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PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIONS IN COMPARISON: A DOUBLE QUESTION

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Abstract: To rethink the relationship between philosophy and religion, or rather between philosophy and religions, it is appropriate to start first with the discipline known as Philosophy of Religion. Right from its label, the modern expression Philosophy of Religion configures a discipline elaborated precisely in opposition to the institutionalized faiths of Europe, which are considered to tend to be intolerant and heralds of division among men. A God held as absolute, a perfect infinity by definition, ends up contrasting with the observation of evil, especially the evil caused by "wars of religion," which result in the unjust suffering of the innocent. The progressive modern configuration of the philosophy of religion also stems from this insistence and the associated desire for tolerance, both human and religious.

This paper traverses the problematic issues of the reflection of philosophers such as Spinoza, Hume, Locke, Leibniz, and Kant, to arrive at a contemporary configuration of the philosophical-religious problematic. The questions and problems, posed between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the aforementioned authors, return today with urgency, when, alongside a relative sociological persistence of the sacred and religions, we also witness a dangerous return of religious fundamentalisms, in the name of a re-emerging claim to truth, which is boasted by this or that specific religious horizon, over others. On this basis, any proposal of pluralism and any theory of dialogue seem impossible, especially if one starts from fundamentalist religious positions. We have before us, therefore, a situation that is in many ways oxymoronic, and which presents the scholar of religious affairs with a real challenge.

1. Critical thinking, religion, religions

In rethinking the relationship between philosophy and religion, or rather, between philosophy and religions, I believe it appropriate to begin first with an explicit historical awareness of the problem and therefore with the discipline known as philosophy of religion,[1] a legitimate reflection in the era of religious struggles in a Europe torn between different confessions.

Even its very label, the modern expression "Philosophy of Religion" defines a discipline developed precisely in opposition to the institutionalized faiths of Europe, considered tendentiously intolerant and a harbinger of division among humanity. Whether referring to the Preface to Ralph Cudworth's 1678 work, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*,[2] or to Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*[3] (1670), a polemical intent is evident alongside the positive proposal.

[1] Angelino C., *Religione e filosofia. Temi e problemi di filosofia della religione*, Il melangolo, Genova 1983; Bucaro G., *Filosofia della religione: forme e figure: la riflessione sul "senso" del fatto religioso da Spinoza a Nietzsche, da Bloch a Eliade*, Città Nuova, Roma 1992; Fabris A., *Introduzione alla filosofia della religione*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2002; Ferretti G., *Filosofia della religione*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1972; Mancini I., *Filosofia della religione*, Marietti, Genova 1991; Schmitz J., *Filosofia della religione*, Queriniana, Brescia 1988.

[2] Cudworth R., *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: Wherein all the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is confuted, and its Impossibility demonstrated*, Legare Street Press, Hungerford 2022.

[3] Spinoza B., *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, Jovian Press, 2017.

A God assumed to be absolute, exerting his causality on the world, a perfect infinite by definition, ultimately clashes with the recognition of evil, especially the evil caused by "religious wars," which lead to the unjust suffering of innocents. The progressive modern configuration of the philosophy of religion also stems from this insistence and from the associated desire for tolerance, both human and religious, following the terrible conflicts and bloodshed caused by the laceration of Western Christianity. Both the Protestant and Catholic Reformation movements, the struggles between the various branches of the Lutheran Reformation, and the cultural, political, disciplinary, and legal struggle began by the Catholic Counter-Reformation had, in fact, contributed significantly to darkening the European social and political landscape and, consequently, had made many yearn for a period of universal pacification.

Spinoza, who lays out the foundation of his philosophical and religious thought in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Ethica more geometrico demonstrata*,[4] seems driven by a desire to defend, rather than explicitly deconstruct, religion. In fact, when he acknowledges the rupture of harmony between faith and tradition, he seeks to defend religion against modern tendencies of the autonomy of reason and the excessive tolerance of any religious denomination. He does so through a process that questions the very essence of religion, beyond its historical characteristics and manifestations.

The modern intent of the *Tractatus* is clear. The *Dissertations* seek to demonstrate that the freedom to philosophize can not only be granted while preserving religion and the peace of the state, but cannot be taken away except along with the peace of the state and religion itself. Why, then, was the work condemned by the Dutch courts, along with Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*?

