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DIALOGUE IS THE ONLY WAY TO PREVENT THE DISASTER¹

By **Ismail Bardhi**

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“To Allāh belongs the East and the West. So, wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah... For each is a direction toward which it faces. So race to good. Allāh will bring you forth all together. Indeed, Allāh is over all things competent. (Qur’ān, 2:115, 148)

Dialogue, as any other reality, assumes that meaning which is attached to it through interpretation, especially in these difficult times when the most elementary issues are losing their reality or physiognomy, when we see the “detachment” of mind from nature. Since reality can be interpreted as a written text, I deem it necessary to present the basic features of truth, which is passing through phases of great torment for humanity, in a time when we are witnessing how the untruth is often being presented and advocated as truth.

The word *truth* is one of the crucial and most frequently used words in today’s religion and theology. Truly, the known forms of “searching for truth” have a truth of their own, with reference to the forms of “searching for truth,” in philosophy, metaphysics and religion. The way to the truth has always been the only way from it - from the truth. Truth is deeper and more encompassing than what we think it is, because it appears even to the one who is not in search for it. But, nevertheless, the one who is not searching for the truth has to endure it. It should be sought, but not “created”, as only God has the right to create. The interpretation of the truth in the Holy Scripture is: to be pure from doubt, fraud, lie, exploitation, in all of its meanings, because it doesn’t tolerate anything else, but the truth.

It is an indisputable fact that heavenly religions, or the followers of the Holy Books, are called to be attentive toward the truth in the holy text and its genuineness. It is impossible to accept religion from non-religion and God from His repudiators (apostates). As followers

¹ The paper was delivered at the 35th Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches “New Threats and Sowing Seeds of Hope: Operation Early Warning” in Philadelphia, PA, March 5-8, 2005, in a session entitled “At a Fork in the Road: Prevention or Disaster” in which the main focus was Macedonia.

of the heavenly religions we are called to interpret religion within its framework, to create conditions for religious dialogue, each of us in his or her *Lebensraum*, and thereby to support global peace, which we desperately need.

The role of religion has been and remains to be of great importance at all times. As is well known, the position of religion during the communist regimes was very difficult: it was misused, impoverished, isolated or even forbidden, and it goes without saying that believers were often severely punished. This caused the disruption of the natural development of the religious culture and theology in those countries. In our country, the Republic of Macedonia, the religious *Lebensraum* also has passed through different phases, and the interpretation of the faith which was confined within national and historical “interests” has created difficulties for the development of theology and religion. On the other hand, the state and official policy not only have not demonstrated the necessary interest for religion, but have even damaged religions with their mental and physical destructiveness. It is time to ameliorate it, something we believe that could be and should be done, of course, by using the proper legal national and international mechanisms.

We, the believers in the Balkans in general, and in Macedonia in particular, have felt all this on our skin, especially confronted with a huge problem - a meaningless war with innocent victims. In this armed conflict there were some tendencies to involve even the religious element, i.e. the highest religious institutions in Macedonia, which, fortunately, with great wisdom avoided such tendencies. Both the beginning and the end of the “war” in Macedonia² still remain unknown and unclear, as well as to who “won” and who “lost.” It was a challenge not only for us, but also for the others, and I am referring to those who tried hard to indirectly ruin the historical neighbouring, the fragile coexistence and peace in our country. In this respect it is useful to remember the quote of Albert Camus, who, regarding the holocaust, has said: “Unfortunately, it’s impossible for the victim of the concentration camp to explain to those who despise him that they shouldn’t do that.”

It is a fact that people in our country, both Muslims and Christians, as well as Jews, may not have been talking very much with each other, but this does not mean that we have not lived together. Living together or next to each other and not talking to each other is nothing more than a cultural crisis, however, it is also natural. It is in the nature of the human being to live in the same way at the beginning of life - without talking and the ending - in

² The author is referring to the armed conflict in 2001 and 2002 - editor.

silence, while that period in between, namely that of living, is best regulated and acculturated by the Holy Books.

We are witnessing that with little efforts the inter-religious dialogue in Macedonia has been welcomed. In this regard, the Global Dialogue Institute from Philadelphia, USA, has given us notable assistance. We began and continue holding lectures by our professors respectively in our two faculties (or colleges or theological seminaries, as they are called in the USA), Islamic and Orthodox; mutual visits to each other's sacral objects by professors and teachers of our two institutions; publishing articles with religious subjects and joint appearance in the media. We are also thinking to develop this activity at even higher levels by establishing new departments for comparative religious studies. I believe that this meeting will be a great contribution for our country as well.

As it has been mentioned above, truth is inside and within everything; it is the only thing that has the power to keep the balance of harmony and happiness among humans, without hurting the human soul and its physical part, and for this the role of religion is unquestionable. There is no peace or dialogue without the truth, nor is there truth without submission to God. And dialogue is one of the best ways to avoid destruction.