himself: "What is Spain?" An enormous multitude of people have passed through our land. This is why to define Spain as a closed entity is to falsify reality.

Essentially, racism is caused by a feeling of threat when faced with people who are appreciably different in their *physical and cultural* characteristics. The rivalries between different cultural zones within the Spanish state cannot yet be called racism although they are *based on the same feeling of threat*. If cultural diversity does not accompany physical differences then neither, normally, does racism appear. Who despises the coloured players of the N. B. A.?

The phenomenon is very complex. The fear of the threat posed arises in the face of incompatible cultural conventions and also when faced with economic "competitors", especially if these are socially and economically weaker. Why are there not racist attacks against high-ranking Japanese executives or Arab sheikhs, but against dark-skinned Maghribians? The former have the prestige of money, power and culture; besides, they create jobs. The latter are easily changed into "Turks' heads", burdened with the responsibility for all collective fears: unemployment, drugs, unsafe city life.

If the source of the problem were *cultural and economic* we could perhaps dispense with the term racism. Besides, hardly anyone admits to having racist feelings. But if you ever have the opportunity to work with skinhe-

ads, you become aware that the Negro race really does generate in them a feeling of intense and immediate repulsion. That fear of difference has created in them a powerful and instantaneous defence mechanism. These youths are the violent extreme, but there are many less radical racist positions: some parents would have certain reservations about accepting their children's mixed-race relationships.

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We are talking about racism, but is it correct to classify human beings into races? Some time ago, numerous scientists rejected these classifications, *considering that genetic differences are insignificant*. It is always preferable to talk of ethnic groups, as this term includes cultural conventions and the way in which people organise their lives.

Human beings are primarily cultural. The biological is always on a secondary level. If we reduce the importance of the biological in our everyday language, we can avoid racial prejudices. Not everything will be solved, because we still have the foundations of racism before us: cultural and economic conflicts. The former can only be confronted with a broad mental horizon, and the latter with a personal and collective generosity which surmounts egotism.

3. RELIGIONS AND FUNDAMENTALISM: TOO OFTEN ALLIED

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3.1. IS FUNDAMENTALISM INHERENT IN ISLAM?

1. A great warning to humanity

When one finishes reading the Koran, one arrives at the conclusion that this holy book of the Muslims is a great warning to humanity. If most of the books of the Old Testament are a narration written by Jewish people to reveal the graces and punishments of God, the Koran is presented as though written by that same God in the third person, so that it could be recited by Mohammed. Thus, although events of the past are also narrated in the Koran, this is done with a very clear pedagogical intention. Brief stories are selected, of peoples who succumbed through not listening to

the prophets, and of those people who obtained the favour of God. Many of the narratives end by stating, in one or two sentences, the message that God wants to offer us. Let us set down some examples:

He is Who dominates His servants. He is the Wise One, the Well Informed. (Koran 6, 18)

God does not direct the perverse people. (Koran 9, 24)

God knows well what they do. (Koran 10, 36)

God watches everything. (Koran 33, 52)

God is indulgent, merciful. (Koran 33, 52)¹¹

These and many other similar maxims are repeated over and over again as if they were choruses. Besides the narratives, we encounter a high number of rules of conduct and social structure disseminated throughout the Koranic text. The warning of God is clear: believe in the one God and share in the community of Muslims, keeping the established laws. If you act in this way, then however much of a sinner you may be, God will have mercy. The merciful epithet is one of those most frequently repeated in the Koran. Not even Mohammed is ever presented as a perfect man. (Koran 80, 1).

The problem is, also repeated with great insistence, the phrase that the “Lord is disposed to pardon, but also to punish painfully” (Koran 41, 43). The warning of a severe judgement is constant. However, the Muslim has it set down very clearly that no-one deserves punishment for being unaware of a prohibition. (Koran 6, 54).

2. The West fears Islam

The West fears that Islam can only be lived in a fundamentalist manner. It is true that this fear is being confirmed by the news which reaches us from Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Iran... Yet all those countries live in the need of self-definition and recovery of identity following the period of colonisation*. Their feeling of inferiority when faced with the technological advances of Western culture has been very great.

The fundamentalism by which they live is their concrete form of nationalism. To the whole situation we must add the enormous corruption of its rulers and the extreme poverty of a population which is growing more than the economy.

This situation causes us to forget that in other times Islamic culture was much more advanced than our own. As we have seen already, fundamentalism has a lot to do with the kind of interpretation one makes of the texts. Up to the tenth century, then, there was a great freedom of interpretation within Islam¹². It was the time of the Ijtihad. This word means the effort which every believer must make to penetrate into the message of the texts. Intellectual and mystical development¹³ is enormously vast at this time¹⁴.

However the time comes when, for fear of interpretations becoming too unorthodox, the prohibition of free interpretation is declared. The believer must have recourse to competent mediums. It is declared that “the doors of the Ijtihad are closed”. From what we have said up to now, we can easily deduce that if interpretation is closed, if it is not possible to adapt religious language to new circumstances, every look at the past will be done from a decontextualisation.

3. The possibility of a tolerant Islam

Will Islam be capable of emerging from the fundamentalist phase in which it is now submerged? Not a few Muslim

* The attempts at development within the capitalist model have resulted in the uprooting of great urban masses with respect to the values of their traditional culture.

intellectuals declare the need for a new opening of the door of the Ijtihad. It is true that the news we receive from many Arab countries is distressing. In no way will the task be easy. But neither was the task easy for Vatican II. Besides, who in the 19th century expected the changes that the Church itself was going to undergo?

