

**Reflection on religious beliefs, secularity, and the state
as part of a conference on the theme
“Muslims in Western Society”**

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Qu'as-tu à regarder la paille qui est dans l'oeil de ton frère ? Et la poutre qui est dans ton oeil à toi, tu ne la remarques pas? (bible chrétienne: Mathieu 7:3)

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (Christian Bible: Matthew 7:3)

أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ

« A ta'muruna al-nasa bil-birri wa-tanasawna anfusakum » (Qur'an, surah 2 ayah 44)

« Commanderez-vous aux gens la piété alors que vous-mêmes vous l'oubliez? » (Coran, chapitre 2, verset 44)

“Would you command righteousness to people and forget for yourselves?” (Qur'an, chapter 2, verse 44)

Introduction:

To speak of "religious beliefs," "secularity," and "the state" raises two questions. How is each term defined? And what is the relationship between these three concepts? I will propose preliminary definitions in order to ensure a common point of reference for exchanges during our conference. This point of reference also requires recognition from the outset of the context in which the conference is held: a Canadian, western and internationalized context in light of strong Muslim immigration post-September 11, 2001, and the many security and identity repercussions.

My reflection relates initially to a linguistic and philosophical analysis of the three concepts of "religious beliefs," "secularity," and "state," and secondly, of the relationship between these three concepts and our conference theme: "Muslims in Western Society." This reflection will integrate elements connected to my principal research query: How do we facilitate, individually and collectively, a transition from dependence to independence to interdependence, while avoiding the risks and perils of the current codependence, in our human interaction, and on local, national and international levels?

I- Sub-theme: The relationship between “religious beliefs,” “secularity,” and the “state”

A) The question of definitions

There are no perfect or consensual definitions. They reflect the subjectivity related to the contexts and multiple identities of their authors. For this conference, I deliberately

chose to use the same source, Wikipedia, as a point of departure in attempting to define the three concepts upon which the Trudeau Foundation has asked me to reflect. The reason is simple. The traditional academic approach gives priority to scientific encyclopedias in which the articles are mainly written by a sole author, whose name and scientific reputation are usually transparent. The credibility of these articles lies in a modernistic belief in the independence of the author/expert.

But the individual subjectivity of each author represents a form of limitation inherent in their intellectual production. An attentive reading can deconstruct a good part of this subjectivity, a process itself relative since it is limited by the subjectivity of the reader. It is the celebrated Gadamerian principle of the meeting of horizons, in that there never can be a perfect meeting of horizons of comprehension between each person involved in a dialogue that is face-to-face, as will be the case during the Trudeau Foundation conference, where people will differ due to the geographical or temporal distance that may separate them. What is much more difficult to detect remains the collective subjectivity of the scientific discourse that such encyclopedia companies conceal. We confront a similar challenge in the choice of the conference theme, and in particular the subject of reflection it contains. To sum up, it is the challenge raised by the two initial quotations.

In contrast with articles in traditional academic encyclopedias, the process of writing Wikipedia articles is made possible due to a new form of cooperation in the computer world (open-source architecture). This free-of-charge encyclopedia for those who have Internet access represents a new way of cooperating in the presentation of knowledge so that it is accessible to all, as much in its production as in its distribution. As with academic encyclopedias, subjective viewpoints may not be absent; they are simply different. They are the fruit of a community, more or less large and unfortunately anonymous, which takes part in the writing on a subject and which must, by that fact itself, find a way of writing that integrates the various points of view. But according to the degree of background and interests of those taking part, it becomes no less than the whole of the people who constitute an article's production group, also reflecting subjectivity, but more collective this time.

It is the case in the following article sections on the concepts of "belief" and "religion." I will show the interdependence of the link between modes of knowledge production and new comprehensions of reality. This intellectual exercise constitutes a philosophical foundation for better understanding our own western collective subjectivity, universal and Canadian, in particular compared to our fellow Muslim citizens, and vice versa.

Definition of "belief:"

"The term 'belief' is generally applied to indicate the adoption, by a conscious being, of a world view that is not formed by experience or science, but rather by exchanges between various individuals or various dogmatic texts. Belief, in a more restricted sense, can indicate a view based on empirical or scientific facts."