One can respond with the reasons Spinoza himself sets forth in a letter to Oldenburg in 1665: theologians harbor strong prejudices against those who intend to apply their intellect to philosophical research, and therefore, anyone who freely expresses his thoughts appears to them and to public opinion to be inherently atheistic and contemptuous of the "petulant" instructions of preachers. To many readers, Spinoza's text, in addition to being excessively liberal, appears tainted by pantheism, starting with the biblical quotation from 1 John 4:15, reproduced on the title page of the work: that knowledge that "we are in God and God is in us" seems, precisely, to seek to identify the two poles of every religious experience, without clearly distinguishing between us and God, or rather, it seems to affirm that we and all things are in God, obviously to the detriment of transcendence.

Moreover, the opening lines of the preface to the *Tractatus* explain that the psychological, and in some respects ontological, genesis of every superstition is linked to situations of fear and adversity, which drive human beings to resort to phantoms and delusions.

In turning to the specific universal Christian revelation, to verify whether its doctrines differ from those attainable through natural light, Spinoza arrives at a substantial concordance between revealed truths and truths attained through natural means.

Maintaining that philosophical freedom poses no threat to authentic religiosity or to peace within the public community, he argues that one could freely engage in a rereading of the sacred book of the Judeo-Christian tradition with a view to highlighting the fundamental agreement existing between authentic biblical teaching and natural reason. Spinoza's approach, at first glance positive and functional to the valorization of religion in the face of reason, becomes, however, essentially "deconstructive," as it ends up reducing the scope of the biblical text to a rationally shareable common denominator, that is, to a restricted set of dogmas, deemed fully compatible with the demands of emancipated modern reason.

[4] Spinoza B., *Ethics*, Princeton Univ Press, 2020; see also Spinoza B., *Correspondence: The Letters*, Literary Licensing, LLC, 2013.

In any case, it can be observed that, in the *Ethics*, beyond the ambiguity of the notion of God, sometimes described as a Person and sometimes as Nature, beyond the geometric form adopted, Spinoza proposes a God who is exclusively "philosophical". In other words, Spinoza's *Deus "sive" Natura* is positioned precisely at the borderline position where trust in God weakens and the critical transition toward the recognition of a Godless universe is accomplished, one that exists without any purpose and therefore without any "meaning" or "value".

Upon closer inspection, Spinoza's "originality" compared to contemporary philosophy could also represent the beginning of what Cornelio Fabro mercilessly called constructivist atheism, even describing it as the fundamental orientation of modern civilization.[5]

2. Further divergences between philosophy and religion

Locke, too—who moved within the framework of a certain pacification between the extremes evident among Catholic and Reformed groups, starting with *A Letter Concerning Toleration*[6]—insisted on a certain "rationalistic" interpretation of the Bible and the Christian faith.

From his earliest writings, Locke's perspective was predominantly politico-religious, perfectly in tune with the theological debate of the second half of the 17th century in Holland and England. He contributed to the implementation of the Reformed principle of *sola scriptura*, sometimes proposing the criterion of textual harmony, sometimes that of the genuine intentions of the biblical author.

Prioritizing the Gospel of John, Locke also conducts a rigorous exegesis of the Christological titles, affirming that the sole article of faith consists in belief in the messiahship of Christ, a tolerant and dialogical spirit, certainly not a promoter of sedition or a disturber of public peace. Regarding the problem of the relationship between religious and civil society, the philosopher becomes a theoretician of the principle of tolerance: the state must not concern itself with the salvation of the soul, therefore, no to Caesaropapism, since religion does not enter into the nature and purpose of a state. In turn, the church cannot constitute itself as a juridical and civil society, and therefore cannot employ coercive laws, but must allow free choice of faith and admit opinion in theology.

Hume's position is unique. Together with Locke, he is one of the great theorists of the concept of tolerance, within a framework of thought that posed the major objections to the metaphysical principle of causality and developed new laws of the intellect.

