



# On Interreligious Dialogue

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## ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE<sup>1</sup>

Thom SICKING s.j.

The context of the Middle East today is marked by the awful reality of war and violence. Dialogue seems to be the only way out of this terrible situation. At the same time, peaceful dialogue without military pressure appears as a nonrealistic proposition. Can war be eliminated just by talking? Is this not wishful thinking, without taking reality seriously? Is dialogue between people and nations possible, as long as they hate each other passionately? To discover where and when dialogue is possible, and what are its limits and its possibilities, it is necessary to distinguish between three types of dialogue:

The dialogue between religions  
The dialogue between theologians  
The dialogue of life.

### DIALOGUE BETWEEN RELIGIONS

#### *Dialogue between religions or dialogue between religious traditions*

It is more and more common to talk about “interreligious dialogue”, without specifying what is meant by “religion”. To make a comparison between religions, it is not sufficient to simply compare their theology, because the theology of different religions covers just a part of the reality.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an elaboration of a communication given at the University of Paderborn in the frame of the “Conference on Methods and Criteria for Comparative Theology”, 8-10<sup>th</sup> August 2014. Comparative Theology does not concern just a discussion between Christian theologians in the frame of the ecumenical movement but also a way of comparing the theologies of different religions.

A religion is much more than a theological reflection. The concept of religion itself is not clear for everybody: there are so many possible definitions. Talking about a comparison between religions supposes an agreement on such a definition. Most of the time, we compare religious traditions, not religions. Therefore, I propose to distinguish between three levels. Then we can see on which level interreligious dialogue can situate itself.

- a) *Religious traditions.* Inside the Christian religion, we find Catholics, Protestants, Copts, Maronites, Greek Orthodox and many others. They are all Christian. None of them can identify themselves simply as being “The Christian religion”. They all participate in the same tradition, with more or less important varieties. No institution can comprehend all these varieties. There are several Christian institutions, several Churches, not just one. The same reflection can be made about other religions. Most religions consider themselves as “universal”, but every religion is confronted with the cultural, national, geographical and historical differences, so that each big religion has several divisions and locations. Each one takes root in a common tradition. Therefore, I prefer to speak about religious traditions. Every tradition has several branches. There can be gatherings such as the “World Council of Churches”, or the “Organization of Islamic Cooperation”, but they are just gatherings of different partners. No institution or organization can represent the entire Christian or Islamic tradition.
- b) The second level is that of a *religious institution*. Several components constitute an institution. There are laws, there is an administration, and there is a creed with some definitions saying who is a believer and who is not. There are conditions to become a member or measures taken against someone who doesn’t follow the prescriptions, or an authority who can say what is true according to the tradition or not, etc. Inside the same religious tradition, you will find several religious institutions. All of them participate in that common tradition. However, none of them can claim to be its only true representative excluding all the others.

Inside a religious institution, there can be several sub-institutions. For example, inside the institution of the Catholic Church there are several Catholic Churches: Latin, Maronite, Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, etc. Each one is a complete religious institution, with their authorities, their laws, and their identity. They all belong to a bigger institution that unites them, but leaves sufficient autonomy to everyone to become a rather independent religious institution. Thus, the Catholic Church is a very big institution with a complicated organization. Nevertheless, it is still an institution and not just a religious gathering. She is big, but cannot consider herself as the only representative of the Christian tradition. There is a head; there is an administration, etc.

The Orthodox Church has a structure of several Patriarchates, or “autocephalic” churches less centralized than the Roman Catholic Church. Each one has a large autonomy but they consider themselves as being members of one Church.

Islam is organized in a different way. There was a period when the Sultan considered himself as the head of all Muslims. But that institution of sultanate doesn’t exist anymore. The Muslims are today organized in their respective countries. In most Muslim countries, the religion has an important influence on the socio-political organization and the legislations. Inside every religious tradition, we can observe a large variety of institutions giving an existence to the religious tradition in special cultural contexts.

- c) On the third level, I would like to speak of “*religiosity*”: bits and pieces of religion. Some rituals, behaviors or devotions exist on their own, without a clear relation to a religious institution. In different forms of syncretism, one can find such “bits and pieces”. They can also be found in popular devotions, which are not always related to an officially recognized form of a particular religious institution, but gather, on several occasions, the believers of different religious denominations<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See: *Rituels religieux entre partage et cloisonnement*. Colloque organized by the CEDIFR in February 2012 and edited in the “*Annales de sociologie et d’anthropologie*”, volume 23 – année 2012, Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, Université Saint-Joseph, Beyrouth.