We may be tempted to say that in the Gospels we have, as essential ideas, the love of one's enemy, forgiveness without limits, etc., which have allowed us to recognise more easily the values of tolerance, dialogue, freedoms, etc. It is true, the Gospels are very different to Koran. However, Islam does not lack elements that could lay the foundations of a more open way of thinking. For example, Islam does not oblige non-Muslims to keep its laws. This theoretical principle has normally been respected. Non-Muslims had to pay only a tax corresponding to the obligatory alms paid by every well-off Muslim.

The problem of the Koran is that the texts on strictly religious duties are mingled with those on political duties. But many Muslims know how to distinguish between the importance of one and the other. To play down certain laws of communal living more in tune with the time in which they were made, and to adapt them to the present moment, is to make a non-fundamentalist interpretation.

Sometimes we are shocked to find such concepts in the Koran as Sharia law or "holy war". But we should no longer wonder that there is in the Koranic text an aspiration to organise society. The concept of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth meant an advan-

ce in the justice system of that time: you cannot pay off your enemy with a greater coin. Jesus overcame even this law by forgiving his enemies on the cross. However, justice in our countries is guided more by Sharia law than by the law of forgiveness, however much we say that the fundamental mission of our prisons is social rehabilitation. Besides, the Koran also anticipates a relinquishment of Sharia law. It will serve as atonement for the believer. (Koran 5, 45).

With regard to holy war¹⁵, we will say briefly that this is a more spiritual than military concept. It consists of the *interior* struggle against the evil that degrades us¹⁶. It becomes military war as well in the event of the Muslim faith being attacked or put into serious peril (Koran 8, 39). Whatever may happen in combat, there is an express prohibition from dealing with the enemy in any extreme way. (Koran 2, 190)

The chance of a tolerant interpretation of Islam is real, and would be more internally coherent. Christianity has improved it because we have passed through an Enlightenment and through continued criticisms of the Church's ultra-conservatism. Finally, the Church has taken on modernity and has accepted in all its radical nature –but not without opposition, incoherence and unwarranted sudden halts– the study of the Bible from the standpoints of philology, sociology, history, etc. Islam has this battle pending. The Koranic text has still not been scientifically studied. This is why they deny that certain parts of the Book's content should have reached Mohammed through his contact with Christians and Jews. For them, the text

is God's dictation through an angel. Mohammed has put in no words of his own.

The problem of interfaith dialogue is not due so much to the differences between both theologies as to the fact that Christianity and Islam speak from different paradigms. Christianity speaks

from modernity, and Islam from a position less mature in historical terms.

Let us now move to think about why religion has often been lived through fundamentalist attitudes. Will it not be the case that it has some theological points which fundamentalist personalities can easily interpret in a false way?

3.2. POINTS THAT AID FUNDAMENTALISM

1. Forgiveness and punishment

Religious experience should never lead to intolerance, as we are entering into a relationship with God, Who is the essence of goodness. The portrayal of a harsh and punishing God is a projection of our desires for vengeance or of our social need for "order". Our justice understands the law of Sharia, the redress of offences. But what is the Justice of God?

In the Gospel we see that the labourers who arrive at work at the last moment earn the same amount as those who have worked all day. This generosity to the last of all seems an injustice to us. Mercy overflows and goes beyond justice. If deep within the foundations of every religious man there is a profound experience of gratuitous and undeserved forgiveness, it is not possible for intolerant attitudes to generate

from there. Rather will this man be the protector who deals with the others.

Still, the experience of forgiveness stimulates a fight against evil. From this moment on, the believer will be tempted to combat it with different weapons to the ones God has used with him. God hates evil but profoundly loves the one who commits it. The human being will find it much more difficult to make this distinction, and will tend towards the elimination of both.

Moreover, certain masochistic personalities seek and need to be punished. They are unwilling to accept forgiveness and want to be the ones to redeem themselves. They will find personal reaffirmation and security in their pathological interpretation of religion. They will also be able to dichotomise all reality, beginning with the concepts of good and evil.

2. The temptation to control and know God

All religions assume that God has revealed Himself to man. God wants to enter into a relationship with His creatures in order to give Himself and communicate His wishes. He desires to help man to find his happiness and, with this intention, prescribes for him principles of conduct and reveals to him something of who He Himself is. One of the first temptations is that of wanting to know God totally. *To control God means controlling the greatest of mysteries and, as in God we may come to know the meaning of all the enigmas posed by man, the fundamentalist believes that he can, in the end, control all uncertainty.* The mystic's desire for God has a radically different origin: a mystic wants to see God in order to enter into full relationship with his Beloved. But he leaves God free, and does not try to dominate Him. He is aware of His transcendence.

The great temptation of religion is to define God completely, and thus to be able to manage Him. God surpasses our reason, and all the concepts we can attribute to Him are nothing more than human ideas which, perhaps, point us towards what God is, but do not exhaust it. God is always greater, always new and surprising. He escapes any definition.

The first Letter of St John tells us that no-one has seen God (1 Jn 4, 12). In the Old Testament, Moses wishes to see God. However, God only allows himself to be seen fleetingly and “from behind” (Ex 33, 23). The Muslims pray a rosary that consists of repeating the ninety-nine names¹⁷ (characteristics) of

God. The hundredth name, ineffable, is omitted to express “*the final impossibility that human intelligence should capture the ultimate essence of God*”¹⁸.