In *The Natural History of Religion*,[7] Hume reiterates the now common thesis that, in religion, one must always reject any superstitious, fanatical, and obscurantist influence. Almost anticipating Kant's hypothetical imperative, according to which one behaves well for the sake of the future reward of paradise, he points out that allowing oneself to be imbued with such an ethical approach could lead to immoral outcomes, as it would lead one to believe that merely performing certain outward acts is sufficient to obtain future good.

Regarding the historical-psychological genesis of religious attitudes, Hume believes, like Spinoza, that they arise from the feeling of fear that humans have before nature and the unfathomable mystery of faith. *Timor fecit deos*, in short, as the classical Epicureans explained. But fear, taken to the extreme, becomes terror, which risks further sinking into superstition and obscurantism. There is no need for rational arguments or proofs of God's existence, either a priori or a posteriori.

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[5] Fabro C., *Introduzione all'ateismo moderno*, 2 voll., Studium, Roma 1969.

[6] Locke J., *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.

[7] Hume D., *The Natural History of Religion*, Zinc Read, 2023.

In this context, we can better understand some of the ideas of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), sometimes too hastily labeled a "rationalist." *The Essays on Theodicy*[8] address a theme that, still today, resurfaces even in those areas of contemporary theology that had hastily dismissed Leibniz's very serious question about the origin of evil and its consistency in a world described as brought into being by an Absolute who, by definition, should be good and, consequently, desire the good of its products.

As far as theodicy is concerned, this is not so much a typically modern issue, as throughout history questions have been raised about the compatibility between a God, supposedly good, and the effects of pain and suffering observed in the creation he himself willed. Modern, however, and truly Leibnizian, is the theoretical solution that, almost definitively developing a "science of the doctrine of God's justice," leverages the experience of evil and suffering observed in this world. This is observed not to conclude that God does not exist, but rather with the stated aim of demonstrating that theistic faith endures, despite evil and suffering, and that God cannot be held responsible in any way, despite the presence of evil.

Although thinkers such as Voltaire and Whitehead have dismissed Leibniz's solution as ridiculous or an imprudent artifice, attempting to save face for the Creator and the theology of the time, although Kant himself, after having previously adhered to Leibnizian theses, starting from the 1791 essay *On the Failure of All Attempted Philosophical Theodicies*[9] judged Leibniz's solution to be a miserable subterfuge and a petty pun, it is not absurd to see in the logical-speculative demands of theodicy a possible antidote, even in the era of God's orphanhood and the world's disenchantment.

And so Leibniz's Theodicy, especially through its popularization or, as Hegel calls it, its trivialization by that "pedantic barbarism or barbaric pedantry" that is philosophy and, in particular, Wolff's *Theologia naturalis*, overflows in the production of countless treatises and manuals, informing the very organization of theological studies, as well as philosophical-religious ones, even overcoming the Kantian prohibition on pursuing it as doctrinal theodicy, while admitting it within the realm of the practical use of reason as a justification of God's justice, immediately exhibited by our reason.

In fact, from his devout and markedly scholastic beginnings, Leibniz never conceived God as a "living God," nor even as a "sovereign I," a "personal Subject," but rather as a lofty scientific abstraction, a complex mathematical function, which no finite mind would be capable of expressing, but which, aside from an infinite difference in degree, would essentially not be too different from mathematical functions. Over time, Leibniz demonstrated undeniable progress in his "system" of theodicy, to the point of becoming capable of conceiving God as a "skilled mechanic," an "excellent geometer," a "good architect," a wise monarch, an organizer and legislator, a restorer of moral order, even more than a preserver of the system of cosmic harmony.

However, the God Leibniz ultimately exhibits is neither the glorious God of much of Western philosophy, nor the Christian God, but rather the calculating God of a refined, yet always manageable, art of combinatorial science, a God of ice. Creating, by incessant flashes of lightning, moment by moment, a world entirely composed of splendid and solitary monads, this God, himself a supreme monad, could never escape the obligation of the best. If He is truly good and wise, Leibniz asserts against Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), God is always obliged to infallibly choose the best among the infinite possible combinations.

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[8] Leibniz G.W., *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil,* Open Court Publishing Company, 1988.

[9] Kant I., *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in Id., *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: And Other Writings*, ed. by A. Wood - G. di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 15-30.