It seems important to distinguish clearly between these three levels when we talk about the comparison between religions. It is possible to talk about a comparison between religious traditions, to make a comparison between religious books, between rituals, etc. By comparing religious institutions and not religions as a whole, we make comparisons between specific expressions of religions. And even inside religious institutions, a big variety can appear, so that we have to indicate on which institution we focus ourselves, with the limits of time (a period in history) and place.

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY INSIDE THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION:  
ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS

*Dialogue between Churches*

Before entering the subject of interreligious dialogue in the region of the Near East, it is useful to start with the theological dialogue between Christians in this region. In Lebanon, there are twelve Christian denominations in five cultural traditions: The Syriac, Greek, Armenian, Coptic and Western tradition (Latin and Protestant). Inside these traditions, the Catholic Oriental churches proclaim their unity with Rome, while the other churches of different orthodox denominations do not recognize the authority of the Pope. The formation of all these denominations is a long and complicated history. Without going back to the origin, let us consider the reality of our days. In the recent past, several agreements between the different orthodox traditions and Rome, and sometimes between different orthodox churches have been realized. The traditional nominations of Monophysites, Nestorians and Jacobites are abandoned as names given by theologians hostile to these traditions. This abandoning of names frequently used in western theology is significant: it is a sign of respect for these traditions for their identity and for their theology.

The texts of these agreements are all written with the same scheme saying: “every one of us tried to express the same truth with different expressions<sup>3</sup>”. In this way, every Church can stick to its own traditional

<sup>3</sup> A good illustration can be found in HOFRIKTER, Peter / MARTE, Johann (ed): *Documents on Unity in Faith between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church*, Tyrolia Verlag, Innsbruck-Wien, 2013.

formulations. At the same time, they recognize that they have a common faith. Nowadays a clear distinction between the formulation of the truth and the truth itself is accepted. These Churches and their theologians became more conscious that it was and always is difficult to translate Greek philosophical terms in Syriac and that was one of the reasons of misunderstanding each other. They realized also that the different theological expressions can never be assimilated as being the truth in itself: they are always an approximation of something that surpasses human understanding. By this process, there came more and more room for diversity. It is this diversity in itself that makes dialogue possible and interesting. Had something like comparative theology been possible in the past, the struggles about dogmatic formulations of the truth could have been avoided. The progress in more recent theology is the fruit of that kind of comparative theology. But this progress is not sufficient to eliminate the division between the Churches. Many other factors are responsible for the division between Churches: the struggles around dogmatic formulations were also a way to make other tensions – political, cultural – visible. Today many agreements about the essential dogmatic issues have been found, but the division between the churches has not been resolved by these agreements, because the divisions were not only theological. Theological agreement is an important step to unity, but just a step. Many others should follow. This indicates the limits of comparative theology. It is very useful, but not sufficient. And this concerns just the inter-Christian dialogue.

In this kind of inter-Christian dialogue, the different participants try to represent a religious institution. They will speak in the name of the authority of their Church, but they do not succeed all the time. The conclusions of dialogue have to be accepted, by the different churches involved, not only by the authorities but also by the common believers. It is a slow and difficult process. But these exchanges are more than just a discussion between individual theologians. They try to speak in the name of their specific Church and the institution to which they belong. They can only talk in the name of their own institution or Church, when they are mandated by the competent authorities. A good example is the “Balamand” agreement, where the delegates of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church made a big progress in the discussion about “Uniatism”, accepting that trying to obtain the conversion of Greek Orthodox Christians to the Greek Catholic Church is not a valuable way to achieve union, but accepting at the same time the right of the Greek

Catholic Church to exist and to proclaim its unity with the Roman Catholic Church. Every kind of “proselytism” should be banned. But this agreement had to be implemented by the different Orthodox Churches, also the ones who did not send delegates to the meeting of Balamand. They did not, and in the catholic world, criticisms have also been formulated. So, even an official dialogue between mandated theologians and Church authorities is not sufficient in itself to reach agreement between the Churches.

If this is true for the dialogue between Christian theologians, it is also true for the dialogue between theologians of different religious traditions. The difference here is that between Christian theologians the purpose is to find a way to unity between the different churches and denominations. The interreligious dialogue does not have that goal. The partners know that there is a fundamental difference between them. Dialogue starts most of the time by the recognition of these differences: every partner respects the other and gives him the right to be and to stay different. The purpose of interreligious dialogue and comparative theology is not to bring about unity between the religions (or better: between religious traditions), but to understand each other and to learn something of the richness of the other tradition.

