The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue
“Living together in equal dignity”
James Barnett

i) The publication of a white paper by the Council of Europe is a significant event. The latest white paper on intercultural dialogue is only the third to be produced by the Council of Europe. The first two were on the protection of rights and the dignity of the mentally ill, in particular of patients who do not wish to be in a psychiatric hospital (2000) and that on the legal consequences for relations (2003). In this case the white paper aims to contribute to the continuing debate on the meeting of cultures in current society in view of European plurality.

ii) The document must also increase awareness by politicians, administrators, educators, the media and civil society of the need for intercultural dialogue as well as of the standards of the Council of Europe.

iii) In offering a definition of intercultural dialogue the document sets out the principles of the Council of Europe as universal values which go beyond cultural difference. The principles are closely related to the Churches’ Social Activities which affirm the equality of every human being.

iv) The churches read the white paper with much interest, while bringing their support and their particular awareness. This short guide is aimed at readers of the white paper who would like to know about the background thinking of the Council of Europe and the challenges for the churches.

The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental political organisation. It was founded in the aftermath of the second world war, while looking for a “better world” after the atrocities committed in Europe during (and before) the war.

On 5 May 1949 the ten founding member states of the Council of Europe signed the Treaty of St James, while the UN had already produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Nevertheless the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), produced by the Council of Europe, was really a European version of the Universal Declaration. In particular the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights are binding for the member states of the Council of Europe, which must also incorporate into their national law the jurisprudence of the Court. An estate is effectively the “defendant”.

At the time of the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 there were twenty-three member states, for the most part from Western Europe, but also including Turkey.

Now there are double the number of member states. With the accession of Montenegro in 2004 they number 47 states from all regions of our continent.

Membership of the Council of Europe, therefore, represents the historical diversity of Europe, which includes communities made up of immigrants of whom many have arrived in Europe since the second world war.

The values and the ideals of the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is founded on four “pillars”:

• Democracy
• Human Rights
• The Rule of Law
• Together with the INGOs which were granted participative status in 2003

Human Rights are seen as universal values, which express the ethical and legal consequences of human dignity. Universality is a result of our common humanity and makes no reference to religious or non religious conviction.
The Council of Europe and Religion

The Council of Europe is self-evidently “neutral”, that is impartial in respect of religion. At the same time the Council of Europe is aware of possible related difficulties - an interest that goes back to the ‘eighties. The Parliamentary Assembly has received:

• Mr Martinez’s report on the Jewish Contribution to European Culture (1987).¹
• Recommendation 1162 on the Contribution of Islamic Civilisation to European Culture (1991)²

More recently the Parliamentary Assembly has considered

• Education and Religion³
• Religion and democracy⁴
• State, religion, laïcité and human rights⁵
• (to) creationism⁶

Human rights and Religion: relevance and difficulty:

Relevance

In 1999 the Parliamentary Assembly had elected the first Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Alvaro Gil Roblès. The status of the Commissioner includes a certain independence, which makes it easier to contribute creatively to the work of the Council of Europe. Following his election, Mr Gil Robles developed a series of colloquies held in the years 2000-2006. The thinking behind the colloquies was related to important issues:

1. The responsibilities of religion in promoting peace. The role of religion in the public sphere, but the neutrality of rights in the relation between the individual and the state.⁷
2. Respect for the belief of the other. The religions must be tolerant of the other and of his belief.
3. In respect of Church/State relations, the religions must have a voice, but the influence of one religion or another could be more important given the influence of history.
4. Education for religion is seen as the meeting point between public life and religion.
5. What role is there for religion in an international organisation? One cannot exclude a comprehensive method of thought.⁸

In principle religion should not be ignored because religion has a role in the public sphere but human rights are neutral, while also expecting tolerance among and between religions. Religion should have a voice so as to avoid the exclusion of a comprehensive method of thought when faced with public neutrality.

This is ambiguous, but ambiguity sheds light on the religious problem.⁹

Difficulty

The Council of Europe is a political organisation. Council of Europe competence includes neither interreligious debate nor theology.

