MANIFESTO 2024 - CALEM-ICAZ FOUNDATION

« We will tell you, thanks to the revelation of this Quran,
the most beautiful stories, although you were once among the ignorant »[1].

The Quran is an admirable text, sanctified by generations of believers, based on the most beautiful stories. These stories are not specifically culturally anchored; they speak to us about our humanity, here and now. But I do not think that we should state them, in the language of our secular traditions, in order to reinforce particularisms or schisms, but rather to create bridges, while identifying the often inexpressible signs of the Universal through the particular.

This is despite the fact that monotheistic traditions, like those of the Zoroastrians before, also carry within the seeds of our humanity's self-destruction narrative. This temptation of the worst is generally symbolized by the appearance of two messengers of God in particular: the archangels Michael[2] and Gabriel[3]. These two avatars of the Divine appear together only once in the Quran[4]: at the moment of weighing our actions[5], on the "last judgment day"[6].

Thus, faced with the recurring debates which concern these myths and these traditions

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[1] Quran: 12.3.

[2] *Mika'il.*

[3] *Djibril.*

[4] They are also considered, by monotheistic traditions, to be the two angels sent by God to Abraham's nephew, the prophet Lot, in Sodom and Gomorrah.

[5] Steigerwald, D. (1999). « *L'islâm : les valeurs communes au judéo-christianisme ».* Médiaspaul.

[6] Quran: 2.98. The Quran insists that we are the sole judges of our own actions; Quran: 69.19.

conveyed for millennia by religion, and sometimes by its most totalitarian millenarian tendencies[7], we find ourselves all too often very helpless, vulnerable: sometimes angry, sometimes in search of universal redemption. Vulnerability, a strongly contemporary term human and social sciences, as well as in philosophy, is generally accepted in its most common meaning: weakness and fragility.

Are we, collectively, too fragile in the face of the blows of fascism, wherever they come from? On the contrary, are we too often motivated by our ancestral fears, rather than by our democratic ideals? What are we standing for in our now globalized lives, as millions of poor and hungry people flee the ravages of the climate crisis and rush to Europe?[8] *"What lines of flight remain when the wandering of a stigma has chased away the dream of oneself"*?[9] At the heart of this civilizational maelstrom, is a spiritual renaissance, beyond religious dogmatism, thinkable? What collective, academic, cultural and social structures would allow us to cross the ford, like Moses and Aaron, at our bloody "red sea", in midst of this fierce post-modern era, towards to a truly peaceful *Islamicate[10]*?

For fifteen years, with this media coverage around the concept of progressive and inclusive religiosity, we are often faced with individuals, whether or not they are personally concerned by the present question, who have heard so many things on the topic, and their opposite, that they want to have both a synthetic and global idea of these issues, from our religious traditions' point of view. Living together, apostasy, gender: what do religious[11] texts really say, within our communities in the *diaspora* and on the other side of the Mediterranean, on these most burning social issues?[12]

This manifesto therefore represents, above all, our systemic vision of these identity and social tensions, through the prism of a blind spot that is that of the status of minorities. Because the way we consider minority identities offers a plethora of information about the overall functioning of a given society or community.

Consequently, the first objective of our organizational paradigm is to recapitulate the scriptural sources relating to these questions, by choosing several concrete issues, as well as by describing the way in which they have been considered in the recent history of our religions.

The secondary objective of our organizational paradigm is to establish a dialogue, rather than having the last word, or denying other approaches to these issues, in order to be able to contribute to imagining bridges between our cultural traditions, and the daily lives of believers as actors of their

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[7] Belief which advocates working towards the advent of the antichrist (*Al-dadjal*), in order to subsequently precipitate the earthly reign of the Messiah.

[8] Espineira, K. & al. (2016). « Corps vulnérables vies dévulnérabilisées ». L'Harmattan, Paris.

[9] Supra, introduction.

[10] Hodgson, M. (1977). « *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1-3: The Classical Age of Islam* ». University of Chicago Press.

[11] Sociologically Islam does not exist, "it" speaks even less; it is the believers, inspired by traditions written down on paper for centuries, who keep these religions alive.

[12] Helly, D. (2006). « Diaspora : un enjeu politique, un symbole, un concept ? » ; in *Espace populations sociétés, 1.* Available online - http://eps.revues.org/960

destiny, wherever they come from and wherever they live.

This paradigm, at the intersection of theoretical ideals and sociological facts, commonly described as that of a theology of liberation, most often conceived through the prism of identities described as "minority", or even "extreme" behaviors, has already allowed us to establish a certain number of observations.