Nonetheless, the temptation to control God is always present, and it is not difficult to believe that this can be achieved through the revelatory texts. It is only a question of closing the doors to possible new interpretations. We have already seen how Islam closed its doors to free interpretation in the tenth century. Catholicism, for its part, reserved the authority of correct interpretation of the Scriptures exclusively for the hierarchy of the Church. Protestantism fought against this.

The opposite extreme also has its enormous dangers: as there are false interpretations, it is essential that there should be someone to sanction them. However, it is necessary that this someone be open to new research into the sacred texts.

3. The concept of revelation

In order for man to be able to comprehend what God wishes to reveal to him, it is essential that He speak to him in human language. The Jews receive tablets of the Law, Christianity a God¹⁹ made man, and Islam a Koran dictated through the medium of an angel. In all these three religions “of the Book”, God desires to communicate. But he has to do so in a language comprehensible to man. This *incarnation* of the message, or adaptation of God to the culture and historical moment of a people, is an essential element of removing fundamentalism. It gives religion the duty, in later

times, of keeping up the essential element of revelation and adapting forms to the new times so that the message can be intelligible. This is not a question of changing the message, but of keeping it alive.

Christianity, as opposed to Islam, has an advantage in this task: In the Book of Revelation, God *does not dictate* to man. Christianity understands that the Biblical texts are the word of God in a different way to those of Islam. This is not a text written by God and revealed to a man, but God communicating with the heart of an individual who afterwards will try to formulate that experience of divinity in his own words. In this way, the writings of the Bible transmit a true experience of God through a language both intelligible and valid for that culture and world view. In this day and age, it is necessary to separate the essential from these texts, to embody and formulate it in our language, although this may never be completely possible.

When one considers that the formulation of the sacred text has been done by human beings, and knows that inspiration respects personal or historical particularities, it is easier to accept that there must be things which may have to be reformulated in the light of the new times. Nonetheless, what happens when it is understood that revelation comes about by means of dictation? The Angel Gabriel is sent to Mohammed to reveal to him the Koran (Koran 2, 97). The incomparable poetic beauty of the Koran is one of the arguments used by Muslims to support this concept of revelation.

No-one removed from God can have invented this Koran. Not only that, but it comes to confirm the preceding messages and to explain in detail the Scripture, free of doubts, that proceeds from the Lord of the universe. Or as they say: "he has devised it". Say: If what you say is true, bring a similar sura and call on whoever you may, instead of calling on God!" (Koran 10, 37-38)

No man would have been able to write such suras (chapters). Understanding revelation in this way creates an enormous hindrance to the separation of the text's background and forms. More, it ensures that classical Arabic, the language in which the revelation was made, is left exalted. This is why Muslims are often resistant to the idea of a non-Muslim being able to obtain a Koran written in Arabic (Koran 56, 79) and why they permit translations of it only because these can bring non-believers to the faith. I remember a Moroccan asked me to cross out some phrases written in Arabic before throwing them into the wastepaper basket, out of respect for the language of God. Attitudes like this are absolutely not general, but they show the dangers of believing in a dictated revelation.

The Muslim considers the Koran to be self-sufficient. There is everything, and all that is to be believed. But this has been radicalised to the point where some Muslims believe that they can see in the Koran the prediction of the scientific discoveries in the most recent centuries. Every great advance of mankind may be seen recorded in the Koran, they say. Curiously, this is not the mentality

that the ancient classical authors of Islamic culture seem to reveal.

But if God has spoken, how shall we dare to change His words to adapt them to other people or later times? In the Koran there seems to be no room for interpretative research based on a study of the context, the genesis of the text, the meaning of the words in their time... But it is not impossible. It would be enough to think that God has communicated in a moment of history, in words determined with the purpose that those people should understand Him, and that today, notwithstanding, He would communicate the same message in a different way. Yet it is not a question of changing the original text, which in itself has value, for a more modern one, but of interpreting it in the light of the new times.

4. The task of spreading the message

When someone loves a thing, he or she feels desire to communicate it. Joy stimulates the human being to share it out. Whoever experiences the profound love of God will also be moved to ensure that others can enjoy the same happiness. The life that God generates in man is so expansive that it has to be preached.

This is why Christianity and Islam are ardent preachers of their message. They are proposals of a way of life, of plenitude. Christians proclaim the Good News. Both religions find in their sacred texts clear orders to preach. Judaism, on the other hand, is not capable of emerging from its blood ties: the Jews are the

only Chosen People. Christianity and Islam surmount this sectarianism by inviting all races and cultures to follow the way of salvation. The concept of Chosen People is extended to that of a community of Christians or Muslims. But precisely because of this universality of its messages, they may fall into the rejection of any other way.

The dictum that “there is no salvation outside the Church²⁰” (Boniface VIII in 1.302, taking the sentence from Ciprianus) is famous. When religion itself is understood in this way, preaching becomes an anguished imperative: the one who is not converted will not be saved. Therefore, we have the foundations set to justify the crusades and any method of evangelism including force. And it is worth all this and more –the fundamentalist would say– as the eternal life of many men and women is at stake.

Islam has also fallen into these same errors when it has legitimised some wars under the plea of holy war. It feels especially called to fight polytheism and atheism. However, it is tolerant with Christianity and Judaism, as it has no hesitation in affirming that the God of the Jews and Christians is the same as their own and that in these religions God has also spoken to humanity.

