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PLAZA Y VALDES

P Y V

EDITORES

**THE DIFFERENCE IN THE DIFFERENCE.
OLD MODELS AND NEW DIALECTICS FOR THE
CONTINUITY OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

Simon Mercieca
University of Malta

The events of the last months of year 2006 have rekindled the need for dialogue between religions. The leaders of the EuroMediterranean Institute —ISR well have read what John XXIII called the signs of time, when they decided to organize the international conference “Cultures and religions into dialogue for a common Euro-mediterranean house”. My reflection will touch two points of interreligious dialogue. The first is about interreligious dialogue between Christian denominations and the second concerns the relationship of Christianity with Islam, from the perspective of my religion, that is Roman Catholic. In addition, these two positions will be examined again in my role as head of the Maltese network of the new Anna Lindh Foundation, established by the European Community for the dialogue between cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean landscape.

THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

The meeting at the Vatican on 23 November 2006 between the Pope and the head of the Anglican Church has been reported the day after on the third page of the american newspaper *International Herald Tribune*. The importance of this article is not in the cronicle of the event, but in the interpretation and in the way it has been reported. The newspaper has a

protestant slant, but the columnist, Ian Fisher, has no reservations in giving to Caesar what is Caesar's own. The head of the Anglican Church Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury, is considered a very important leader in the Christian world with more 70 million faithful. The columnist notes that the distance between the Catholic Church and the Anglican increases progressively because the latter is open to the consecration of female bishop and to the acceptance of homosexual priests and bishops. Despite this divergence, Fisher interprets the meeting as a new form of dialogue. The journalist recognizes that the Catholic Church has a internal capacity to transmit and communicate new forms of meetings considered difficult because of cultural barriers. Citing R. William Franklin, american Episcopal bishop, the columnist notes that this meeting did show the ability of the Catholic Church to create strong relationships even when a disagreement on basic issues exists.

The observation of Franklin is very important, because it stresses the capacity of the Catholic Church to go against the tide and find ways for dialogue even when it is nonexistent and impossible. This happens even when many forces, large or small, not excluding those catholic, are pushing to confrontation from everywhere. This philosophy has old roots in the Church itself: many examples can be found in its so ancient history, from Saint Augustine to Saint Thomas of Aquino, from Raimond Llull to Saint Teresa of Avila.

The meeting with the more important exponent of the Anglican Church takes place on the eve of the other major meeting of the Pope with Bartholomew I, Patriarch of the Orthodox greek, in Istanbul, Turkey. The Pope's journey to Istanbul has many meanings, which characterize the visit. The first is undoubtedly due to the fact that the Pope goes to visit a country that was for centuries the center of Islam. Considered the second Rome, the city of Constantinople became, after 1453, the undisputed center of Islam. After the conquest of Egypt by the Ottomans in 1517, and after the fall of the mamelouk caliphate of Cairo, Constantinople became the center of this religion. The sultan is the undisputed leader of Islam and defends the spread of Sunni line in his domain.

Many years have passed since the birth and fall of empires and plenty of water, as an english proverb says, has passed under the bridge. The empires of all kinds rise and set but religion survives and testifies itself. The fall of the temporal powers of the Caliphates and then of Ottoman Empire, as the temporal power of popes, now belong to history. What has remained is "the truth transmitted by religions". In history, only the truth remains and lies, revealed, disappear from its pages.

There is a common consensus to recognize that in contemporary european history, after years of hostility towards religion, now we are witnessing a religious awakening of the European peoples. Perhaps the flood of people who attended the solemn funeral of Pope John Paul II is a testimony to that effect.

This awakening is occurring even though a part of Europe is anti-catholic. Many media are hostile to religion, especially Catholicism, directly and indirectly. This hostility ex-

presses itself especially in the British media, that many times have a Protestant matrix and inspiration. Others are hostile to religion starting from the debate of the Enlightenment in Europe.

This fear must be divided into two aspects. The first is determined by the perennial fear of many representatives of the Christian religion (but not of Roman Catholic faith) to be absorbed by the doctrine and the Roman Catholic structures. And this fear is present in the Anglican and Protestant as in the Orthodox Catholics.

