

Christians and Muslims in Europe: Perspectives for Dialogue

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In 1974 the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, then the Secretariat for Non-Christians, took the initiative of organizing a reflection on the subject of Christian-Muslim relations at the European level. A meeting was held in Luxemburg on March 13-14 of that year on non-Christians in Europe, but the emphasis was in fact mainly on the presence of Muslims. In 1978 a representative from our Council took part in an encounter on relations with Muslims organized by the Conference of European Churches (KEK), and since that date we have also taken part, as observers, in the work by the « Islam in Europe » Committee. This committee has, since 1988, assembled representatives from the KEK and the European Council of Episcopal Conferences. Another venue for reflection, less official but very useful, has been provided by the « Journées d'Arras ». We have taken part in these a little less regularly.

Hence it can be said that a certain collective experience underpins the reflections presented today, but the limitations of this communication must be borne in mind. It will attempt to give an overall picture of the situation in Europe, without entering into too much detail. In particular, there will not be much emphasis on the situation in France on which there has already been a communication.

1. The situation

1.1. The religious map of Europe

In his first encyclical letter, *Redemptor hominis*, Pope John Paul II referred to the religious map of the world. He underlined the importance for the Church of taking account of religious plurality. By reducing the scale, we can apply the Pope's reflection to Europe.

In the Synod for Europe, where the question of the Christian roots of European culture was raised, there were already those who voiced reminders that Jewish communities existed in Europe in the Mediterranean areas before the arrival of Christianity. These communities provided points of entry for the first messengers of the Gospel. Thus in our continent, Jews and Christians have a shared history, which included periods of collaboration, even if it was also characterized by recurrent phases of anti-Semitism, and reached the height of evil in the *shoah*.

Very soon after its birth, Islam, expanding fast, established itself in Spain, Sicily and southern Italy. Even if the Norman conquest and the *Reconquista* led by Isabella and Ferdinand put an end to its presence, these events did not wipe out the contribution of Islam to European culture. There have been Muslim communities over a very long time in other regions of Europe: the Tatars in Russia, around the borders of Poland and Ukraine, and even in Finland; the populations of Turkish origin, and those that were converted to Islam following the Ottoman invasion in the Balkans. These communities are outside the area we are concerned with, but the attitude of Western Europe towards the Muslims in Bosnia or Albania can be thought to have some bearing on the future of Christian-Muslim relations.

In Western Europe it is this century that has seen the growth of Islam. Immigration began at the start of the century, in particular after the « Great War », and then intensified after the Second

World War. The origins of the various Muslim communities reflect the varying colonial experience of Western powers. This is a subject to which it will be necessary to return later.

Immigrants from other religious obediences should not be forgotten : a considerable number of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains in the United Kingdom; Buddhists from Indochina who sought refuge in France; and more recently the establishment of Tibetan monasteries in several countries. We are all aware of the development of Buddhism in Western Europe and its attraction for a considerable number of our fellow-Europeans. It is so that relationships between Christians and Muslims can be seen in a wider setting that the existence of other religious communities has been mentioned at the outset.

1.2. Diverse origins

The exact number of Muslims in Europe is not known. There is no census giving accurate statistics. A report issued by the « Islam in Europe » committee puts the figure around 20 to 24 million for the whole of Europe including Russia. The number of Muslims in Western Europe could be estimated at around 12 million.

It should be noted that there is some unevenness in distribution. The greatest number are to be found in France (3,500,000 - 4,000, 000), followed by Germany (2,500,000 and then Britain (1,750,000). The Netherlands (500,000) and Belgium (300,000) have less Muslims in absolute numbers, but when the population is taken into account the proportion is quite high. Spain (200,000) and Italy (500,000, though some sources quote twice this number) have a small number in relation to their populations.