The solution to the problems caused by Islam and Christianity's desires to expand is not found in an abandonment of preaching but in a respect for the other, the different. The Church, from Vatican II onwards, has known how to see very positive aspects in non-confessional organisations: God speaks to the world and not only within the heart of the same Church. It is a step towards le-

aving behind the dichotomising of the world into good and evil, Christians and non-Christians.

5. Church and State

The Church has often enough been led into the temptation to identify itself with the governing regime. The Church received some benefits for this, but forgot about the need to bear in mind that the Kingdom is not yet fully present amongst us, that there is still a lot to be changed and improved. From this viewpoint, the Church should always be in a certain opposition. Besides, Christianity does not concern itself so much with the concrete norms by which a State chooses to govern, as with a series of principles of solidarity, justice and equality which all States should endeavour to make possible.

Islam, on the other hand, cannot be understood without an identification with power, as this must guide the people as much in material terms as spiritually. The Caliph assumes political and religious power. Islam establishes very clearly that religion is not something lived individually but a social entity. Therefore it does not only have laws relating to worship, but to the organisation of society. The Koran is also a code of civil law which regulates the government of the Muslim community. Islamic law is not obligatory to non-Muslims. This is why, when this law has to be the law of the State, it is presupposed that

the people of this State are principally Muslims. The non-Muslim minority can live in its territory after accepting a series of compromises²¹.

When there is a great uniformity in a State (the great majority are Muslims) this system is sustainable. But when a plurality of beliefs co-exist within, it collapses. So Islam lives in a permanent longing for independence, in order to be able to govern itself with its own norms.

The identification with power carries a great danger: that of making use of the force of the State to impose religion. Violence can be used as a means of persuasion.

In theory, Christianity has a greater facility for freeing itself from this temptation thanks to the fact that Jesus did not dictate a list of norms but a mode of behaviour.

Besides, Jesus places Himself above the law. He feels free to interpret it and to make whatever exceptions may be necessary to ensure that it does not become unjust: we see how Jesus also heals on the Sabbath day. Mohammed, however, is a subject of the law. He has come to proclaim and keep it. Mohammed receives a word and Jesus is the Word. To follow Jesus implies, then, to be on constant alert to discern if in any moment it is necessary to make an exception to one norm for the sake of a greater good. The person who believes in Jesus follows a living man, and not a book of laws with which to comply.

4. WAYS OF HOPE

The ways towards a solution to the problem of fundamentalist radicalism are complex. If the principal cause is the fear of uncertainty, of what is different, our educational actions must principally address this point.

4.1. NOTES FOR ACTION

It is a question of sensitivity: *it is essential to learn to value what foreign to us is*. But the work to make this possible does not need to touch on knowledge as heavily as upon experience. It is difficult, not to say impossible, to maintain a rational discussion with any fundamentalist. There is no possible agreement because he or she does not look for the most logical, most rational solution, but that which provides the highest security. So only the experience of what foreign is enriches me, only the knowledge gained from the other as something which strengthens and does not intimidate me, will allow maturity to be reached.

1. Education

The action begins within the family. Parents are the first ones to accompany the child in his discovery of his social environment. When he walks hand in hand with those who give him security, he dares to go in search of what is new²². Little by little he perceives a source of wonder in what is different. A marvellous world opens for discovery before his eyes. Maintaining a child's curiosity is fundamental. Traumatic experiences teach him to take precautions. And if these are of a greater intensity than he can assimilate, he may close himself off to all experimentation. It is essential that

he reacts with wonder and interest rather than apprehension or fear in the face of what is new.

Parents are the first “others” he encounters. This is why this first relationship is of the greatest importance. If it were traumatic, there would be the danger of his considering every unknown person a potential enemy.

Education continues at school. There he will meet other equals who will often compete with him. However, experiences of friendship will help him to rely on others. Successful (amicable) encounters with individuals of other cultures, of different skin colours, will teach him to value and respect diversity. In this aspect, schools have a very important role to play. We should foster intercultural schools, in which different cultures could come into contact. If this is not possible, why not organise mixed summer camps? I believe that we should aim at a very concrete objective: to create conditions that make intercultural friendships possible. If we achieve this, we will have taken a great step towards ending racism.

When these vital experiences have been well absorbed, the moment will be favourable to underpin respect for other ways of thinking. Philosophy and history are very useful tools for this. At this stage, we deal with knowledge.

2. If we were all philosophers and historians to a degree...

Philosophy, in general, predisposes the subject to be critical in the face of any affirmation: before accepting it as valid, he will pause to study it. The phi-

losopher seeks the truth, and that is why he will always keep a door open to change his opinion if he discovers that he was mistaken, or if he discovers truth in another way of thinking. The philosopher's attitude is, therefore, the one most contrary to the fundamentalist's narrow-mindedness: he will inquire about opinions different from his own in order to analyse their value.

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History is another fundamental critical tool. History teaches us that cultures change in time. It compels us to recognise that the customs we now experience as sacrosanct are not eternal but have a determined origin in history. The argument that something “has always been done like this” is no longer valid. Yet history does not only bring to light historical changes but also the roots that tie us to the past. Beneath transformations there are certain things that go on without change. This is how history gives identity to people. It also brings to us in the present time the errors of humanity in other times. It shows us the experience that human beings have acquired over time in order not to repeat those mistakes and to bring certain achievements up to date. *When we forget the horrors of Nazism, we will face the danger of living through it once more.*

It is harmful to limit the teaching of history to that of our own small country. We should also teach our students the history of neighbouring peoples, making special mention of the culture of the Arabs, and recalling that these, in the Middle Ages, were more “civilised” than ourselves²³. In natural science classes we should emphasise that the coloured man is not a primitive condition of evolution but a different derivation of the first hominids, which were neither white nor black. We should, finally, promote stays in the Third World. There we will be able to appraise its culture from its own point of view and we will never again see it as inferior. More, when we see that they prefer their customs to ours we will inevitably ask ourselves: when will we banish Eurocentrism? Will we not, the developed countries, prove to be more degraded in human and cultural terms?