The second aspect of fear comes from the secular West world that sees in the Church of Rome, for historical and political reasons, the instrument for the suppression of individual freedom in the name of moral principles and Christian ethics, often seen as opposed to the principles of individual freedom.

Surely, in dialogues with the Anglicans and in particular with the Orthodox Catholics, the Church has made much progress, as shown by the information came from the Vatican: the meeting with Williams and the meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew. Is very beautiful, but also deep, the reflection given by *International Herald Tribune* on the need to continue this dialogue: "Continuing this dialogue with Anglicans is a way of connecting with the liberal side of Catholicism. The Anglicans and Protestants are 'the liberal side of Catholicism'".

Perhaps the uniting between the Church of Rome and other Christian churches seems remote, even if the political concept of assigning to a Christian thinking the political dialectics of conservatives and liberals, offers not only a basis for dialogue but also for flexible unity. In the Western world the two political denominations, right and left, work under the cloak of parliamentary democracy. This concept recalls me historical situations of medieval origins, that I want to repropose because I am sure, though not a theologian, that in search of the roots of Christian history you can find the positions to mitigate the differences created in the Catholic world because of different views on dogma and theological principles.

For example, a cardinal difference between Catholic and Protestant denominations concerns Eucharist. After the Council of Trent the Church affirms with great force the theory of trans-substantiation. On the other side, the Protestants line up for con-substantiation. I remember very well, during my studies at Paris's Sorbonne University, Professor Pierre Chaunu, when he emphasized that in the history of religions, particularly that of Lutherans, the least known was the fact that the two positions have roots in the Middle Ages and that the two concepts were taught at the Sorbonne in Paris. Martin Luther accepts the con-substantiation. Before the Council of Trent the two positions were accepted by the Church. The same must be said for the pyramid structure of the Church, which begins to affirm itself with the first division and the split with East, continues with the schism in the West, is strengthened with the Council of Trent and reaches the climax with Pius IX, during the First Vatican Council, with the affirmation of the infallibility of the Pope. It's laudable that

the Roman Church, to enter in dialogue with other Christian denominations, make the great effort to revise many of his positions.

The first review is when the Church cut the excommunication to the patriarch of the Orthodox; the second is when it makes almost irrelevant the theory of infallibility. It seems clear that in interfaith dialogue the Church should go towards a shared management, mainly with the Orthodox. The major obstacle that remains in this direction, especially after the visit of the Pope to Patriarch Bartholomew I in Istanbul, is the bitterness from history. This unity through shared management must first be accepted by the faithful of each confession. In the contemporary world the research for the difference in the differences can lead, as is happening, to a constructive approach towards a possible unity.

There is a second fear of secularized West. The European secularization is, in my opinion, at a point of transition or confusion, if not perplexity. In France, the secular state is very articulate. Indeed, for example, the anti-clerical side is ready to make alliances with all those who can contribute to weakening of the Catholic religion in France. This aspect of secular fundamentalism comes all to absurdity to make alliance with Islam. All this comes from a very old historical dialectics, but also very French, that is the approach of King Francis I with the Ottoman Empire (continued in various forms by other French monarchs) to weaken the power of the Habsburgs first and then of the papacy. This is an absurdity! As rightly said Pope Benedict XVI, and as was noted by the Grand Mufti of Istanbul during the Pope's visit to the Blue Mosque in Turkey, the biggest fear of Islam comes from the secular and atheist West, thereby from that world represented by anti-Christian secularism.

I still remember, while studying for my doctorate in Paris, the news of the killing of three French monks and another Belgian at Tizi-Ouzou in Algeria. They lived in community in a monastery in the mountains of Algeria. The fact, happened during Christmas of 1994, upset many people in France. The killing was the work of Muslim fundamentalists battling in these years with the Algerian government (considered secular). What surprises me the most was the reaction of secular and anti-clerical French environments. At the demonstration, organized by the diocese of Paris, in Trocadero Square, there was not a great mass protesting and praying. This was interpreted as a positive sign by some radicals, but minority, of French secularism, as a sign of political weakness of the French Catholic Church.

