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## Islam in Slovakia in interreligious dialogue

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Jozef Jurko was ordained priest in 1973, awarded the Licentiate of Theology in 1997 and the Doctorate of Theology in 1999 at PAT Kraków. Since 2006, as a professor of Theology at Faculty of Theology in Košice of Catholic University in Ružomberok, he has been focusing on the Second Vatican Council and the Fundamental Theology. He wrote more than 300 scholarly and pastoral articles and publications, such as *Church in the Catechism of Catholic Church* (1997); *Synopses of the Second Vatican Council's Documents* (1998); *Second Vatican Council and Slovakia* (1999); *Resonance of the Second Vatican Council's Ideas in Slovakia* (2007); *Reflection on Council Reforms Implementation in the Field of Liturgy in the Local Particular Church of Košice* (2009); *Spiritual Phenomenon Influencing the Present Times* (2010); *Overview of Religionistics* (2011); *Overview of Theology* (2012); *Overview of the Second Vatican Council* (2012).

Slovakia and the Czech Republic have common historical epochs, which are tied up by common intersections. The first significant contact with Muslims in the Czech and Slovak modern history was recorded after 1878, when demographical movement in Austria-Hungary, after the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, contributed to the settlement of Muslim immigrants in the territory of both our countries. In 1912 Austro-Hungarian Empire approved Islam as one of the religions allowed in all its territory – also in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. After Austria-Hungary collapse, Muslims from Balkan decided to set-

tle down permanently in the area which became Czechoslovakia. The movement of immigrants was not limited at all, after the new state was established. Considering profitable economic situation the movement of immigrants even increased. Furthermore in the 30s the first thought about founding Muslim community in Czechoslovakia appeared<sup>1</sup>.

On 8th November 1934 the group of Prague Muslims established Muslims religious community for Czechoslovakia with the head office in Prague. The first aim of this community was to build a mosque in Prague and win a recognition by the Czechoslovakian government. In the foundation time, between 1934 and 1935, this new community had circa 700 members. The Czechoslovakian Republic took over a lot from the legislation of the Habsburg Monarchy, but it was not possible to comply with the requirement of the Muslims. In the case of the official recognition of the Muslim community there was no change till the Nazis' occupation of the Czech.

In the time of Communism the number of Muslim inhabitants was increasing. In the 50s and 60s a lot of immigrants came to CSSR from Islamic countries. Most of them were students who were sent by communist or socialist parties from the Middle East. Many of these students decided to stay in Czechoslovakia after they had finished their university studies. One of the motives for doing so was a marriage to a person of Czechoslovakian nationality and starting a family afterwards. Muslim religious community, in which these students were comprised, existed only as an informal association trying to break through in the times of internal liberalization. The effort to register in 1968 was not successful. In the times of normalization in the 70s and 80s, it meant a kind of stagnation for Muslims in Czechoslovakia. Since the release of the situation in November 1989, the postulates have been put forward to think about how the Muslim community could be possibly restored.

In the new conditions Muslims begun to devote themselves to creating an organizational background. Muslim religious community was renewed in 1991, but it could not gain the legal status.

After November 1989 an Islamic foundation was established in Prague. It was a non-profit organization, which specialized in fulfilling the needs of Muslims - in particular from Prague and its close surroundings. In the beginning of the 90s the creation of Islamic founda-

<sup>1</sup> Comp. R. Čikeš, *Registrácia cirkvi a náboženských spoločností verzus náboženská sloboda*, [in:] M. Moravčíková, M. Lojda (eds.), *Islam v Európe*, Bratislava 2005, s. 15; M. Mendel, *Muslimove v českých zemích. (1934-1989)*, „Dingir“, č. 1, roč. 9, 2006, p. 16.

tion in Brno began, too. It was registered on 31st December 1998 and followed the previous work of the organization. The above-mentioned foundations administered and still administer the mosques and Islamic centres in Prague and Brno, the cities which are hometowns of the two biggest Islamic communities in the Czech Republic. The number of Muslims in these communities ranges approximately around 10 000<sup>2</sup>.

In Slovakia, the situation is much different from the situation in the Czech Republic. While in the Czech Republic the Muslim community has been registered in 2004 (as The Centre of Muslim communities), in Slovakia it has not happened yet. In Slovakia, no mosque or Islamic cultural centre has been built till now – Muslim community did not receive permission for their buildings in the area of the capital city. The Muslims themselves see mainly intentional obstructions of the city assembly behind this failure, and ideological prejudices, as well. Also the number of Muslim believers is substantially lower in Slovakia compared to neighbouring countries. The representatives of Islamic organizations in the Slovakian state claim that the number of Muslims in here reaches five thousands, with at least 150 converts from the group of the native Slovaks. The Muslim community in Slovakia consists mainly of foreign students (most of them associated in Association of Muslim students in Slovakia), but also businessmen, entrepreneurs and doctors who found the new home in Slovakia and started a family here after studies<sup>3</sup>.