Why root alongside minorities? On the one hand, because the way in which we treat minority identities or behaviors, within a given social group, says a lot about the way in which the internal dynamics of this group function, and are perpetuated from a generation the other.

Indeed, this may seem contradictory, but beyond the value judgment, we must understand that this is a phenomenon that is easy to analyze in terms of psycho-social systems linked to group dynamics. This phenomenon of "fascization" of identities, through the dogmatic and exclusive rewriting of cultural heritages, arises from the fear of a social group, whatsoever, especially in times of economic and then political crisis, of seeing its identity undermined, questioned by the minority within[13].

Mirroring these unconscious and unjustified phobias, we will here highlight the fact that the representation of a possible universal humanism, claimed at the heart of our cultural or religious traditions, must therefore be refounded, on the one hand on a temporal primacy of human law, for the support and development of a just societal order; on the other hand, under the impulse of the Divine, by a superiority of the ethical example embodied by our prophetic traditions, thus placed above our human instincts, which contribute to sclerosis our interindividual interactions in times of crisis[14].

This is where the *spirit of religious law* resides. Pragmatic primacy of the sociological, ethical superiority of the axiological. This is where the main minority Liberation theology's axiom lies, as well as the primary complexity of this type of intersectional approach. How easy it is to write it, and how difficult it is to see it unfold.

Added to the fact that culture, when observed as being the product of interindividual interactions, nevertheless seems impossible to organically separate from religion, outside of any context, and *vice versa*. Every religion is an artifact of its mother culture; it never falls from the sky. Just as we are not able, to this day, to give an example of a single culture that would have emerged without producing spiritual representations.

On the other side of the Mediterranean, since the dawn of the twentieth century, in the light of postcolonial liberation struggles, religious dogmatism has never been so instrumentalized in order to influence social-political, and then identity dynamics. This shall continue to have consequences on our spiritual representations, everywhere else in the world.

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[13] Moscovici, S. (1979). « *Psychologie des minorités actives* ». PUF, Paris.
[14] Zahed, L. (2017). *« Islams en devenirs : L'émergence d'éthiques islamiques libératrices par la conscience accrue des genres & des corporalités minoritaires ».* CALEM, Marseille.

Our organizational, intersectional paradigm will thus make it possible to trace, in a systematic[15] and systemic[16] manner, through the narrative of concrete examples, the origin of scriptural sources in connection with a certain representation of religious ethics in Islam: *al-adab[17]*.

In French there are, and recently more and more, many terms borrowed from Arabic, much more than from Gaulish. However, these terms do not always exactly cover the classical meaning that we had before their passage into our Western vernacular languages, or even into their slangs. For all practical purposes, I will therefore specify that Islam, with a capital "I", refers in French to the so-called "Arab-Muslim" civilization, and not to Islam as a religion *stricto sensu*. Islam is therefore above all Muslims, and others.

We must also distinguish different representations of the link to this Islam: Islam, religion of "peace" (and not of submission); *shari'a*, path towards "Enlightenment", towards awakening - *al-yaqine* - which is not a dogmatic prison; *fiqh*, traditional Islamic understanding of the divine message (it is not a "law").

Let us add to this that within secular and democratic societies, the only law is that of the Democratic *Respublica[18]*. This is how it is today in secular societies, and according to the theology of Liberation which I follow, God wanted it this way for our greatest good! Only the theology of Liberation, endeavored by minorities' perspectives, will allow us to move beyond dysphoria[19] and conflicts of allegiance.

These epistemological perspectives also make it possible to deconstruct the sophisms at work here, through which the so-called "Islamists", for a century, have participated in the strengthening of murderous and fascistic identities in Islam, through an exclusively dogmatic and rigorous representation of spiritual traditions, thus perceived as fundamentally Islamizing and not universal.

Neuro-psychosocial-theology, is the term I use to define this intersectional, ethico-religious paradigm, thereby taking into account all of the primary determining factors of this present problematic thus described: the factors linked to the functioning of our most atavistic brain structures; those linked to our most intimate ancestral beliefs; and finally the factors linked to the way we implement these latest, in our daily lives, in order to shape our interactions with all of creation.

It nevertheless remains, in view of the current context, that our religious traditions will be ethical and universalist, or will no longer be. But to this there is an additional political difficulty: here

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[15] Toutes les sources directement ou indirectement liées à un sujet d'étude donné, en référence à la *théologie systématique*.
[16] Afin de constituer un système de pensée scientifique, cohérent.
[17] Translation which does not exactly cover the epistemological scope of the terms considered here. Cf. Izutsu, T. (2002). *« Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Quran »*. McGill-Queen's University Press, Canada.
[18] Belonging to all of us.
[19] Two representations of ourself and the world, which are incompatible, theoretically, and which coexist in our mind.

we are stuck between two extremes, which I have already dealt with elsewhere[20].