We must consider that some secular Europeans, once very skeptical about the Church and some of them even anticlerical, are becoming, for better or for worse, allies of the Catholic Church, in which they see a role and a precise image, after the collapse of ideals of atheist and secular state. Fear of radical Islam is creating a shift from the European secularism to the Church. They hope that this same Church become the new bastion or the new political force against fundamentalism, especially Muslim. This phenomenon is growing throughout Europe. My small country, Malta, is not excluded from this new dialectic. Also other Christian denominations (but not Roman Catholic) in Europe are approaching the

Church of Rome because they see in this institution the representative of a position contrary to fundamentalist aggressivity of Islam. The recent speech of the Pope at Ratisbone University clearly shows this new phenomenon.

THE TEACHING IN THE UNIVERSITY OF RATISBONE

The speech of Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Ratisbone, or more exactly the quote from the speech of medieval byzantine Emperor Manuel Paléologos, has generated a dispute, but has also opened a new road to dialogue. The speech of Emperor loses its historical significance and, after new reading, it becomes an instrument of the logic of Huntington in *Clash of Civilizations*. Manuel Paleologos enters the christian dialectic, in an presumed confrontation of civilizations, or more exactly in a direct conflict with the Islamic world. The quote dialogue from the Pope is interpreted as an attack to Islam by the more important arab media or better muslims, but also by those of secular inspiration, as the Washington Post. It's necessary to specify that the speech has been done, maybe by an oversight, on the eve of a scheduled visit to Turkey, that is a secular state, perhaps the most secular in Europe, but with a strong religious presence of sunni muslims, and at the same time an ally of America.

The speech, or the controversy, has provoked a lot of ironic or tragicomic. The Pope, before this speech, has made another with which he dismantled the theory of Huntington with a single sentence: Islam fears secular West. Perhaps this sentence has fallen in deaf ears, which did not want to hear. To be sure, when the Holy Father has pronounced this sentence, has done more as a refined theologian, as a real university professor, than as head of a religion with a billion of believers. When Benedict XVI quotes historical speeches, he does, as well observed my colleague at University of Malta, Peter Serracino-Inglott, a friend of this institution, even in quality of professor, not as head of a Church. In other words, he called for an intellectual dialogue with teachers or an academic debate. Perhaps he forgot his new role as Pope, which requires a different kind of dialectic, less intellectual, more emotional and religiously diplomatic. Perhaps Benedict XVI, think Serracino-Inglott, when rose on the chair in the University of Ratisbone, forgot to be the head of the Catholic Church.

On the other hand, this academic slip emphasized the aspect of fallibility, present in every person, with the result that Benedict XVI begins to arouse admiration because he continues to regard himself as a man, that is to say continues to wear the toga of the professor and to speak with the authority of the professor. At the same time he is aware that his speech can also be opposed because is that of a professor, more that of one who expresses dogmas that faithful and not believers bind to its figure.

In the Western world is a rule that a public figure of any significance is exposed to the criticism of public opinion. The Pope is not excluded from this logic. The reaction of the West to these protests is not born by the same sense of protests, promoted and accepted in democratic countries, but the manner in which some protests have been made. It's condemnable and unacceptable the manipulation of the protest towards anti-democratic positions, made to deny people the right to free expression.

A young student of social anthropology at the University of Malta, and also my friend, Mark Anthony Falzon, has classified the so-called popular reaction in the Islamic world to Pope's speech, as well as for the cartoons published in Denmark, in five categories:

- 1) Muslims that are indifferent to the history of the publication of the cartoons or to the Pope's speech, or that otherwise do not feel offended.
- 2) Muslims who felt offended, while recognizing the right of free speech as an intrinsic part of freedom of expression.
- 3) Muslims who have condemned the cartoons and the speech as private observations, without consequences.
- 4) Muslims who have protested in a civil way.
- 5) Muslims who have created much chaos in the streets burning pictures and banners and calling for revenge and blood. (*Malta Today*: 24 September 2006)

Mark Anthony Falzon considers minority the fifth category: an insignificant fraction of the Islamic world, who attracts worldwide media attention because of its speaks and violent demonstrations. The actions of this minority group determine news that for many of us Europeans, linked to a sedentary lifestyle, in the luxury of our homes is interesting to hear and follow.