This definition of the term "belief" suggests both a broad definition and also another more restricted one. Firstly, it is necessary to make clear that no text fundamental to a belief is necessarily dogmatic. Moreover, there seems to be a contradiction between the first definition and the second. For many individuals, a belief is the result of personal experiences which have as much if not more weight than that of various scientific

rationalist discourses to which they may have access. A belief can invest experiences as well, but within a framework often much more limited and less rigorous than the methodologies employed in scientific experiments. It thus becomes a question of degree of experience in the process of rationalization, because rationalization is never completely absent from the intellectual process that supports any belief. Furthermore, the reverse is also true: the production of scientific discourse is built on experience more or less limited by the history of the works, leaving place in the realms of intellectual production to many beliefs as well. The fact that this restricted definition of a world view "based on empirical or scientific facts" is included in this encyclopedia entry demonstrates this.

However, a major element is missing from this definition: beliefs live in a complex world of identities that are shaped by power relationships that vary from one society to the next. There is therefore interdependence between beliefs and their social/economic/political context. The choice to juxtapose a definition inherently broader than the word "belief" with a definition supposedly more restricted may suggest an implicit dichotomy between, on the one hand, an alleged irrationality in the process of acquiring the first kind of "beliefs" and, on the other hand, the rationality of the second. This underlying division of the double definition of "belief" represents, in my opinion, a collective subjectivity. In this case, it acts as a western scientific subjectivity which reduces the field of the rationalization's application to all that is not metaphysical or, in other words, the realm of faith. It is the dichotomy of faith versus reason that formed the nucleus of public debates during the Age of Enlightenment in western Europe and which continues to infuse the dialogue between religion/nation-state in the group of western secular nationalism. Such a dichotomy reflects the ability of this waning rationalist discourse in the construction of this definition in Wikipedia. This perception of reality, in turn, reinforces a great amount of individual comprehension on the concept of "belief."

The concept of "belief" therefore lies at the heart of our theme, because it forms the basis of all the multiple identities that are dear to us, such as those of omnipresent nationalism (Canadian, Quebecer, First Nations, or for others who possess a dual – or more - nationality today) or those of various ideologies, ethnicities, social classes, races, etc., and of course, religions.

Definition of “religion:”

"Religion is: 1) the totality of families of beliefs and dogmas defining the relationship between the human and the sacred; 2) related practices and rites appropriate for each one of these belief families."

This definition is useful because it uses the words "belief," "family," and "sacred." I will not reiterate the first, discussed in the preceding section. The second, "family," indicates the diversity within a whole; an image useful in understanding the family ties between various religions, currents of philosophical thought, and what is called increasingly today, spirituality. The third, "sacred," clearly indicates a degree of subjective importance attached to a source by such. An object may very well be sacred for some but not for others. The sacred does not necessarily reside in the object itself but in what a person perceives of this object or concept. In other words, sacred is not only what is traditionally associated in the West with God or all that would emanate from God,

directly or by association, or with any metaphysical discourse that transcends the boundaries within which science has developed, boundaries it is constantly expanding. Many people, individually and collectively, unconsciously sanctify one or more of their identities by the way in which symbols, personages, institutions and objects that result from this are invested with and subjected to a power, with degrees of reverence and dissidence that vary according to circumstances.

On this base of a broader comprehension of "sacred," it is thus possible to include in the definition of "religion" not only religions in the stricter sense (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Baha'ism, etc.) but also what today is known as spirituality. Some limit the latter to the new religious movements. Others also include all ancient forms and those revived from aboriginal cultures. Finally, many researchers also speak about "civil religion" in the sense that contemporary civil societies also comprise symbolic and ritualistic systems, based on a belief in the "nation," an identity often imagined to be unique.

This way of including the "nation" reflects a concept of identity that is singular and essentialized. It indicates a modernistic reading that makes conspicuous all possible forms of identity even as it speaks to the identity, in the singular, of a person. This manner of reducing identity to a single form of identity is simplistic and diminishes the complexity of multiple identities that shape equally the human being and humanity, in a system of identity inter-references constructed on a constant exchange between individual and collective dimensions. In stressing only the individual dimension of identity, being an identity based on the concept of "nation" or "religion," the collective dimension inherent in its functioning on identity remains unconscious. This unconsciousness limits and distorts our comprehension of the mechanisms underpinning identity, a major source of error in inter-identity relations, which include, inter alia, intercultural and inter-religious.