Jozef Tvardzík put the following information about Islam on a Slovakian website:

“There are five thousands Muslims in Slovakia, although official numbers are substantially lower. In the census of 2011, nearly two thousand people proclaimed themselves Muslims. Most of them Slovak Muslims live in the vicinity of Bratislava, Košice, Nitra or Levice, and there live primarily representatives of the higher class – doctors, scientists, entrepreneurs and students, too. Numerous are also the families of cooks and waiters in Arabic ice-cream shops and kebab houses. Islam is not registered as religion in Slovakia. It means that Muslims cannot organize Muslim burials, and eventual weddings do not have formal legality having a standard different from official procedures. Moreover, Muslims are not entitled to get financial benefits

<sup>2</sup> Comp. K. Sládek i in., *Křesťanství a islám v liberálním státu: výzvy, tradice a současnost*, Červený Kostelec 2011, p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Comp. R. Čikeš, *Registrácia cirkvi a náboženských spoločnosti...*, op. cit., p. 16.

from the state, or the possibility to teach religion in schools, or to establish own schools. Because Muslim community does not have any mosques, their gatherings take place in rented houses or provisional chapels. In Bratislava, there are such gathering places in Ružinov at Peterska Street, in Petržalka, the oldest one is in the Passage behind Obchodna Street, which is also attended by the lawyer Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty<sup>4</sup>.

It is possible to inform about connections with Islam in wide spectrum of attitudes to this minority in Slovakia at different web sites<sup>5</sup>.

There was an institution for relationships between State and Churches in Slovakia, which was established by the Minister of Culture Ivan Hudec. Its activity started on 1st January 1997 and its first director became historian Peter Mulík, who held the position of director of church's department in the Ministry of Culture. After fourteen years of its work Minister Daniel Krajcer, who cancelled this institution in 2011 became its grave-digger. The Institution, which dealt with interdepartmental research of relationship between the state and the churches and had five employees, definitively ended. The Institute for relationships between State and Churches worked out many social demands and tasks, such as annual complex statistic of registered Churches; it was creating models of financing churches or organizing conferences. In addition it had rich publishing results. It was engaged in restitutions, financing churches, pastoral work of Gypsies, Islam, New Age, terrorism and fostered the relationship between religion and addictions<sup>6</sup>. On the basis of the works of this institution there are the following statements about the situation in Slovakia concerning the accomplished Islamism. They are contained in the following chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Comp. J. Tvardzík, *Ako žijú moslimovia na Slovensku?*, [www.etrend.sk/ekonomika/ako-ziju-moslimovia-na-slovensku-trend-sk-prinasa-tri-pribehy.html](http://www.etrend.sk/ekonomika/ako-ziju-moslimovia-na-slovensku-trend-sk-prinasa-tri-pribehy.html) [accessed: 3.02.2015].

<sup>5</sup> Comp. P. Kováč, *Rozhovor: Moslimovia na Slovensku – ich postoj k terorizmu a džihádu. Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty, spisovateľ, autor niekoľkých publikácií o islame*, [www.aktuality.sk/clanok/181353/rozhovor-moslimovia-na-slovensku-ich-postoj-k-terorizmu-a-dzihadu/](http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/181353/rozhovor-moslimovia-na-slovensku-ich-postoj-k-terorizmu-a-dzihadu/) [accessed: 3.02.2015]; *Moslimovia na Slovensku by chceli mať mešitu*, [http://debata.pravda.sk/debata/cz-A100811\\_200030\\_sk\\_domace\\_p09/prispevok\\_/275462/](http://debata.pravda.sk/debata/cz-A100811_200030_sk_domace_p09/prispevok_/275462/) [accessed: 3.02.2015]; M. Cenker, *Moslimskí migranti v Bratislave* (2009), [www.multikulti.sk/studie/moslimski\\_migranti\\_v\\_bratislave.html](http://www.multikulti.sk/studie/moslimski_migranti_v_bratislave.html) [accessed: 3.02.2015].

<sup>6</sup> Comp. M. Demko, *Téma: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkvi nečakane končí*, [www.postoy.sk/ustav\\_pre\\_vztah\\_statu\\_a\\_cirkvi\\_necakane\\_konci](http://www.postoy.sk/ustav_pre_vztah_statu_a_cirkvi_necakane_konci) [accessed: 31.01.2015].