These minority actions force Europeans to reflect positively or negatively. In Malta public opinion has been divided, although the majority of maltese citizens was with the Pope and against Islam. The attitude is not only determined by the fact that Malta is a catholic island; the disruption was also present in these people, in Malta, who do not feel represented by the Church, because they are secular. Traditionally, many of them are supporters of the Arab people for the recent history of colonization. But now they begin to feel threatened in freedom, that they see as the expression of a fundamental value. This freedom in Europe was the result of physical, psychological and verbal clashes against the Church. Now, these same people are seeing in the islamic religion, presented by the media as a homogeneous structure --even if that does not match--, a new enemy that threatens this right considered fundamental in Europe.

These episodes bring out in the gots of the past, as when, a few years ago, a professor of the University of Malta had been threatened with a knife by a muslim student, for having

expressed opinions against Islam. Perhaps these acts are considered low-level, such as rare cases of vandalism in Malta against Christian icons. These incidents show that even in peaceful Malta is a need for dialogue and education to prevent these isolated cases become a 'casus belli' that could disturb the peaceful coexistence lived until now.

THE NEED FOR A RECIPROCAL DIALOGUE

The presence of immigrants on this island is also opening a dialogue between cultures to new levels. The Muslim presence is growing, and the need for exchange, of dialogue increases in order to not increase the risk of xenophobia. The waves of immigration that South Europe is undergoing right now is to be seen in this dialectic of dialogue. Many of these immigrants are muslims. Malta, like the other european states, considers legitimate requests of immigrants to exercise their religion. When immigrants arrive in Malta on boats, have only what they wear; especially women, are without the 'chador' or other type of veil that covers his head. After they establish in centers prepared for them, many women begin to bring the muslim veil. This is a very significant particular. Malta accepts their beliefs and helps them to express their religion, even with visible signs.

But tolerance in the Mediterranean, as everywhere, must be reciprocal. An operator who works between the muslim and arab immigrants in Malta told me that there are instances of 'fatwa' —death penalty— against those who change religion. The state has tried to solve the problem in a solomonic way, helping them to live the Island to go to America where, with all the evils of this new empire, there is more tolerance and protection.

Of course, Europeans are asking the reciprocity of respect. Many consider Europe is open to dialogue with other confessions. Many countries, where Islam is a state religion or where Muslims are in majority, are less open. Perhaps the state that is the most inclined to a mutual dialogue, and with the greater islamic community, is Turkey. The visit of Pope Benedict XVI is strengthening this opening. But this state has also, like the other european countries, an secular array.

In Europe there is the fear that democracy do not work in muslim countries considered "too pious". Under the religious aspect, amazed us the news that an afghan man has been sentenced to death for having changed faith and become a Christian, according to islamic law in force in that country. To escape to rejection, after the international furore, particularly that of the catholic classes in Italy, the state of Afghanistan made the solomonic decision to consider this man as crazy. This was the only option existing in Islamic law to avoid penalty for who changes his faith. The news brings more sensation when one considers that in that country and at this time, Americans and Europeans are engaged in a mission to build

democracy. Unfortunately Europe, more interested in a media democracy, really supports the establishment of theocracies. The eastern peoples are right when they do not believe in these settings, which have only the face of democracy, but do not have its heart.

The West insists that the change must be immediate. It really does not take into account the aspirations of these peoples, often united only by a geographic structure with totally different cultures. Surely the building is slow and it's a hard work to build change. Nobody can think of implementing a democracy, when there are people who interpret religion as a tool for making politics. Today it is the Muslim religion, but it has been so also for the Christian. Religion can also serve as a vehicle for new settings that, finally, perhaps are leading to dictatorship.