It must be noted that the same problem of myopia applies to this section in Wikipedia in defining the concept of "religion" as with that of "belief:" the individual dimension overshadows the collective western subjectivity from which it emerges. By the absence of initial reference to the importance of collective dimensions, as often the case in the field of identity as in that of institutions, the relationship of the individual to the sacred has preference. This reflects the importance attached to people as individuals who, in a liberal view of the world, assume an independence of thought and action that should lie at the base of the concept of citizenship in a democratic nation-state.

This subtle form of reducing the complexity in the operation of religions is not neutral. This reduction of the religious has individual dimensions, when related to the concept of privatization (of tangible goods as much as people reduced to become only individuals), engender a basic reaction from many religious groups which reject this reductionism. These groups have been found not only in western Christianity as established in North America for five centuries, but also in Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism, as well as other ancient religions whose presence in America, in general, is more recent.

In the end, such a reduction of "religion" to individual dimensions also makes it possible to remain blind to religious dimensions, understood in the broader sense, to identities and institutions connected to political ideologies such as nationalism,

fundamentalism in the modern nation-state, and secularity (or "secularism" in more Anglo-Saxon milieus). One can wonder, for example, why in the three concepts of the sub-theme suggested by the Trudeau Foundation the word "belief" in "religious beliefs" is not capitalized but that the words "Secularity" and "State" are. Could this be an example of a subtle form of sacralization of civil religion today to the detriment of the traditional categories of religion? Can one then speak about dogmatism also in the expression of a national public religion?

The dogmatism one finds in many expressions of nationalistic patriotism, in both the 20th century and today, is stronger and more extreme than the dogmatism of certain religious milieus. Indeed, the large majority of violent deaths during the 20th century had, at their source, a fierce competition between western ideologies (or of western origin) non-religious (liberalism, socialism, communism, fascism, etc.) where individuals, just as much as nation-states, contributed to the violence. Still today, violent deaths in the name of nationalist interests are as numerous as, if not more so, than those much mediatized issues of various religious discourses. To affirm religion as the source of the problem of violence today is thus a form of myopia, of invisible blinders. In the same way, to affirm that the West is the source of the problem of violence today, as maintained by many Islamists, is equally short-sighted. The major problem is that these two myopias, in our global reality, reinforce one another thanks to the media. It is the phenomenon that I call codependence, in several discourses on representation of identity, in particular those connected to current concerns about safety and terrorism. I will return to this below.

Finally, the word "religion" comprises a dimension of collective subjectivity inherited though a long etymological genealogy which descends, in this case, from Latin. According to Wikipedia, as always, there is no unanimity regarding its etymological roots, depending on whether one puts the emphasis on *re-ligare* (to join or connect the human to the divine), *relegere* (to read over, to begin again), or *religio* (scruples in the practice of rites and fear in the face of supernatural forces). It is when one attempts to translate the word "religion" from western languages into other non-western linguistic systems that very interesting differences emerge. The authors of the article mention that "In the Far East, the word religion is the combination of two sinograms:

- 宗 *shū* (Japanese) or *zōng* (Chinese), which designates the origin of a group united by the cult of common ancestry;
- 教 *kyō* (Japanese) or *jiào* (Chinese), which signifies "teaching," "school."

On the other hand, the article does not include anything about word "din" in Arabic or "dat" in Hebrew, or of the concept of "dharma" in several South Asian religious traditions, or the Chinese "Tao," to mention only some of several points of comparison.

The importance of this comparative work lies in the fact that the study of the translation processes of the word "religion" in other cultures shows the power relationships between societies and the various hermeneutics of receiving this central concept in the West, but expressed differently elsewhere, during the period of western colonization throughout the world. Every country around the world during the period of western colonialism in the 19th and early 20th centuries was forced to be defined through the prism of western concepts, as was religion. This power relationship was one of dependence, which unfortunately continues to exist during the current post-colonial

period. But the economic rise of Japan in the 1980s and early 1990s, as well as of China and India today, with a return of Japan, shows the possibility for major changes in the future, in both the medium and long term. In the short term, the focus of the international community on the Islam-western societies relationship, represented by the new Alliance of Civilizations of the United Nations, is thus only one extension of a western myopia centered on protecting its own interests, to the detriment of a real sharing of access to the decision-making processes, along with the development and distribution of the world's material and intellectual resources.