3. Immigration

The fact of having been born within fixed borders makes an individual a citizen of that country. From that moment he has rights and responsibilities established by the law. But why can nationality be denied to a foreigner who undertakes to fulfil his share of its duties?

It is symptomatic of this that we should fight for equality of opportunities within our borders, but not outside them. We often lack a more universal vision. The aid that wealthy countries hand out to underdeveloped countries still appears like gestures of charity rather than justice.

A great number of people have passed through our country, and have left their imprint. They form part of our identity. Immigrations always enrich, not only because they permit an intense mutual influence between two cultures but because those who emigrate are normally the best qualified²⁴. Nonetheless, it is true that excessive immigration could provoke the rejection of a sector of the population. This is why immigration should be permitted at an appropriate rate, and it should be possible to spread it throughout the country in a homogenous way. It is not positive for outstanding locations of immigration to be created, because these turn into ‘closed shops’.

A country behaves in a way similar to any liquid: it cannot simply melt down any quantity of immigrants. However, the rate of dissolution varies enormously according to the temperature. This, in a country, is the degree of conscience-raising and openness. By working on respect for other cultures –and for a certain generosity– we can make a greater immigration possible.

We must always seek the maximum integration of those who come to our country. But where are they to be integrated? If all immigrants are settled in the most impoverished districts, we may be sure that they will live through the problems of violence, drug addiction, etc., of these areas. Let us not be surprised, then, if the proportion of Maghribians in the prison population becomes very high. *It is not due to their coming from where they do, but to having to live where they are living.*

4.2. HOPE OF DIALOGUE

1. No-one has an absolute viewpoint

No-one can embrace all reality in just one glance. If we look at a cube, for example, we can see only three of its sides at once. When we turn it around to see the other three, we realise that the first disappear from our sight. This same thing happens when we discuss current affairs: two people are looking at the same object but they do not agree because each one sees it from his point of view (which depends on one's own personality, one's personal history, economic level, place of residence, etc). In both discourses there is a part of truth.

Dialogue is the instrument that we use to communicate our point of view. But it is not easy to engage in dialogue. In order to see the truth that is in other people's discourse, it is essential that we abandon our point of view for an instant to put ourselves in the other person's place. We have to move ourselves to be able to see the cube from the other angle. It is a sacrifice, an effort. Panic takes possession of us because for a few moments, while we move over to the other side, we lose our viewpoint, our convictions, our securities, and we have not yet arrived at other new ones.

Our democracy is founded upon dialogue. If we want to preserve it, we must educate about the importance of dialogue. But dialogue requires the equality of its participants²⁵. When we are not seeking the truth, communication pursues only the domination of the other,

the act of convincing him of my viewpoint. The media can play a great role in the promotion of dialogue and respect. However, often, debates only present the most confrontational positions in order to look more showy. In practice, they encourage the dichotomising of problems.

The first reason to be tolerant is that no-one has the absolute viewpoint. We have need of other people. They enrich us because their personal history, their experiences, etc., put them in an unique position.

this concept of tolerance
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2. But, how to be wise and tolerant?

The recognition of our limitations compels us to tolerance, to not rejecting others' opinions too rapidly. In the present times, the fall of the great ideologies, and the relativism of many fields of thought, have favoured the consideration of tolerance as a fundamental democratic value.

But this concept of tolerance as a mere weakness of thought is still dangerous: When I believe something with certainty, why must I be tolerant?

The challenge presented to us is as follows: how to be both wise and tolerant? Responding to this question, we give reasons to be tolerant not only to the wise but to those who believe themselves to be so:

1) Some issues are not worthy of a confrontation. The wise man is not only the one who knows but the one who is able to put things in their right place. He will give each thing the importance it deserves, without going too far. The wise man will be at variance with many issues, but will recognise that only some very essential ones deserve the dedication of the whole man. He will tolerate minor errors, because a combative attitude would bring greater evils. The fundamentalist, on the other hand, is capable of giving his life, or demanding the same from others, for causes without importance. He does not know how to put each problem in its right place.

2) Tolerance and respect for the dignity of people are superior benefits to the “certainties” which each group might wish to impose by force on its fellow citizens. The wise man will try to defend his ideas against what he considers to be the errors of his fellow citizens but he will have to do so using the means permitted to him by democratic law. The radical, instead of making use of the democratic channels, uses violent methods to achieve his objectives. The dictator believes that the end justifies the means.

3) It is essential to “separate the sin from the sinner”. The Christian command to “love one's enemy” can only be lived out when we distinguish the subject from his actions. In this way it is possible to reject evil, to be intolerant of it and, still, to be tolerant and understanding with the one who commits it. The reality that all human beings are children of God makes them always worthy of esteem. The other is my brother and, for this reason, I accept him with all his weaknesses.

4.3. DOES TOLERANCE HAVE LIMITS?

From the three reasons to be tolerant we can extract some conclusions. First: we can tolerate errors of little importance. Second: we must always tolerate and respect the person. Third: we must be intolerant with Evil, not with “evil-doers”.