Many Europeans are doing unilaterally first concrete steps towards acceptance of new and important realities that these events are causing, even if there is a recent history of adversity and hatred. We must not forget that Europeans who lived in north African countries, at the end of the wars of independence, have been driven from their homes. Now, these Europeans are accepting the children of those who have thrown them out, and live with them. The problem is to integrate the children of immigrants, especially those newly arrived.

When north African states were under the Muslim religious dictatorship, which acknowledged as spiritual leader the Ottoman Sultan, it was a need for secular movements inspired by Mazzinianism, which were attended by Maltese as Emilio Sceberras, intermediary in introduction in this Island of secular nationalism and also in collaboration to disseminate these ideas in other countries of the Mediterranean from North Africa to the heart of the Ottoman Empire. This nationalism was not truly antireligious, but it was against use of religion as a political weapon. The result was the formation of the "Young Turks Movement" in Turkey. This secular movement is still alive.

Unfortunately, the events of various kinds of confrontation with the Muslim world and the symbolic history of crusades, now are truly losing the historical significance of defensive war, to become a punishment mission. I believe that this negative propaganda is not right for a balanced dialogue about an important event in European history. We are making fools of ourselves, in particular through the fantasies of movies and media. Perhaps the more emblematic film is the *Robin Hood* of Kevin Costner. The Islamic are described as smart, polite, correct; the Christian Catholic from Friar Tuck to the Bishop are presented as vile people, the rabble without scruples. This is a ridiculous aspect of Christianity.

The same idea reappeared in the recent film by Ridley Scott, *Kingdom of Heaven*, in which Christians are described as bad, even if among them were some good. Among the bad guys appear Christian knights the Templars and the Latin Bishop of Jerusalem, a man described as an opportunist, without principles, coward and hypocrite. On the other hand, Muslims are all good, pious and of sound principles. British academicians have made clear

that the film distorts the history of the crusades and gives a favourable image of Arabs. Jonathan Riley-Smith, one of the leading british scholars on crusades, used no uncertain terms and said that the film is "rubbish," "ridiculous," "complete fiction" and "dangerous to Arab relations."

This contrasts with the reality we are living: a few fundamentalists are doing the martyrs, perhaps inadvertently. The nun killed in Mogadishu, Somalia, has been killed just because she was a Catholic or Christian. Also in Turkey a priest was killed because he was a Christian. This brings to mind the remark of Saint Augustine: "the blood of martyrs refunds Church".

We see troubled "spots" on smaller groups that show these killers as heroes of the muslim world in the sacred war against West. condemnations for these acts of violence are few, and often are by Muslims who live in the West. Probably the West begins to appreciate the most If the condemnations come also from muslim worlds, especially those in Asia. Maybe a problem in the West that these atrocities have been made against Catholic Christians. No media has tried to attack these acts of violence or bring complaints against actions taken by other religious denominations against Catholic Christians, particularly Roman.

THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN FOUNDATION: ANNA LINDH

In the days between November 25 and 27,2006, I had the opportunity to participate, as leader of the maltese network of Anna Lindh Foundation, the meeting that this foundation held in Tampere in Finland. This meeting was organized simultaneously at the meeting of ministers of the countries of the European Community and the Mediterranean.

During this meeting of heads of networks of the 35 countries of Euro-Med in Tampere, the center of discussions in the 'plenium' has been interreligious dialogue, especially between the so-called Christian West and the Muslim world. The Roman Catholic Church has occupied an important role in this dialogue after the Pope's speech in Ratisbone. This speech has been connected to the reaction of the islamic world because of the publication of irreverent cartoons in Denmark.

On subjects concerning inter-religious dialogue have raised two important issues. The first concerned the declaration on the Pope's speech made by the head of the foundation, and the other was on the way to ecumenism.

I start with a little analysis, as director of the maltese network, on the muslim world reaction to the cartoons and to the Pope's speech. Personally, I support freedom of expression and in this context I am in solidarity with the cartoonists and the Pope. I believe in the right to express controversia! views, but is not thinkable all this turning in an violent action. This

thinking is shared by the majority of the directors of the Anna Lindh network for dialogue between cultures.