### *Dialogue between theologians*

Inside every religious tradition, we can find theologians of the same tradition, in discussion with each other. And, more and more frequently there are also theologians of several religious traditions meeting and listening to the other. No one can consider himself as a representative of his whole tradition, but he is related to his religious identity and therefore can enter in dialogue with other theologians of a different religious tradition. To simplify my position, I should say: comparison between religious traditions as a whole: no. Comparison between theologians: yes. I do not know what dialogue between religious traditions could be. To realize a dialogue between Islam and Christianity one should know what is Islam or Christianity. And a clear definition, acceptable to all the believers of such a religious identity, does not exist and cannot exist. It should be a negation of the very important diversity existing inside each tradition. A good example is the World Council of Churches. To make the participation of all the Churches possible, a clear formulation of what every Church presents

to its members as the truth was needed. The formula that was adopted was a very narrow one: if something more detailed should have been formulated, it could not find acceptance from all the member churches.

Dialogue between theologians, first inside their own tradition and, further on, between theologians of different religious traditions, is not only possible, but also very useful. To develop this kind of dialogue several conditions should be present such as: mutual respect, acceptance of the differences, consciousness of one's own identity, and, if possible, first of all, good human relations.

*Dialogue between theologians:*

*Interreligious comparative theology by Christian and Muslim theologians*

Three examples show the different figures of such a theology.

1) *Michel Hayek and Youakim Moubarac*

In 2012 the Faculty of Religious Sciences of the Saint Joseph University in Beirut organized an international colloquium about "Figures of Dialogue"<sup>4</sup>. Between the figures presented in this colloquium were two influent Maronite theologians, the two of them disciples of the late Louis Massignon: Michel Hayek and Youakim Moubarac<sup>5</sup>. The two tried to develop a Christian theology of Islam. They did not come to the same conclusions, and they did not agree with each other. It is not the place here to enter into that discussion. It is enough to say that each one tried to find a way to give a positive place to Islam inside their Christian theology.

Hayek did it by focusing on the figure of Ismael, the first son of Abraham and his slave Agar. Ismael is presented as the father of a kind of religion for the "left out of the Abrahamic heritage", a religion of the people of the desert. The result was a monotheistic religion faithful to the revelation of Abraham. He considers this as a stage in the history of salvation that needs to, and can be developed.

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<sup>4</sup> "Figures du dialogue, problématique, grands pionniers et perspectives comparées": Actes de colloque international organisé par la Faculté des sciences religieuses, Institut d'Études islamo-chrétiennes avec le concours de l'Ambassade de Suisse au Liban et la Fondation de Georges N. Frem, Publications de l'Université Saint-joseph, Beyrouth, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Antoine FLEYFEL made a good presentation of the theology of these two figures; *L'islam dans les pensées de Michel Hayek et Youakim Moubarac*. In *Figures du dialogue*, p. 116-164.

Moubarac developed the faith of Abraham and his religion, considering Islam as a religion that is profoundly faithful to the Abrahamic heritage. He assumed the possibility of different traditions coming out of the Abrahamic heritage, everyone having his own truth and value, without the obligation to make them “compatible” or to insert them in a coherent synthesis. They are different and they should stay so.

The common preoccupation of Hayek and Moubarac, notwithstanding their differences, is to give a positive evaluation of Islam, without leaving their Christian identity. Are they making comparisons? Are they in dialogue with Islam? They had a good and very thorough knowledge of the Islamic tradition. They tried to make only affirmations that could be acceptable for a Muslim theologian. But, as far as I know, they did not discuss their opinions with Muslim theologians. Not a direct, personal dialogue. They were working in their rooms and library, the two of them in Paris. They wanted to give the Christians a possibility to appreciate positively the Islamic religion. They are well known and their work has influence until today, where other thinkers continue their reflection or react to them. They did not specify on which Islam they were reflecting. In my distinction, it seems to me that they situate themselves at the level of religious traditions because they do not say if they are speaking of the Shi’ite Islam or the Sunni, the Islam of the Asian tradition (Pakistan for example) or rather the Islam of the Near East. Or which one of the four officially recognized juridical schools of Sunni Islam, etc. They were in dialogue with the Islamic tradition in their offices. Their work is a kind of comparative theology without having a personal relation with Muslim theologians. They were perhaps more in dialogue with other Christian theologians and with a long Christian tradition which has a rather negative view on Islam. And they surely did so, because they wanted to change something about the relations between Muslims and Christians in their home country: Lebanon.