On the one hand, we would have those who are decried as "Islamists", who call themselves reformists[21], who claim that Islam means "peace" in Arabic, but who only exclude the "others" thus fantasized. Even more, they base the very axiological principles of their reform on discrimination, rather than on inclusion: the cornerstone of a universalism, which they nevertheless claim to be part of. For "Islamists", universal peace would be Islam, and nothing else, but not entirely for women, certainly not for Jews, absolutely never for gender minorities and apostates.

On the other hand, we would have those who are described as "secularists", who call themselves defenders of individual freedoms, whom some accuse of not defending the human rights of Muslims as fiercely, or even of being a tad "Islamophobes"[22], in an openly uninhibited manner; considering, for instance, that civilian victims, whenever identified as "Arab-Muslim", would only be an unfortunate variable of necessary adjustment. Liberation theologies are precisely about placing the most vulnerable at the heart of our political, ethical and spiritual concerns.

Here, whether they belong to one presupposed extreme or another, we are often confronted with people who spout the same banalities about an Islamic culture thus reified, but without ever attacking the radical Islamizing evil. These two extremes are reluctant, according to their deep ideological nature, to cross the abyss between individual authenticity and collective idealism.

The philosopher of the last century, Hannah Arendt[23], initiated such an enterprise of creating an intellectual substrate, linked to the social-political establishment of all forms of fascism: beyond their facades with various cultural colors, their underlying dynamics are similar, systemically speaking[24].

As intellectuals, artists or organizations leaders, engaged in these areas for thirty years, our hobby has been to identify the common points, the sufficient and necessary underlying dynamics, for the development of Fascized identities in times of crisis, at the expense of minorities, in order to avoid the pitfall of being deceived by simple ideological facades, that are indeed diverse and varied.

Even more, over the last two decades, we have witnessed the waltz of terminologies, more or

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[20] Zahed, L. (2018). « *Radicalisations Intersectionnelles : L'exception culturelle des minorités tunisiennes, le Maghreb et la France en miroir* ». CALEM, Marseille.

[21] [21] Cf. for instance *« L'islamisme est-il la forme musulmane de la théologie de la libération ? »,* available online - https://orientxxi.info/magazine/l-islamisme-est-il-la-forme-musulmane-de-la-theologie-de-la-liberation,2525 ; or « *Le réformisme islamique : courants de pensée et intellectuels* », disponible en ligne - https://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/Entretien-avec-Steven-Duarte-Le-reformisme-islamique-courants-de-pensee-et.html ; and Ramadan, T. (2015). « *La réforme radicale* ». Poche, Paris.

[22] I will quote Nathalie Galesne, on the rise of "anti-Islamic" representations in Europe at the beginning of the century, in particular through her analysis of the former great Italian reporter's pamphlet: Oriana Fallaci; « *Islam en Italie : cris de guerre médiatiques et roulements de tambours politiques* ». La Pensée de midi, 2008/4 (n°26) – pages 67 à 80. Available online - https://www.cairn.info/revue-la-pensee-de-midi-2008-4-page-67.htm

[23] Arendt, H. (2005). « *Le système totalitaire* ». Points, Paris.

[24] Zahed, L. (2016). « *LGBT musulman-es : du Placard aux Lumières: Face aux obscurantismes et aux homonationalismes* ». CALEM, Marseille.

less flowery, in order to qualify these different intersecting issues, linked to the radicalization of certain religious people. Thus, as a premise of this manifesto, I have chosen to use a dynamic terminology, which makes it possible to overcome political divisions, while having the interest of describing these ideological processes.

In this regard, *Islamists* is a term which refers to those individuals who consider that: "*Islam remains the source from which everything is conceived*"[25]; unlike "secular" Muslims, who consider Islam as a philosophy of life, an axiological framework integrated into the rest of the architecture of their spiritual existence.

As for our representation of *universalism*, here it is defined as intersectional and inclusive. This is how this concept is reestablished by the black American academic, Kimberlé Crenshaw, in order to describe the way in which the intersection between racism and sexism allowed her to bring to light the blind spot of certain activist circles, which never take takes into account the entire spectrum of discrimination to be deconstructed[26].