### Situation of Muslims in Slovakia

Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty, a graduate of Faculty of the Law University in Bratislava, was involved in General Association of Muslim's Students in Bratislava and he was elected its chairman. Later, he left the Association and started to devote himself to publishing work about Islam; he translated 30th part of the Koran into the Slovak language (1997) and he wrote other publications concerning Islamic religion. At the present time he works in attorney office as trainee and is the chairman of the Association of Friends of the Islamic Literature in Slovakia.

In his paper contained in the collection of writings about Islam in Europe there is also a specific statement about Islam in Slovakia:

"Islamic culture is the name of the culture, for which the basis is the Islamic religion. To understand the attitude of Islamic culture towards the question of religion freedom and the question of human rights we have to understand the attitude of Islamic religion to that. If we want to know the attitude of Islamic religion to the stated questions we have to know what the Koran – the headstone of Islamic religion – tells about them"<sup>7</sup>.

The Koran talks about religious freedom very clearly and explicitly in the way that no one could be forced to follow whatever religion, including Islam or to follow them against his will. That means, the Koran commands Muslims to follow all what is sent down in it and not to change it for anything in the world, but at the same time the Koran gives them the duty to respect Christian and Jewish religions the truths of which were sent down by God in the past and under the stated principle respect the existence of other religions or people without denomination. The fact that someone respects somebody else does not have to mean that he agrees with him partially or completely in everything. In the case of human rights the attitude of the Koran is similar. What we call the fundamental human rights today is anchored in the Koran either directly, or indirectly. This concerns for example the right to life, the right for freedom, right for freedom in religion and so on. In the Koran we can even find the category of social and economic rights, such as the right to social welfare in the case of material deprivation and others.

The basis of Islamic religion is the Koran with which the protection of all stated rights and freedoms is associated, but in certain

<sup>7</sup> A. Al-sbenaty, *Moslimovia na Slovensku*, [in:] M. Moravčíková, M. Lojda (eds.), *Islam v Európe. In Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkvi*, Bratislava 2005, p. 28.

moral and ethic boundaries it should bring the profit to the humanity and prevent it from self-destruction. Instead of theological truths also the elements of scientific disciplines are included which were created during some historical periods. While the science connected to the interpretation of the Koran is one of the oldest sciences, the science about translation of the Koran into other languages can be regarded as one of the youngest ones. That means that in Islamic religion the real life of the society is reflected, too. Thus Islamic culture implies on the basis of the Islamic religion the elements of customs and habits of a certain given area or territory. This leads us to the statement that Islamic culture is diverse and it can differ from one area to another. The fundamental connection link for all different cultures remains the Islamic religion with its rules.

In the 20th century in Islamic countries, we could come across the efforts to reform the various aspects like national, cultural to religious aspects. Reform in religious matters focused more on political than other problems. In those times it became apparent that Muslims start to deal with the local customs and consider them as an important part of the religion. It was caused by the fact that classic and traditional way of life starts to decompose. Reforms were born in the period of national and liberation struggles of Muslim's nations under the colonial and occupational domination. That was perhaps the reason why the religious reforms focused more on the political side.

Nowadays we can find Muslims divided in three opinion groups in the Islamic world. There are following opinion groups:

**The first**, conservative: They are the Muslims accustomed to a certain lifestyle, which they saw in their ancestors. This way of life is for them a part of the religion and therefore they attempt not to lose this way of life, entirely or partially.

**The second group**, has already, more or less, been moving away from the Islamic religion. These are Muslims who succumbed to the influence of everyday life, habits and practices of the surrounding world and its cultures to the extent that they are far away from their religion. They left its spirit and retain only its characteristics, or they diverted from the religion altogether. They only try to keep fundamental religious practices, and so they consider their duty to God complete.

**The third**, the middle group: These are Muslims who are gu-

ided by moderation. They respect the principles of their religion and seek to live a life in conformity with it and its spirit. It is the most stable group, which is both involved in the social life of the country in which they live, and at the same time also tries to live a life according to the Islamic religion.

On the edge of the groups mentioned above stays however the fourth group that is most problematic. It is those Muslims, who believe that they have found the right way, differ from the principles and spirit of Islam appreciably. What is surprising is that this group does not consist only of conservative Muslims, but also of the representatives of the other groups of Muslims. Members of that group are, which is misinterpreted by many, looking for appropriate provisions in the Islamic religion to solve their problems, not recognizing other solutions, and they are prone to use violence.

Dividing Muslims into these groups can be applied, with some differences, to the Muslims living in Europe. The environment of European cultures makes it more expressive. Islamic culture, as we described it, is now changing. It can be observed as a result of openness to the outside world and expansion of satellite television stations, that there are certain changes in it. In Bratislava there is no official mosque or Islamic cultural centre, Bratislava is the only capital city in the EU having such a situation. There is an absence of social or cultural programs for Muslims, who live here. Maybe it is a mistake of the Muslims themselves in the first place.

