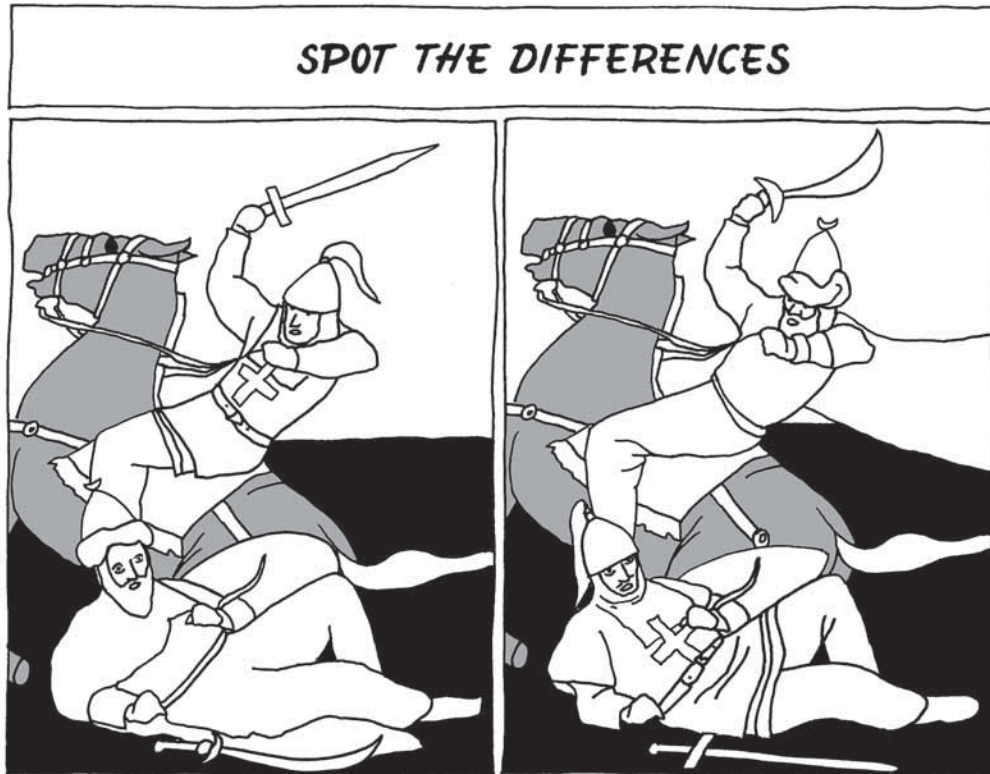# 8 Religion and tolerance

Figure 8

> Come, come, whoever you are; Wanderer, idolater, worshipper of fire; Come, even though you have broken your vows a thousand times; Come, and come yet again; Ours is not a caravan of despair.
>
> Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi, 13th century

8.1 Introduction

Do you realise how deeply religion(s) affect(s) your life? All around you, whether you are a believer or not, you can see the signs of religions. You may hear a call for prayer from the minaret of a mosque or church bells. When your friends get married, you might go to a synagogue or a church, or just attend a ceremony in the city hall. Every year you may decorate a pine tree at home and celebrate Christmas, or you might buy egg-shaped chocolates for Easter. For religious festivals, you may buy new clothes and visit your relatives or elderly neighbours, or give gifts to children. At a funeral, you hear prayers. No matter where you live in relation to the Mediterranean, religion plays an important role in your society, whether you are religious or not.

In European and Mediterranean societies, there have always been different religions and religious diversity, around which there is a complex mixture of facts and myths, truths and misconceptions. On the one hand, religions bring people together: in principle, they constitute spaces for living, for practising the more noble qualities of human beings such as humanism, solidarity and compassion, by bringing together humanity's efforts for a better shared future. On the other hand, history shows that religions have also been used or misused to justify painful conflicts and wars, persecutions and intolerance in the name of God, which have ultimately divided people rather than bringing them together. However, religions are probably not the problem, as some people suggest, nor the solution as others would like them to be. In Euro-Mediterranean societies, they simply exist together with other contemporary processes (migration, socio-economic differences, globalisation and so on) as an important factor to consider in relation to young people and youth work.

Religion is an issue that most young people have to deal with in their daily lives at home, in public, at work or at school. Youth work can help to making religious differences a factor of cultural enrichment for young people, instead of being a source of confrontation, especially through the lenses of mutual understanding, tolerance and acceptance of difference. This chapter aims to be a contribution to this by exploring the major concepts that are often used in relation to religion, such as religious tolerance, diversity, pluralism, inter-religious/inter-faith dialogue and secularism. In addition, this chapter provides some basic information about the Baha'i Faith, Christianity, Druze, Islam, Judaism and Yazidism as examples of some of the religions and faiths that have flourished in Mediterranean lands and have been followed by millions of European and Mediterranean adherents for centuries.

It should be noted that exploring these subjects to ensure unbiased and objective information on religions is not an easy task. Firstly, this is because of the depth and variety of information and speculation about the religions concerned, and secondly a result of the great sensitivity of the issue of religion, especially in the Euro-Mediterranean context. Accordingly, the information provided here should be considered as an introduction, with a selection of stimulating questions for any youth work leaders who may be interested in the basic concepts, discussions and starting points in relation to religions, religious diversity and inter-religious dialogue.

8.2 Tolerance and religious (in)tolerance

The notion of tolerance has various connotations, meanings and values attached to it; language, culture and tradition play important roles in shaping and understanding those nuances.

In the English language, the word "tolerate" means "to bear" or "to allow"; in German the meaning of "tolerance" is closer to "acceptance" and "respect". In French, *Le Petit Robert* describes the term as "indulgence and comprehension of the other, acceptance of a different opinion, not without the possibility to forbid or to require". In Turkish, *hoşgörü* refers to "understanding and allowing."[1] In Arabic *tasâmuh*, according to *Lissan al-Arab*,[2] is "to ease the process mutually and on an equal basis from both parties". Another word in Arabic, *musamaha*, refers to smoothing mutually and equally in cases of contestation, slander, defamation, dispute or enmity. In Hebrew, *savlanut* means "patience", which also refers to acknowledging and legitimising opinions and/or beliefs different from one's own or what one is used to.

Tolerance

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) agreed on a "contemporary, universal and active" understanding of tolerance in the "Declaration of Principles on Tolerance" (Paris, 16 November 1995). In Article 1, "tolerance" as a concept with all its components is defined as follows:

1.1. Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.

1.2. Tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. … Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and States.[3]

The different connotations of the word imply that acts of "tolerance" may take different forms because of differences in understanding, especially when the term is used in an intercultural context. Tolerance as a concept is open to positive and negative interpretation and use. It can be interpreted as acceptance and comprehension in one context, but it can be discriminating and negative when used to refer to putting up with something without even considering it. Respect of difference, on the other hand, is accepting the difference for what it is. Between these two notions, there is a sizeable nuance. For example, while respect may allow "those who are different"' to feel at home in a foreign environment, tolerance may make one feel like "the other". In this sense, UNESCO principles on tolerance say that the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice, nor the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions, but that those principles are complementary to respect for human rights.

Without artificially separating the two connotations, the distinction is very relevant when it comes to youth work. The orientation, aims, methods and dynamics of youth work practices would certainly be different by taking a positive or a negative approach to the term "tolerance".

Any reflections on, or definitions of, tolerance apply also to the idea of religious tolerance: the different meanings, the role of history and tradition, positive and negative understandings of the term and so on. But there are some other ideas that it is important to consider when approaching the notion of religious tolerance or, conversely, religious intolerance.

The notion of religious tolerance is closely linked to freedom of religion or belief. Religious tolerance implies the recognition, respect and promotion of religious pluralism. Accordingly, religious intolerance can be defined as "emotional, psychological, philosophical and religious attitudes that may prompt acts of discrimination or other violations of religious freedom, as well as manifestations of hate and persecutions against persons or groups of a different religion or belief".[4] For example, children of a certain religion may not be allowed to enrol by some schools, or landlords may not let their property to some families of other religious beliefs. Such acts can range from unfair treatment in education, employment, housing or law to acts by individual, such as staring in public places or throwing stones at members of other religions.

These examples result from some kind of initially negative opinion combined with a negative act directed at a religion, religious doctrine or practice (or the persons or institutions belonging to that religion) that is disliked or disapproved of.[5] Religious intolerance can be observed at different levels: among adherents of the same religion (intra-religious intolerance); between one religion or religious attitude and another, manifesting itself in various forms of antagonistic conflicts between persons and groups of persons (inter-religious intolerance); in the form of confrontational atheism or confrontational theism, which is intolerant of free choice and practice of religious commitment; or in the form of anti-secularism, which refers to a form of political activism attempting to force a political entity to adopt a religious commitment.[6]

Religious diversity is not necessarily a source of conflict; but, when triggered by other reasons, religious diversity may lead to tension in many parts of the world, including the Mediterranean and Europe. With awareness of what religious intolerance refers to, it is possible that positive religious tolerance could lead to the peaceful co-existence of several religions and religious views, because each religion constitutes a paradigm, a model, which is neither right nor wrong, neither superior nor inferior, relative to other religious viewpoints.[7]

8.3   Religious diversity in Euro-Mediterranean societies

For centuries, the Mediterranean basin has been a crossroads of peoples, civilisations and religions. Many religions have flourished in the Mediterranean lands and spread all over the world. The Baha'i Faith, Christianity, Druze, Islam, Judaism and Yazidism are only some of the religions and faiths still practised in Mediterranean and European countries. Followers of many other beliefs and faiths – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Rastafarianism and various forms of Animism – as well as atheists, also co-exist in these societies.