It is a kind of comparative theology because these two theologians try to give a place to the other, who is different. But it is also a development of Christian theology, asking which place can be given to non-Christian religions.

2) *Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara*

The second example is quite different from the first. Fadi Daou, a Maronite priest and theologian, and Nayla Tabbara, a Sunni Muslim historian and theologian. The two of them were professors at the Faculty of Religious Sciences of the University Saint-Joseph of Beirut (USJ). Nayla presented her PhD at the USJ and the “École Pratique des Hautes Études” (EPHE) on the Sufi commentaries of the *sourat* of the Cavern<sup>6</sup>. They became close friends, and both have a thorough knowledge of the two religions. Fady Daou was, for many years, first professor and later director of the Institute of Practical Theology (ISSR<sup>7</sup>). He left the Institute to found Adyan, together with Nayla Tabbara. This new institution created several programs for interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Their common interest is the creation of the best possible conditions for mutual knowledge and interreligious encounters, by lectures, sessions, the development of programs for religious culture in schools, and much more<sup>8</sup>. Two persons, with a common interest. Sincere believers, everyone in his own religion. Friends, with a deep respect for the religious convictions of each other. These are almost the best thinkable conditions for comparative theology. Their purpose is not only to develop a theology of mutual understanding, but also to make good relations flourish in reality, in Lebanon first, but also elsewhere if possible. They know how much harm results of mutual ignorance. They wrote together a book “The Divine Hospitality”<sup>9</sup>. They developed the way in which Christian theology can consider the place of non-Christian believers and how Islam can consider the place of non-Muslim believers. The book is not a dialogue in the sense that they exchange their mutual ideas. It is more a parallel way: each one develops his own ideas in his own tradition. For sure, not all Christian theologians will

<sup>6</sup> The title in French: Nayla TABBARA, *Les commentaires soufis de la sourate de La Caverne : le récit coranique comme symbole de l'itinéraire spirituel*. The publication by the Éditions du Cerf is awaited.

<sup>7</sup> Institut supérieur de sciences religieuses (ISSR). The main purpose of the Institute is the formation in the field of the practical theology: theology in a narrow relation with the pastoral reality of the country.

<sup>8</sup> Adyan is a Lebanese foundation for interreligious studies and spiritual solidarity. It was founded on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2006 by members from Christian and Muslim denominations. Site <http://www.adyanvillage.net>

<sup>9</sup> Fadi DAOU, Nayla TABBARA, *L'hospitalité divine. L'autre dans le dialogue des théologies chrétienne et musulmane. Colloquium salutis, Études en sciences et théologie des religions*, Volume 1, Berlin-Zürich, LIT Verlag 2013.

agree with Fady Daou, neither will the Muslim theologians all accept the developments of Nayla Tabbara. They cannot consider themselves as representatives of their religious tradition. But, at least, they offer a well argued view and a possible theology that remains faithful to their own religious beliefs.

In our first example, Michel Hayek and Youakim Moubarac did not directly meet Muslims in their theological reflection. Nayla Tabbara and Fadi Daou know each other very well and understand and appreciate each other's way of thinking. But they leave to the reader the possibility to make the comparisons they discover. It is not their aim to do it in the place of the reader. Their approach is very similar to what the ZeKK<sup>10</sup> tries to do in Paderborn: take a common subject and let each one develop his ideas about that subject. Then you are free to discover the differences and the similarities. Free, first of all because one starts to know what the other one is really thinking. And, doing so, one gives place to the different ways of treating the same subject, and thus make mutual understanding possible. And then, free also, because nobody is telling you what you should think.

### 3) Heidi Hirvonen: *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Lebanese Context*<sup>11</sup>

A conference given at the International Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS) in Malaysia in 2004. The conference is an abstract of her book: *Christian-Muslim Dialogue. Perspectives of Four Lebanese Thinkers*. In this recent book the author presents and compares the positions of four important Lebanese thinkers. Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, an important Chi'ite theologian who died in 2010. Dr Mahmoud Ayoub, a professor of Islamic studies and comparative religion at Temple University, Philadelphia. He is a Chi'ite Muslim and gives also lectures in Lebanon. Bishop Georges Khodr, Metropolite of Mount Lebanon, a Greek Orthodox bishop and prominent theologian and finally, Mouchir

<sup>10</sup> ZeKK: Centre for Comparative Theology and Cultural Studies.