The biggest problem is that every Muslim who comes to Slovakia brings along with him his own ideas about life and his own culture, which is different from the ideas of other Muslims. However, what connects them all is that suddenly they found themselves in a free environment, which they were not used to. Everybody quickly gets used to it, but with the freedom they lose certain discipline, to which they were accustomed, certain social and cultural ties. Previously, it was all taken care of, but now they must control and manage their own cases for themselves. They met with a democratic society, with democratic management rules, but most of incoming Muslims do not know how to use democracy in a real life. They are used to the fact that – until now – there has always been someone who decided on everything, without any effort or responsibility on their part.

I do not think there is a problem when two, three or more cultures mingle. I believe, rather, that constant contact between cultures and their mutual understanding has a positive effect on all cultures.



It is an enriching element for them and eliminates many of the problems and conflicts that could otherwise arise. It depends on the method and the means of communication. Firstly, we must understand one another, and this applies to both the Muslims and to non-Muslims, as well. We must understand the habits of one another; understand the different way of life and the different view of this life. Not to seek a dialogue with pre-established prejudices and barriers. When we understand one another and admit that there might be someone who thinks different than me, but we admit that we could live with him, teach him something and learn from him, then the dialogue starts by itself even without anybody initiating and continuing it<sup>8</sup>.

In addition, the Institute for relationships between State and the Churches issues yearbooks regularly, where there are couple of information about official events in various Churches and religious societies. This Institution has managed to issue the publication: "The life of Mohammad, Messenger of God"<sup>9</sup>. And organized also the conference entitled: "Islam in contexts"<sup>10</sup>. Also in printed form there is quite serious and valuable literature about Islam in the Slovak language<sup>11</sup>. In several regional publications there are many valuable statements about Islam and other religions. In the Czech language there are 320 publications<sup>12</sup> and more than a hundred were published in Slovak<sup>13</sup>.

### Suggestions for Interreligious Dialogue

After the unfortunate terrorist attacks in Paris earlier this year a joint statement of the Conference of Bishops was issued, also a statement of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities, which says:

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<sup>8</sup> A. Al-sbenaty, *Moslimovia na Slovensku*, [in:] M. Moravčíková, M. Lojda (eds.), *Islam v Európe...*, op. cit., p. 28-33.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Ishák, *Život Mohammada, posla Božieho*, Bratislava 2003.

<sup>10</sup> M. Moravčíková (ed.), *Islam v súvislostiach*, Bratislava 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Joint publication, *Islám*, Bratislava 2004; R. Spencer, *Islám bez závoje*, Praha 2006; W. Crofter, *Velká kniha Islámu*, Praha 2006; Z. Muller, *Islám a islamiismus*, Praha 2010.

<sup>12</sup> K. Sykora, *Literatura o islámu a islámském právu dostupná v České republice*, <http://karelsykora.blog.idnes.cz/c/446657/Literatura-o-islam-u-a-islam-skem-pravu-dostupna-v-Ceske-republice.html> [accessed: 3.02.2015].

<sup>13</sup> M. Eliade, *Dejiny náboženských predstáv a ideí*, t. 3, Bratislava 1997; M. Eliade, *O Islame*, Bratislava 2001; M. Watt, *Islám*, [in:] Ch. Partridge, *Vieery a vyznania*, Bratislava 2006, p. 356-393.

“On Wednesday January 7, 2015 in Paris a brutal terrorist attack took place against the offices of the French satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* and next against the kosher shop. We are saddened and shocked by these events... We want to believe that the eruption of jihadist terror in Europe, despite great pain and indignation which it caused, will not lead to collectivization of guilt in all Muslims and to new violence. We express our support to all the people longing for peace, without distinction of cultures and religions. We call all the people to mutual respect and tolerance of different religions and cultures and to respect our common fundamental moral and ethical values, to the sanctity of life and the dignity of every human being”<sup>14</sup>.

It is regarded as a very important statement in face of this painful event. In this document the Muslim leaders are not signed, because they do not have a legal representation in Slovakia. Nevertheless, we should get to know those with whom we want to lead the dialogue. Only if we know the historical, cultural, political, social and religious foundations, traditions, costumes and attitudes there will be a way to have esteem and respect towards the value systems of the others. In a dialogue, not only our own values and priorities should be promoted.

Interreligious dialogue should lead to forming atmosphere of peace among the nations, so that despite other religious beliefs there are grounds for peaceful coexistence, building unity, and not for separation or mutual fight.