> **Q: Can you name the religions or religious beliefs which exist in your society?**

None of these religions is a monolithic entity. They have been heavily influenced and developed by the societies in which they have appeared, evolved and operated. This means that not only may different religions exist in geographical proximity, but the practice and beliefs of the same religion may differ from one context to another. This is one of the factors that make religious diversity especially complex, especially in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Adherents of different religions have always had connections or contact with each other. They sometimes live together in the same society and sometimes apart in different societies, but there is always interaction in other aspects of life, like marriage, neighbourhood or business relations.

8.4   Confusion between religions, nationalities and cultures

Religion, nationality and culture are three concepts for which many (sometimes contested) definitions can be found. In the simplest sense, religion is human beings' relation to what they regard as holy, sacred, spiritual or divine,[8] along with a set of

organised beliefs and practices of a group of people who share their faith. However, if we look from the point of view of groups or individuals, rather than entire religious systems, we are likely to find considerable diversity within the framework of any one religion, whether denominational, sectarian or cultural, or some combination of these categories.[9] This is also valid for nationality and culture. Indeed, all these concepts constitute part of an individual's identity, alongside other elements, and they are very much intertwined.

If these are three different but inter-related concepts, how can this relation be established and understood? How can individuals grasp the nuances in situations where, for example, people from their nationality profess different religions, people from their religion have different nationalities or cultures, or people from their country have different cultural identities? In other words, for example, are all Greek people Orthodox Christians? Or are all Arabs Muslim? Or do all Jewish people practise Judaism?

From the history and practice of religions, one can see that moral conduct, belief and participation in religious institutions are generally constituent elements of religious life as practised by believers and as commanded by religious sages and scriptures, in addition to the most basic element of religion, worship.[10] Throughout the development of religions, many daily religious and societal features have been embedded in the environment where that religion was practised and they are reflected in religious culture and politics. Many pieces of literature, poetry, art and music, dress codes, ways of doing things and innovations can be found in the history of religions, with varying degrees of importance and acceptance. Although many of these were not written in sacred books, they have become the products of common practice and interpretation by believing individuals and communities.

Throughout history, each religion has produced its own forms of culture and political understanding, which have been passed on to the next generation of its believers in traditions and customs; these are sometimes modified and adapted to new circumstances, while sometimes they continue to be practised strictly. Many examples can be given from daily practices, such as celebrations of marriage, rituals of death and burial, circumcision, and the celebration of feasts and holy days. Those symbolic features and differences are both visible (like wearing headscarves) and invisible (like norms of social interaction or definition of sin).

When cultures encounter one another, religion often offers an ideological framework which legitimises the defence and development of a particular way of life.[11] When cultures find ideological expression in terms of religion or nationality, or both, a problem arises because adherents of religions are also members of communities with shared material interests and emotional identities. Considering that religious professionals (the priests, rabbis, imams and theologians) are also members of such communities and share interests and fears, it is not surprising to see that religious institutions have sometimes become actively involved in conflict situations on one side or the other.[12]

In the modern world, generalisations such as "all Arabs are Muslims", "only Jewish people live in Israel" or "the EU is a Christian club" on the one hand show the growing complexity and diversity of societies, and on the other make the division between religions, cultures and nationalities deeper and sharper. This is because, even when a certain state officially adopts a religion and promotes a very homogeneous culture, history has proved that not all people living in that country were believers of that religion or shared a common culture. The plurality of religions and beliefs has always been there, even in cases where attempts have been made to curb such diversity by more or less oppressive or violent acts. Symbols of religious plurality, both historically

and as modern phenomena, can be found everywhere, with most classical examples from such cities as Jerusalem, Cordoba, Antwerp and Istanbul, where different religions and religious cultures co-existed together for centuries.

Q: Do all the citizens of your country belong to the same religion? Or do all the members of your religion bear your own nationality?

These simplifications are, in some cases, the fruit of a lack of knowledge and, in some other cases, the result of intended stereotypes and generalisations, ignoring growing minority groups and presenting diverse societies in a monolithic way in a logic of opposing blocks as in "the clash of civilisations". Tragic and violent events in Euro-Mediterranean history are often linked back to the crusades, colonisation and de-colonisation, and are regarded and used as a justification for the conflicts of today.[13] Religions have often been used as the explosive component of a cocktail of economic and geo-strategic interests, intolerance and violence.

In the main, the superficial analysis of those painful events by the media helps to rein-force a narrow view of reality. Expressions such as "the West wants to invade us" or "Arabs are fundamentalists" may be just on the lips of radical groups but are consid-erably present in the collective subconscious of modern societies. Complex realities demand knowledge, sensitivity and respect. Exploring and overcoming this mono-lithic thinking can be one of the contributions of youth work and can help to enable a religiously/culturally diverse but peaceful world. Overcoming the national logic, promoting the effective participation of religious, cultural and national minorities and going beyond the historical relations between countries are all necessities but they are still big challenges in the practice of Euro-Mediterranean youth work.

8.5 Religious pluralism and diversity, and inter-faith dialogue

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change one's religion or belief, and the freedom, either alone or in com-munity with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[14]

Religious pluralism refers to the co-existence of – and peaceful relations between – different religions, not in a competitive way, but rather in co-operation, the showing of respect to beliefs held in common.[15] The concept acknowledges religious diversity, the showing of respect to the beliefs and practices of the adherents of different religions or different branches of the same religion at individual, community or state levels. Through globalisation and migration but also through travel, trade, the media and the Internet, religious pluralism enters countries where there is one predominant religion.[16] In almost all societies, a degree of religious and cultural plurality and di-versity is experienced, due to different factors such as the migration of peoples, the existence of indigenous peoples and the emergence of new (religious) movements.[17]

It seems that the political and social tendency in a growing number of societies is towards taking a pluralistic approach, or at least this is what has inspired a growing number of constitutions. However, problems occur when various entities deal with religious diversity in practice.

> **Q:** In your own environment, can you find signs of religious pluralism? In your neighbourhood, are there any sacred places for other religions?

The existence of stereotypes is one of the problems. Stereotypes often lead to discriminatory behaviour and serve to justify prejudice. They are often erroneous, they oversimplify and they take no account of the diversity of the people in a given group, because they do not consider the circumstances of the individual or the range of reasons why members of a group may differ from one another in a variety of ways. At various points in history, often at times of conflict, some religious believers have tended to stereotype other religions as a result of encounters through events such as colonialism. Thus, a key principle to ensure religious diversity in the context of plurality is to avoid stereotyping.[18]

Another problem of dealing with religious diversity is the danger of religious discrimination. For example, in European history, religious wars between Catholics and Protestants or Eastern Orthodox Christians led to discrimination against religious minorities in many countries. Judaism is a religion that has been particularly discriminated against across Europe. After the expulsions from Spain and Portugal in the 15th century, for example, those Jewish people who remained were converted by force or had to practise their religion secretly and at great risk (the same thing has happened to many Muslims). Prejudice and misconceptions about the Jewish faith have certainly fuelled anti-Semitic attitudes, which have in turn been used to justify discrimination and segregation, of which the Holocaust was the culmination.[19] In the 21st century, Antisemitism is as alive as ever: groups claiming their superiority desecrate Jewish cemeteries, networks of neo-Nazi groups (often including young people) openly shout their hostility to Jewish people, and many Internet websites and literature circulate this hostility.[20]

> **Antisemitism**
>
> This is a certain perception of Jewish people, often expressed by hatred and in some cases physical or verbal attacks on Jewish people and the symbols of their faith.[21] It is a combination of power, prejudice, xenophobia and intolerance against Jewish people.[22]

Strong and deep-rooted prejudice against Islam has also become more visible in European societies, with actions such as not granting Islam official recognition as a religion, withholding permission to build mosques or not providing facilities or support to Muslim religious groups or communities.[23] Although it is not a new phenomenon, acts of Islamophobia have increased around the world, especially in the aftermath of the attacks on the United States in 2001, and also as a result of such socio-economic phenomena as migration and globalisation. With the perception of Islam as being associated only with terrorism and extremism, Islamophobia has contributed to negative views of Islam and Muslims, wrongly generalising militant religious extremism and ultra-conservatism onto all Muslim countries and Muslim people. This intolerance

and stereotyped view of Islam have manifested themselves in a number of ways, ranging from verbal or written abuse, discrimination at schools and workplaces, and psychological harassment or pressure, to outright violent attacks on mosques and individuals, especially Muslim women who wear headscarves.[24]

Islamophobia literally means a fear of or prejudice against Islam, Muslims and matters pertaining to them. It is an extreme form of religious discrimination and prejudice.