To return to our two initial definitions, an attentive analysis of the juxtaposition of "belief" and "religion" in the expression "religious beliefs" thus reveals not only the dangers of limiting our conversations to the concept of "beliefs" in the subset of "religious beliefs;" it also shows the same western scientific subjectivity common to the Wikipedia authors in defining the words "belief" and "religion" is found among those who chose to juxtapose "religious beliefs" with two other very different concepts, "secularity" and "state," which I prefer to write without capitalizing. Indeed, the process of "belief" is as present in the operation of religious identities as in that of ideological identities connected to science and, of course, both concepts of "secularity" and "state."

Definition of secularity:

"Secularity refers to the principle of separation of political and administrative power of the state with religious power, as well as the character of the institutions which respect this principle. The French word, *laïcité* comes from the Greek "Laos" (people): it is secularity that relates to the people and is independent of religious organizations. According to this principle, religious belief concerns the privacy of the individual. Religious convictions - or the absence of conviction - for each person, perhaps should be distinguished from the spiritual options or metaphysical theists that are more or less independent of religions and voluntarily ignored by the administration."

This definition of the concept of secularity clearly indicates separation between political and religious powers. This dichotomy is useful for our working hypothesis because it is founded on the belief that such a separation is possible. In a modern and positivist world view, where it is possible to imagine concepts essentialized and distinct from one another, one can understand the idea that such a separation is possible and, according to various points of view, that it is even desirable. This design lies at the heart of modernity and remains central to its construction, always unfinished according to the statement of several contemporary thinkers. They are no longer satisfied, as were their philosophical predecessors of two hundred years ago, to reject the role of any religious institution in the political arena. This stage has existed for several decades in the majority of western democracies, for example in France, where it has held sway for 100 years, since the December 9, 1905 law making secularity the political philosophy of the French nation-state. But this secularization process continues to evolve. It is now a goal for its partisans to ensure that no form of religion can interfere with the public domain, such as in legal, health, or education matters. This logic pushes forward so-called "purification" which took place in France, for example, with the 2004 law prohibiting the wearing of any distinctive religious symbol in schools. The current Tunisian government, in the wake of the French move that some call of a latent colonial spirit, continues to pursue this logic, which today justifies a growing amount of repression in the name of protection of

secular values that are increasingly anachronistic to the Arab world, where the rise of Islam over two generations is only strengthened by this increase in the secularized intransigence of the Tunisian power, which, paradoxically, becomes increasingly authoritarian, therefore contrary to the democratic spirit normally associated with secularity. The 1990s demonstrated the result of such a course in Turkey, which resulted in the 2002 democratic election of an Islamic party (AKP).

Beyond our respective political colors, we must delve into the philosophical foundations to be able to understand the ideological mechanisms of all societies. In Canada last year, often virulent debates arose surrounding the question of a possible introduction of an Islamic court of arbitration in Ontario. Even though a Catholic arbitration court based on canon law and a Jewish arbitration court based on the *halakhah*, or Jewish law, were already officially in place for more than a decade, the Islamic one was eliminated in face of the fear that the *shari' ah*, the Islamic law, might one day take root on Canadian soil. This fear reaction is based in large part on ignorance of two important points. First, a difference must be made between Canada's legal normative binarism (common law and civil law) which easily accommodates new arbitration courts, religious as well as non-religious (depending on the province), to decrease the burden (and costs!) on the traditional official legal system, and the parallel legal compromises for those who wish to use them. Their number remains very low in our strongly secularized society. Paradoxically, in the name of the values of freedom and equality strongly influenced by a concept of equality between all people, the non-religious majority of the Canadian population as well as the majority of people who are religious and also believe in the separation of church and state, have increased the marginalization of a weak religious minority more strict in observing judicial norms related to their respective religious identities. It is this belief in an objectivist secularity twinned with an identities policy that too often foments a tyranny of the majority. Openness to the other is not as widespread as we think, even in Canada where the multiculturalism discourse must become that of interculturalism if we wish that identity interactions will promote complementary relationships rather than those of dominance. The latter do nothing but promote exclusions, perceived and real.