As a sign from heaven, this meeting takes place in a week full of extraordinary events, on the eve of the visit of the Pope in Turkey and of the meeting of foreign ministers of Euro-Med in Tampere. It was a common feeling in the 'plenium' of the Anna Lindh Foundation that Europe is going through a critical moment: the Mediterranean has been defined as a sick territory. The members of this partnership have expressed a desire for a new definition of Europe. There was the common feeling that Europe was utopian, because unfortunately there is not still a place where everyone can live in harmony and peace. The European society is undergoing social, cultural and religious changes; there is the need to create a new definition of European. Behind this quest for a new European order there is a very important fear. For many Europe is within a catastrophe, but this idea can even be hiding a secret agenda, very dangerous if played right into the hands of extremist and fundamentalist movements.

Old Europe has been appreciated for its openness to the discovery of new realities and its capacity to create changes. Because of its history, today's Europe can talk about European specificity. The directors of European networks present during the plenium were aware of these issues. The main idea lays on the difference that Europe can offer, building on its successes. The diversity must be a reason, a ground for unity. In this subject, Europe is achieving today European values that have become universal. The article 2 of the Declaration on Human Rights talks about diversity and indeed promotes it. The size and power of the Church as a spiritual leader, are in promoting diversity. This possibility has enabled the Church to grow with a speech of love and respect. The Church has not been afraid to adopt and incorporate other cultures. Surely if the dialogue between religions, particularly among Christians, should continue to grow, the Church needs to resume its historical capacity to accept the diversity, to incorporate it without annihilate it. We must remember that this approach starts from individual. Do not forget that all religions, from Judaism to Christianity, as well as Muslim, have made many atrocities for hegemony. The Egyptian Ibn Mahfuz, Nobel prize for literature, recognizes this historical reality, also suffered on his person, and stresses that the mania for hegemony has produced terrible atrocities in the history of mankind.

If the Church wants to move forward and become an always more relevant institution in contemporary society, must continue to stand out for its openness towards others, and to accept the right of others to be different: that's to say to support the concept that there is a difference in difference. This also applies to all other religions, Christian or not. All must begin to accept the other. Dialogue must be built on a mutual exchange.

The Church and all other religious denominations must give more listening to what the civil society says. Thus religions may continue to become a meeting point, not a confronta-

tion place. Unfortunately, the dogmas of every kind and nature, are leading institutions to unnecessary clashes. Religion must work against all forms of discrimination and injustice, starting from the same internal organs. For example, giving more space to women. The monotheistic religions, as well as Eastern, must give more space to women, who have the capacity to be good interlocutors, especially on issues that 'prima face' seem for clash and conflict. Who develops this work should not be considered an enemy or a weak person with difficulties, but it must be appreciated for the dedication to others. In fact, who should take this path of dialogue and dialectic, can do so only if he is strong.

The second point concerns the ritual of ecumenical meetings. During this meeting, was revealed a perplexity on how inter-religious dialogue has been done so far. The ecumenical meetings have been made with a pattern of prayer, but without a genuine continuation because all remain locked in their rigid confessional parameters. The scheme was seen as an ideal model for the dialectic of Huntington on the conflict of cultures. For my part I do not agree on this idea.

The differences on the concept of ecumenism come just from the use of the term ecumene. This term of Greek origin '*oikoumene*' means "the inhabited world", with historical reference to the world of Roman Empire and medieval Christian. In other words, the ecumenism is only workable between the Christian religions that aspire, although remotely, for a possible union. Perhaps within the Church there are also people who think they can extend this idea to the Jews, because of the common roots of Christianity and Jewish religion. The dialogue with the other non-Christian religions is covered by the principle of religious dialogue and intercultural dialogue. Perhaps these differences are not more clearly in the memory of many, and the term "Ecumenical" has a meaning which in English translates as "loose epithet". Indeed this term is often used in the abstract, and at the same time as an arbitrary term. But this term really has no universal semantics because, as history shows, particularly that of religions, there are different kinds of dialogue. The dialogue with the Christian denominations is much different than that with non-Christian denominations. Many times, the dialogue between Christian confessions searches to arrive at a unity, wanted even if still distant. The dialogue between different religions, as between the Christian and Jewish or Muslim, is designed for another purpose, to achieve greater understanding between religions, and the desire that the believers of these religions live in peace with each other. Then, the ecumenical meetings aspire to achieve different purposes. This difference in the difference in the dialogues is seen as a formulation that comes precisely in the dialectic of Huntington.