Antisemitism and Islamophobia are very concrete and widespread forms of religious discrimination, and so is intolerance towards Christians. The phenomenon cuts across different cultures and religions, and Mediterranean and Arab countries are no exceptions. Some incidents of discrimination and official intolerance can be exemplified in those countries too: citizens from various religious backgrounds (such as Christians, Baha'is and some Muslim groups)[25] face difficulties in issuing or amending their identity papers; some religious individuals or groups are prohibited from constructing or having access to their religious facilities; poorer educational opportunities or citizenship rights are provided for the members of different religions.[26]

Fundamentalism and fanaticism are two phenomena that endanger religious diversity. Prejudice, xenophobia, religious ethnocentrism, intolerance and stereotypes are all inherent in any type of fundamentalism or fanaticism. However, the acts and behaviour of a fundamentalist or fanatic also create generalisations, stereotypes and fantasies even about members of the same religion (who may have nothing to do with the fundamentalist's aims). The media play a role in spreading fear of perceived threats from fundamentalist and fanatic groups, and creating clichés in the form of distorted and manipulated words and pictures. In the interplay of action and reaction, each side's antagonism feeds on the other's in a never-ending spiral of suspicion and rejection, which ends up with mutual rejection.[27] For the aims of youth work, this double trap is one to be avoided through exchange, mutual understanding and dialogue against stereotypes and prejudices.

Fundamentalism

This can be defined as a type of militantly conservative religious movement characterised by advocating strict conformity to sacred texts.[28] More broadly, it is "an orientation to the world, which indicates outrage and protest against (and also fear of) change and against a certain ideological orientation, the orientation of modernism."[29] Once used exclusively to refer to American Protestants who insisted on the inerrancy of the Bible, the term "fundamentalism" has been applied more broadly, since the late 20th century, to a wide variety of religious movements, more often referring to the extreme conservative wing of a religion.[30]

The cultural content and historical circumstances in which fundamentalism emerges may vary across cultures, along with its doctrines and practices.[31] However, "the worldview and ethos of fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are united by a common worldview which anchors all of life in the authority of the sacred and a shared ethos that expresses itself through outrage at the pace and extent of modern secularisation."[32] Acts of religious fundamentalism can take an individualistic form, or can be pursued by groups or by governments; in the latter case it is not surprising

to see that fundamentalism is also engaged in politics to a great extent. The types of fundamentalist attitudes and acts vary considerably; they can include hostility to homosexuals, prejudice against women, separation of sexes, prejudice against ethnic or racial minorities, or violent acts such as mobbing, street fights, assassinations or suicide bombings.

A fanatic is someone marked by excessive enthusiasm and often intense, uncritical devotion[33] to a cause, and excessive intolerance of opposing views. Being a fan of something or somebody is different from being a fanatic. Many people are fans of football clubs, pop singers, movies or trends. Their behaviours can be viewed as unusual or unconventional by others, but they do not necessarily violate social norms.[34] Similarly, fanaticism is a kind of obsession that rejects any doubt or questioning of the phenomenon which is liked, worshipped and loved. This behaviour is not specific to religions and it is possible to see fanatics in many aspects of life. Fanaticism often implies intolerance, the violation of human rights and the use of violence for the achievement of its goals.

In terms of religious fanaticism, it is possible to argue that fundamentalist groups justify violence with fanaticism. It then becomes an extreme form of religious fundamentalism in which the acts of the religious fanatic go well beyond social norms and formal laws, and reach a violent level. One aspect of both phenomena which is always underestimated is that religious fundamentalism and fanaticism often harm not only others who are perceived as threats but also members of the same religious belief, for example women.

Problems are often caused by the inappropriateness of state structures and administrations, and their consequent inability to take into account and deal with religious diversity. To ensure religious pluralism, nation states are often recommended to:[35]

- guarantee freedom of conscience and religious expression (by allowing all religions to develop in identical conditions; by facilitating observance of religious rites and customs, for example, of marriage, dress or holy days; by ensuring freedom and equal rights of education to all citizens regardless of their religious belief; and by ensuring fair and equal access to the public media for all religions);

- promote education about religions (by encouraging schools to teach the comparative history of different religions, stressing their origins, the similarities in some of their values and the diversity of their customs, traditions and festivals);

- promote better relations with and between religions (by engaging in dialogue between religions, theologians, philosophers and historians); and

- promote the cultural and social expression of religions (by ensuring equal conditions for the maintenance and conservation of religious buildings and other assets of all religions; by safeguarding cultural traditions and different religious festivals).

> **Q: Can you think of ways of ensuring and valuing religious pluralism in your daily life or in international youth activities?**

Many recent efforts to ensure religious pluralism refer to inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue, which is also assigned priority within Euro-Mediterranean relations between the region's religions: notably Islam, Christianity and Judaism. To the extent that conflicts increasingly have religious associations, the promotion of inter-religious dialogue and

reciprocal interactions among different religions and spiritual and humanistic traditions would challenge ignorance and prejudice.[36] Such a dialogue is also considered as a way of enhancing mutual "understanding of the sensitivities of the 'Other'" and consequently overcoming "various ethnic, linguistic and sectarian differences, which in turn trigger extremism and blind fanaticism and will", while at the same time contributing "to a dialogue between civilisations, instead of a 'clash of civilisations'."[37] In that sense, the dialogue is to take place within a sea of images, prejudices or stereotypes, which are mostly negatively reflected upon the "other".

Since culture and religion are seen as inextricably intertwined, intercultural communication also has a role in "providing an opportunity for discussion involving representatives of various religions and cultures, activists and experts in conflict prevention and human rights", and "presenting, sharing and introducing good practice and drawing up joint action plans to affirm the virtues of peace and prevent conflicts".[38] Dialogue can be organised at international, regional, national or local level, focusing on a variety of topics and concerns, such as the need to deepen understanding, share spiritual concerns, pass on values, respect one another's faiths, prepare for social action and learn to live in a multi-religious, multicultural society in lasting peace.[39]

The term 'inter-religious dialogue' is often used, but it is somehow difficult to define. It is clear that this dialogue is something rather more specific than mere conversation or diplomatic negotiations.[40] It requires an ethic based on tolerance, so that the partners in dialogue can be open and co-operative enough to understand each other. It also requires a willingness to listen and to learn, as well as a readiness to challenge different collective memories, which require thorough rethinking and reworking.[41]

Language also becomes crucial in the dialogue, in terms not only of pure translation, but also of contextual understanding. For such a mechanism to work effectively there is also a need to respect the fundamental human rights of all sides engaged in dialogue.[42] There are still some aspects of the dialogue that require further refinement: to define such a dialogue within determined conceptual and historical framework(s); to understand the contents of the dialogue and to define the ways of implementation; and to find models for balanced participation of women and men as an essential precondition for the dialogue.[43]

> **The World Conference of Religions for Peace**
>
> This is an organisation in which all the major world religions are actively represented. Since the 1990s, it has gained major public prominence and the support of significant religious leaders. The organisation brings together hundreds of key religious leaders every five years to discuss the great issues of the time.[44]

The young participants in the symposium on Inter-Religious and Intercultural Dialogue in Youth Work[45] (Istanbul, 2007) made a number of recommendations by which inter-religious and intercultural dialogue can be further developed. Those recommendations ask governments and decision-makers to introduce intercultural and inter-religious education and dialogue into educational institutions, and diversity into their programmes and school systems, starting at an early age. This should be ensured through curriculum development and teacher training, in formal and non-formal education, by proposing different viewpoints representative of all groups, ethnicities and religions.

Local authorities are also asked to raise awareness of diversity in their communities, in order to develop local policies which support the intercultural and inter-religious

initiatives of non-governmental organisations, to develop structures to bring together representatives of different religious and cultural communities, and to enable the participation of all groups (regardless of gender, ethnic background, religion, age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation or physical and mental abilities) in local decisions. The recommendations support the active participation of youth organisations from all religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds in public debates and policy-making; the recognition of the existence of faith-based youth organisations; and the creation of international youth media networks to promote co-operation and exchange of knowledge, experiences and views.

8.6 Some religions present in the Euro-Mediterranean social space

This section aims to provide some basic information on some of the religions (namely, in alphabetical order, Baha'i Faith, Christianity, Druze, Islam, Judaism and Yazidism) which have flourished in the Mediterranean lands and spread around the world over thousands of years. Being followed by millions of European and Mediterranean people and being living entities, these religions and faiths have created religious practices, cultural patterns, historical events and social/political values that have been the subject of numerous studies and various speculations. It is impossible to mention all aspects of all religions in a limited number of pages. Instead, this section intends to show how different religions and faiths are very rich in themselves and, at a very basic level, what kind of historical, political and cultural characteristics they have developed over the centuries.

Furthermore, religious rituals and daily practices are without doubt part of the cultural and social life of societies. They are mostly accepted and performed by believers and practitioners of the religions, and their significance may vary from one person or group of persons to another. However, to the extent that they are embedded in the social and cultural environment of a society, these symbols and practices are not limited to the believers of that particular religion or faith, but also shared by other members of society. Thus they have the potential to act as a sign of solidarity and to open a way to dialogue, with acceptance of, recognition of and respect for a diversity of beliefs between people of different faiths. Accordingly, this section also aims to provide basic introductory information for actors in international youth work about some of the religions present in the Euro-Mediterranean social space, information which may have an impact on the planning and realisation of youth activities.