The specific role of religion in democratic society, however, remains a delicate problem. Clearly, it is not the parliamentarian’s task to define this role or to take a stance on theological questions of any kind. That is a matter solely for religious organisations, and the strictest separation between state and religion must be observed. Nevertheless, religion is a major social phenomenon and is difficult to separate from culture. I believe that responsible politicians have a duty to address all aspects of society, including the religious aspect. However, they must also ensure that freedom of belief remains compatible with respect for all other human rights.¹⁰

¹ Document 5778
² Recommandation 1162 (1991) relative à la contribution de la civilisation islamique à la culture européenne
³ Doc. 10673 19 septembre 2005 Education et religion André Schneider parti populaire européen
⁴ Doc. 8270 27 novembre 1998 Religion et démocratie Rapport Rapporteur : M. Lluis Maria de Puig, Espagne, Groupe socialiste
⁵ Doc 11298 8 juin 2007 Etat, religion, laïcité et droits de l’homme Rapporteur: M. Lluis Maria de Puig, Espagne, Groupe socialiste
⁶ Doc. 11375 17 septembre 2007 Les dangers du créationnisme dans l’éducation Rapport Rapporteur : Mme Anne Brasseur, Luxembourg, ADLE
⁷ Sometimes religion see Human Rights as neutral in regard to abortion, blasphemy etc, but religion is a private matter according to specialists in human rights. Therefore, legally, religion are an organised interest group.
⁸ The European Organisations see religions as INGOs. Therefore interreligious dialogue underpins tolerance, but this view may be too limited. What is the place of religion at the international level? The organisations do not see themselves as guarantors of values.
⁹ See the report on a colloquy “Religion, Law and Human Rights” that took place at Windsor Castle in March 2008.
¹⁰ 7 novembre 1998 Religion et Democracy Report of the Commission on culture and education Rapporteur: Mr. Lluis Maria de Puig, Spain, Socialist group.
Intercultural Dialogue

At the Warsaw Summit in 2005, the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe were aware of the importance of intercultural issues. Interreligious ones were connected.

1. The Meeting of Heads of State and government in Warsaw 16-17 May 2005: Declaration

“This Summit gives us the opportunity to renew our commitment to the common values and principles which are rooted in Europe’s cultural, religious and humanistic heritage – a heritage both shared and rich in its diversity”.

§6. We shall foster European identity and unity, based on shared fundamental values, respect for our common heritage and cultural diversity. We are resolved to ensure that our diversity becomes a source of mutual enrichment, inter alia, by fostering political, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. We will continue our work on national minorities, thus contributing to the development of democratic stability.11

2. The Action plan (follow up to the Warsaw Summit)

§6 Fostering Intercultural Dialogue

We shall systematically encourage intercultural and inter-faith dialogue, based on universal human rights, as a means of promoting awareness, understanding, reconciliation and tolerance, as well as preventing conflicts and ensuring integration and the cohesion of society. The active involvement of civil society in this dialogue, in which both men and women should be able to participate on an equal basis, must be ensured. Issues faced by cultural and religious minorities can often be best addressed at the local level. Therefore, we ask the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to be actively involved in these issues and promote best practices.

We will strengthen cooperation and coordination both within the Council of Europe and with other regional and international institutions. To this effect, a coordinator for intercultural dialogue shall be appointed within the Council of Europe to monitor in cooperation with existing structures the implementation of the Organisation’s practical programmes and ensure coordination with other institutions.

Action Plan [link]

In October 2005 the Ministers of Culture met at Faro in Portugal.12 In the first part of their vision they said:

We are committed in particular to promoting a model of democratic culture, underpinning the law and institutions and actively involving civil society and citizens, and to ensuring that diversity is a source of mutual enrichment, by promoting political, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. Access to and participation in cultural life for all – in the sense of the European Cultural Convention – are essential conditions to achieve this aim.

In addition:

Furthermore, to provide the Council of Europe with the new resources required to implement this strategy, we advocate:
- the launch of a Council of Europe “White paper on integrated policies for the management of cultural diversity through intercultural dialogue and conflict prevention”;

The Human Rights Commissioner's final colloquy

The Colloquy took place in Kazan in February 2006 with the title "dialogue, tolerance and education: the concerted action of the council of Europe and the religious communities". In the final declaration it was affirmed:

In the majority of Council of Europe member states the new generations do not even receive an education in their own religious heritage, much less that of others. For this reason, it had previously been suggested to establish up an Institute capable of contributing to the development of teaching programmes, methods and materials in the member states. At the same time this Institute would serve as a research centre on these matters. It should also be a training centre for instructors, a meeting place and a forum for dialogue and exchange. Course content should be defined in close collaboration with representatives of the different religions traditionally present in Europe.