This tropism of a certain militant systemic, supposedly Universalist, has long placed individuals from several visible minorities at the intersection of discriminations, superimposed on one another, hyperbolized, colliding and reinforcing each other, without being identified in a specific and objective manner. This is what makes certain intellectuals say that: "*When we think about universalism, we are in a metonymic logic[27], and we take the part for the whole*"[28].

Finally, the term *separatism* appeared in the French national public debate recently, when the eponymous law was drafted[29]. During our discussions, prior to the vote on this law, with my anthropologist colleagues from the *Office of Religious Affairs* at the French Ministry of Interior, we came to the conclusion that this term had at least the advantage of allowing us to no longer be forced to make exclusive use of "communitarianism"[30], the meaning of which is variable and too often still depends on the skin color, or confession, of the individuals building up certain communities in particular.

Epistemological as well as terminological premises of our topic thereby posed, we will continue to develop concrete projects inch'Allah - academic, cultural and artistic -, in order to support these contemporary mutations of cultural or religious representations, beyond a fascist political conception, in this case Islamizing, of our individual and collective identities.

We will thus take head-on, in an intersectional manner, the deconstruction of an exclusive representation of Islam, because we are fully aware of the fact that all processes of fascisization of

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[25] Bouzar, D. (2004). *« Monsieur Islam n'existe pas », page 85*. Hachette, Paris.
[26] Eponymous book (2023). Payot, Paris.
[27] Take the part for the whole (e.g.: content / container).
[28] Louis-Georges Tin (2020). *« Les impostures de l'Universalismes »*. Textuel (Actes Sud), Paris.
[29] Law of 24th August 2021.
[30] A French political neologism pointing at the fact that European citizens from Arab-Muslim descent would have that inherent tendency of living only together, separated from the rest of the democratic society.

identities, whatever the era or culture considered, which we today call separatism, begin with the exclusion of "others", considered as no longer part of a social-identity group worthy of humanity. Thus, we will be opposed to the exclusion of the "other", this time within the group, in order to reinforce the boundaries of the latter, by stigmatizing beliefs or behaviors described as "perverse" or "unnatural".

Finally, we will be opposed to the rewriting of the historiographical past of the identity and cultural origins of the so-called "Arab-Muslim" world, in order to complete the process of analyzing this particular radicalization which[31], like all the others, is systemically and systematically social-politically constructed on the backs of religious, ethnic, linguistic, gender, or other minorities[32].

The fact remains that such a paradigmatic organizational dynamic, certainly systemic and rigorous, contains several blind spots. This type of social-cultural organization, such as the CALEM Foundation, presents the obvious advantage of considering reality as it is, rather than conjecturing indefinitely about what this or that culture, thus reified, will command us to be.

More particularly, our liberating theological approach places individuals at the center of our axiological considerations, whether philosophical or more specifically religious. This is a major difference with the identity tensions carried by other historical movements, which have had a more dichotomous point of view on the question, considering that two identities would coexist, in a more or less split way, within the representation that the individual concerned has of himself or herself or themselves: the believer on one side, the citizen on the other.

But the major challenge facing this type of social-cultural organization is that shared by all projects qualified as progressive and inclusive[33], developed from within a secular, cultural and religious tradition. This challenge consists of separating what is essential to faith, from what is imposed by a culture or a given social-political context, according to economic and geostrategic postcolonial factors, most often determining although implicit; then, on the other hand, to sift through what concerns the peaceful preservation of one spiritual tradition among many others, from what relates to the emancipation[34] of the individuals who keep these traditions alive.

There are undoubtedly additional pitfalls to this type of commitment, at the intersection between social-cultural diversity and Universalist faith, due to a particular, multidisciplinary terrain with multifactorial determinism, in full mutation for around thirty years, in connection with Islam as a philosophical-religious tradition, but also the particular contemporary history of the countries on both

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[31] Zahed, L. (2018). « *Radicalisations Intersectionnelles…* » ; op. cit.

[32] Zahed, L. (2016). « *LGBT musulman-es…* ». Op. cit.

[33] In the sense that we adapt our representation of ethical axioms to the progression of the society in which we live, with the aim of including all of humanity without excluding anyone on the basis of arbitrary, discriminatory considerations.

[34] Liberation through the passage from prejudice to conviction, centered on the well-being of oneself and others. This is what we call *maslaha* in Arabic. See for example Louizi, M. (2018). *« Libérer l'islam de l'islamisme ».* Fondapol, Paris.

shores of the Mediterranean

However, when crossed in this way, these minority issues will allow us to establish solid conjectures about the way in which certain leaders proceeded, little by little throughout the end of the last century until the present day, to an alienation of traditions, while reinforcing their fascistic political dynamics, against living together – called *covivencia* during the Andalusian era – and the emancipation of the greatest number.