These exclusions do not encourage various minority groups to become integrated, and even less to become assimilated, by a popular logic that could be summarized as "if they chose to come here, it's up to them to adapt to our laws and mores." Indeed, this logic quickly breaks down in the face of the parallel case of aboriginals, who have lived with marginalization for hundreds of years. Time should be taken, too briefly here, to compare the systemic marginalization which has a long history, silently reproducing in generation after generation. The only way of overcoming them is to re-read our respective stories together in settings of open and respectful dialogue, in order to inscribe them in a common version that takes into account that the respective multiple readings of our historical realities are often quite different from others in the same geographical space. We should therefore study the various perceptions of the world (worldviews) extant in the Canadian population, in order to undertake this great challenge before it goes any further. The diversity of our multiple identities enables us to build interdependent, complementary and cooperative identities, because it is the same challenge that humanity as a whole faces regarding our relationship with the natural world.

It is thus necessary to transcend the western paradigm that essentializes not only its own philosophical concepts but, by symbiosis, the interpretation of various sectors of society. These essentializations make it possible to accept relationships of force, which strive to exclude those who, either in part or in whole, individually or collectively, in the name of their own freedom of choice, cling to their respective minority identity differences. ("They are not like us ... the others") And this essentialization exists just as easily with the majority of minority communities in one way or another.

We live in a time when the cancer of popular positivism has spread well beyond the porous borders of the West, initially through colonialism and later through today's neo-liberal post-colonialism. Fear-of-terrorism rhetoric legitimizes apologetic discourse in the name of western national identities, often very opportunist. It camouflages immense transfers of funds towards military and security forces, which only serve to reinforce the instability of our human relations, already sufficiently strained. These measures camouflage the much more urgent danger of our collective human relationship with the natural environment, which has become more urgent so quickly that the negative effects are already being seen. To change our modes of production and consumption, especially in wealthy countries and social classes, is an undertaking difficult to imagine. It is much easier to conduct witch hunts, for those who today disguise themselves, depending on how the wind is blowing in the West, as Islamist Muslims. These measures embitter the psychological exclusions of one-fifth of the world's peoples and serve to further embolden anti-Western extremists.

These exclusions, increasingly systematized as much for minority religious identities as for other forms of minority identities where similar logic operates (race, ethnicity, social class, etc), gradually promulgate the logic of victimization in a society that ideologizes these social relations based on the politics of identities (identity politics). The violence which exploded recently in certain Paris suburbs illustrates this point: minority identities today accumulate experiences of exclusion wherein are planted the seeds of tomorrow's violence. The more identity discourse is built on essentializing and alienating foundations (othering) ("we are the best and the others are good for nothing"), the more these exclusions, injustices, and thus violence will increase. It may take several forms: invisible and very often internalized (quiet anger that transforms into either apathy or suicide) or gradually externalized in various forms of radical behaviors where physical violence is only the result of a long and predictable process. The ultimate integration of both is found in the growing practice of kamikazes, the suicidal terrorists who sow disproportionate fear today, especially in western countries, despite of the fact that their victims are much more numerous elsewhere. Such extremist behaviors are found just as much in those acting mainly as individuals as they are in people with a community identity. Some are associated with terrorist organizations. But we must also include in the analysis nationalist armies, which also often sow violence, adding to the perception in many parts of the world of a double standard operating in countries, which on the one hand preach democracy and human rights, and on the other protection by too-often violent means from those judged to have foreign allegiances.

It is the management of these real identity differences, overlapping in the relations of political, economic, religious and cultural powers, objectified by some (modernist) and built or imagined by others (post-modernist), which is at the heart of the challenges

surrounding a political philosophy of pluralism. It must be founded not on objectivist notions of possible independence of concepts, but rather on subjectivist ideals of interdependence in which the key to daily life is the dialogue between all concerned people or their representatives, and well-anchored in values of mutual aid and real equity. Indeed, we are seeing the end not only of the positivist logic of separation of politics and religion, but also the end of any hope of experiencing a clean and clear separation between the religious and legal sectors or of religion and education, to mention only these two sectors of society.