➔ 8.6.1 Baha'i Faith[46]

Baha'i Faith emerged in Persia (Iran) in the middle of the 19th century. It was founded by Baha'u'llah with the message that there is one God and unity of all faiths. Baha'i Faith proclaims the essential unity of all religions and the unity of humanity, and accordingly its followers devote themselves to the abolition of racial, class and religious prejudices. After Baha'u'llah's death, his son led the faith; by the beginning of 20th century, the faith had also gained adherents in Europe and North America. In 1921, the leadership of the Baha'i community entered a new phase, evolving from that of a single individual to an administrative order with a system of elected bodies and appointed individuals.[47] In the 21st century, it is claimed to have about six or seven million followers worldwide.[48] Baha'is have suffered religious persecution, particularly in Iran towards the end of the 20th century.[49]

The fundamental beliefs of Baha'i faith can be summarised as follows:

- God in Baha'i Faith is single, imperishable and the creator of all things (including all the creatures and forces in the universe), whose existence is thought to be eternal, without a beginning or end.[50]

- God is absolutely unknowable but does reveal himself through appointed messengers, who include Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad and, most recently, Baha'u'llah. Because each messenger speaks from the point of view of a particular time and historical context, it is believed that all religious truth is relative.

- Human beings are believed to have a rational soul, which provides the species with a unique capacity to recognise God's station and humanity's relationship with its creator.[51]

- The writings of Baha'u'llah, the Bab, and 'Abdu'l-Baha form the sacred scriptures of the Baha'i Faith.

- The great bulk of Baha'i teaching is concerned with social ethics; the faith has no priesthood or sacraments and does not observe ritual forms in its worship.

There are obligations of prayer, fasting and monogamy, and followers are encouraged to abstain from alcohol and tobacco. Members are also expected to attend the Nineteen Day Feast on the first day of each month of the Baha'i calendar, in which the year is divided into 19 months of 19 days, with four extra days. There is no preaching. Services consist of readings from the scriptures of all religions.

The supreme governing body of Baha'i Faith is the international Universal House of Justice, which has its headquarters in Haifa, Israel, near the shrine of Baha'u'llah. It functions as the administrative, legislative and judicial body for the Baha'i commonwealth around the world.

➜ 8.6.2 Christianity[52]

Christianity developed out of Judaism in the first century ce. Christianity, a monotheistic religion, is based on the teachings of Jesus, a Jew of Nazareth, seeking to remain faithful to the experience of one God. Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of God. The acts and words attributed to Jesus[53] by the gospels, four biblical narratives covering the life and death of Jesus, constitute Christianity's basic teachings about the way that God loved them and the way they should live.[54] Two of the most famous stories are the story of the Prodigal Son, where it is shown how much God loves his people, and the story of the Good Samaritan, which shows how people should love each other.[55] Jesus is believed to have been crucified in Jerusalem and to have been resurrected from death. His teachings were initially spread by a group of twelve followers, the apostles.

During the first years of Christianity, many believers carried the message of Jesus throughout the Roman Empire, where small Christian communities developed. In these years, Christians faced intolerance and persecution from Roman emperors. As missionary and theologian, Saul of Tarsus (also known as Saint Paul) helped to establish Christianity as a universal religion rather than a Jewish sect and, together with others, he shaped the early Church.[56] Under Constantine, Christianity was adopted as

the official religion of the Roman Empire in 312 ce,[57] and this provided the impulse for a distinctively Christian culture from the mid-300s ce. In 325, the First Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council of the Christian Church, was summoned.[58] By the 5th century, the Bishop of Rome (the pope) had become the leading spokesman for Christendom and assumed an important role throughout the middle ages. After the fall of the Roman Empire in the west, the Church entered into a long period of missionary activity. Christianity spread to the peoples of northern and central Europe.

The first major division in Christianity occurred around 1054 with the Great Schism between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome. This was a result of significant religious, cultural and political differences between the Eastern and Western churches, embodied in the question of Christian leadership and different views on the use of images (icons), the nature of the Holy Spirit and the date of Easter, among other topics. As a result, the Christian Church was divided into the West (Roman Catholic) and the East (Greek Orthodox).

Beginning in the late 11th century, Roman Catholic kings organised military expeditions, the Crusades,[59] aiming to recover the Holy Land from Muslims. Many Crusades were organised up to the 16th century, and they left their mark on the crusaders as much as on their counterparts. It is argued that the Crusades minimised any possibility of reunification of the two churches and as a result changed the structure of European society. Some historians state that the Crusades slowed the advance of Islamic power (though the extent of this is questionable) and helped western Europe avoid conquest by Muslim armies.[60]

The next major division in Christianity occurred in the 16th century, initiated by Martin Luther and John Calvin. The Reformation,[61] having far-reaching political, economic and social effects in the years to come, represented the foundation of Protestantism. The changing role and character of the Church over the centuries, particularly in the office of the papacy and its deep involvement in the political life of Western Europe, had resulted in increased political manipulation, combined with the church's increasing power and wealth. This role was interpreted as the bankruptcy of the church as a spiritual force. Martin Luther, in his 95 Theses (1517), listed his demands for ethical and theological reform of the church. The Reformation movement resulted in the emergence of other groups of reformers and Protestants in Europe, such as Calvinists, Anglicans, the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, Anabaptists and Quakers.

Between 1618 and 1648 Europe witnessed a series of wars. The Thirty Years' War[62] started as a religious war between Protestants and Catholics within the Holy Roman Empire, but it gradually developed into a general political war involving most of the European major powers. The conclusion of the war with the Peace of Westphalia (1648) meant for Roman Catholicism the *de facto* acceptance of the religious pluralism that had developed out of the Reformation: Protestantism obtained a legal standing alongside Roman Catholicism, and the map of Europe was irrevocably changed. The ancient notion of a Roman Catholic empire of Europe was permanently abandoned, and the essential structure of modern Europe as a community of sovereign states was established. This was the beginning of the secularisation of politics. In addition to Renaissance humanism and Reformation ideas, the Enlightenment[63] in the 18th century, a Western philosophical movement, challenged essential Christian views, replacing the scriptures and words of priests with "reason" through methods of historical and literary criticism, providing the philosophical roots of secularism.

The most important facts and beliefs of Christianity can be summarised as follows:

- There is only one God, who created the world distinct from Him but who is believed to be active within it. God is the unity of three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (the Holy Trinity).

- Jesus (Christ) is the Son of God, who came to Earth as a man. He was born of the Virgin Mary by immaculate conception. He was crucified and was seen alive after He had died (resurrection). Jesus is conceived of as both human and divine but, unlike any other human, without sin.

- The Christian place of worship is the church.

- Human beings are created by God and for God, but are responsible for their own lives. God is the judge of all that they do, but He also seeks to help them when they go wrong. Christians believe that their life will be judged after death by the way it was lived.

- The holy book of Christianity is the Bible and it has two parts: the Old Testament (sacred writings of the Jewish people written before the time of Jesus) and the New Testament (which includes the gospels).

Sunday, also called the Lord's Day, is the day of rest and worship for Christians, who attend mass at church. The Lord's Prayer,[64] taught to his disciples by Jesus, is the principal prayer used by all Christians in common worship. Baptism[65] is a sacrament of admission to the Christian Church both of infants and adults. The forms and rituals of the different churches vary, but baptism involves the use of water (application of or immersion in) and a prayer to the Holy Trinity. Lent[66] is a period of penitential preparation for Easter, in imitation of Jesus' fasting in the wilderness. The timing of Lent differs in Western and Eastern churches.

Easter[67] is the principal festival of the Christian Church and celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after crucifixion. The date of Easter is different in the Eastern and the Western Churches, due to differences in the calendars used. All Christian traditions have their own special liturgical emphases for Easter. Easter may also encompass some traditional elements, especially for children, with symbols such as painted and decorated eggs and rabbits. Pentecost,[68] also called Whit Sunday, commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and other followers of Jesus, fifty days after Easter. Christmas[69] is the festival commemorating the birth of Jesus, commonly associated with December 25th, though the date may differ between branches of Christianity.

Christian denominations can be classified historically in reference to schisms (divisions between churches). Some denominations significantly differ from others on issues of doctrine and ritual, such as their theological belief in the Trinity and the nature of Jesus; belief in the saints; the use of icons; the celibacy of priests; the role of the Church; and the figure of the pope and his infallibility.

Roman Catholicism[70] recognises seven sacraments (religious rites): baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper, in the form of the Mass), penance (reconciliation), anointing of the sick, marriage, and holy orders.[71] In Catholicism, the pope is the infallible interpreter of divine revelation and has full authority over the Church in all matters of belief and practice. The office of the papacy is in the Vatican and the Church organisation is strictly hierarchical. Only men can enter the priesthood, and priests must take vows of celibacy.

Eastern Orthodoxy[72] is a fellowship of autonomous, or independent self-governing, churches which accept the decisions of the ecumenical councils. Most of these churches

share the same essential doctrines (are in full communion) with one another. The titular head of the Eastern Orthodox churches is the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (in Istanbul), but its many territorial churches are governed autonomously by head bishops or patriarchs (who must be unmarried or widowed, although lower orders of the clergy may marry). The churches accept seven sacraments or holy acts: baptism, chrismation (similar to confirmation, but peculiar to Eastern churches), the Lord's Supper, ordination, penance, anointing of the sick and marriage. Its adherents live mostly in Greece, Russia, the Balkans, Ukraine and the Middle East. The Armenian, Coptic (in Egypt), Ethiopian, Eritrean, Syriac (in Antioch) and Indian Orthodox churches are collectively referred to as the Oriental Orthodox churches, which agree among themselves upon slightly different doctrines (especially in relation to acceptance of ecumenical councils) than those of the Eastern Orthodox churches.[73]

Protestantism[74] developed out of the Reformation, which criticised the Catholic Church and the authority of the pope. Today, it covers a variety of denominations. The followers of Luther established the evangelical churches of Germany and Scandinavia; Calvin and more radical reformers founded Reformed churches in Switzerland; Calvin's disciple Knox established Presbyterianism in Scotland, and the Church of England and the Episcopal Church developed as other branches of Protestantism. The doctrines of Protestant denominations vary considerably, but all emphasise the supremacy of the Bible in matters of faith and order, justification by grace through faith and not through works, and the priesthood of all believers. Sacramental doctrine varies among Protestants, but most limit the sacraments to two: baptism and Holy Communion. The religious authority is the individual Christian with their Bible.