Finally, despite the shortcomings and controversies that this type of approach arouses today, the paradigm of a systematic and systemic liberation theology, applied to the particular case of religion, will have influenced an entire generation of committed citizens defending human rights. Plus, more and more researchers see in this alternative, intersectional approach – here called *neuro-psychosocial-theology* -, more than a simple approach disqualified by dogmatic good "thought", as much as by the prejudices of those and those who distrust Muslims; some would consider it non-objective, or politically too strongly tinged with idealistic and candid universalism.

Not dealing with the religious question, in a culturally inclusive, ethical and objective manner, without seeking, with the deepest scrutiny, potential evils at their spiritual, and organic, and ideological roots, today in Europe and elsewhere in the world, does not mean leaving the field open to the most extreme identity and political representations in the matter? How could we let our most beautiful stories, steeped in spirituality, gradually metamorphose into ideological, separatist and partisan nightmares?

With each generation, spiritual things are reappropriated: in one way or another[35]. I therefore reiterate here the two-headed metaphor of Gabriel and Michael. The first of these archangels being the "*force of the Divine word*"[36], the one who delivered the "message" of God to the prophets and prophetesses of the Torah[37], the Bible and the Quran[38]; the second being considered as the leader of the "*sublime synod*" of agents of good[39], a sauroctonian paladin who vanquished the demonic temptations lurking in each of us.

At the dawn of what some describe as the age of maturity for our humanity, a choice that dates back to time immemorial, a weighing of our actions is once again offered to all of us. Will the spirit of

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[35] Islamic prophetic tradition, considered "authentic", although it is reported by Abu Huraira: "*Allah will send to this community, at the beginning of each century, those who will allow the revival of their religion*". (cf. Abu Dawud: hadith 4291).

[36] *Al-Djabr.*

[37] "*Gabriel approached where I was standing. Terrified, I threw myself on my face, but he said to me: "You who are only a man, know, however, that this vision concerns the end of times*"; Daniel: 8.17.

[38] "*By the star in its decline! Your companion has not gone astray or been misled, and he does not utter anything out of passion; it is nothing other than an inspired revelation that [The Angel Gabriel] taught him: prodigious strength, gifted with sagacity; It was then that he showed himself in his real [angelic] form, while he was on the upper horizon*"; Quran: 53.1-7.
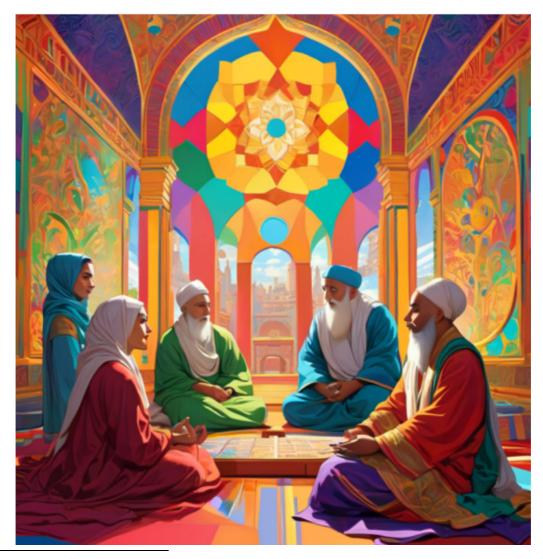
[39] Quran: 38.69

divine redemption[40] be therefore incarnated, deep within us, through devastation, or that of appeasement and Universal care?

We invite our partners and allies to continue to patiently plow this furrow, of a holistic human consciousness, ecological in the broad sense of the term, which represents our identities as worth more than the sum of the parts, rather than as an aggregate of essentialized performative factors.

This is the path that the CALEM Foundation wants to continue to explore: that of spiritual liberation through culture, of a Universalism achieved through the collective celebration of diversalism, of a particular awareness of the condition of the most vulnerable amongst us, through participatory, popular and supportive field projects, in partnership with organizations and individuals of good will.

Doctor & Imam Mohamed Lotfi Ludovic ZAHED – Founder and Rector of the CALEM-ICAZ Foundation [41]

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[40] Understood in the sense of bringing us back to "good", and not as a "redemption" from an original sin: a concept which does not exist in the Quran.

[41] *Confederation of Associations LGBTQIA+ Euro-Africans or Muslims*; *International Cheikh-a Zahed*: from a consortium of organizations created by the Zahed family - supporting green energies, children with disabilities, vulnerable minorities.