Age of Enlightenment logic has run its course; the West and the westernized international community face the challenges of increasing integration with the rest of the world, inter alia, by their respective immigration policies and resource exploitation techniques, material as well as human, throughout the world. The great majority of westerners (and well as other westernized elites around the world) find themselves at a philosophical and ethical impasse: the continuation of competitive rather than cooperative identity policies encourages the need for an enemy (previously communism, now Islam) to nourish the desire for economic grandeur, to the detriment of democratic aspirations associated with ideals of individual rights. Westerners who continue to subscribe to a political philosophy, whether modernist or postmodernist, based on liberal economic concepts (private property, competition, etc.) within the parameters defined by the sovereignty of the nation-state, feed the global injustice that destabilizes legal systems of the international community.

Should we choose to continue this logic in our interpretation of reality, arising from a highly mediatized reading of the facts (media which operate under the logic of the marketplace, where the value of the material profit is often more important than that of proportional presentation and the interpretation of the facts), we condemn ourselves to continue the vicious circle of codependence, in which radical rhetoric is employed by all sides to reinforce a position rationalized from identity dynamics in the name of nationalist, religious, patriarchal, or other interests. These interests cannot exist in a vacuum; they are invariably accompanied by infrastructures of varying complexity. The most widespread and strongly entrenched of which today is the state, in its contemporary nation-state form.

Definition of state:

"The **state** is an entity governing the organization of a country, which has a legal structure, delineated by territorial borders and consisting of institutions that ensure supreme authority (sovereignty)."

This definition of the word "state" also reveals a modernist subjectivity, directly connecting the concept of state to that of a country with well-defined territorial borders but especially to a supreme authority. This supreme authority does sit well in a postmodern reading of the state, a state which loses its initial capital letter. The state is no longer the major entity in political and economic management today. There are multinationals and individuals whose decision-making power in economic and political realities transcends the great majority of nation-states.

A definition of the state must therefore take into account these new transnational realities. But it must also include the questions of the limited justice deployed by a single

legal system (two in the case of Canada), especially in the nation-states where a great plurality of identities reigns. We face, in Canada in particular, new challenges arising from legal pluralism, having to manage within the same state several distinct legal cultures that many citizens use in the name of the right to freedom of conscience, and religious practices in particular. It is experienced not only by Muslims, Jews and Catholics; many aboriginal communities assert and practice alternatives already, in the margins of the system, often with the latter's assent in a very beneficial gesture of inter-legal cooperation.

What is certain is that a narrow interpretation of official judicial power often results in various forms and degrees of discrimination by the cultural majority towards various minorities. A pluralistic interpretation, however, allows more openness to minorities, so that each may develop solutions adapted to their needs while respecting the will of the majority as much as possible. This dialogue has existed for many years; it is a pity that after September 11, 2001, increased Islamophobia in Canada has affected not only this legal dialogue with the Muslim community, but also that with the Jews and the Catholics. The result surely will be increased religious radicalism in its resistance to the norms of the secular majority's legal system. It thus will be equally so in the political sector, through democratic participation. The accumulation of these trends is one of the sources of erosion of supreme authority in certain western nation-states, Canada in particular.

It is thus possible to establish a link between the western collective subjectivity emerging from an attentive analysis of the four Wikipedia definitions used here. While becoming more conscious of this subjectivity which all citizens, residents, or immigrants more or less share, in what a majority calls Canada, it becomes possible to imagine more clearly solutions to the multiple challenges of both internal and external integration of our multiple identities within the current power relationships of an increasingly globalized Canada.

II- The relationship between the sub-theme of “religious beliefs,” “secularity,” “state,” and the conference theme “Muslims in Western Societies”

Today, with the rapid growth of globalization and following a prolonged period of seeking political, economic, and cultural independence that corresponds to both the colonial and post-colonial eras, one is confronted with the challenge to better master and, more importantly, better reconcile the fundamental concepts and worldviews of different societies. This work of integration must respect the rich and varied contributions of all involved in this conference, partly because Canadian society is now comprised of people whose identity roots connect us to all their cultures, religions, ideologies, and societies, which constitute various visions of the world that increasingly interpenetrate.