Probably more important than the number is the diversity of origins of these Muslim communities. In France, North Africans dominate the scene, and among them Muslims from Algeria or of Algerian origin, but Muslims from West Africa should also be noted (Senegal, Mali), and the number of Turks is growing. Muslim presence in Germany is very markedly Turkish, following relations cultivated in the past by Germany with the Ottoman empire, although there are Muslims from other areas, including Iran. In Britain, most Muslims are from the Indian sub-continent, but the Yemeni community, which is the most long-standing, should not be forgotten, nor the Cypriots, nor the large number of Arabs living in London. The Netherlands also have Muslims from their former colonies, particularly Surinam, and they have been joined by North Africans, mostly Moroccan, and Turks. The latter two groups are found in Belgium and also in Luxemburg, which is the European country with the largest proportion of foreign residents. In Spain the Muslim population is largely Moroccan, but there are also students from the Middle East. In Italy the growing number of Muslims is of varying origin - Tunisia, Egypt, Somalia, Morocco, Eritrea, and more recently Albania.

It should be noted that many of these Muslims are full citizens of the countries where they reside. This is particularly true of France and Britain. In Germany, it would appear that there are only 100,000 Muslims with German nationality. To these citizens of foreign extraction, or second or third generation descendants, should be added converts to Islam. The number here is difficult to assess, but they are in some instances influential in Islamic organisations.

There is a last remark to be made here : the variety of origins of these Muslims makes unity more difficult for them to achieve, within each country and within Europe.

1.3. Diverse social situations

The majority of Muslims in Western Europe belong to the working class (here a difference can be seen with ex-Yugoslavia, where many were in farming). It should be said that many are engaged in precarious employment, and unemployment, especially among young Muslims, is high.

But other categories of Muslims should not be forgotten. In many quarters they have established their own trades and businesses, cafés and restaurants. Hence there are a number who are self-employed. There are also professionals, doctors from North Africa or the Middle East, teachers and journalists. As the younger generation benefits by higher education, so the number belonging to professional categories will increase. Thus it is not only with the poor and underprivileged that Christians are in contact.

1.4. Legal status

Since relationships between « Church » and State vary from one European country to another, it is understandable that the legal status of Muslims should also vary. Belgium was the first country to give official recognition to Islam, as early as 1974. Austria followed in 1979, even though there was already a legislative basis dating back to the Austro-Hungarian empire. The recognition granted in these countries has repercussions particularly in the field of education, but also in taxation. In Belgium, the government, in the absence of a central Muslim organization, recognized the Islamic Cultural Centre as the representative. Since this Centre depended on the embassies, the decision was disputed by a number of Muslims. The government eventually created the « Committee of Sages ». This then became a « Constitutive Council » which elected an executive body of 17 members. This Committee can appoint teachers of religion, and also spiritual assistants for hospitals and prisons.

In Germany, the State maintains a position of neutrality towards religions. These religions can become « publicly recognized corporations » (*Köperschaft öffentlichen Rechts*). Once this is done, the State collects a special tax which it then allocates to the respective religions. Islam has not yet succeeded in obtaining this recognition on account of its lack of internal unity. It is interesting to note that in Germany, where many matters are settled at Federal State level (*Länder*), it was decided not to grant this recognition without the agreement of the other States. Muslim associations can be recognized as private law associations.

Another country where Islam could have obtained a degree of recognition is the Netherlands. Here too the State maintains neutrality, while at the same time applying what is known as the « system of pillars » (*verzuiling*). Four « pillars » are recognized : the Catholic Church, the Reformed Church, re-reformed communities and secularism/humanism. There was a recommendation to include Islam as another « pillar », but it was not taken up, once again on account of lack of internal unity.

In Italy some Muslims are pressing the government to establish an agreement (*intesa*) as has been done with other religious communities. This would enable Muslim bodies to benefit from the 8/1000 on tax from those registering as Muslims. However, the body that presented this demand is not considered as representative. There is no central body in the Muslim community which could manage the funds in the name of all concerned.

In Britain, where the Anglican Church is the established Church in England, while the established Church in Scotland is the Presbyterian Church, each religious community has its particular status. Muslim organizations can register as charities, which confers some tax advantages.