<sup>11</sup> Heidi HIRVONEN gave a conference at the "International Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies" (IAMS) in Malaysia in 2004. The text can be found at "www.missionstudies.org" The paper is an abstract of her book *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Perspectives of Four Lebanese Thinkers*. Leiden, Brill 2013.

Aoun, a Lebanese philosopher with an important reflexion on interreligious dialogue<sup>12</sup>.

These four personalities did not engage a dialogue with each other. The dialogue is here the work of Heidi Hirvonen, who compares and comments the way in which each of the four thinkers understands dialogue and gives a place to the believers of other religions. She discovers similarities between a Christian and a Muslim theologian, and differences between the two Chi'ites or the two Christians. She thus establishes a kind of comparative theology between theologians of the same religion and between theologians of different religious traditions. Doing this she gives a good example of this kind of theology. It is interesting to note that her conference has been given at an Association for Mission Studies: A Christian meeting that desires to develop its reflection on interreligious dialogue and the relation of this dialogue and mission.

To resume these three types of comparative theology:

Hayek and Moubarac: Christian theologians developing a theology trying to give a place to the Islam. Islam is present in their work, so there is a kind of dialogue. But it is also a monologue: they don't engage a discussion with Islam theologians.

Daou and Tabbara: two parallel theologies. They know each other quite well and are certainly influenced by the deep relation and the friendship between them. Their book is very close to comparative theology.

Hirvonen: an author makes several theologians discuss by comparisons. These theologians did not meet each other. They probably know the ideas of the other persons but, again, each of them develops his own thought. The comparison is the work of a fifth author who gave the conference and wrote the book.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, his book *Fondements du dialogue islamo-chrétien*, Publications de l'Institut des Études Islamo-Chrétiennes, Université Saint-Joseph, Beyrouth, Librairie Orientale, 2003, p.171.

*Dialogue of life: promoting interreligious relations.*

1. *Official dialogue*

Comparative theology seems to be, up to now, an important issue between specialists. How can this work become useful for the believers of the different religious traditions? As seen so far, the attempts to come to a real dialogue are mostly the work of individual theologians who do not represent the religious institution they belong to. Dialogues between official representatives of religious institutions take place. But they do not touch real theology. They speak more about relations, about good understanding, perhaps about some interpretation of history that in the past blocked good relations. This kind of dialogue is important and made good progress during the years. The Institute for Islamic-Christian Studies (IEIC) of the Université Saint-Joseph has, to date, published four volumes of common Islamic-Christian Declarations<sup>13</sup>. The texts are published in their original language (Arabic, French, and English) with an analytical index at the end. It becomes clear that the institutional dialogue and the dialogue between theologians does not treat the same themes and have different goals. But there is no opposition. They can mutually prepare the field that permits every kind of dialogue to go further.

2. *Training for dialogue*

It is understandable, and probably good, that the common believers do not engage themselves in theological dialogue: they do not have the knowledge of their own religion and even less of the religion of the other. But they meet the others. Therefore, the Institute of Islamic-

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<sup>13</sup> NASRI HADDAD, Juliette, *Déclarations Communes Islamo-Chrétiennes. De 2006 à 2008*, Institut d'Études Islamo-Chrétiennes, Collection « Études et documents islamo-chrétiens », Beyrouth, Université Saint-Joseph, 2011.

NASRI HADDAD, Juliette, *Déclarations Communes Islamo-Chrétiennes. De 2002 à 2005c*, Institut d'Études Islamo-Chrétiennes, Collection « Études et documents islamo-chrétiens », Beyrouth, Université Saint-Joseph, 2007.

NASRI HADDAD, Juliette, *Déclarations Communes Islamo-Chrétiennes. De 1995 à 2001c*, Institut d'Études Islamo-Chrétiennes, Collection « Études et documents islamo-chrétiens », Beyrouth, Université Saint-Joseph, 2003.

NASRI HADDAD, Juliette, *Déclarations Communes Islamo-Chrétiennes. De 1954c à 1995c*, Institut d'Études Islamo-Chrétiennes, Collection « Études et documents islamo-chrétiens », Beyrouth, Université Saint-Joseph, 1997.