Pope Benedict XVI constantly demands mutuality in relations between Muslims and Christians. On May 15th, 2006, during the audience granted to the members of the plenary session of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travellers, he said that with regard to the arrival of immigrants, inhabitants of countries with Muslim majority, in Europe, the Catholic Church realizes how important interreligious dialogue is. He identifies it as a part of the Church current service to the humanity.

Mutuality contains the relationship, which is based on mutual respect. It must take root in the heart and soul of man. Christians who opened their arms to immigrants of Islamic religion have justified expectations that Christians who immigrate to countries with a Muslim majority population, will meet with the acceptance and respect for their religious identity<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> *Spoločné vyhlásenie k teroristickým útokom v Paríži*, [www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20150111002](http://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20150111002) [accessed: 11.01.2015].

<sup>15</sup> Comp. F. Sočufka, *Výzva pre kresťana*, Trnava 2006, p. 109.

The task of the Church is to evangelize the whole world: peoples and cultures. This evangelizing task of the Church is a rich and complex activity. It covers various elements, such as life testimony to Christ, service to people, evangelization, catechesis, prayer life, apostolate and the interreligious dialogue. The explicit proclamation of Christ is a necessity and a priority in the evangelizing mission of the Church, as Paul VI said:

“You cannot speak about genuine evangelization if it does not proclaim also the name, doctrine, life and promise, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God” (EN 22).

Someone wrote that many religions teach that the things of this world do not have a lasting value, they will pass away. Religion teaches man to live a proper life and not to become the slave of things. It empowers a man to live according to the hierarchy of values and thus grow spiritually. What values can the believers of various religions learn to reach true harmony in life? I think these are the following values: God is the Creator of all people; all people are searching God; truth, goodness and spiritual beauty give more satisfaction than the possession of material goods, evil has to be overpowered by good; do not do to another man what you do not want the others do unto you; the goods of the land is for everyone, so those who have more, have a responsibility towards those who suffer a lack.

For us, Christians, the faith in God as our Father and in Jesus Christ as the only Salvatore of all humanity belongs to the fundamental values. We also believe in the only ultimate goal of every human being: to see God in heaven as he is<sup>16</sup>.

In the book “Christianity and the World Religions” Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote about the basis of Christian and universal understanding the following words:

“God, who is revealed in Jesus Christ, is the merciful Father of everybody who seeks him with a sincere heart. May they belong to any religion, God’s Son out of love for God and the humanity suffered and died to atone for the sins of everybody and in the resurrection he opened them the way to the eternal life”<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Comp. F. Arinze, *Medzináboženský dialóg*, [in:] *Svedectvo viery*, t. 1, Ontario 1991, p. 335-339.

<sup>17</sup> Comp. A. Riccardi, *Buh nemá strach*, Kostelní Vydří 2006, p. 76-77.

### Finding ways to dialogue with Muslims

Along the Mediterranean coast Christians have made encounters with other religious worlds. There is an old story, going back to the time when Islam conquered the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. And by this coexistence – as noted by Alain Ducellier – occurred meetings, discussions, and sometimes spiritual encounters, too. But in the 19th and 20th centuries these encounters ceased, and despite many offenses on both sides, we still live next to each other. The Second Vatican Council brought something very new in the attitude to other religions and worlds. Islam is for the Christian consciousness something mysterious, if not outlandish. This is a complex and hard problem that many try to avoid<sup>18</sup>. To meet with a woman dressed according to the Islamic law on the street is possible more and more, and also the events in Sydney, Peshawar and Paris are getting to be reported and commented upon more frequently. It causes reactions in everyone and therefore it is appropriate to make some reflections about Muslims.

Unlike the Bible, which is the work of many people, the Koran is the work of one man. Although this conviction is not quite correct... Mohamed just heard the message of the "spirit" sometimes identified with the angel Gabriel, who had brought the message of Allah for future Muslim communities. Tradition underlines that Muhammad was illiterate, so he was not dependent on some literary model.

What he remembered, was later recorded. Already in this respect is the Koran substantially different from the Bible, where people who wrote it, were influenced by God, and there are still people who do the writing and bringing it into their culture, history and traditions. Thus the Bible has its divine, but also a human side. That is why it is still re-interpreted with help of literary and historical criticism. In contrast, the Koran cannot be interpreted, because as it is formulated, it is already an interpretation. It has to be preached and received. The human participation in the creation of the Koran is negated. The author refers to Milan Balaban, who wrote it in the paper: "The Bible and the Koran" in *Kostnické jiskry* 1/2006. Muslims believe that Muhammad was only the mediator and therefore, if one reads the Koran, it is like Allah is talking to him alone. The Koran does not offer the same space for interpretation as the Bible does<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Comp. *ibid.*, p. 86-87.