The discussions in Kazan once again pointed to the need to forge ahead and make this project a reality. It was suggested that the teaching should focus on the customs, rites and culture upheld by the basic tenets of the religion concerned. This training in spiritual, moral and civic values should strengthen public democracy and responsible citizenship based on respect for human rights. It is not intended to replace existing confessional religious education, … These efforts need to be taken further, however, and for this it would be very useful if the religious communities were represented in the Council of Europe, in order to contribute their support, their experience and their thoughts on the development of society and the protection of human rights.13

---

11 Ibid.
12 For the Faro Declaration on Council of Europe strategy for the development of dialogue see: https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM(2005)164&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864
The Russian Presidency of the Council of Europe
The Russian Presidency of the Council of Europe (May-November 2006) organised a Conference in Nizhny Novgorod from 7-9 September 2006 with the title *Dialogue of Cultures and Inter-Faith Cooperation*. In the final declaration we read:

2. The participants rejected the idea of a clash of civilisations being at the heart of present-day instability. It is in the interests of all cultural, ethnic and religious communities that such misleading and provocative ideas are not used as a factor of political mobilisation. Although the insensitivity of some towards the global outlooks and cultural traditions of others is deeply regrettable, attempts to put views across through violence or threats are totally unacceptable.

One way of responding to these challenges from the strategists of conflict between civilisations is to promote effective intercultural and interfaith dialogue and cooperation at local, national and international level. The aim of such a dialogue, which is a major priority for both the Council of Europe and national governments, is not a mere exchange of views but the attainment of social harmony respecting political diversity - on the basis of the recognition of internationally accepted human rights - and thereby greater security in Europe and the world.14

The White Paper
The White Paper (of which an aim is to initiate a continuing debate) was written as the follow up to a reflection process on European Diversity, while also taking account of the related question of religion and interreligious dialogue, though the latter is not a competence of the Council of Europe. In an interview Madame Gabriella Battaini Dragoni, Director General of Education, Culture, Heritage, Youth and Sport at the Council of Europe outlines the objectives of the White paper:

1. Democratic management of the fundamental values of the Council and of diversity.
2. The development of a participation policy for those who live in the 47 member states of the Council of Europe.
3. Competence (knowledge of history, religious facts, art and civilisation etc.)
4. To enable spaces for dialogue to come into existence.
5. International relations in Europe

See the link [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/)

Drafting the white paper: the process.
The Council of Europe opened a wide ranging consultation in 2007. Questionnaires were sent:

i. to all the member states
ii. to members of the Parliamentary Assembly
iii. to the Congress of regional and local authorities in Europe
iv. to representatives of the religious communities
v. to migrant communities
vi. to journalists
vii. to cultural organisations
viii. to other INGOs

Outline of the White Paper
The starting point is that “old approaches to the management of cultural diversity were no longer adequate to societies in which the degree of that diversity (rather than its existence) was unprecedented and ever-growing.” Moreover “respondents to the questionnaires and participants in consultation events nevertheless were united in stating that universal principles, as upheld by the Council of Europe, offered a moral compass.”15

Some principles:
One of the current themes of the consultation was that old approaches to the management of cultural diversity were no longer adequate to societies in which the degree of that diversity (rather than its existence) was unprecedented and ever growing... Respondents to the questionnaires and participants in consultation events nevertheless were united in stating that universal principles, as upheld by the Council of Europe, provided a moral compass.16

---

15 cpt i:3 pp.9f
16 White paper 1.3 pp. 9f
There is a list of key expressions\textsuperscript{17} which set out the concepts that should be defined:

As for universal principles, the key expressions evaluate them

**Intercultural dialogue** is understood as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect (see section 3). It operates at all levels – within societies, between the societies of Europe and between Europe and the wider world.

The second key expression is multiculturalism which is defined:

**Multiculturalism** (like assimilationism) is understood as a specific policy approach (see section 3), whereas the terms cultural diversity and multiculturality denote the empirical fact that different cultures exist and may interact within a given space and social organisation.