Q: Which symbols (clothes, hair styles, jewellery and so on) might identify a person as a member of a particular religion in your surroundings?

→ 8.6.3 Druze[75]

Druze is a Middle Eastern religious affiliation that originated in the 11th century. It is said to have begun as an offshoot of the Isma'ili sect of Islam, but it is unique in its incorporation of various philosophies, because of which many Islamic scholars label Druze as a non-Muslim religion.[76] Most communities of Druze live in Lebanon, Syria, Israel or Jordan, but adherents also live in Australia, Canada, Europe, Latin America, the United States and West Africa.

The faith was officially revealed in the early 11th century by Hamza Bin Ali, a Persian Ismaili mystic and scholar.[77] Throughout the Crusades (11th to 15th centuries), the Druze placed their military resources at the service of Sunni Muslims against the crusaders,[78] especially in Syria and Lebanon, which also helped them to gain respect from the Muslim caliphs.[79] However, dynasties and families of Druze also suffered from persecutions throughout their history, for example, from Fatimid (11th century) and Mamluk (14th century) armies. They came into conflict with the Ottoman Empire over the following centuries, but Druze villages also spread and prospered under the reign of the Ottoman Sultans.[80] By the 20th century, the Druze were officially recognised by Syria, Lebanon and Israel as a separate religious community, and they play important roles in Syrian and Lebanese politics.[81]

Druze religion is characterised by an eclectic system of doctrines and by a cohesion and loyalty among its members. The Druze call themselves *muwahhidun*, 'monotheists'. Druze religious doctrine is the secret teachings of the *hikmah*, which is known only to an elite of religiously trained wise men, the *uqqâl* or 'knowers'. Most Druze know only parts of their religion's theology and they are referred to as *juhhâl*, the 'ignorants'. The Druze community differs from other religions in its conception of monotheism, in its internal division of believers into *uqqâl* and *juhhâl*, and in its religious strictures, which emphasise the obligation of solidarity as a fundamental of the faith and on the need for separation from surrounding religious faiths.[82]

The belief in the revelation of God in the form of a human being is considered the most important fundamental principle of the Druze faith. The Druze believe that their founder, al-Hakim bi-Amrih Allah, was actually an incarnation of God. All Druze have the duty to accept the truth about Hakim, deny other religious beliefs, avoid unbelievers, and maintain solidarity and mutual aid with other Druze. Druze have been careful not to consider anyone a member of the sect who was not born to a Druze father and mother. Accordingly, there is no missionary activity to expand the belief. Marriage between Druze and non-Druze is discouraged.[83]

The fundamentals of faith and the system of Druze laws were inscribed in numerous epistles, which are held secret from all who are not Druze. The permission and privilege of access to these epistles, as well as membership of *uqqâl*, involve meeting specific religious and ethical requirements. The Druze faith is not a ritual-ceremonial faith in essence, but rather a neo-platonic philosophy. They attribute significance to observance of seven religious teachings (*ta'alim*): holding one's tongue; watching over one's brothers; abandoning worship of the occult and vanity; shirking the devil and acts of evil; the uniqueness of the great God in every generation and at all times; willing acceptance of God's deeds, whatever they might be; and coming to terms with both the concealed and the apparent decrees of God.[84]

➜ 8.6.4 Islam[85]

Islam originated with the teachings of Muhammad in the Arab peninsula in the early 600s ce. The Arabic word Islam means 'submission' to the will of God. Its adherents are called Muslims. Muhammad is regarded as God's (Allah in Arabic) final prophet. The will of God was sent by Allah through the angel Gabriel to his messenger Muhammad over a period of 20 years in a series of revelations and messages. Those revelations, in the form of verses, are considered to be the direct word of God and were compiled as the Holy Koran (Qur'an).

Muhammad first preached his revelations in Mecca and gained a small group of followers. Due to a violent reaction against this new faith, Muhammad and his followers fled Mecca and went to practise their faith in Medina. This migration in 622 CE became known as the *Hijra* and marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. Eight years later, Muhammad was welcomed back to Mecca, which underwent a mass conversion to Islam, marking the beginning of its expansion. The spread of Islam continued after Muhammad's death in 632 CE, under the reign of caliphs who succeeded Muhammad as spiritual, political and military leaders of the Muslim community, with all his powers except that of prophecy.[86] Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman were the first three caliphs. The controversy over the selection of the fourth caliph, 'Ali, eventually split Islam into the Sunnite and Shi'ite branches in the 7th century.

At the end of the 7th century, the Umayyad Dynasty, the first dynasty of the Muslim caliphate, with its capital at Damascus, prevailed for seventy years and Islam expanded

to the Maghreb, the Iberian Peninsula (Al-Andalus) and central Asia. In the mid-8th century, Islamic civilisation flourished in poetry, commerce, arts and science under the Abbasid Dynasty, which moved the capital of the caliphate to Baghdad and made the city one of the cultural centres of the world at the time. Islamic law (shariah), which was extensive but uncoordinated, was systematised during the 8th and 9th centuries. However, in the 9th and 10th centuries, the caliphate showed signs of fracture with the rise of regional dynasties.[87]

> *Shariah*[88] is the Islamic law established in the Koran and *haddith*. Its scope is wide, since it regulates Muslims' relationships not only among themselves and with the state, but also with God. Ritual practices, ethical standards and legal rules (in both private and public activities) are all integral parts of Shariah law. Historically, many aspects of life – penal laws, laws of transactions, family laws and succession laws – were regulated by Shariah laws and applied by Shariah courts. During the 19th century, Muslim society, with the exception of the Arabian peninsula, brought about radical changes in the fields of Shariah civil and criminal law, because of the needs of the time, introducing codes based upon new models and a system of secular tribunals to apply them.

Starting in 1095, alliances of European Christian kingdoms mobilised their resources to initiate the Crusades, with the religious aim (among others) of taking the Holy Land. Numerous Crusades were organised in the following 500 years, in which various Muslim groups and Islamic dynasties fought against the numerous European Christian forces. Historically, the presentation of the European and Arab versions of the Crusades had very little in common, apart from shaping different perceptions and stereotyped images about the other side. After the defeat of the crusaders by Muslim armies, the Arab version of the Crusades became "a heroic story of how the Muslims overcame their rivalries and united long enough to win a holy war."[89]

From the 11th century onwards, Islam continued to be adopted and spread under various dynasties (as *de facto* rulers of the caliphate) such as the Seljuk Turks (12th century), the Mamluk Dynasty (13th century) and the Ottoman Empire (13th century onwards). In 1453, Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium, was besieged and conquered by the Ottoman Empire. In the 15th and 16th centuries, three major Muslim empires reigned: the Ottoman Empire in much of the Middle East, the Balkans and northern Africa; the Shi'ite Safavid Empire in Iran; and the Mughul Empire in most of present-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Relations between the Muslim empires were not free from rivalry.[90] By the end of the 19th century, the Muslim empires had declined significantly and by the early 20th century, with the Ottomans' defeat in World War I, the last one collapsed.[91] The 20th century witnessed the rise of nationalism in the Arab and Muslim world and the birth of independent, predominantly Muslim states, which adopted many interpretations of Islam and many schools of thought and law from the history of Islam.

> *Jihad*[92] is rooted in the Koran's command to struggle (as the literal meaning) in the path of God and in the example of the Prophet Muhammad. It relates to two meanings: struggling against the evil in oneself – to be virtuous and moral, making a serious effort to do good works and help to reform society – and fighting injustice and oppression, spreading and defending Islam, and creating a just society through preaching, teaching and, if necessary, armed struggle or holy war.

The most important facts and beliefs of Islam can be summarised as follows:

- God (*Allah*) is the creator and judge of humankind, omnipotent, compassionate and merciful. Everything occurs at his command, and submission to God is the basis of Islam.

- Muslim faith rests on belief in one God, the angels, the scriptures (from the Torah to the Koran), the prophets (from Adam to Muhammad), Judgment Day and Destiny (good and bad).

- Muhammad is the final prophet of God. He was both a prophet and a very human figure, an ideal model for Muslims to follow as they strive to do God's will, and an example for guidance in all aspects of life.

- Human beings have been created free and in the image of God. They have been given an intellect which allows them to discern between good and bad, and to choose whether or not to struggle for justice, combat evil and follow the good. On the last day, God will judge every person according to their deeds and all the dead will be resurrected and either rewarded with heaven or punished with hell.

- Being a Muslim rests on five pillars:

- affirmation of the faith (*shahâda*), that is, to profess that "there is only one God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God";

- praying five times a day (*al-salât*), at dawn, midday, afternoon, sunset and evening, either in the mosque collectively or at a clean place individually;

- fasting (*al-sawm*) by abstaining from food, drink, smoking and sexual relations from dawn to sunset every day during the month of Ramadan, commemorating the revelation of the Koran to Muhammad;

- making the pilgrimage to Mecca (*al-hajj*) at least once in a lifetime if one's financial and physical conditions allow;

- paying a tax (*al-zakât*) on one's capital for the benefit of the poor and needy of society.