Christian Studies (IEIC)<sup>14</sup> of the Université Saint-Joseph developed a training course for interreligious dialogue. In every group there are Muslims and Christians working together. The course is given in two levels:

First level which aim to:

- Know the perceptions they have of each other's religious communities and clarify them for each other.
- Have a basic knowledge about communication skills.
- Have a general overview about Christian and Muslim doctrine and feasts.
- Have a general introduction to the conflict resolution process.
- Produce in common, four educational models about four Muslim-Christian subjects, to be taught in their schools.

Second level:

- Have basic knowledge about conflict resolution skills and be able to practice negotiation skills.
- Be initiated about Non-Violent communication skills.
- Be initiated about their personality types from a psychological side.
- Be able to distinguish between different religious teaching strategies.
- Have an overview about the role of religions in Lebanese past wars.
- Have an overview about the concept religious liberty.
- Practice through Islamo-Christian groups the transmission of Islamo-Christian knowledge to students in each other's schools.

These formations are expanding rapidly and create a climate where some theological thinking becomes possible. Some of these groups are constituted of teachers in secondary schools. They can promote an atmosphere of openness and understanding in their schools.

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<sup>14</sup> Program developed by its coordinator Rita Ayoub.

The ONG “Adyan” founded by Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara works in the same sense. Adyan developed programs for interreligious culture for secondary schools, and organizes regularly meetings with Muslims and Christians from different countries.

This kind of work prepares the way for a peaceful living together in the respect of the differences. The most violent and aggressive opinions in Lebanon can be found in the regions where there are only Christians or only Muslims. They know the other only by stereotypes which are most of the time negative. In the mixed regions, tensions and sometimes dramatic events happen, but in general people living in these regions have a much better understanding of the other.

The IEIC offers also a program on the level of a Master degree in Christian-Muslim relations. It is intentional that the title is not “Christian-Muslim Dialogue”. Dialogue is the exception, and to have a successful dialogue there should first be relations. In the Institute, every subject is given by two professors, one Muslim and one Christian. They talk only of their own religion. And the students can see for themselves what to do with this twofold information. As a result, there are good relations between the students. They become friends. And at the end of their formation, a Muslim is capable of speaking about his religion to a Christian audience in a way that is understandable to these Christians. And the same thing is true for Christians addressing a Muslim public. During their formation, friendships appear and continue. This is also true for the professors who start to know each other quite well. The Institute became a place where several traditions meet and feel themselves respected.

One of the results of all this work could be comparative theology. It happens sometimes in an informal way. But the Institute is not a faculty of Theology. Its work concentrates itself on the interreligious reality of Lebanon. For example: The Master program contains a topic of “Professional Conferences” where prominent figures of the Lebanese society express themselves saying how they cope with the different believers in their firms, institutions or societies. What are their problems and which kind of solutions they found.

Since comparative theology is a very delicate and difficult project, it is good to reflect first about the conditions where such a theology can arise! The dialogue of life precedes the theological reflections.

**SOMMAIRE :** Thom SICKING s.j., « **Le dialogue interreligieux** » – *Pour pouvoir parler sérieusement de dialogue interreligieux, il faut d'abord préciser ce que l'on entend par religion. Il est nécessaire de distinguer « tradition religieuse », « institution religieuse » et « religiosité ». Il est de même important de réfléchir sur les personnes en dialogue, en l'occurrence des théologiens dans la majorité des cas. Que représentent-ils ? Leur propre opinion ? Le point de vue de l'institution à laquelle ils appartiennent ? S'agit-il d'un consensus entre théologiens ? Il faut reconnaître qu'il existe plusieurs et différents genres de dialogue. L'article relève trois exemples-types. D'abord, deux théologiens chrétiens qui cherchent à donner une place à l'islam au sein du cadre de leur propre théologie. Ensuite, deux théologiens amis, l'un chrétien et l'autre musulman qui réfléchissent sur la place à donner aux croyants d'une autre religion dans leur théologie. Enfin, une personne qui étudie le point de vue de plusieurs théologiens, deux chrétiens et deux musulmans, et relève les points de convergence et de divergence, parfois même à l'intérieur d'une même tradition religieuse. Pour conclure : toute forme de dialogue interreligieux suppose une culture de dialogue qui est d'abord basée sur de bonnes relations humaines. Des formations pour favoriser une telle culture existent et doivent suivre différentes étapes. L'auteur nous y présente un exemple de ce genre de formation.*