In fact, some are trying to combat this dialectic with positive criticism, that's to say, they show with concrete actions the new anti-Huntington dialectic. So the direction of the European Anna Lindh Foundation, took as an example a interreligious community in Syria to show how it should be the dialectic that does not follow the model of Huntington. In fact,

the 'Anna Lindh' gave the Euro-Mediterranean prize for dialogue between cultures to the the community of the monastery of Mar Musa, represented by Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, Catholic, which celebrates the Syriac rite and lives in Syria. He is the soul and engine of this interreligious community, consisting mainly of Christians and Muslims. Christians are also from different denominations. This kind of life is regarded as the true type of dialogue. Living together. But to have this kind of dialogue there was always need of these meetings. Christians — anyway believers— must believe in the power of prayer. These prayer meetings have opened the doors of dialogue to the point that a Roman Catholic Pope goes and prays with a Muslim Grand Mufti inside a mosque, looking towards Mecca.

You can think that this approximation of Catholics is the result of a weakness. I do not think so. As already was said, the philosopher Ratzinger has undermined the theory of clash of cultures, saying that Muslim East and Islam are not afraid of the Christian religions, but of secular West. This found recognition in the edition of the reputable newspaper *Financial Times*, dated December 2 of 2006. The journalist Christopher Caldwell, commenting on page 7 the Pope's trip to Turkey, could not hide the success of Benedict XVI as a partner in the global dialogue between cultures and writes that "The good news is that fears of civilizational conflict may be overblown too. The pope's trip could have been a cultural mine-field". Actually it has been not: it was indeed the trip that was more successful and cultural meaning.

With the benefit of hindsight, international journalists foresaw before the visit began, that this would be a great failure. The more intelligent welcomed the signal of the time. Taking cue again by another article in the British newspaper *Financial Times*, published in Ankara on the eve of this visit, Monday November 27, 2006, Vincent Boland points out the weakness of Muslims protest in Ankara, as in the rest of Turkey, contrary to the expectations of Western and Islamic media. The number of protesters was much lower than forecasts of the organizers of the protests. On page 24 of the same newspaper, the trip of the Pope is compared to that of the young prophet Daniel thrown into the pit of lions. There was the expectation to see if Benedict XVI emerged unharmed from this experience, as Daniel, or defeated. Looking ahead to the media the event can be considered a great success, even if Benedict XVI is not the pope of the media as his predecessor: he has difficulties to become accustomed to the spotlight of television cameras. The international media are beginning to recognize that he is the man of dialogue, which achieves not only to exit without any scratch from the pit, but even to tame lions. The toga of university 'alma mater' and the cardinal royal purple go in the drawer, in favor of white dress, synonymous with the papacy and also a symbol in Europe and the Middle East of humility. All this is in favor of interreligious dialogue.

CONCLUSION

The behavior of the Pope in Istanbul showed that neither the Church nor the West are ignoring the presence on the planet of more of a billion people belonging, in one way or another, to the Muslim faith. Moreover, neither the Muslim world can continue to ignore the dynamics of change and the need to adapt to this change to avoid rifts, how has already happened in Europe. Unfortunately, the controversial Danish cartoons or the Pope's speech in Ratisbone have showed that differences in Islam are not only religious, mainly between Sunnis and Shiites, but more importantly, between those Muslims who live in the Western world (and I mean all countries with a parliamentary democracy with a liberal array, from Europe until America, Australia and India). Important representatives of Islam in these countries are asking for changes on how Islam sees 'Dar il Haarb' and 'Dar is Salam': the house of peace and the house of war are in reality the structures by which Islam manages and interprets the world. Democracy, human rights, mutual respect, compassion and overcoming differences, to the point of accepting differences in differences, are values born in the West but with universal dimensions. All the peoples of all religions need to safeguard these values in all corners of the world.