- The Muslim place of communal worship is called the mosque (*masjid*). An *imâm* is the person leading the prayer and worship in the mosque.

- The Koran (*Qur'an*) is the sacred book of Islam. The sayings and deeds of Muhammad (*Sunna*) and 'traditions' (*Hadith*) are also important sources of belief and practice.

The day of communal worship is Friday in Islam. Believers gather at the mosque to pray and hear a sermon. In many Muslim countries, this means, in practice, that weekends are usually on Fridays and Saturdays. Muslims do not eat pork and, in accordance with Mohammad's sayings, they avoid the consumption of intoxicating or alcoholic beverages. *Halâl* (lawful) meat must come from animals slaughtered according to Islamic rules.

There are many religious festivals and feasts in Islam. '*Id al-Fitr*[93] or '*Id al-saghîr* (small festival) marks the end of Ramadan and fasting, and is celebrated for three days follow-ing the end of Ramadan. '*Id al-Adha*[94] or '*Id al-Qurban* or '*Id al-kabîr* (major festival) marks the end of the pilgrimage (*Hajj*) and commemorates the ransoming of Abraham's son Ishmael with a ram. To symbolise that event, families who can afford it sacrifice a ritually acceptable animal (sheep, goat, camel or cow) and then divide the flesh equally among themselves, the poor, and friends and neighbours. This happens about

70 days after the end of the Ramadan, and the feast lasts for four days. At both feasts, a communal prayer is performed at daybreak on the first day. Both feasts are times of official receptions and private visits, when friends greet one another, presents are given, new clothes are worn and the graves of relatives are visited.

The major divisions in the history of Islam[95] arose over questions of leadership of the Muslim community, called the caliphate, not over issues of doctrine. Only later did denominations emerge, based on divergent emphases in doctrine and practice. Today there are more groups branching off from these groups.

Sunnite[96] Muslims regard their beliefs as the mainstream, traditionalist branch of Islam. They are the largest group in Islam. They recognise the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Alî) as Muhammad's rightful successors. They base their religion on the Koran and the Sunna as understood by the majority of the community under the structure of four schools of thought: Hanbalites, Malikites, Hanafites and Shafiites.

Shi'ites[97] believe that Muslim leadership belonged to Muhammad's son-in-law, 'Ali, and his descendants alone. They are less numerous than the Sunnites, though they are largest religious group in Iran and Iraq, and there are many adherents in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, East Africa, India and Pakistan. The subdivisions are the Twelvers, Isma'ilis and Zaydis.

The Alawites[98] (in Arabic) or Alevis[99] (in Turkish) live mainly in Syria and Turkey and their basic doctrine is the deification of 'Ali. They consider the five pillars of Islam as symbolic duties because belief is considered to be between the person and God, and obligatory ceremonies to show belief in God are not considered necessary. Instead, they have their own religious ceremonies (*cem*), officiated at by 'holy men', at which religious poems are sung and men and women carry out ritual dances (*semah*). They profess obedience to a set of simple moral norms and claim to live according to the inner meaning of religion rather than its external demands. Their main principles are to "behave honestly" and to "be contented with less because the person is mortal".

Sufism[100] is a mystical movement within Islam which seeks to discipline the mind and body in order to experience the presence of God directly. It began as a reform movement in response to the growing materialism and wealth of Muslim society after Muhammad. Religion for Sufis is an inner experience, an asceticism that renounces the luxuries of the world in a struggle with oneself against greed, laziness and ego, a devotion purely to obedience to God. The practices of contemporary Sufi orders vary, but the movement has been important for Islam, especially in its contributions to literature.

> **Q: How may different religious practices and beliefs may affect a Euro-Mediterranean youth activity?**

➜ 8.6.5 Judaism[101]

Judaism, one of the major monotheistic world religions, flourished as the faith of the ancient Hebrews around 4 000 years ago in the land of Canaan.[102] The start of Judaism is told in the first five books of the Bible. It is believed that God made a covenant first with Abraham and then renewed it with Isaac, Jacob and Moses; God guided the Jewish people through many troubles and gave them a set of rules by which they should live, including the Ten Commandments.

Followers of Judaism lived both in peace and prosperity under the reign of kings such as David and Solomon, but also under the conquest and rule of others, such as the Persian, Hellenic and Roman empires. Over the centuries (until c.70 CE), the history of Judaism was marked by exiles from and resettlements in the Holy Land, and the importance given to the destruction and reconstruction of the Temples. After the destruction of the Second Temple, of which the only remnant today is the Western Wall (also known as The Wailing Wall), the Jews dispersed throughout the world in the Jewish Diaspora. This dispersal was accompanied by a shift in emphasis in Judaism from a Temple cult to a religion of the home (or traditions of the Diaspora), which is also considered to be the development of Rabbinic Judaism.

The Jewish Diaspora[103] refers to the presence of Jews outside the land of Israel, as a result of expulsion from that land. It is believed to have started with the dispersal of Jews in the Babylonian exile, around 600 BCE, leading to hopes for restoration under the leadership of a messiah. The concept carries religious, philosophical, political and eschatological connotations, inasmuch as the Jews perceive a special relationship between the land of Israel and themselves.

For the following centuries, followers of Judaism continued to live in Jewish settlements under the Roman Empire (c. 200 CE), the Byzantine Empire (c. 600 CE) and Islamic rulers (during the Middle Ages). Around 1000 CE, the Crusades and the expansion of Christian society led to the marginalisation of Jewish communities in Europe. By the 11th century, Jewish people faced violent attacks and persecution, together with anti-Semitic stereotyping.[104] In the following centuries, they were expelled from England (13th century), France (14th century) and Spain (15th century). The expelled Jews moved to new locations in Europe such as Poland and the Netherlands, and in the Ottoman Empire, Arab lands and Palestine in the 15th century.

After the mid-18th century, the American and French revolutions resulted in the emancipation of Jews from discriminatory and segregational laws and customs, their attainment of legal status as citizens and the freedom of individual Jews to pursue careers.[105] *Haskalah*, also called the Jewish Enlightenment, started in the 18th century as a movement among European Jews advocating Enlightenment values and secular education. By the mid-19th century, Reform Judaism began to arise as a movement trying to adapt the traditional Jewish religion to the changing conditions of the modern world.[106] In the 20th century, two major phenomena have deeply influenced modern Judaism: the Holocaust and Zionism.[107]

Historically, Diaspora Jews outnumbered the Jews at home. The chief centres of Judaism shifted from country to country (Babylonia, Persia, Spain, France, Germany, Poland, Russia and the USA), and Jewish communities gradually developed distinctive languages, rituals and cultures. While some lived in peace, others became victims of violent Antisemitism.[108] In the 19th century, some countries gradually withdrew restrictions on Jewish people, while in others there were brutal pogroms (systematic, massive acts of violence) against Jewish communities, encouraged by the anti-Semitic policies of governments.[109]

The rise of fascism in the first part of the 20th century brought further hardship for Jews in Europe. Recent Jewish history is marked by the Holocaust *(Shoah* in Hebrew*)*, the culmination of the racist and anti-Semitic policies that characterised Germany's Nazi government. This resulted in the systematic extermination of six million Jewish people just for being Jews, one million of them children.[110] This tragedy also affected the spirituality of many Jewish people, as they tried to assimilate how God could allow such a thing to happen to his chosen people.

Zionism[111] refers to the Jewish nationalist movement with the goal of creating a Jewish national state in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jews (the Holy Land); it has been a key element of contemporary Jewish history. It began in the mid-19th century and gained strength as many Jews began to feel that the only way they could live in safety would be in a country of their own. The first Zionist congress was held in Basel in 1897 on the initiative of Theodor Herzl, the father of political Zionism. In 1917, the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration, a statement of support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.[112]

In the following years after the establishment of urban and rural Jewish settlements, Jewish immigration to the region remained slow until the rise of Antisemitism in Europe in the 1930s. After strong paramilitary opposition to British colonial rule for many years and with the growth of tension between Arabs and Zionists, Britain submitted a plan to the United Nations in 1947, which proposed partition of the country into separate Arab and Jewish states and the internationalisation of Jerusalem. In May 1948, the State of Israel was created. With this, the Zionist movement achieved its political objective and since then it has concentrated on providing financial aid to Israel, supporting Jewish immigrants from all over the world and educating Diaspora Jews.[113] On the other hand, the foundation of the State of Israel brought about Arab-Israeli tension in the Middle East for the coming decades. It still continues.

The most important facts and beliefs of Judaism can be summarised as follows:

- There is only one God who is the creator and sustainer of the universe and all creatures. God is omnipotent, omniscient and eternal, and the father of all mankind, but has a unique covenant with Jewish people (*berith*).

- Israel was chosen because it accepted the Torah; the people of Israel are God's chosen people.

- Human beings are made in the image of God and should try to seek holiness in every area and activity of life.

- Moses was a teacher, prophet, lawgiver and leader; known as Moshe Rabbeinu, the "master" and "father" (greatest) of the prophets.[114]

- The Messiah, a person appointed by God, it is believed, will come to the world one day and will bring an era of peace.