Contemporary interpretations of terrorism in particular and violence in general that reduce the analysis to categories supposedly independent of one another (i.e.: "Muslim" versus "western" or "Canadian") and individual expressions that do not take into account communal institutions such as nation-states, which also sometimes commit crimes against humanity according to definitions accepted by the international community, remain interpretations which camouflage identity power plays, practiced as much by nationalist entities as by the majority of popular religions and ideologies today, on both the right and left, the old two dimensional and very simplistic way of describing things.

Analyses that compare the various forms of sacralization of powers related to our multiple identities are thus more useful. To clearly identify these mechanisms appears to me to be urgent. Since the dichotomies between religion and philosophy, or faith and reason, between public secular citizenship versus privatized religion or spirituality, as between individual freedom within a democratic nation-state versus so-called constraints in non-democratic tribal or religious societies where there is a lack of "good governance," also serve as examples of reductive interpretation that highlights the myopia of working solely or mainly from a western worldview built on vestiges of the Age of Enlightenment. The reproduction of this rhetoric perpetuates a growing anachronism between a naïve sacralization of a western past, and the sometimes dubious values and realities of unrestrained globalization, which seeks to protect its assets, often more material than social, for the West and the elites that profit from it.

Fear of division is the real Achilles' heel of western society. The veneration of competition can only work against the common good and good governance, because the safety of any community and society has become completely interrelated with that of others. This globalization requires new ethical and philosophical foundations, where the integration of multiple cultures, religions, spiritualities and civilizations transform us in our identity relationship towards a greater awareness of our interdependence, at the same time between us as human beings, and with the natural world.

But this process of integration cannot be undertaken naively either. The processes of power relationships between our multiple identities must be considered, in particular the great similarities of their ethical dimensions. We very quickly move from climatic change to the consequences that are difficult to foresee, and toward global social tensions and increased violence, should we remain in a power relationship based simply on the politics of identities that is now the norm throughout the world, instead of turning us towards what I call the politics of values or better still, the politics of virtues. Rampant militarization and pollution conceal identity insecurities while at the same time those who allow them are often in the vanguard of political and economic power, which should engender the responsibility for the sharing of resources, and not their accumulation which accentuates social and economic disparities.

These identity egoisms see the source of their fear in the other, whether it be, for example, Islam for westerners or the Christian missionary for Muslims. The justifications over the course of militarization are thus inscribed in a logic of codependence at once psychological, linguistic, and political, with disastrous economic and especially environmental impacts.

This logic is present, unfortunately, in the articulation of our conference theme. In the preceding processes, it was not sufficient to substitute the word "Islam" with the word "Muslims" to avoid the danger of essentialization, by narrow definition the relationship between Islam and the West, Muslims and westerners. If the choice is opportune it is also opportunistic, because it conceals, in my opinion, the inherent problem of the subject: a pernicious process of victimization of the victim, a process firmly anchored in western culture, at the risk of my carrying a narrow judgment. From the Greeks to the Romans, medieval Catholics to Protestants, liberals to communists, to 20th century socialists and fascists, to various fundamentalist movements during the post-Cold War period, religious or not, modernist and postmodernist, the various identities which form the genealogy of

the West today were built over centuries in a relationship of power more often than not presented in a narrow binarity of the relationship between the self and the other. Few societies took the same narrow course and preaching "empiricism," overall, for more than two millennia.

Such a reading of macro-history is more revealing of the effects of reproduction over several centuries of identity patterns, inside within which are played out historical transformation. It is thus the interior of thin interstices that I call "windows of opportunity," often very short in time and very restricted in number of participants and geographical space, that social change and human transformation are carried out. But it is the accumulation of a number of these changes and transformations which become, sooner or later, inevitably obvious. Is not the new cyber-frontier one of these contemporary interstices, with the help of which we may be able to build new, more "virtual" power relationships?