The White Paper does not favour multiculturalism, which was not considered to be desirable by the Commissioner for Human Rights’ colloquies either:

Whilst driven by benign intentions, multiculturalism is now seen by many as having fostered communal segregation and mutual incomprehension, as well as having contributed to the undermining of the rights of individuals – and, in particular, women – within minority communities, perceived as if these were single collective actors. The cultural diversity of contemporary societies has to be acknowledged as an empirical fact. However, a recurrent theme of the consultation was that multiculturalism was a policy with which respondents no longer felt at ease.\textsuperscript{18}

**Social Cohesion** is a *sine qua non* because

**Social cohesion**, as understood by the Council of Europe, denotes the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means.\textsuperscript{19}

The groups involved and the public authorities include all the actors, including bodies involved in government and actors in civil society, among them the INGOs. The goal is always integration which

is understood as … (living) together with full respect for the dignity of each individual, the common good, pluralism and diversity, non-violence and solidarity, as well as their ability to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life … It requires the protection of the weak, as well as the right to differ … Effective integration policies should … They should respect immigrants’ dignity and distinct identity and to take them into account when elaborating policies.

Finally positive measures are required to avoid all inequality.

**The Churches and the White Paper**

The writing of the white paper is the result of a process of reflection and debate. Politicians as well as civil servants are interested in practical issues. It is apparent that the plurality of European Society (European Societies) includes some of the problems and difficulties of living together. It is essential that citizens should get on so that they can live together. From a practical point of view the white paper is in favour of integration while rejecting multiculturalism. It puts the emphasis on values that are described as “universal” - common humanity, human dignity and human rights as universal values.

In general the churches would agree. The classic definition is the creation of man and woman in the image of God (Genesis i:26). Moreover in his letter to the Galatians, Sit Paul wrote:

You are, all of you, sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Merely by belonging to Christ you are the posterity of Abraham, the heirs he was promised.\textsuperscript{20}

The principle is born out by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). A multiracial and multicultural church was established, at least among those who followed St Paul’s teaching and that of the “Hellenist party”. Mainstream, if not universal thought in current Christianity is that all human beings should be welcomed whatever their origin. Moreover, liturgical practice reflects ambient culture, for example in the Christian Ashrams in India.

This is an established principle, despite a sometimes lamentable history.

---

\textsuperscript{17} cpt. 1.4 pp.10f.  
\textsuperscript{18} cpt. 3.3 p.19  
\textsuperscript{19} cpt. 1.4 p.11  
\textsuperscript{20} Gal iii: 26-29.
Contradictory Methods

Religious thought is meditative and philosophical. It must evolve in the context of the churches because faith is mysterious while the duty of Christians is better to know God. An example is the Rule of St Benedict chapter lviii. “The Novice Master … observes carefully the one who has newly arrived. Does he really seek after God?” This is a key element of the contribution of those who are said to belong to “communities of faith and conviction”. In addition believers, whatever their confession, are interested in the origin of human dignity, for example, in view of the Aristotelian tradition in which God is the prime source and mover of the Cosmos.

Nevertheless conceptual, philosophical or spiritual differences do not preclude practical if not a theoretical agreement. However, the interpretation of human rights, for example by the Strasbourg Court, sometimes contradicts the interpretation of the religious tradition by certain communities of “conviction” - an example is the marriage of transsexuals.\(^{21}\) Religion can reflect but the court must decide. We will come back to that, but first we should look at the White Paper.

What contribution and what contradiction ? :

The fact that the ideals of the Council of Europe and of Christianity are close does not preclude the need to make critical judgements so as to illuminate and to contribute to that of which one approves. The principle was well expressed at the Council of Youth which took place at Taizé in the ‘seventies. The question asked was How can we be signs of contradiction according to the Gospel? A Franco-Polish group was made up of young French people, successors to those who marched in 1968 and who criticised capitalism. The polish reaction was no less Christian, but the Poles said that it was not capitalism of which the Poles disapproved. The Churches should be as neutral as the Council of Europe about the fundamental equality of every human being, but they should also be looking at the most difficult questions. In addition it is self-evident that religions, that is religious differences, were at the root of historical conflict like the Wars of Religion in France, the Crusades or the Thirty Years War. In addition, the “compromise” achieved in the principle of cuius regio eius religio left difficulties which were almost impossible to resolve. The religious tradition imposed by the religious allegiance of a monarch or an elector passed on a religion which was more or less part of a person’s identity, sometimes opposed to a similar kind of laïcité. This dangerous recipe was apparent in England and Scotland. At the Coronation service, the monarch swore (and still swears)\(^{22}\) an oath to support the Protestant Reformed faith as by law established, whereas the Catholic faith was proscribed until the return of the Benedictine Communities and the Catholic Relief Act 1792 that reacted the persecution of Catholics in the French revolution. To be loyal and Catholic was perceived as a contradiction.