2. Different tendencies among Muslims

2.1. Demands

In the first years of the last wave of migrations, religion was not the central concern of Muslims. As a labour force they were looking for employment. They needed to learn the language of the country they had come to. Housing was another concern, since they were often in inadequate

conditions materially, *gastarbeiter* huts or derelict housing earmarked for demolition. For them, material aspects were dominant concerns.

It is when these workers were able to have their wives and families join them that religious needs began to be felt. Not only were temporary places for prayer sought, there was also the desire to build mosques for purposes of religious education and as social centres.

In this area, Muslims encounter many difficulties. If in the Netherlands, at least in the 1976-1984 period, the Muslim community did receive subsidies from the government for the construction of mosques (up to 30% of the total cost), it was not always easy to obtain the permission required. Bureaucratic delays were often a cover for opposition on the part of local populations. Conflicts arose between communities and civil authorities, sometimes caused by the fact that Muslims used private homes or other premises as mosques or prayer places, without waiting for the required authorisation to do so, or used mosques or places of prayer for other purposes (qur'anic schools, clubs, the latter being possible logistic centres for the support of fundamentalist or even terrorist movements). This arouses suspicions in the local population who fear Muslim fundamentalism.

When Muslims gain strength, they begin to express demands in the area of ritual. Some wish to observe ritual prayer (*salât*) during working hours. They can ask for special time arrangements during the month of Ramadan. There are demands for the Muslim feasts of *Id al-Fitr* and *Id al-Adhâ* to be holidays, at least for Muslims. There is concern about obtaining *hallâl* meat (which in Sweden has led to serious conflict with the civil authorities, since the Muslim method of slaughter is strictly forbidden as being completely barbarous). The communities also feel the need to have their own cemeteries, which is an indicator that they are no longer looking towards their countries of origin. It is above all in the field of education that requirements are most felt. Many parents want for their children an educational environment able to provide moral values and respectful towards religion. There is often great dissatisfaction with State schools, which motivates the demand for the establishment of Muslim schools, but also the choice of Catholic schools by a significant number of parents. A special need is felt with regard to girls, since mixed education is refused by some parents, or at least they refuse to allow their daughters to take part in certain activities like swimming and gymnastics. Requirements for girls in the area of dress can also create problems, as is well known. Now there are boys entering into conflict with the educational authorities because they want to wear beards in accordance with the *sunna* tradition of the Prophet. This behaviour can be religiously motivated, but there can also be some ostentation in this manner of proclaiming identity.

Responses from authorities toward these demands differ from one country to another. When religion is included in the school curriculum, there is generally an arrangement for the teaching of Islam. Denmark is the most generous in this respect : for a group of twelve children, religious teaching and also native language teaching are provided. Elsewhere, in Austria, Germany, and Belgium, provisions exist for the teaching of Islam, but there is often a lack of teachers. In Britain, the latest educational reform (1988) stipulated that school assemblies and religious teaching should reflect the dominant culture and therefore be predominantly Christian. This caused considerable reaction among Muslim parents. Muslim organisations encouraged parents to « withdraw » their children from school assemblies and religious lessons. The demand for the establishment of Muslim schools is becoming more pressing. Normally speaking, where there are large numbers of Muslims, they should be able to open a school with government subsidies (voluntary aided schools) in the same way as Christians and Jews. But the local authorities do not give the required permission, probably for fear that confessional schools would prevent integration of Muslims into society. A Government commission did not reach agreement on supporting the right of Muslims to have subsidies for their schools. Resentment on the part of Muslims is very strong, since they see this policy as being unfair and biased. They are obliged to establish private schools, the quality of which is often doubtful, on their own means.

2.2. Feelings of discrimination

There can be little doubt that there is indeed discrimination against Muslims. But sometimes this discrimination relates to being migrants or newcomers, rather than to the religious factor. Salaries can be lower (especially with non-legalised workers), prospects for promotion more problematic, and likelihood of unemployment greater. To this should be added outbursts of racism that occur here and there, sometimes violently.