3. Kant's contributions

Kant's position is undoubtedly of great interest. Almost as if answering the third fundamental question of his first Critique (what can I hope for?), in his work *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*,[10] Kant also conducts his own analytical investigation of the typical themes of the Christian religion (such as evil, freedom, the church and its dogmas...), essentially acknowledging a certain rationality in revealed religion, thus not assuming a preconceived notion of irrationality towards religion. Indeed, while bringing revealed religion back within the confines of reason alone, Kant believes that faith, in its essence, remains rational—that is, perfectly corresponding, in its structure, to what pure reason would be capable of developing, and can therefore allow human beings to develop some sort of answer to the same arduous, and otherwise insoluble, question of evil.

Indeed, if understood as a radical sin that corrupts the foundations of every principle, evil can give rise—*ex parte hominis*—to conversion, understood here as the indefinite progress of human beings toward good, even if, *ex parte Dei*, man can continue to be considered as someone converted to good by divine grace. From this perspective, Jesus Christ is primarily seen as "the Teacher of the Gospels," that is, he represents the archetype of moral intention in all its purity, a being to be imitated as a prototype of the human condition, destined for progress and the overcoming of radical evil on the arduous and long journey toward ethical duty. (p. 174) All this is well known.

3.1. Philosophy of religion as a philosophy of revelation

Nevertheless, it has not always been appropriately observed that Kantian reflection reveals a significant twist, shifting the speculative focus from the theme of reason to the all-important theme of revelation.[11]

As is well known, "our reason is incapable of forming the concept of a self-sufficient Being who can sacrifice something of His beatitude and strip Himself of what He possesses," so much less could it form the concept—typical of Judeo-Christian revelation—of a Being capable of revealing Himself in the form of *kenosis*, or annihilation.

However, our reason cannot help but seek some explanation, which it cannot do without in its characteristic eagerness to know; an eagerness typical of those who possess wings to fly and intend to do so, even at the risk of escaping the atmosphere and burning up on impact with friction.

An investigation, however conducted, can never offer an expansion of cognition; however, by resorting to the so-called schematism of analogy, that is, by working on an example drawn from the sensible to grasp something of the supersensible, human reason is nevertheless able to achieve at least some plausible explanation. This, while not increasing knowledge, nevertheless constitutes a schema capable of making a concept accessible. From this schema, it cannot, of course, infer that the schema necessarily pertains to the object to be thought, yet it is nevertheless acquiring some knowledge through this schema. But, as Kant's argument progresses, the *quaestio de revelatione* is now taking on increasingly precise features, to the detriment of a *quaestio de religione*, from which the argument seemed to be aiming to emerge.

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[10] Kant I., *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, op. cit.

[11] Ferretti G., *Filosofia della religione come ermeneutica della rivelazione*, Morcelliana, Brescia [s.d.]; Filoramo G., *Filosofia della rivelazione*, in "Archivio di Filosofia" 62 (1994), Cedam, Padova; Forte B., *In ascolto dell'altro. Filosofia e rivelazione*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1995; Incardona N., *Filosofia e rivelazione: presupposti critici e fondamenti programmatici*, Palumbo, Palermo 1960; Jaspers K.–Zahrnt H., *Filosofia e fede nella rivelazione*, Queriniana, Brescia 1989; Possenti V., *Filosofia e rivelazione: un contributo al dibattito tra ragione e fede*, Città Nuova, Roma 1999; Colonnello P.–Giustiniani P., *Ragione e rivelazione*, Borla 2003.

Perhaps the truest and most radical question in Kant's writing is emerging. And it no longer seems to concern religion, but increasingly revelation: "Whether revelation is accidental or necessary and sufficient for the one true religion?" That is, whether for a true religion compatible with the chosen philosophical model to exist there must be a contact, a relationship between an Absolute and the human being, or whether, instead, such a possible connection—even if historically established in some cases—is to be considered merely accidental from the perspective of pure reason; or, again, whether in a general theory of religion, conducted in the light of reason alone, revelation must assume a substantial or accidental function, that is, it must necessarily exist, or it could both exist and not exist.

In theory, reason—all human reason—is capable of conceiving the concept of pure religion. In practice, reason—all human reason—can undertake a concrete process of rational analysis, examining, for example, a single revealed religion. Revelation, both in its general form of communication of noetic content by an Absolute and in its historical manifestations, encompasses faith; this, in turn, encompasses, as a narrower and more concentric sphere, pure rational religion, or the specific field of inquiry of critical philosophy.