To conclude this conference which seeks to clarify the inter-references and resistances to which all human beings face today, not only Muslims in western societies, I suggest the need to very seriously consider three types of simultaneous change and transformation: climatic, security, and spiritual. Measurable climate changes have taken place already for several decades; we have seen in the same month 30 years of scientific debate on their veracity, alongside a political debate on how to act to slow down the rate of these changes, and the not-easily conceivable consequences. Yet some political, economic, and religious leaders resist. What feeds their myopia is related to fears for short-term security, which themselves are the fruit of often-narrow ethical and philosophical behaviors, which do not integrate well with the multiple identity dimensions of human beings. This imbalance is, in my opinion, the fruit of a lack of spirituality. To begin to rebalance the relationship between humanity and its natural world, we must rebalance these three vectors of change and transformation, at once personal and community-based. This challenge also points us towards a redistribution of traditional state powers, toward more flexible and just power structures, in their concrete results for the life of all human beings.

To accomplish this, it is necessary to become aware of the weight of history and the words we use, from which springs the importance attached in my reflection on the question of defining the principal concepts central to our conference. "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Such historical ignorance is fed, in part, by the controversy which our subject highlights. But ignorance of identity mechanisms plays a greater part. These mechanisms are reflected in the use of words with which we build our social realities. These words have a much greater longevity than the human beings who use them; mostly in underestimating the weight of our perceptions of reality. To choose words with accuracy, and articulate ideas with precision, are both associated with the process of rationalization which is no longer sufficient in our global reality. We must also learn to better recognize respective genealogies, from their ideal production in given contexts to their reception in various milieus and societies, often very remote from their points of origin. Both work in tandem. Indeed, a word does not survive without an audience. And words, like human beings, change with the passing years under the three aspects at the same time, but not always at the same rhythm: their form

(physical/linguistic), their reading (personality/pronunciation) and, of course, their meaning.

What we must better understand, today, is their link with mechanisms of identity construction, which is as much intellectual as emotional. Perceptions of reality, especially in the postmodern era in which I find myself, must be contextualized following linguistic twists which continue to take place today in all the scientific fields. All intellectual production is the fruit of a person who lives in a geographical, social, and quite precise historical context. But one must also better understand that they are emotive mechanisms related to constructions, deconstructions, and constant rebuilding of our multiple identities as human beings. In other words, our identities, like our body cells, do not cease changing, but in way often stripped of possibilities. The increasingly fast pace of discoveries in the field of DNA and the neurosciences reveals unsuspected mechanisms and, more and more, the interdependence between the material world and what was perceived long ago as the immaterial one. The impacts of a thought on an object, for example, or the trans-generational bonds which perpetuate addictive behaviors, are but two examples.

Conclusion:

What the majority of westerners fail to sufficiently realize is the weight of collective dimensions on the mechanisms of identity construction. Too often, we reduce the concept of identity (made conspicuous and essentialized) to the individual level alone, influenced by a philosophy of individual independence where self is built by oneself in a process of freedom and authenticity. Everyone is affirmed in his proper individuality, often to the detriment of recognizing the communal and interdependent dimensions of our multiple identities as human beings.

These blinders, especially in times of heightened emotion, go on and blind us more than we suspect. They trap us in this situation of codependence, so unhealthy for the future of humanity. The information apparatus of our western societies, of media and political rhetoric, not to mention the legal and official economic controls, to highlight only a few, depicts a highly limited mosaic of reality; the space between differences is often more narrow and narrowing than one thinks. The inescapable interplay between identity similarities and differences, present in any society but played out under more or less different rules from one society to another, according to their degree of geographical and historical proximity, remain one of the principal discoveries to make together on the playing field of our conference.

We thus will have the choice to use, most of us, privileges related to our membership in the Canadian identity and the responsibility to build a Canadian society that is resilient and open to equitable globalization. The practice of this choice will make it possible to better contribute to a paradigm shift from the codependence of today towards true interdependence. To achieve this, reconciliation is necessary, between local, provincial, national, international, intercultural, inter-religious, and inter-visions of the world. This reconciliation is only possible if one evolves from the dialogue of the deaf to a dialogue of listening, from a policy of identities to a policy of virtues. Do we, the participants in this conference, have the courage to dialogue virtuously on these difficult questions?