However, there appears to be the feeling among some that, though tolerated as migrants, they are not accepted as Muslims. Their rules regarding dress, diet or ritual are seen as « deviant ». They feel they are judged, not for themselves, but in relation to the outside : events in Algeria, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. If they put forward claims for the application of Muslim *family rights*, refusal is motivated by reference to *criminal law*. Mosques and Islamic centres are viewed with suspicion, as being likely to foster fundamentalism.

There are also those who are afraid of becoming the object of Christian mission. The proclamation of the « decade of evangelism » in Britain caused feelings of alarm, and moderate Muslims voiced protest.

2.3. Towards European Islam ?

The « myth of the return home » entertained by the first Muslim migrants after the Second World War had a twofold consequence : the reference was not so much the country of integration as the country of origin, Algeria, Pakistan, Turkey or any other. Therefore it was less necessary to push religious demands, since they were accounted for in the home country. When the members of Muslim communities realised that their stay was not temporary but stable, it became important for them to be able to live out their religion in an integral manner.

At this juncture two issues appear : can Western European countries accept the existence of Muslim communities within them ? can Muslim communities cope with a minority situation ?

With respect to the first issue; it should be said that it is not merely a question of integrating individuals from another religion, but the encounter with a religion that refuses privatisation, that comprises requirements not only in the religious field, but also in the social field.

There are some who say that Europe has always been pluricultural, so that there should be no difficulty in assimilating newcomers and new cultural contributions. The multiple roots of European culture have been recalled above, but it must also be said that 19th century romanticism also produced national cultures. These cultures allow regional or religious sub-cultures to persist, so long as the dominant culture is respected. Is it on this score, as sub-cultures, that Islamic communities will find their place in European countries ? Or should something more be expected ? Are the dominant cultures ready to make concessions and allow themselves to be changed ?

Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, Grand Rabbi of the United Jewish Assemblies of the Commonwealth, suggests a « community of communities » as a solution to this problem. The identity of each community would be respected, but the members would have a common language enabling communication and avoiding isolation of communities one from the other.

What is the identity of Muslim cultures in Western European countries ? These communities, as has been said, are very fragmented - ethnic divisions, ideological differences, a multiplicity of organisations. One can wonder if the organisations are an advantage or a drawback for integration. Inasmuch as they depend on other countries in the Muslim world (India, Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Senegal, or any other) for their programmes of action and also for their

leaders, they tend to reinforce isolation. But as they have to adapt to rules dictated by the different countries they are in to be able to function, they are also factors for integration. They also become communication channels with civil authorities. It should be said that the authorities have sometimes encouraged collaboration among organisations in order to establish a body capable of representing the interests of the Muslim community with the government. There are, therefore, various tendencies in these communities. There are two I would like to look at more closely.

2.3.1. Accommodating Islam

Some consider that Islam cannot live in a minority situation. According to this idea, it will always try to get the upper hand, to change the *dâr al-harb* (house of war) or *dâr al-sulh* (house of truce) into *dâr al-islam* (house of peace or islam). Is this strictly true ? There are countries where Islam appears to accommodate to its minority status. South Africa is one, where Muslims contributed to reflection on the new Constitution. But the most striking example is India, where the Muslim minority is composed of those who opted against the separatist state of Pakistan. These Muslims had to justify their position with theological arguments.

It is an Indian Muslim, residing in Saudi Arabia, who founded the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. The review published by this institute contains articles on the situation of Muslims in different European countries. In these articles, neither the desire for integral application of Islamic law (*shari'a*) nor the desire to impose Islam on the overall population of these countries is to be felt. On the contrary, partial application of the *shari'a* is advocated, for instance in the area of personal status, and the desire is for Islam to be recognised simply as one of the components of society. Hence it is not a question of forming Muslim states inside Europe, but of enabling Muslims to be fully German, Belgian, British or French while at the same time being fully Muslim.