Tolerance is not equivalent to considering valid, or permitting, all attitudes or all actions. It would be a mistake to think in this way. But where does tolerance say “enough”? How do we restrain Evil? The fundamentalist fills the

issue of Evil with undue content, that is to say, excessive things seem intolerable to him.

Today, we can say that the limit of tolerance is in the respect for human rights. Human rights are those minimum rights upon which the countries have agreed, and which are essential to safeguard because they are the indispensable condition of any possibility of a “human” coexistence in which people may be respected in their dignity. Basically, there exist two groups of rights.

The one, which makes reference to individual freedoms (of association, of political participation, of ownership of private property, of leaving and entering one's own country, the right to life, etc) and others that we could call social rights (equality of opportunities, the right to education, to social security, to a decent job and wage, to the satisfaction of economic, social and cultural rights indispensable to one's dignity...).

The legitimacy of these rights is based on the fact that they are not peculiar

to just one country, but have been approved by the Assembly of the United Nations. It is true that the formulation is very Western. But beyond the concrete formulation, there is something of the universal that underlies them. The reason for this is that we are able to think that every rational person in conditions of lucidity, freedom and the will to attain what is good would reach the conclusion that these rights (beyond their concrete formulation) are to be preserved.

And so we must fight against all transgressions of these fundamental rights, and we must not be tolerant with the intolerant. But this does not mean that the struggle against intolerance can violate the rights it seeks to defend. To conclude: tolerance is inadmissible in the face of the reality of the poor man, the oppressed man and the slave. If we take this seriously we will realise that we will have to stop tolerating so much hunger in the world, so much poverty in the Fourth World and so much unemployment in our cities.

4.4. CONTRADICTIONS OF FUNDAMENTALISM

We know that fundamentalism also makes reference to a fixed way of interpreting religious texts. We are now going to show, then, how this interpretation is a false one, and how it often falls into certain contradictions.

1. Reading “to the letter” does not exist

The discipline that studies how sacred and juridical texts, etc., are to be interpreted, is given the name of herme-

neutics. For years, hermeneutists have criticised the interpretation of texts “to the letter”²⁶. At first sight it can seem strange. This expression is popularly used to urge people to interpret with objectivity and not according to their own interests. When it means no more than this we can accept it.

However, we soon meet the first contradiction: the fundamentalists of different Christian denominations do not agree. The fundamentalist sets out to read the holy texts “to the letter”. But how is it possible that two people who claim to interpret a text literally should extract such disparate conclusions? How is it that a Jehovah's Witness and a fundamentalist Protestant or Catholic lives religion so differently? Why has one text been interpreted differently throughout history? *All reading is now being interpretation*. The son of a specific culture, I am entering into a relationship with a text from the past. Fundamentalists are not conscious of this reality.

Let us not defend here the idea that every interpretation should be valid. What we have to ask ourselves when reading a sacred text is not so much what it meant for ancient men –although this can be of great interest– but, continuing from this, what it means for us today. In the following point, we will further clarify this aspect.

2. We are more followers than imitators of Jesus

Sometimes it can be very interesting to know what exactly Jesus wanted to say to his disciples when He was prea-

ching. However, the more important thing is what He wants to say to us *today*. To achieve this updating of the message, it will be necessary to have an accurate knowledge of the historical context in which Jesus lived.

From Jesus' way of life we extract not so much particular and detailed norms of conduct as inspiring principles which can guide our actions. Starting from these principles, perhaps we will elaborate some valid norms for our time. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated today in a different manner from the way in which the first Christians used to do it and also to the way it was done fifty years ago. The important thing is not that it should be the same or different but that the fundamental message should be unchanging. What wishes to be expressed will adapt symbols appropriate to every age, which point towards the same frame of reference.

The fundamentalist imitates, and in imitating decontextualises. The Christian takes the attitudes of Jesus and tries to put them into practice. But it is the Spirit that makes us see the message of Jesus in the light of the new times. Although it is not really a question of mathematical problems, often the problem is resolved using a kind of “rule of three”. If Jesus, in that time, acted in this way, how must we ourselves act in our time? Thanks to the human sciences (history, sociology...) we know the historical context of Jesus and that of the present time, and we know how Jesus lived through the testimony of the apostles. One example: if Jesus made progress in His time in the valuation of

women, how must we value them today? The role of woman in society has changed. Therefore, her function cannot be limited to what it had been in that time.

3. Symbolic language of religious texts

We face an aspect that we cannot forget. Religion uses a symbolic language to convey some kind of transcendence. The symbol is used to make that abstract concept visible. For example, the dove symbolises peace when it brings an olive branch. The symbol always has some characteristic of that which it sets out to represent.

The fundamentalist believes that religious language is similar to the scientific one. This is why he cannot understand certain Biblical texts. The creation of Adam and Eve from the mud has never pretended to be a scientific fact, but a way of explaining that we are children of God and that man, not God, causes Evil.

Catechists sometimes use the image of the white-bearded grandfather to represent the goodness of God. It is a symbol. It would make no sense for a child to complain one day to his catechist because God does not have a beard. The adolescent who cannot recognise that people have been telling him about God by means of symbols may react in two different ways: by rejecting the faith because he does not believe in a God with a beard, or by believing blindly that God has a beard because this is what he has always been taught. This last is the fundamentalist. Neither the one nor the other has understood that

religious actions use symbolism to express themselves. We see the two attitudes present respectively in the atheism and fundamentalism of the last century. But the symbol is like a finger that points to something further beyond itself. As it has been said, “the fool is the one who stays looking at the finger”.