The visit of the Pope overcomes all other events because it shows an openness towards the Muslim world by the Catholic Pope but also, and perhaps this is much more important, a openness to other Christians, to those Orthodox brothers who continue to see the patriarch of Constantinople their religious referent.

There is not doubt that religion is a political force and also a source for a political identity. For their part, religious leaders must have three capacities: honesty, moderation and openness. The three modern concepts overlap to the three old requirements set out by Saint Augustine for the person of a bishop or any other shepherd of souls, that's to know to be 'custos' (which, from Latin, means guardian), 'pastor' (shepherd) and 'lector' (preacher). These are the tools to create an 'ethos' for peace and dialogue between communities of different confessions. If the people begin to respect the cultural diversity, it will be more easy to find solutions for the difficulties of the spiritual life.

There are no easy solutions to complex phenomena. To be sure, the public debate is very important, and this symposium on cultures and religions into dialogue for a common Euro-Mediterranean house, in Sardinia, helps and will help the debate. This conference should not be seen as a goal, on the contrary should be a tool to achieve the goal. Dialogue and coexistence stop being an utopia and may gradually become reality. This symposium is promoting an understanding between peoples and that is another step to a bigger sensitivity towards religions and cultures "others". It is hoped that such initiatives will also organize other shore of the Mediterranean. One hopes that happens what in English is called "multiplier effect".

These meetings are to see that dialogue is with everyone, not just with Islam but also, as Catholics and Christians, between different denominations of this religion. In the western vision Islam appears monolithic, although really there are deep rifts and lack of dialogue inside it. The need for dialogue is also important in the structure of the world that Edward Said liked to call 'Eastern', and that for him corresponded to Islam.

There is no doubt that the Catholic Church is today in the forefron of this interreligious dialogue. I am sure that the theologian Ratzinger promoted dialogue already in his role as prefect of faith (even if his communications are perhaps misunderstood by the media). Now in the role of Pope Benedict XVI is showing that he is able to work with all religious denominations. The expression adopted in the visit in Turkey, "dialogue, brotherhood and reconciliation", should be seen as ideal slogan for anyone who wants to work in the field of interreligious dialogue. In other words, it's a phrase that highlights in all the need for reciprocity. These words have urged all countries, whatever their order, equal rights for Christians (regardless of belonging to religion or Church) to follow their faith, as Muslims today have the right to religious freedom in the West. Indeed, the Church is doing more, asking for minorities, particularly Muslims, rights which they did not have so far: as the right to religious education in public schools in Europe. Christians have the right to enjoy the same equality in other states, without fear of persecution. The 'rector emeritus' of the University of Malta, Peter Serracino Ingott, interprets the Pope's speech in Ratisbone as a sincere dialogue with Islam. (*Malta Today*: September 24,2006) The events of his visit in Turkey have confirmed this interpretation.

Perhaps one of more great exponents of this theory of dialogue is the philosopher of Enlightenment Voltaire. His reflections have more value today, because its philosophical positions were seen as the matrix of secularization and the dechristianization of Europe. Voltaire, on the contrary, were looking for the true who had difficulty to find in French institutionalized religion, too kind to aristocrats and social inequality. The reflection that I am going to quote has appeared in a letter published in a Maltese newspaper and written by Rachid Titouah in a local controversy about the clash between West and Islamic civilizations. Invoking God, Voltaire wrote, "You were not given for men hearts to hate or hands to kill. But the differences in the way we look, our ridiculous costumes, our imperfect system of laws and our stupid views, all these nuances will not be interpreted as signs of hatred and persecution?" (*Malta Today*, October 1,2006).

But the merciful God gave these same ideas two thousand years ago. The trial of God will not be based on our knowledge of religions, in our zeal to defend the dogma, but as Jesus of Nazareth said, on our actions, concrete or deliberate, regardless of our beliefs, towards poorest people of our contemporary society.