<sup>19</sup> Comp. D. Novak, *Bible, Korán a násilí*, <http://david-novak.blogspot.sk/2014/12/bible-koran-nasili.html> [accessed: 16.12.2014].

In the context of the dialogue there are many misunderstandings. There is a real dialogue between religious people, not between religions. Problems arise when the two religious groups get into contact in a land of a different culture. In the case of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad it was a religious insult that Muslims perceive as a blasphemy. The violence that followed was not a religious reaction, but cultural. Violence, however, was used by groups of people who had their own interests and driving force behind their protests.

The dialogue is not a substitute for mission. Christ did not tell his disciples: "Go and make the dialogue", but "Go and preach the gospel to every creature" (com. Mk 16,14). It will remain a responsible role and duty of every baptized Christian. The dialogue is only the most adequate means of our times, by which the Gospel is proclaimed and in which - in the first place - it should be respected by other people in spite of their personal beliefs. If we talk about dialogue with believers of other religions, we mean the inner attitude that dominates and takes into account the situation of the other part of the dialogue, to respect the time of the truth to mature and its adaptation by the other side. Truth must never be imposed, or commanded. It needs to be discovered. It is not about false respect or relativization of the truth at all.

In some Nations of the old Continent the signs of the fatigue of the divine truth can be observed. The truth appears to them as an unattainable goal. The consequence of this is that some of these nations set out on a journey to find the substitution of eternal God's truth. They have become pilgrims of existentiality and metaphysics, nations without identity. Mohammedan's world - on the contrary - has no identity problem. In this context, in fact, there cannot be any dialogue: a society that has renounced its own national and historical identity on the one hand, and Muslim immigrants, infiltrating fundamentalist elements, who reject anything that is not Islam, on the other. This is not the dialogue, but a cultural suicide.

Romano Guardini argued in the tragic period between the two World Wars in Germany that the most urgent task of the young generation of Germans is an education to the truth. This task appears today as paramount.

The Gospel incarnated in a particular culture, is capable today - as it was in the past - to heal, elevate and fertilize all the cultural expressions of man. Jesus Christ is the definitive answer to the big question of man. "The mystery of man truly becomes clear only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word" (GS 22). In the core of each culture we can find the same approach to the mystery of God and man. There is no culture

that would not be religious in its substance. The only exception to this general principle seems to be the current culture of the western world<sup>20</sup>.

### **The call for dialogue with Muslims**

Taking the courage for a dialogue between Christians and Muslims can already be found in numerous documents of main religious leaders, to whom we can also add some quite new initiatives: Joint Declaration, signed by Francis Pope and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. on November 30, 2014 at the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Fanar (Istanbul).

Big challenges, that the current world is facing, ask for solidarity of all the people of good will. Therefore, we also recognize the importance of developing a constructive dialogue with Islam, based on mutual respect and friendship. Muslims and Christians, inspired by common values and fostered by a genuine fraternal affection, are called to join their forces to work in the interests of justice, peace and respect for the dignity and rights of every person, especially in those areas where they coexisted for millennia peacefully, but now tragically suffer horrors of wars together. Moreover, as Christian leaders, we are called – as all other religious leaders – to follow and strengthen interreligious dialogue and make every effort to build a culture of peace and solidarity between people and nations... We raise our fervent prayer that God may grant the gift of peace, love and unity to the whole human family. "The Lord Himself will give you a lasting peace in every respect. The Lord be with you all!" (2Thes 3,16). Fanar 30 November, 2014<sup>21</sup>.

Peter Berger pointed out that the moral law is there somewhere above us, and illustrates it in the following story: James Morris in his excellent history of the British Empire recalls the story of Charles Napier, who among his notable acts in 1843 conquered Sind and brought there ordinary minimalist rules typical for British way of government. One of its major provisions was the prohibition of Satí. The British tolerated, in principle, many indigenous peculiarities, traditions and customs, but did not intend to suffer the burning of the widows. Sand's Brahmans defended Satí and declared that it was an ancient custom.

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<sup>20</sup> Comp. F. Sočufka, *Výzva pre kresťana...*, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> Text zverejnený na internetovej stránke [http://sk.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/30/spolo%C4%8Dn%C3%A9\\_prehl%C3%A1senie\\_p%C3%A1pe%C5%BEa\\_franti%C5%A1ka\\_a\\_patriarchu\\_bartolomeja/slo-838792](http://sk.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/30/spolo%C4%8Dn%C3%A9_prehl%C3%A1senie_p%C3%A1pe%C5%BEa_franti%C5%A1ka_a_patriarchu_bartolomeja/slo-838792) Vatikánskeho rozhlasu [accessed: 16.12.2014].