In General the duty of the Churches includes the examination of their approach to religious plurality. Interconfessional and interreligious differences are a consequence of conscientiously held “convictions”. Those who expect to be taken seriously must necessarily take seriously the views of those with whom they speak. It is therefore necessary to look again at the concept of dialogue. According to the White Paper “Intercultural dialogue is understood as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect”, but one can add that one should say or mean “you fascinate me, I want to know you better”. So we need to go beyond the requirements of the white paper. It follows that those who engage in discussion need good knowledge of their own traditions.

Religion and Religious Facts

A chapter in the white paper considers the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. It is clearly necessary, yet it is difficult to be sure that the political organisations understand relig-

\(^{21}\) application no. 28957/95 Christine Goodwin v. The United Kingdom.

\(^{22}\) There is currently a debate about the theoretical or possible marriage of a monarch of the united Kingdom to a Catholic.
The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living together in equal dignity”

The religious organisations, in particular the traditional understanding of the Roman Catholic Church, claim to exist in their own right. A more conservative (outmoded) interpretation of the Roman *Magisterium* assumed that the Church’s structure was pyramidal, that it was presided over collegially by the Holy Father and the Bishops, and that it was given authority to teach Christian doctrine. This assumption, like that of revealed or inspired “Biblical belief” in the evangelical tradition, implies that the Universal Church is made up of people from all cultural traditions, with a cultural dimension of the religious one. In any even the church takes into itself the culture of the ambient society which it influences in turn. Therefore the universality of Council of Europe values is circumscribed by the worldwide presence of the churches as well as by the worldwide presence of other religious traditions with their own values. It may also be the case that there are counter-cultural aspects to religion. Paradoxically expert knowledge of religion could make a significant contribution to modern society, because the Churches are made up of people from all parts of current society.

However, insofar as there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free ... the Church (the churches) represent a space for integration and not a multicultural society. In suggesting an education and knowledge of the religious fact, the White Paper defines an opportunity for the churches as well as for contemporary society. Whereas interreligious dialogue is not a competence of the Council of Europe, the hope is that religious facts which are not defined in the white paper, should be taught as part of the school curriculum.

It is to be regretted that the white paper does not mention the difficult concept of an awareness (perhaps non confessional) of the existence of religion, or even an awareness of religious facts. That is the title of the Debray report and there is widespread knowledge of the expression while the implications are not well defined. In fact the whole of religious knowledge and experience is complicated as we see from chapter lviii of the Rule of St Benedict. Church support for a non confessional education for Christian theology would be an excellent example if it could develop a comprehensible method of looking at religion in an accessible manner. Thirty years ago the Farmington/Ampleforth Project (of which the writer of this document was one of the Directors) developed an A level Course (17+ years) on *The Theology of the Church and Sacraments*. Non confessional Courses were undertaken by students with no religion as well as by believers in other religious traditions. Fortunately believers were able to become aware of the inadequacies of the teaching offered by churches - an objective mentioned by J-P Willaime.

**Spaces**

The word “space” is used thirty-two times in the white paper. The meaning is not entirely clear. On the other hand, the word “laïcité” is only used once in respect of Recommendation 1804 (2007) on State, religion, laïcité and human rights although laïcité is engaged by the white paper. There is a long running debate on laïcité as well as on the development of the principle and the concept. Theoretically “new” laïcité is the guarantor of a neutral space for religious practice, but also for liberty of thought, belief and conscience. There is no mention of

---

23 The Debray Report takes its stand on the historical influence of religion on culture and the consequences of the loss of religious vocabulary. It was written at the invitation of Jack Lang, Minister of Education in France at the beginning of the years 2000. The Report was published by Odile Jacob in 2002. People had noticed that young French people had little knowledge of their historical culture. They could not really understand their art, architecture, music... whereas the language of the development of French culture is that of Christianity. The design of cathedrals, monasteries and churches as well as the content of literature or of the music of the Mass, for example, expressed the understanding of Christians of the period. Because education for religion has not existed in France for more than a century, young people were not acquiring the knowledge with which they could “decode” the heritage of history. Moreover the cultural influence of recent decades is plural, even secular.