2.3.2. Conquering Islam

Another tendency does exist that should not be forgotten. It is the « missionary » tendency which wants to win Europe over to Islam. This desire is motivated by the conviction that Islam is the ultimate revelation of the original religion; hence it is the religion for all. In addition, there is the conviction that atheistic communism and liberal capitalism are both failures. Europe is in a state of patent moral degeneracy. It is Islam, and Islam alone, that can offer salvation.

This message is proclaimed in various manners : via different Islamic centres, through publications intended to make Islam known, by public demonstration, that includes prayer in public places. Marriage and family are also a way to this end.

Although most mixed marriages are the result of encounters that one could term « non-motivated », no mistake should be made about the intention of some young Muslims to seek out a Christian wife and convert her to Islam. Even if the wife remains Christian, the children will be Muslims. By way of large families, the growth of the Muslim community will be ensured, and one day it will achieve a majority.

There is no reason to be alarmist and to assume that all Muslims entertain a project of this sort, but it is not wise, on the other hand, to ignore it.

2.4. Openness to dialogue

We must now consider how the Church should react to this situation. Before envisaging the different aspects of this response, there is another question to be asked: are the Muslims in Europe open to dialogue ?

First, some points of encounter can be acknowledged. Muslims take part in the activities of the Fraternity of Abraham and the Children of Abraham (Community of Jerusalem). They are members of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. There is a European movement, « Jews, Christians and Muslims » which organises yearly sessions for young people from the three religions who are training for religious responsibilities. A new « Three Faiths Forum » has been launched in Britain. There are other structures enabling dialogue, or at least consultation, such as Marseille-Espérance in France, or the Interfaith Network in Britain. Multilateral dialogue may be easier than face-to-face encounter.

On the bilateral score the Groupe de Recherche Islamo-Chrétien (GRIC) should be mentioned, with its branches in Paris and Belgium (as well as in Morocco and Tunisia). The GRIC has already issued courageous publications on revelation, on faith and justice, on secularism, and intends pursuing its work.

Other levels of encounter could be referred to. Mixed households meet for shared reflection, and there are also groups of Muslim and Christian women.

Some Muslim organisations invite Christian speakers to their meetings. A centre for the spread of Islam, the Islamic Foundation, in Leicester, UK, has just launched a publication called *Encounters* to encourage dialogue. Two of the people in charge of the journal were given grants by the Foundation « Nostra Aetate » established by our Council; one was for research in Christian-Muslim dialogue, the other for studies on Christianity.

It is true that those engaged in activities of this sort are not many in relation to the mass of Muslims. It can nevertheless be seen as a sign of a degree of opening up.

In January 1993, when Pope John Paul II along with the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe announced a weekend of special prayer in Assisi for peace in Europe and in particular in the Balkans, some thirty Muslim representatives from European countries responded to the invitation. This shows, I think, on the part of religious leaders, greater confidence with regard to encounters with Christians.

3. The response of the Church

3.1. The eyes of truth

The first requirement is to look the reality of Muslim presence in Europe in the face, avoiding purely emotive responses. Irenicism, a naive approach refusing to believe in the genuine difficulties in relationships with Muslims, does not make recognition of the truth easy. This may well be a past danger; the danger now is rather that of giving way to fear, fear of being submerged, fear of the loss of cultural identity.

Faced with the « threat » of Islam taken as a worldwide phenomenon, it is good to try to ascertain the exact contours of Muslim communities, and their great fragmentation. Without seeking to play one group against the other, it can be seen that this lack of unity weakens the strength of Islam, just in the same way as lack of unity decreases the strength of Christian witness.

Light also needs to be shed on motivations leading to encounters between Christians and Muslims. On the Christian side, we can be guided by the official teaching of the Church. Pope John Paul II stated : « Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity » (RM 56). It is true that the Church will not renounce proclaiming the name of Christ, Lord and Saviour, for to do so would be to disclaim itself. But it does not enter into dialogue to draw people to itself. By providing a definition of dialogue, the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) already indicates its

purpose : « In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means « all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment » (DM 3), in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both the witness and exploration of respective religious convictions » (DP 9).