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The concept of God as Father is also analogical. We use it to spontaneously infer what we want to say. The Christian never considers himself to be a “son” in the physiological manner. The error of interpretation made by fundamentalists is similar to that of those who would hold that God is a father in a physiological way because Jesus teaches the “Our Father”.

4. Contradictions within the same text

The Bible is made up of a great number of books written by many different authors. It should not be surprising that in a literal interpretation we find opposing opinions here and there. The interpretation which seeks to base itself on the literal meets with serious conflict.

For example, which is the real genealogy of Jesus: the one presented to us by Matthew (Mt. 1. 1ss) or the vastly discordant one proposed by Luke (Lc 3, 23ss)? Taken literally, the Evangelists present a great many historical contradictions. But, from this viewpoint, the Old Testament and New Testament are also irreconcilable: which should be heeded, the laws dictated to Moses or the new guidelines of Jesus? Most Christians are aware of the pre-eminence of the New Testament over the Old one, as Jesus breaks with various traditional laws. This means that we must not read the Old Testament to the letter, as it is necessary for us to interpret it in the light of the New Testament and the Resurrection. The story of the disciples of Emmaus is exemplary: walking with the risen Jesus they come to understand the meaning of His life and of all the Scriptures of the Old Testament. They leave aside interpretation in literal terms to carry it out in the light of the Spirit.

Some time ago, some friends of mine who are Jehovah's Witnesses were

trying to convince me of the need to comply fully with the Bible, and in a literal way besides. Finally, the only reasoning that occurred to me for their rebuff was to ask them why they did not keep the law of the Sabbath and many others present in the Bible, and urge them to become Jews.

To conclude, we can say that the presence of the Spirit in Christian theology is of indispensable help in the struggle against fundamentalism. Jesus, before His death, told His disciples that they would understand all that was happening later, in the light of the Resurrection and with the help of the Spirit. And so the life of Jesus only receives its full meaning after His Resurrection, and therefore, there is always a point "from which" to interpret things.

Besides, thanks to the Spirit, man, throughout history, has been developing his understanding of the Revelation made in Jesus. This is why the Gospels are not dead texts, but works which the Spirit allows us to understand and apply to our particular world.

4.5. INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The Christian has a fundamental reason to be tolerant: the example of our God. God tolerated evil when He made man free. From the story of the Flood onward, God never undertakes to destroy His people although they may turn against Him. But God, in Jesus, has

shown us the form in which He has chosen to confront intolerance: Jesus dying on the cross²⁷. He tolerates what seems intolerable. His proposal, as radical as it is incomprehensible, is that of love for enemies. Jesus felt the temptation to make use of power, fame and money

(the three temptations) to fight against evil and restore the Kingdom. But He rejects coercive methods and chooses the dialogue of love.

These coordinates define the ideal place from which to engage in dialogue with other religions. Unfortunately, interfaith dialogue between Christianity, Islam and Judaism is, often, non-existent. Fundamentalists will say that dialogue is for the religion that thinks itself weak, for those who are not convinced of their beliefs, and not for them. The viewpoints are so remote from each other that it is very difficult to make the effort to put oneself in the place of the other person.

But the great hope is not to be found in the dialogue of words. The great hope is in dedication to the poor and in mysticism.

1. Work with the poor

Dedication to the most marginalised people of society is a language that we can all understand. It is something that every human being of any culture who does not seek to satisfy his own interests will consider praiseworthy. The religions find a point here at which they can unite. Most religious men and women in the Maghrib attend to the neediest people. This is why they are profoundly loved and esteemed by the people. They are testimonies to a real experience of faith.

Judaism constantly recalls attention to the poorest people, especially orphans and widows. Islam exacts from its faithful the “zakat” or obligatory donation for the poor. This donation corres-

ponds with so much per cent of personal income. Christianity has the example of Jesus who gives life to the concept of charity (agape). Charity is the love borne to such an extent for those who have less than ourselves that we give them all that we have: we give up anything that the other does not have. It is sharing in its entirety. Finally, the non-believer will also always appreciate all this commitment and generosity. The paradigm of the French Revolution has supplied him with the ideals of equality and fraternity.

And so in the work for justice, for the poor and marginalised, Jews, Muslims, Christians and non-believers can not only understand each other, but will also even be able to collaborate together.

2. Mysticism

Mysticism is the other great hope. But, who is the mystic? It is not the person who stays in the Tabor or who lives away and separate from the world in order to concentrate only on God. It is the one who sees reality with “the eyes of God”. Mystics of all religions, however much they sometimes emphasise aspects peculiar to their own religion, understand each other, speak the same language: that of the love of God. As all mystics rise towards God, and God is One, they all look at the world in a similar way. God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, unites in Himself all creation and all those who come close to Him. One mystic understands another mystic because they place themselves in the same viewpoint:

that of God. This is why prayer meetings between members of different religions are not difficult and, indeed, are very beneficial. At the same time they do not descend into fundamentalism because they acknowledge bitterly the distance that still separates them from God.

True mystics are enormously generous people, because they have understood from God what is important. Their desire is placed solely in God²⁸. For this reason they live poorly and distribute all they have amongst those who most need it.

The mystics of all religions understand each other because they all seek to diminish the importance of the institutions by which their religion is conveyed. They often pay for this attitude by being considered heretics. They see in the Institution not an end but a means to reach God. They do not despise it but value it, and greatly. But they value it as a medium, and only as such.