Napier's witty answer was wonderfully simple: Even my nation has one habit. When men are burning woman alive, we hang them. So let's do everything that our national habits command us to do!<sup>22</sup> Although it sounded from the position of power and strength, this warning has brought consequences that stopped burning of widows when their man died. It is necessary to seek a consensus that is acceptable in the defence of life.

### Obstacles in the dialogue with Muslims

The dialogue with Islam has its obstacles. They are shown in the reactions of the Muslim world to the speech of Pope Benedict XVI, who spoke at the University in Regensburg on September 12, 2006, during his pastoral visit to Germany.

Benedict XVI devoted his speech to theological and philosophical reflections on the relationship between intellect and faith. In the Muslim world, the passage of speech in which he quoted a fragment from the book published by Professor Theodor Khoury, caused unexpected violent reactions. They came from the dialogue that in the end of the 14th century was led by the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologos with one learned Persian about the Christianity and Islam. In an interview, the mentioned emperor also raised the topic of "jihad" – a holy war, which – for the Muslims – is an extremely touchy issue. Many Islamic leaders openly protested against the speech of Benedict XVI. In many cases they formed their opinion only on the basis of the information provided by the Muslim media. Turkish "Mufti" Ali Bardakoglu, regarded as the highest official authority, admitted that had not even read the complete speech of Benedict XVI. To the whole affair, Benedict XVI took the following stand:

"I would like to express a deep regret at the reactions which occurred in some countries to the specific passages of my speech at the University of Regensburg, which were considered as insults of the feelings of Muslims. They were, in fact, a quotation from a medieval text, which in no way reflects my personal thoughts"<sup>23</sup>.

American Magazine *Islamica* on October 14, 2006 published an open letter of 38 Islamic leaders who wrote it in connection with the Muslim reactions to the September speech of Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg. In the declaration it is stated that Islamic authorities accept the Holy Father's assurance that a controversial part of

<sup>22</sup> Comp. M.O. Vácha, *Místo, na němž stojíš, je posvátná země*, Brno 2008, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Comp. F. Sočufka, *Výzva pre kresťana...*, op. cit., p. 113-114.

the speech, which he quoted, does not reflect his personal opinion. The signatories of the letter include the Grand Mufti of Istanbul, Russia, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Uzbekistan and Oman, Ayatollah Muhammad Taškiri from Iran, a religious adviser of Jordan's King Abdullah II and many others. In the five-page letter they wrote that Christians and Muslims make up more than half of the world's population and therefore they share responsibility for keeping peace. Thirty-eight signatories appreciated that Benedict XVI expressed the absolute and profound respect for all Muslims at the September meeting with ambassadors of countries with a predominantly Muslim population<sup>24</sup>.

Islam is increasingly present in Europe due to strong immigration from Asian and African countries. The author of the publication *Christians coming from Islam* Giorgio Paolucci was looking two years patiently for Christians, converts from Islam, and persuading them to give a personal testimony about their way to Christ. Their real names he did not publish, of course. An introduction to the book was written by the Egyptian Jesuit Samir Khalil Samir, Professor of history, Arabic culture and Islam at the University of Saint Joseph in Beirut. According to the studies of father Samir, apostasy, in recent decades, has become an essential tool in dealing with political opponents. It is enough to accuse the enemy of apostasy, and then follow the execution of the sentence. It is the technique of how to fight the opposition.

It is difficult to find out the number of converts from Islam to Christianity. There are hundreds coming from North Africa, the Middle East and Asia. At the beginning of their conversion there were questions that are born in every human heart: the meaning of life, happiness, love, friendship, and what follows after death. Many of the converts from Islam admitted that neither in the Koran nor in the religious education did they find a satisfactory answer. Most of them were affected by the appealing personal testimony of people, Christians with whom they lived: work colleagues, neighbours, teachers, etc., and also reading the Gospel, in particular the passages about forgiveness. One convert from Algeria stated in his testimony that "Christians in Italy own wardrobe which contains a treasure, a treasure that belongs to everybody". He reproaches them that they

"[...] hold it behind closed doors. You have a duty to proclaim Jesus to all the immigrants coming into your homeland. You lack courage and you are ashamed of Christ"<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Comp. Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>25</sup> F. Sočufka, *Výzva pre kresťana*, op. cit., p. 119.



At the end, he said that we even cannot imagine how Christ radically changed our life. The Italian Bishops' Conference published the document *Catechists coming from Islam* prepared by Don Walther Ruspi<sup>26</sup>.