According to Régis Debray it should be possible to enable people to be aware of religion without contradicting the principle of laïcité (see below). The important issue is the reality of a religious influence on the historical development of culture. In addition religions with their culture exist in their own right. How does one approach the “concrete” presence of either religion or of religions, particularly in view of the principle of laïcité as well as of Council of Europe ideals in the programme of education?

24 Note that the French is *Une Sensibilisation au fait religieux*. It is not easy to translate.

25 The Farmington Institute is a research centre in Oxford. Ampleforth Abbey is a Benedictine Abbey in Yorkshire which runs a secondary school. The Project was wider than being just a Catholic one!
a religious space which remains to be defined. The religions, which exclude one another, manage to work together. Example of this are the colloquies of the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Council of Europe’s dialogue with the religions, et the fora in which believers of a range of tradition meet and work together for peace, for example “Religions for Peace.

The School curriculum could provide a non confessional awareness of the existence of religion in view of the logical and philosophical coherence and therefore of the accessibility of well presented and well understood (religious) facts.

If theology or doctrine and therefore the facts that follow from them, were presented as an attempt better to understand, to explain and order humanity’s spiritual experience, a religious space could go beyond the differences without compromising particular doctrines. The opportunity and the objective would be the definition of a space (which already exists) in which religious believers could say “you fascinate me, I want to know you better” while also continuing to hold their own traditions (but obviously with the possibility of changing religion while taking account of article 9 as well as of Thomism with its definition of conscience).

Conviction

There are more than a dozen references to conviction/the convictions in the White Paper in regard to religious belonging and belief. This implicit definition of religion is acceptable in the vocabulary of the Council of Europe (for example at the preparatory meeting for the next meeting with the religions, which was held on 29-30 June 2009). It is useful to examine the assumption.

1. Believers with the knowledge of prayer and spirituality are aware of the pilgrimage of faith and of the evolution of spiritual perceptions which reflect their personal development throughout life. On the other hand Cardinal Newman described a certainty that he should consecrate his life to God, but Newman wrote his Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine in an ecclesial context.

2. In so far as conviction involves either a set idea or a series of beliefs that do not develop, but rather defined and handed on as what is received or as a revealed tradition it contradicts the educational principle; Education at all levels looks to the development of ideas, to criticism and debate. A religion that is worth believing must be able to sustain rigorous analysis and examination. It is clear that Christianity is not the only religion that can sustain such an examination although we (the CINGO) think that the incarnation of the Son of God must be the best explanation of salvation... Honesty as well as certainly involve an open process of continuous reflection, while a good educator does have the acceptance of his ideas as an objective but rather hopes that his ideas will be accepted as the generations succeed one another.

3. The challenge for the churches - as well as for the other great religions - is to present tradition in a way that is self-authenticating - in view of the fact (yes fact) that the existence of God is neither provable nor disprovable.

4. Dialogue at the grass roots includes an accessible education for religion which can be understood by ordinary people. In that sense the White paper is a challenge.

Finally

The churches exist in a society that has lost the vocabulary of religion in general and of Christianity in particular. The writing of the Debray report was a reaction to the lack of knowledge and understanding of their culture on the part of young French people. At the same time, particularly since 11 September 2001, religion is seen to be dangerous, tied to culture, sometimes a cause of fear of the other and therefore of a refusal to engage in dialogue - examples include Islamophobia and aspects of anti-semitism. An educational contribution by the churches could be the sharing of skills, attitudes and competences so as really to understand and to know their own religion, but also the religion of the other without fear, with respect but above all with the fascination that pertains to people who are at ease with themselves.

So we welcome the White paper. We agree with integration and living together beyond our differences.

We affirm the richness of cultural diversity.
We agree with an open and respectful dialogue of exchange between people and groups of different origin and tradition... in a spirit of understanding and of mutual respect. Self-evidently we recognise the need and the fundamental value of democratic citizenship and governance as well as of spaces for dialogue. The white paper expects a continuing debate to which we commit ourselves.

We are aware of our task which commits us to present religion, its nature, its beliefs and values in an accessible, open manner that respects the consequences of the plurality of contemporary society.

We ask the political organisations to take religion seriously, not to be afraid of it and to be ready to recognise the necessity, the rigour and the value of our competence in a space that is both neutral and laïque, but always with the aim of living together and for the wellbeing of the new Europe in which we will work together for the future of humanity.