This same document goes further : « Interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations. It reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness to one's beliefs and a common exploration of one's respective religious convictions. In dialogue, Christians and others are invited to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God's personal call» (DP 40).

I may appear to put too much emphasis on this point, but it seems to me very important. Our initiatives in the area of interreligious dialogue are often met with suspicion, a suspicion that needs constantly to be overcome. The gratuitous nature of our enterprise cannot be over-emphasised.

3.2. Acting in truth

The first response of the Church towards Muslim migrants was assistance in social integration : literacy, material aid, help with administrative procedures, and so forth. This type of service, a form of expression of the *diakonia* which is an integral part of the mission of the Church, continues, especially in some countries still receiving waves of immigrants.

But as early as 1974, in the Luxemburg meeting mentioned earlier, the report of the study group for Muslims in Europe noted « a tendency on the part of organisations concerned with migrants not to respect the integrity of their religious values, and to reduce them to their economic and social situation ».

To take account of the religion of migrants, of the Islam of Muslims, could well contribute to the shift from assistance to partnership. Even in the social field, Catholic organisations can be called upon to work *with* Muslims rather than work *for* them. Sometimes it is non-confessional bodies or multi-religious associations that enable collaboration between Muslims and Christians.

3.3. Mixed marriages

Christian-Muslim marriages are still a subject of concern for pastors, and rightly so, since these marriages raise a number of problems. Sometimes one has the impression that the issue is reduced to whether or not a dispensation is to be granted, whereas in fact many other questions arise. Should there be an effort to try to prevent Christian-Muslim marriages by warning young people about the difficulties involved? What preparation should be offered to mixed couples? How can contact be maintained with the Christian partner, even - or especially - when the wedding is only celebrated before civil authorities?

It is true that European Churches have given serious thought to the matter, and there are several documents to help ministers. The publications of the Secrétariat pour les Relations avec l'Islam (SRI) of the French Episcopal Conference, issued in 1983 and revised in 1995, should be noted in particular. There are also associations of mixed couples which can give advice and support, but these could well be more numerous.

I would like here to mention two recent documents which have resulted from ecumenical efforts. The first was issued by the «Islam in Europe» Committee. After describing the present situation in Europe with relation to marriage between Christians and Muslims, the document presents the Christian conception of marriage (noting differences on the part of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants) and the Muslim conception of the family and marriage (with notes on the

legislation in force in Muslim home countries). It then goes on to pastoral responsibilities in general. The document distinguishes five stages in pastoral accompaniment:

- initial contacts
- decision-making
- preparation in view of marriage
- early years of marriage
- possible conflictual phase

Relevant advice is given for each of these phases. The document cannot replace orientations provided by the authorities in each Church, but it is worth consulting.

The second document is the result of work undertaken together by our Council and the Office for Inter-Religious Relations of the World Council of Churches. It is at the same time wider in scope and less ambitious. It is wider in that it purposes to take account of all forms of marriage between believers of different traditions, not merely between Christians and Muslims. It is less ambitious in that it cannot enter into detail on the conceptions of marriage and issues of law. It first gives results of a survey of mixed marriages; it analyses some documents that are already available, and raises some issues that ministers cannot avoid (religious freedom, religious differences as a source of tension or enrichment, the education of children, relations with the Christian community). This document, which has been published in our Council's review *Pro Dialogo*, can be seen as a complement to the first.

3.4. The international dimension of Christian-Muslim relations

Although each country has its own specific situation, we must take into account the repercussions that action or a style of relationships can have in other countries. This general reflection is intended to lead on to the question of reciprocity.

Many Oriental Christians, and some Western Christians, accuse those engaged in relations with Muslims in Europe of being naive. According to this point of view, the people concerned, though generous in intention, do not know the real nature of Islam. A reply to this accusation has been given earlier: Islam cannot be treated as a monolithic block; the great diversity of tendencies within Muslim communities must be recognized.