### Conclusion

The whole issue of Islam in Slovakia is noticed only by a few people, because there are other accompanying problems. If they are not approved as a religion by fulfilling the requirements of more than two thousands members there is no place to search for any official communication. More and more women can be seen dressed in clothes that are in the visual way considered to be a Muslim dress. If we want to have an appropriate and adequate respect for these people, then it is necessary to know their culture, traditions, customs, and social conditions to be responsibly ready to accept them. It is not appropriate to rely merely on the information from the mass media, for these are looking only for extreme cases of tabloid tuning. It is not a reliable source. It is better to ask questions and find actual answers, as expressed by a present expert of ours:

"Our education teaches us to apply the rigor, but we neglect the other side of knowledge, and this is the learning itself, discovering mysteries, fleeting inspiration, muse openness, gentleness and tenderness of spirit. These are all qualities at least as important as a rigorous scientific method itself. There are no discoveries without an inspiration and enthusiasm for the cause. Because, as Trinity in the movie Matrix says: It's just questioning what drives us forward"<sup>27</sup>.

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JOZEF JURKO

### Islam in Slovakia in interreligious dialogue

#### Abstract

The Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1912 recognized Islam as one of the allowed religions on its territory – and thus also in the area of Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic the Muslim

<sup>26</sup> Comp. *ibid.*, p. 117-119.

<sup>27</sup> T. Sedláček, *Ekonomía dobra a zla*, Praha 2009, p. 330-331.

religious community was recognized in 2004. In Slovakia it has not happened yet. The Koran orders Muslims to follow everything what is given in it and not to change it for anything else in the world, but simultaneously with this orders them to respect Christians, Jewish and other religions in the world. Especially the Christians have to follow the demand to spread Christ and the Gospel everywhere they are, also to numerous groups of immigrants from Muslim countries. The world actually stays before big challenges how to develop constructive ecumenical dialogue with Islam. Muslims and Christians, inspired by common values, are called to work together in the interest of justice, peace and respect of dignity and rights of every man.

**Keywords:** Islam, Islamic culture, dialogue, religion, Muslims, Christianity.

JOZEF JURKO

### **Islam na Słowacji w dialogu międzyreligijnym**

#### **Streszczenie**

W 1912 roku Cesarstwo Austro-Węgierskie uznało islam za jedną z dozwolonych religii na swym terenie, a więc także na terenie Słowacji i Republiki Czeskiej. W Republice Czeskiej muzułmańska wspólnota wyznaniowa została uznana w 2004 roku. W Słowacji to jeszcze nie nastąpiło. Koran nakazuje muzułmanom kierować się wszystkim, co jest w nim podane i nie zamieniać tego na nic, co jest w świecie, lecz jednocześnie nakazuje też darzyć szacunkiem chrześcijan, Żydów i inne religie świata. Szczególnie zaś chrześcijanie mają spełniać żądanie głoszenia wiary w Chrystusa i Ewangelię wszędzie tam, gdzie się znajdują, także licznym grupom imigrantów z krajów muzułmańskich. Świat stoi w obliczu wielkiego wyzwania, jak rozwijać ekumeniczny dialog z islamem. Muzułmanie i chrześcijanie, pod wpływem wspólnych wartości, wezwani są do współpracy w interesie sprawiedliwości, pokoju i szacunku wobec godności i praw każdego człowieka.

**Słowa kluczowe:** islam, kultura islamska, dialog, religia, muzułmanie, chrześcijaństwo.

JOZEF JURKO

**Islam na Slovensku v medzináboženskom dialógu****Abstrakt**

V roku 1912 Rakúsko-uhorská monarchia uznala islam, ako jedno z náboženstiev, povolených na celom svojom území – teda aj na území Česka a Slovenska. V Česku bola moslimská náboženská obec registrovaná až v roku 2004. Na Slovensku sa tak doteraz nestalo. Korán moslimom prikazuje, aby nasledovali to, čo je v ňom zoslané a aby to nevymenili za nič iné na svete, ale zároveň im ukladá povinnosť rešpektovať kresťanské, židovské náboženstvo a iné náboženstvá sveta. Práve od kresťanov sa žiada, aby hlásali Krista a evanjelium všade kde sa nachádzajú a aj početným prisťahovalcom z moslimských krajín. Svet aktuálne stojí pred veľkými výzvami ako rozvíjať konštruktívny ekumenický dialóg s islamom. Moslimovia a kresťania, inšpirovaní spoločnými hodnotami sú povolaní spoločnými silami pracovať v záujme spravodlivosti, mieru a rešpektovania dôstojnosti a práv každého človeka.

**Kľúčové slová:** islam, islamská kultúra, dialóg, náboženstvo, moslimovia, kresťanstvo.