- The Jewish place of worship is the synagogue. The religious leader of a Jewish community is the rabbi.

- The Holy Books of Judaism are the Torah (the body of divine Jewish teaching; narrowly defined as the Five Books of Moses, but also used to mean all the books of the Bible and the oral traditions)[115] and the Talmud (a compendium of law and commentary on the Torah, applying it to life in later and changed circumstances).

The *Sabbath*, 'the rest', is the holy day and the day of rest in Judaism. During the Sabbath, observant Jews do not do anything that might be counted as work (for example, driving, writing, travelling, cooking or answering the phone). Jewish people do not eat pork, and *kashrut* or 'keeping kosher' is the name of the Jewish dietary laws. Foods are kosher when they meet all the criteria of Jewish law. For example, animals may be eaten only when they are properly slaughtered. Meat and milk products cannot be cooked together and even cooking utensils (dishes, pots and so on) must be kept apart.

There are many religious festivals and feasts in Judaism. *Pesah* or *Pesach* (Passover)[116] is a holiday commemorating the Hebrews' liberation from slavery in Egypt. A special

family meal is held where dietary laws are observed (wine, matza). Prayers and traditional recitations are performed. *Rosh Hashanah* ('Beginning of the Year')[117] is the first two days of the Jewish New Year. A distinctive feature is the blowing of the ram's horn (*shofar*), which calls for a spiritual awakening and alerts Jews to the coming judgment. *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement)[118] is observed 10 lunar days after Rosh Hashanah and is marked by abstention from food, drink and sex. It is a day of purifying oneself of sins and seeking to achieve reconciliation with God. *Hanukkah* (the Feast of Lights, or the Feast of Dedication)[119] commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the lighting of candles for each of the eight days of the festival. The celebrations include a variety of religious and non-religious customs, such as eating, singing, playing games in families with invited guests, and the giving of gifts and money to children.

According to their historical origins, one can distinguish between Ashkenazi Jews (having roots in central Europe) and Sephardi Jews (in Spain, the Maghreb or the Middle East). Ashkenazi Jews differ from Sephardi Jews in their pronunciation of Hebrew, in cultural traditions, in synagogue cantillation (chanting) and especially in synagogue liturgy.[120] Like many other religions, Judaism has also included a number of denominations.

Orthodox Jews[121] adhere very strictly to traditional beliefs and practices. They maintain strict practices such as daily worship, dietary laws (kosher), traditional prayers and ceremonies, regular and intensive study of the Torah, and the separation of men and women in the synagogue. In the State of Israel, Orthodoxy is the official form of Judaism and has considerable power.

Conservative Jews[122] conserve essential elements of traditional Judaism, but also allow for the modernisation of religious practices. For example, in 1985, Conservative Judaism started ordaining women rabbis.

Reform Jews[123] have modified or abandoned many traditional Jewish beliefs, laws and practices in an attempt to adapt Judaism to the changing conditions of the modern world. They challenge the binding force of ritual, laws and customs. In 1937, several fundamental principles were dramatically revised and later the movement debated issues such as new prayer books, the role of women and homosexuality.

Reconstructionist Jews[124] seek to unite Jewish history, tradition, culture and belief with modern life and scientific knowledge, where supernatural elements from religion become less relevant. The movement developed in the late 1920s.

> **Q: Which religious feasts will take place on which days this year in your country?**

➜ 8.6.6 Yazidism[125]

Yazidism is a religion with ancient Indo-European roots, professed primarily by Kurds. There are traditional communities in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Georgia and Armenia, but these have declined since the 1990s because of emigration of Yazidis to European countries such as Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. The Yazidi religion is considered to be a syncretic combination of Zoroastrian, Manichaean, Jewish, Nestorian Christian and Islamic elements.[126]

Yazidis are thought to be descended from the Umayyads. Sheik Adi, the founder of Yazidism, settled in the valley of Lalish (north-east of Mosul) in the early 12th century CE and gained widespread influence. Yazidis believe that they were created separately from the rest of mankind, not even being descended from Adam, and they have kept themselves strictly segregated from the people among whom they live.[127] Although scattered, they have a well-organised, hierarchical society, with a chief sheikh as the supreme religious head and an emir, or prince, as the secular head.[128] The Yazidis are strictly endogamous; they practise marriage within their group.

The fundamental beliefs of Yazidism can be summarised as follows:

- The world was created by God, and is now in the care of seven holy beings, often known as angels or *heft sirr* (the Seven Mysteries).

- The active forces in their religion are Melek Tawus and Sheik Adi.

- *Melek Tawus* (the Peacock Angel) is considered to be the leader of archangels and the representative of God on the face of the Earth. Contrary to his image in the Koran as Satan and source of evil, Yazidis believe that Melek Tawus is not wicked, but that the source of evil is in the heart and spirit of humans themselves. It depends on humans themselves as to which they choose.

- Yazidi thought includes descriptions of heaven and hell, with hell extinguished, and other traditions incorporating these ideas into a belief system that includes reincarnation. Therefore, there is no hell in Yazidism.

- Two key and inter-related features of Yazidism are a preoccupation with religious purity (expressed in the system of caste, food laws, traditional preference for living in Yazidi communities and taboos governing many aspects of life) and belief in metempsychosis (belief that the Seven Holy Beings are periodically reincarnated in human form).

- The holy books of Yazidism are the *Kitêba Cilwe* (Book of Revelation) and the *Mishefa Reş* (Black Book).

- Yazidis have five daily prayers – the Dawn, Sunrise, Noon, Afternoon and Sunset prayers – but most Yazidis only observe only two of these, the Sunrise and Sunset prayers.

Wednesday is the holy day, but Saturday is the day of rest in Yazidism. There is also a three-day fast in December. Children are welcomed into the religion at birth, and circumcision is common but not required. The greatest festival of the year is the Feast of the Assembly (*Cejna Cemaiya*), the annual seven-day pilgrimage to the tomb of Sheik Adi in Lalish. This is an important time for social contact and affirmation of identity. During the celebration, Yazidis bathe in the river, wash figures of Melek Tawus, light hundreds of lamps in the tombs of Sheik Adi and other important religious figures, and sacrifice an ox. New Year's Day is the first Wednesday of April, on which Melek Tawus is believed to have been created by God and to have come down to earth. Another important festival is the *Tawûsgeran* (Circulation of the Peacock).

8.7 Atheism

Atheism has been defined as "disbelief in the existence of any gods or of God", which "may take the form of: (a) dogmatic rejection of specific beliefs, e.g. of Theism; (b) scepticism about all religious claims; or (c) agnosticism, the view that humans can never be certain in matters of so-called religious knowledge (e.g. whether God exists

or not). An atheist may hold belief in God to be false, or irrational, or meaningless".[129] However, the term has philosophical, religious, psychological and sociological aspects, which makes atheism difficult to define.[130]

> **Q: What is the word for 'atheist' in your own language? Does it imply a pejorative, positive or neutral attitude?**

Atheism has existed since ancient times, having a long history but also many meanings as a result of different historical circumstances. In the 400s BCE, atheism and agnosticism became visible in Athens, in the form of criticism of polytheistic religion and mysticism, in the ideas and written works of some philosophers. The Greeks created the term *atheos*, which was taken over by the Romans as *atheus*, and which gave rise to the words 'atheist' and 'atheism' in early modern times. Towards the end of the 2nd century CE, Jews and Christians were considered to be atheists because of their attitude to the pagan gods, which shows that the term was used to label opponents, whether Greeks or Romans, pagans or Christians.[131]

Acceptance of atheistic views was rare in Europe in the middle ages because of the dominance of metaphysics, religion and theology. With the coming of the Renaissance, humanistic tendencies were associated with a sceptical attitude towards explanations in metaphysical-religious terms, which indicated a shift towards man and nature in an empirical and practical manner.[132] Later, Enlightenment thinking brought about sharp criticisms of religion, especially of Christianity. With the recognition of human reasoning as the only source of truth, faith in a supernatural reality became questionable. With the rise of the ideas of rationalism and positivism, experience and empiricism were considered as the way to reach knowledge, signifying a materialistic rather than a metaphysical, theological or religious attitude. In the mid-18th century, the term 'atheism', which had previously been used more as an accusation, appeared as a term of self-definition, a declaration of one's own belief (or the lack of it), when it was used among intellectuals, particularly by Diderot.[133] The French Revolution also helped to bring atheism into the public sphere.

In the 19th century, the denial of the existence of God and the negative evaluation of religion became more intense and radical. Many rationalist and materialist philosophers, including Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche, denied the existence of deities and criticised religion.[134] Darwin's theory of evolution and other scientific advances weakened the value of religion as a way of explaining the nature and existence of the world.

