



HAÏM KORSIA

Chief Rabbi of France

Thierry de Montbrial, Founder and Executive Chairman of Ifri and the WPC

I would now like to give the floor to Haïm Korsia, Chief Rabbi of France and a loyal friend.

Haïm Korsia, Chief Rabbi of France

Thank you, Mr. President. This is perhaps a difficult time to discuss these matters. Religions certainly bear their share of responsibility, but I think it would be mistaken to reduce the conflict between Israel and Hamas to one between faiths. No religion in the world can encourage or incite the massacre of children, hatred and absolute violence. And if it is done in its name, it is a deviation from that religion. Right from the start of our work here, you have stated things clearly, forcefully and rightly. This shows that we are not blaming religion, but looking at how it can help here. This is what I heard in the words of His Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew, about searching in the depths of time, or in the words of Judge Abdelsalam, about understanding how religion is necessary to provide a share of transcendence, not all the transcendence in the world, but a share of it. Rather than seeing religions as the cause of conflict, let's look at how they can try to fix the world. That is what I am going to do.

At one point, I thought of speaking from the lectern to leave my seat empty, because I had asked all the synagogues in the world—and I am very happy to say that the French Bishops' Conference has followed my lead—to ask everyone in their homes, at Shabbat, as I did here on Shabbat, to leave an empty seat to think of the hostages who are not here and whom we miss.

All

the

hostages.

But what is religion? Etymologically, it comes from the verb to connect, *religare*. Everyone thinks it is about connecting people to heaven, to God. But it also means connecting them to each other. The quality of the bond we build with God depends on the quality of the bond we have with each other. That is even how God asks us to act. Only when we have links with our brothers and sisters in humanity can we build a link with God. A wonderful rabbi, Israel Salanter, used to say, "My neighbor's material needs are my spiritual needs." This is what God expects from me. As the prophet Isaiah said, "I do not expect you to indulge in exaggerated religion. Giving to the poor and those in need is what I expect of you."

As Levinas said in response to Heidegger, concerning ourselves only with religion and faith without taking care of the rest "is to ignore the sincerity of hunger and thirst." It would be naive to consider religions alone a factor for peace. Religions must support what is accomplished through politics and reflection as you build it year after year here, in the depth of time. Basically, this is what I call, in a wonderful Hebrew phrase, *tikkun olam*, the repairing of the world. Repairing the world means making it a better place, and that is the title of your conference: making the world a better place. There is a Japanese art form that I love, *kintsugi*, which consists of breaking vases or bowls and soldering them back together with gold, as if our wounds made us both unique and stronger because we heal them and overcome our



despair. Religions also offer this hope.

Einstein said, "If you want to know how old a Jew is, take his age and add 5,000 years." That is a way of talking about the depth of time. This is what Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Bible, says in chapter 32, verse 7: "Ask your father, and he will tell you about your elders, and they will tell you". You can see how we have come back to the themes that our two previous speakers so forcefully expressed. What does this mean? It means being able not to do the same thing as the elders, but drawing on their experience to avoid the pitfalls they point out to us and enable us to find a new way, but one based on their knowledge. Basically, it is called experience. And this is the spirit you are developing at the World Policy Conference. Thierry de Montbrial, our president, always relies on the experience of the elders and the ideas of the young. The Talmud asks a wonderful question: who is taller, a dwarf or a giant? The answer is, "The dwarf when he is sitting on the giant's shoulders." We are a bit like that and that is what you are building here. It is a way of asking, what do the many centuries of experience have to tell us? What do religions have to say?

You put it very well in your introduction: some people say religions are a factor in war, but that is not true. It is not true because a famous geographer once said, "Geography is only good for making war." I will try to prove the opposite with a story I really like about a king who was invincible because he had a perfect ordnance survey map. There were gradients, the slightest variations in terrain, and every time his kingdom was attacked, thanks to his map, he managed to defeat his enemies. One day his son, who was only seven, said to him, "Look Dad, I got you a birthday present." He took him into the map room, tore the map up into little pieces and said, "Look Dad, I made you confetti." The father said nothing to his son, who had just destroyed a priceless map he used to defend his kingdom. But the little boy saw that his father was upset and did not want to say anything to hurt his feelings. A week later, the son said to the king, "Come" and took him to the map room, where the map was perfectly put back together again. The king asked his son, "How did you do that?" His son said, "Dad, your father drew this map on a portrait of his own father. I reconstructed the portraits of my grandfather and great-grandfather, and that is how I found the map." This parable is not just a little tale we tell children. I think that if we are able to restore humanity, the dignity that binds us together, we will also repair the world. That is my conviction, which is why I agreed to take part in this debate.

I would like to let General Georgelin, who was in charge of rebuilding Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, a man I liked very much, have the last word. He said, "To be sure of moving forward, you must let yourself be penetrated by the immutable." And the immutable thing about religions is the relationship between us, which, if it is worthy and correct, allows us to elevate ourselves. That is what I wanted to say here, a very special place where, as you said, I had the honor of taking part in the inauguration of the Abrahamic Family House, with a mosque, a church and a synagogue, all united together, not in a syncretism that would put everyone on an equal footing, with our differences, but in a hope of common brotherhood.

Thierry de Montbrial

Ladies and gentlemen, time flies, even when we are talking about the long term, so we are going to conclude. I think it would be very difficult to add anything to what has been said. The United Arab Emirates' initiative to build the Abrahamic Family House, which I had the pleasure of visiting last year, gave me the idea for this session. I think we should salute our friends from the Emirates for their courage, because this initiative was not an easy one at the time. I think our discussion shows that it was a great and beautiful initiative because of its symbolism.



In this session, I talked a lot about time, and I believe that time is indeed the root of everything. There are three eminent speakers here, but there are also three kinds of time. There is physicists' time, *chronos* in Greek. There is *kairos*, which is the right moment, and we are in the middle of the right moment to do what needs to be done. I only know the Hebrew word, but I imagine there is a Greek equivalent, *olam*. *Olam* is time outside of time, in other words, time that can only be grasped through transcendence, through inner experience. Basically, as I listened to the three of you, I thought we played on these three times, on these three aspects of time.

Now that we are here on earth, let's think about *kairos*. Now is the time to find the right moments to act in dramatic circumstances. I talked about time, and I would like to come back to the other words that stand out in everything that has been said, in my opinion: responsibility and courage. At a given moment, it is easy to go along with what everyone else is thinking, but it is harder to point out what needs to be done when passions are boiling over. That is why I would like to thank all three of you very much for agreeing to participate in what I consider to be an extremely successful exercise.