There is another accusation: you facilitate the integration of Muslims in Europe, but you forget the suffering of Christians in Muslim countries; there should be reciprocity in relations.

The « Islam in Europe » Committee has given consideration to this question. After considerable discussion a first text was published in 1995. This text states that it is not possible to adopt the principle of reciprocity as applied in agreements between States. There is no cause to resort to retaliation if members of one community are ill-treated. Reciprocity in the religious field means «a relationship based on mutual assistance and respect». This document presents a reflection on religious plurality, and its limitations, both in Muslim countries and so-called Christian countries. It then goes on to consider the situation of Christians in the Muslim world, and enumerates the difficulties they have to face : restrictions on assemblies, obstacles to the spread of the Christian message, legal sequels to the conversion to Christianity. Christians are asking Muslims to re-interpret their tradition in the light of the requirements of modern lifestyle, in a spirit of openness.

This text encountered much criticism from both Christians and Muslims. This criticism led the Committee to publish a « message » to European Churches on the subject of relations with Islam. This message, delivered at the Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, is entitled «From reciprocity to reconciliation ». Greater attention is paid to the asymmetrical nature of the situations. « People always talk and write about Islam and the West, rather than Islam and Christianity ». It is not

without reason, since, even if Western countries bear the mark of Christianity, « it is very difficult to consider that the West is composed of Christian societies in the sense in which it can be said that the Islamic world is composed of Muslim societies. There is also asymmetry in the founding processes of the two religions with regard to relationships between religion and State. This leads the authors of the message to suggest a shift « from the idea of reciprocity to that of reconciliation ». Some of the implications of this orientation are indicated: having accurate ideas on Islam and Muslims, based on precise information; defending the religious freedom of Muslims in Europe, in the hope that Muslim countries might guarantee the same freedoms to Christians.

Although it may be agreed that reciprocity cannot be a « *do ut des* », it must surely be admitted that this message is rather toned-down in comparison with the initial text. There is room perhaps for more vigorous calls, better expressing the expectations of Christians. At the inauguration of the mosque in Rome, Pope John Paul II, at the General Audience that coincided with the ceremony, gave voice to this expectation. Church ministers have the duty to constantly emphasize the needs of Christian communities within Muslim societies, and to call for conditions of genuine freedom for these communities.

4. Conclusion: towards the third millennium

Pope John Paul II has invited the whole Church to prepare for the great Jubilee of the year 2000. He has outlined a programme of catechesis and reflection, underlining the ecumenical and interreligious nature of the Jubilee. He sees in the birth of Christ, of which the twentieth centenary will be celebrated, a historical event that concerns all humanity. His wish is that all our brothers and sisters of all religious traditions join with us in these celebrations. It is our task to address these brothers and sisters. With regard to Muslims, can we establish dialogue with them on the subject of Jesus who is the centre of the Jubilee? It does not seem appropriate to start from the Qur'an, since it formally denies the divinity of Christ. Starting from passages in the Gospels and the New Testament that state the divinity of Christ is equally difficult. Indeed, Islam claims that the true Gospel has been altered or falsified, so that these texts would be suspect. It seems preferable to start from the message of Christ, and from there to go on to the person of Our Lord and the mystery this involves.

But there are other aspects of the Jubilee: the combat for justice, efforts towards reconciliation effort. There is the passage from one millennium to the next. It is true that Muslims could say to us: we have a different calendar, based on the *hijra*, the migration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. Your millennium is of no interest to us. » What reply could be given? Can we not say that, in the present-day world, in politics, in trade, in communications, the Christian calendar has become that of the common era. On a purely human plane, there is a certain unity. Will you not reflect with us on the way in which humanity lives? What can we do together to improve our relations? What are our dreams for the coming millennium? What projects should be undertaken?

Seen in this perspective the Jubilee of the year 2000 can provide a framework and possibilities for reinforcing dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Europe, a dialogue that already exists, but which needs to become more widespread and to go deeper.