The negative connotations of the word as a term of abuse persisted into the 19th century and became increasingly associated with immorality and lawlessness. This also led intellectuals to coin new terms of self-definition. Some preferred to describe themselves as 'secularist'. Other concerns led to the emergence of a new term, 'agnosticism', suggested as referring not to a new creed but to a metaphysical unknowing.[135]

Atheism in the 20th century advanced in many societies. Atheistic thought found recognition in a wide variety of other, broader, philosophies, such as existentialism, objectivism, secular humanism, nihilism, logical positivism, Marxism, feminism and the general scientific and rationalist movement.[136] The 20th century also witnessed the political advance of atheism, in the interpretation of the works of Marx and Engels. After the 1917 revolution, the Soviet Union and other communist states promoted state atheism. This resulted in the negative associations of atheism with communism, despite the fact that some prominent atheists were anti-communist.[137]

In the 21st century, in many societies atheism is still regarded as immoral and is treated as a criminal offence, while atheists themselves have suffered civil and political discrimination.[138] Atheist people in some regions of the world do not openly declare themselves as atheists to avoid social stigma and insults, discrimination and persecution. In this sense, atheists suffer from the same intolerance, discrimination and prejudice that many religions and religious people have done. Although religious dialogue concerns first the believers of the diverse faiths and religions, one cannot deny the presence of people who consider themselves atheists or agnostics, with strong philosophical values and references, who wish to be part of this dialogue with religions. Presenting their standpoint and opening a door to dialogue would certainly enrich the dialogue greatly, since atheism is not appreciated in the same way on all sides of the Mediterranean.

> **Q: Is it easy to claim to be an atheist in your country?**

8.8 Secularism

The terms 'secular', 'secularism' and 'secularisation' may have meanings which apply to a range of phenomena of life, such as politics and society. The word derives from Latin, *saeculum*, which means both 'this age' and 'this world', combining a spatial sense and a temporal sense.[139] Being secular often indicates a relative opposition to the sacred, the eternal, and the otherworldly,[140] and a widely accepted definition of secularism is "a process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance".[141]

Secularism refers to a shift from social and political rules governed and dominated by religious norms and values (and belief in the afterlife) towards worldly life, with the development of humanism, in the form of human cultural achievements and possibilities in this world.[142] It is a belief that human activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be based on evidence and fact ('reasoning') rather than religious influence.[143] Modernity has freed spheres of cultural life like art, law, politics, learning, science and commerce from their embeddedness in a comprehensive religious culture, allowing them to pursue their own paths of development.[144]

Secularism may assert the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, and freedom from the government imposition of religion upon the people, within a state that is neutral on matters of belief and gives no state privileges or subsidies to religions.[145] In this sense, secularism proposes non-discrimination because of religious beliefs so that equality towards the citizens of any political entity is ensured and all beliefs are respected. In this framework, each person's religion, including the option of having no religion, is considered as a strictly personal matter, which is consistent with the view that "a good general knowledge of religions and the resulting sense of tolerance are essential to the exercise of democratic citizenship".[146]

In political terms, secularism refers to the independence of politics and law from religion,[147] or the separation of church and state. Here the 'church' refers to the social and political domination of religion, religious institutions and laws; and secularism prefers civil laws over any of those based on religious scriptures or traditions.[148] This goes with the French secular ideal, *laïcité*, which was historically linked to the Jacobin

tradition of the French Revolution and was suspicious of and antagonistic to religion and its influence on the state and society.[149] This tradition produced a struggle against despotism and religion, against the monarch and the Roman Catholic Church, and it ultimately led to a political construction in France at the beginning of the 1900s, through law and the constitution, that church and state are separate entities. Thus, *laïcité* refers to "an institutional system informed by a secular worldview that determines a civic and moral ideal, unifies the community, and legitimates sovereignty."[150] It shapes a social frame in which the boundary between religion and non-religion is clear.

The process of secularisation in nations can be observed on at least two major levels. One is the secularisation of national institutions and structures, such as the organs of the state and government. The other is the secularisation of society – that is, of human consciousness – which leads to increased secularity in belief, behaviours and belonging among the populace.[151] In addition, the meaning and manifestations of secularity can take both positive (pro-secular) and negative (anti-religious) forms.[152]

In the modern world, one can observe different practices of and approaches to secularism at the state level, which are sometimes contradictory. In western European countries and their constitutions, the legal relationship between church and state takes the shape of: (more or less strict) separation of church and state (France and, to a large extent, Ireland); co-operational links between the two (Spain, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Austria and Portugal); or established state church systems (Scandinavian countries, the UK and Greece).[153] For example, in Britain, a number of bishops of the Church of England still retain a place in the House of Lords, the upper chamber of the UK parliament, while it is argued that the links between church and state have very little impact on contemporary life.[154] In France and also in Turkey, religious holidays are still included among the public holidays in the calendar, due to the persistence of religious elements in public life and culture. In some cases, like that of Israel, an avowedly secular state, marriage and divorce are possible only within a recognised religion.[155]

The new multi-religious and multicultural situation resulting from globalisation, migration and growing pluralism also brings the issues related to secularism to the fore. On the one hand, further efforts become necessary to understand and acknowledge the place of religious authorities and faith-based/religious/spiritual communities as they pass on their culture and messages. On the other hand, this new situation also brings obligations to acknowledge the increasing diversity of belief systems and approaches to life, and to explore the dynamic interaction between different religions and the issue of secularism versus religion.[156] Consequently, the secularisation thesis has started to be questioned by those pointing to the resurgence of religion and religious conflict in the modern world.[157] For example, one recent controversy in Europe was the prohibition of wearing ostentatious religious symbols, such as the cross, the *kippah* and, most notably, the headscarf, in French public schools in 2004.

Another debate has been the relationship between Islam and secularism. It is argued that Islam is a system of both religion and worldly life at the same time, and in this sense it is difficult to separate the political from other transactions among people in Islamic teaching.[158] It is also argued that the prevailing Islamic sect in Arab countries has neither a clergy nor a defined church or religious authority, which makes the separation of church and state a non-issue.[159] But there are still a number of issues in relation to human rights and citizenship rights that depend on, or are highly influenced by, Islamic law in many Muslim countries. Examples of these include: civil

laws that regulate various aspects of life such as marriage, divorce and women's rights; education policies (compulsory courses on religion in public schools); freedom of expression and conscience; and issues like abortion or same-sex relationships. In this sense, secularism does not only mean the separation of state and religion, but also the observance of human rights, including the right to practise a religion or belief as well as to change it, as stated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8.9 Religious diversity, tolerance and youth work

Dealing with young people from European and Mediterranean countries necessitates paying special attention to religions, because youth work does not happen in a vacuum of space and time. Values, mental frameworks, discussions and even jokes are affected by reality, history and religious terminology as well. So maybe the first step in approaching religious diversity is to accept diversity as a fact, but not necessarily a source of conflict. This also necessitates having objective, unbiased information about the existence of religious diversity and its elements (the religions themselves) or at least being aware that information can be biased.

Youth work can, indeed, be a platform for dealing openly, naturally and constructively with the richness, tensions and challenges of religions in Euro-Mediterranean societies. An honest approach, trying to overcome stereotypes and misconceptions, is probably the first step in that direction. A growing number of youth organisations are actively working in the field of inter-religious dialogue, a dialogue between equals, being self-critical of their own religious traditions and with the aim of increasing understanding.

One contribution of youth work could be to accept religious diversity and work with it in international youth activities. Taking differences of belief and practice within the group into consideration, before and during the activity, would be a good first step. Knowing about some of the rituals and practices of different religious can be very useful and important for the good functioning and success of youth events. Consideration of dietary laws, places and times for prayer, the religious calendar and daily practices of different religious groups (the Sabbath, Friday prayers, Ramadan, Sunday celebrations, holidays) might help the organisers of youth activities provide a respectful and peaceful atmosphere as well as avoid problems of travel and the timing and efficiency of activities. The particularities of the place of the activity and the expectations of the hosting environment are equally important, in order to show respect for the needs of the group participants.

If the mutual expectations are implicit, they are better made explicit at an early stage of the activity. In practice, religious diversity could be considered at various stages of an activity: in the recruitment of the team and of the participants, in introductory exercises, in intercultural evenings, in timetables or in organising meals, by explicitly or implicitly dealing with difference and diversity.

> **Q:** Taking into account the practices and factual characteristics of major religions, what would you take into consideration when organising a Euro-Mediterranean youth event?

A degree of sensitivity towards religious diversity within the group would create a certain positive and motivating curiosity towards the religious practices and beliefs of others. This might also help to promote mutual respect and understanding, while helping to overcome any strong prejudices against religious beliefs and practices. Religious diversity is not only relevant to the target group of the activities, but also to the trainers' team, which often contains such diversity within itself.

Inter-religious or interfaith dialogue is highly relevant for youth work in two ways. Firstly, its outcomes provide opportunities for better understanding and mutual respect for and among the young people within the activities. In addition, it can itself be a subject, a theme to work upon.

Within the youth campaign All Different – All Equal, the Council of Europe's Directorate of Youth and Sport initiated the Istanbul Youth Process, with the aims of providing development opportunities and supporting projects for inter-religious dialogue with and by young people. Activities in this process bring together young people from a range of religions, as well as grass-roots youth workers and youth organisations. The Istanbul Youth Declaration, issued by participants in a youth symposium where the process was launched, places intercultural and inter-religious dialogue "within the framework of indivisible, inalienable and universal human rights" and calls upon faith-based youth organisations to "promote respect for each other and facilitate the process of living in diversity, both at local and international levels, and foster their interaction with other kinds of youth organisations and activities."[160]

The SALTO report

Produced by three SALTO Resource Centres,[161] *Faith, religion and dialogue: educational report* is aimed at youth workers, trainers, youth leaders and anyone else with an active interest in issues related to youth, faith and inter-religious dialogue. It is a reference book to inspire and inform about the design of training activities and youth projects; to help develop training materials and tools for training; for self-development for those new to the topics; and to stimulate debate, discussion and dialogue.

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