We can conclude, therefore, that when we are capable of living our lives mystically we will no longer need to talk of tolerance.

1. I follow Rogeli Armengol, "El fundamentalismo de las personas y de los grupos humanos", in: *Enrique de la Lama, En defensa de la tolerancia: crítica de los Fundamentalismos*, ed. Llar del Llibre, Barcelona, 1994.
2. Rogeli Armengol, p. 13.
3. On the history of Protestant fundamentalism, see: Jean Paul Willaime, "El fonamentalisme Protestant" in: *El fonamentalisme*, ed. Cruïlla, Barcelona 1994, p. 31-45.
4. See "Silabus o corrección de los errores modernos" in: E. Denzinger, *El magisterio de la Iglesia*, trans. D. Ruíz Bueno, ed. Herder, Barcelona 1963, n. 1700ss.
5. See "Juramento contra los errores del modernismo" in: E. Denzinger n° 2145ss.
6. T. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, trans. A. Contín, F.C.E. Madrid 1982, pp. 224-246.
7. The term is from Eriksson, *Infancia y sociedad*, Hormé, Buenos Aires 1973, quoted in Hortal, A. *Ética, 1. Los autores y sus circunstancias*, Pontifical University of Comillas, Madrid 1994 p. 61.
8. M. Corbí, *La religió que ve*, Claret 1991, p. 16
9. Cfr. M. Corbí, p. 28.
10. Cfr. Hegel, *Fenomenología del Espíritu*, vol. I, ch. IV. SS 10, 11, 12.
11. *El Corán*, trans. J. Cortés, ed. Herder, Barcelona 1992.
12. María Teresa de Borbón Parma, *Magreb: Nuestro Poniente Próximo*, ed. Libertarias, Madrid 1994, p. 33 ss.
13. Regarding the tolerance of Islam, the best thing is to turn towards Sufi mysticism. A good introduction is Emilio Galindo's article, "El sufismo, corazón del Islam", p. 41-60, ed. Popular, Madrid 1992.
14. For a comprehensive analysis of Islamic thought throughout history as well as an abundant bibliography, see: M. Cruz-Hernández, *Historia del pensamiento islámico*, vol. I, II, III, ed. Alianza, Madrid 1996.
15. For an understanding of the relationship between the concepts of Ijtihad (effort at interpretation) and jihad (poorly translated as "holy war") see: Emilio Galindo, *El Islam al final del siglo XX*, ed. SM, Madrid 1996, pp. 34-37.
16. See M. Corbí, *La religió que ve*, ed. Claret, Barcelona 1991, p. 190ss.
17. To know what these ninety-nine names are, see: Jacques Jomier, *Para conocer el Islam*, trans. Alfonso Ortiz García, ed. Verbo divino, Estella 1989, p. 41. We recommend this work for all who desire a good, clear and pedagogical introduction to Islam.
18. Cristóbal Cuevas, *El pensamiento del Islam*, ed. Istmo, Madrid 1972, p. 105. On the number one hundred: Robert Caspar, *Para una visión cristiana del Islam*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1995. Trans. R. Sanchis Cueto p. 103: "En cuanto al número cien de esa lista, sería el secreto nombre de Dios".
19. On the vision of Jesus and Mary in Islam: Robert Caspar, *Para una visión cristiana del Islam*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1995. Trans. Ricardo Sanchis Cueto. If you prefer the same theme addressed through Muslim apologetics with a complete collection of Koranic texts, see: Dr Maneh Hammad Al Johani, *Jesús en el Islam*, ed. Centro Islámico en España, Madrid 1991. Trans. A. Maher Safi.

20. "Bula Unam Sanctam" in E. Denzinger, *El magisterio de la Iglesia*, ed. Herder, Barcelona 1963, n° 468.
21. See: P. Chalmeta, *Invasión e islamización*, ed. Mafre, Madrid 1994, p. 215-216.
22. On the psychological causes of fundamentalism, see: Víctor Hernández, *Fundamentalismo, narcisismo y psicosis*, in E. de Lama "En defensa de la tolerancia".
23. For a thought-provoking and pleasant-to-read comparative study of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, from the viewpoint of the evaluation of the thought of each one, see: Karen Armstrong, *Una historia de Dios*, ed. Paidós, Barcelona 1995, trans. R. Alfonso Díez Aragón.
24. With regard to this, a surprising study was carried out which showed that the death rate of Moroccan immigrants to France is lower than that of the French themselves. See: Youssef Courbage, "La mortalité et les causes de décès des Marocains en France 1979-1991" in: *Population, Revue bimestrielle de l'Institut national d'Études démographiques*, 50e année, Janvier-Février 1995, numéro 1.
25. A theory very much present in Habermas. For example, in *Teoría de la acción comunicativa*, ed. Cátedra, Madrid 1994, p. 154ss, trans. Manuel Jiménez Redondo.
26. In my concept of interpretation I follow H. G. Gadamer, *Verdad y método*, ed. Sígueme, Salamanca 1991, trans. A. Agud Aparicio.
27. On Jesus and tolerance, see: Máxim Muñoz, "Tolerancia y experiencia cristiana de Dios," in *La tolerancia*, Revista Sal Terrae, June 1995, vol. 83/6 (no. 980), Santander.
28. Very rich in ideas is C. Vega's article on Sufi mysticism, "La cara oculta del Islam: los místicos sufíes" in: *Conocer el Islam*, Revista Sal Terrae, May 1996, vol. 84/5 (n. 990) Santander.