The paradigm of concentric circles, which characterizes Kant's entire project from his youth, evokes the mathematical-geometric image of a set or subsets and expresses, from a methodological perspective, the correct relationship that must exist between the realm of philosophical inquiry and the sphere of religious phenomena. In turn, however, pure rational religion, implemented from the center of the geometric system, cannot fail to also involve a critical examination of the historical aspect of each revelation: this level, too, must be investigated by the philosopher to verify, this time on the historical-documentary and statutory level, to what extent what is proposed by historical religions, all based on temporal and circumscribed revelations of the Absolute, is shown to be coherent and consistent with the demands of pure rational religion itself.

Revelation, in Kant's philosophical-religious writings, is also understood as *supplementum*. This term does not so much indicate what "supplies" but rather "what is added," which perfects and completes, as revealed or supernatural religion, what human reason could and would already be able to achieve. Revelation *ex alto* integrates, with certain specific contents, the very distinct field of natural revelation, whose contents would otherwise be thinkable autonomously within the limits of simple human reason.

To better understand the attempt of this Kantian writing, it is important to remember that, in the last decade of the 18th century, there was a heightened discussion surrounding revelation theistically understood, that is, revelation as communication between an Absolute and human beings through events occurring in history and space.

Now, the same Kantian problem of radical evil could be explained differently, depending on one's approach from different scientific or disciplinary perspectives. A philosophical perspective must ask only what the rational origin of radical evil is, remaining within a rigorously pure context, at the central point of its own "epistemological-ethical circumference": within the sphere of revelation, in fact, there are concentric subspheres, namely faith and pure rational religion. A philosophical perspective must ask why we human beings sometimes, in our maxims, transgress the moral law.

Any agreement with the findings of exegetical research—the origin of evil being identified with the beginning of evil itself in the human race, not from a tendency but from a sin, a lie, or a transgression of the moral law perceived as a divine command—cannot but bring joy, as I observed. But the perspective remains strictly philosophical, and reason yields only to the authority of a "natural" revelation: the human subject is the sole author of moral good and evil. In the case of evil, however, it must be recognized that a sort of "lying" process is being activated within him, analogous to that which the Bible, through its figurative and visual method, ascribes to the temptation induced by the serpent. From the serpent's standpoint, the human being, instead of putting into action his natural tendency, freely and explicitly opts for a transgression with respect to the duty to follow the dictates of the law

4. Reflections on radical evil in our time

But the doctrine of radical evil has an even greater relevance, affecting not only the realm of religious theological discourse, but also the interpretation of the course of modern philosophy. The great problem of modern philosophy, that of freedom, cannot fail to bring with it that of evil. Now, in the "modern" two tendencies meet, or rather, clash in this regard: one that somehow tends to attenuate the sense of evil by seeking teleological, dialectical, and other justifications, and another that instead sees evil as scandalous and irreducibly unjustifiable. Kant, refusing to consider evil as a simple imperfection or limitation of human nature, held it to be unfathomable in its origin; it therefore leads to the abyss of mystery, opening us to disconcerting aspects of being. This very theory of radical evil, which so shocked Kant's contemporaries, may be the reason why his writings on the philosophy of religion are so timely.

For his part, a scholar who has long reconsidered these themes in our time, Paul Ricoeur, in a highly significant work, *Finitude et culpabilité,*[12] rethinking Kant and Leibniz's theory of the finiteness of creatures as the cause of moral evil, effectively emphasizes a key point: limitation as such is insufficient to approach the *limen* of moral evil. Not every limitation is the possibility of failure, but only the specific limitation that characterizes human reality, the limitation that arises from the disproportionate relationship between finitude and infinity. The specific limitation of human reality, Ricoeur observes, consists in not coinciding with itself. Nor is it useful to define limitation as a participation in nothingness, in non-being.

But let us pause for now to consider the intrinsic characteristic of human limitation, a limitation that merely makes evil possible. However, there is a leap from this possibility to the reality of evil, as Ricoeur himself has aptly highlighted: and here lies the enigma of guilt. How can we justify the transition from the possibility to the reality of evil? This is a crucial point in many of the many avenues of contemporary speculation.

In a distinctive reflection, characterized as the *ontology of freedom*,[13] a philosopher who has long developed this theme, Luigi Pareyson, argues that the intermediary or bridge between the possibility and the reality of evil lies in the exercise of human freedom. Pareyson's theses, which draw on an original reading of Heidegger and Schelling's later works, are well known. Here it is possible to only briefly recall them, given the problematic stimulus they can provide on the question of guilt and evil. According to Pareyson, speaking of human freedom entails first discerning the intrinsic reference to the original freedom, divine freedom, which makes the exercise of human freedom itself possible.

God, in fact, is the freedom that, with the very first act, affirmed itself by being able to deny itself, and thus proved positive and victorious over negation. But here Pareyson discerns a disturbing element: the shadow of evil in God, in the sense that precisely to assert himself as positivity and victory over evil, God had to know negation and experience the negative, transforming, in his creative activity, the static nothingness of the initial "non-being" into the "active nothingness" that is evil. It is therefore He who, in a certain sense, introduced it into the universe. But we must be careful with this particularly thorny issue: evil in God would appear only as a remote possibility, born already vanquished and devoid of any attempt to actualize itself. Evil, Pareyson observes, is like a past that was never present and an image that was never real.[14]

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[12] Ricoeur P., *Philosophie de la volonté*: Tome 2 : *Finitude et culpabilité*, Points, 2009.

[13] Pareyson L., *Ontologia della libertà*, Einaudi, Torino 2000.

[14] Ferretti G., (cur.), *La ragione e il male*. "Atti" del terzo Colloquio su filosofia e religione, Macerata, 8-10 May 1986, Marietti, Genova 1988; Id., (cur.), *Filosofia ed esperienza religiosa: a partire da Luigi Pareyson*. "Atti" del sesto Colloquio su filosofia e religione, Macerata, 7-9 Ottobre 1993, Università degli studi, Macerata 1995.

Yet, this inoperative trace can still constitute a danger not for God, who has overcome evil and negativity *ab aeterno*, but for humanity, which can give new life and vigor to the seed of negativity thanks to the freedom that is inherent in us.

If sin consists primarily in challenging divinity, in repeating Adam's mistake of wanting to be like God, in attempting to renew the same "divine origin", then "denial slips from man's hands and turns against him who dared to revive it." In this way, man makes real what previously lay dormant as a possibility. The way out that Pareyson suggests as a remedy for "this cosmotheandric tragedy, which epitomizes the history of freedom," is another matter; reflection on suffering, now recovered in a genuinely religious sense, is another matter: only in this way would suffering, in its relationship with guilt, lose its character of penalty and punishment, to manifest itself above all as "expiation and redemption," indeed as a "revelation of the ultimate meaning of things".

Let us now return to our fundamental questions: that is, the need to reexamine religious experience not in metaphysical, but in historical terms; to rethinking the relationship between transcendence and metaphysics; to the question of religion as a "hermeneutic of life"; to the problem of demythologization. Especially today, in the face of fundamentalisms cloaked in devout ideals, in the face of the language of war and nuclear danger, the old questions return, with a changed tone. They are interpellations that arise as a result of all-too-human human choices.

These are thorny questions and problems at all times, but they are particularly urgent today on the international stage, today when, alongside a relative sociological persistence of the sacred and religions, we are also witnessing a dangerous return of religious fundamentalisms in the name of a re-emerging exclusivity of truth, which is vaunted by this or that specific religious horizon over others. On this basis, any proposal for pluralism and any theory of dialogue seem impossible, especially if one starts from fundamentalist religious positions, which do not admit, alongside faith and sacred texts, any further mediation between believed faith and lived life. Precisely from the perspective of studying the conditions of possibility for a religion, we must, again and again, ask ourselves whether religious faiths, as they appear historically, are truly all the same, and, furthermore, whether they are irremediably united by an obsession with truth—a truth that is not biased, which would thus lead to intolerance, extremism, and closed-mindedness.

We therefore face a situation that is in many ways oxymoronic, and that represents a genuine challenge for the scholar of religious matters.

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