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SEDOS



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SEDOS (Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission) is a forum open to Institutes of Consecrated Life, which commit themselves to deepening their understanding of global mission. It encourages research and disseminates information through its Bulletin and Homepage, the annual SEDOS Residential Seminar (beginning of May), public conferences, and workshops.

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Opening Address



Good afternoon, my brothers and sisters and welcome to the SEDOS Residential Seminar. The topic of our Seminar this year

is “*Mission in a Pluralistic World*”.

What a Pluralistic world we live in! You have all come from various countries as well as from Rome, for this Seminar. I pray that we will all not only be enriched by it, but will be more determined to live our mission in this challenging and pluralistic world.

Pope Francis told us in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 273). What a power-full statement! Yes, Mission is about being, proclaiming, transmitting, bearing witness, being passionate about spreading the message with passion – pass it on – passing it on (Kate Duval, SSND).

The mission is more challenging today because events in one part of the world can adversely affect people in another part, e.g. the shooting in New Zealand and its effect of retaliation in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday.

Recently, I came across this statement, “If we had no winter, spring would not be so pleasant; if we did not sometimes taste adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome” (Anne Bradstreet). But we would rather not choose adversity. Once, I was relating the story of the killing of some Christians in Nigeria to an old friend here in Rome. His response was, “how wonderful, they are now martyrs!” I was angry but kept quiet. After some reflection, I said to myself, he was right, this is our Christian belief that they are now martyrs. We pray for courage in times of adversity and persecution.

How can we in our little mission spread the Good News to transform people, including fundamentalists, and bring them to love their neighbor? We need patience to remain in communication and in dialogue with an open heart, open mind and open will to be and to

see the change we desire!

The Mission Statements in our respective Constitutions have worded each Congregation’s mission in simple, powerful and inspiring ways and we live it. You have chosen to attend this Seminar on *Mission in a Pluralistic*

World to listen attentively and to participate in exploring what this theme could mean in this age, concerning justice with compassion, interreligious dialogue, respect for the mission of others and Christian witnessing in a pluralistic world.



Mission as Interfaith Dialogue



Introduction

First, let me thank SEDOS for the invitation to give the Opening Lecture at this Seminar. I want to start by looking back at events on Easter morning. On that day, we rejoiced that God who became flesh and lived among us, has overcome death. We felt filled with gratitude and hope, knowing that the source of all life lives, and we renewed our commitment to be an instrument of hope and life in the world. During the Easter vigil, on Easter Saturday night, in Churches throughout the world, many people were baptised into the Church. Some of those who were baptised were adults who until then had no concept of God in their lives, but many others were ‘converts’ and had known God through African traditional religions, or Islam or some other faith community expression. Should we rejoice that they have now freely chosen to become Christians and be baptised? Why do we rejoice since we now believe that people can be saved whether or not they are baptised?

We woke up on Easter morning to hear the tragic news of Churches bombed in Sri Lanka and so many people, who had come to Church to celebrate Life, lost their lives at the hand of terrorists, who we presume to be Muslim, and in response people of all faiths rose out in a great wave of sadness expressing sympathy and solidarity. Others unfortunately expressed a strengthening of their anti-Muslim sentiments and others voiced their abhorrence of all religions as a source of evil.

The mystery which we have celebrated at Easter as well as the unfortunate fact of

violence done in the name of religion, put before us very starkly some of the central challenges at the heart of our understanding and practice of Mission as Interfaith dialogue. These are questions that must come before us as we reflect on the whole concept of mission in a world of religious pluralism and cynicism and indeed on mission as interfaith dialogue.

At this Seminar we are gathered to share and reflect on our mission in a pluralistic world, with a particular focus on the fact of religious pluralism. The truth is that there was never a time in human history when the world was not one of religious pluralism! What has changed of course is our attitude as Christians and as missionaries towards this reality.

Interfaith dialogue is something that is spoken of today in all circles, both religious and political, and any amount of writing is available on it. Indeed, the last SEDOS Bulletin is dedicated to this topic and provides very interesting and well-informed reflections on it. Here at this seminar there is a great line up of speakers who will speak from both their studies and their lived experiences of dialogue. Therefore, in this Opening Lecture I want to share some of my own reflections on mission as a member of a religious congregation founded for mission *ad gentes*, how this brought me to see interfaith dialogue as a very particular and necessary part of living this missionary call today, and my journey of reflection and practice in that field firstly in Nigeria and now in Ireland. My experience is of Muslim-Christian relations more than of other interfaith relations. However, I hope that in sharing my thoughts, I will highlight some particular challenges which mission as interfaith dialogue presents, both in our understanding of mission and in the actual practice of dialogue.

1. Reflections on Mission *ad gentes*; the 'specific missionary vocation'

After my First Profession, I was sent on a mission to Argentina to work in the area of mission awareness. I worked there for seven years, living among the poor in slum areas outside Cordoba and later outside Buenos Aires, and was very much involved in the activities of the Pontifical Missionary Societies. In our seminars and talks and other activities, we spoke of the 'alarming' fact that about half the world's Catholics were Latin Americans but only about 5% of the world's missionaries hailed from Latin America. We constantly reminded people of the fact that only a third of the world was Christian and there was a great need for Latin America to share the faith it had received with the billions of non-Christians in other parts of the world. Certainly, our work among the poor where we lived, and the fact that we formed and accompanied many young people to go on mission to poorer parts of Argentina, was very worthwhile and fulfilling. However, the focus of our mission awareness was something which I later reflected on in some depth.

Why were we so alarmed by the fact that only a third of the world's population is Christian; should this fact be of any concern to us as missionaries and is increasing the percentage of Christians in the world really *the* aim or even *an* aim of mission? I put this in very simplistic terms for the sake of today's presentation, but I think the question was and still remains valid and is one which is soundly before us when we speak today of mission as interfaith dialogue.

After Argentina I went to Rome to study Missiology in the Gregorian. Even though I had already done a degree in Theology in Maynooth, here in Rome I was for the first time introduced to the depth and beauty of diverse religious traditions. I took some courses on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, African Traditional Religions, and also did a closer study of the Church of the Latter day Saints (Mormons). It was indeed a wakeup call to realise that I had spent years studying

theology but had not at all been introduced to all these rich faith traditions where billions of people have experienced and worshipped God and live in communities guided by the moral codes developed within these faith experiences. I know that today in many seminaries and theology faculties students do tend to study a little on other religions but for the most part our theology as Christians, our understanding of revelation, and even of mission, is drawn almost entirely from Christian sources with little or no wealth drawn from other faiths. This in itself speaks volumes and is a serious challenge.

My own congregation was founded for mission '*ad gentes*', which John Paul in Redemptoris Missio 33/34 & 37 defined as sent out to non-Christian peoples and situations. I wondered how we could possibly understand and live our mission if we knew little or nothing about the faith experiences of these people to whom we were sent. In Redemptoris Missio, the Pope spoke of interreligious dialogue as part of the Church's evangelizing mission (RMi 55), 'to discover in them the ray of truth that enlightens all people' and to be done in an attitude of respect for the other religions and out of a desire to get to know and to learn from other religious ways. However, 'the Church alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation'. To me this seemed rather arrogant and disrespectful, since I knew in my heart that Christ never preached the Church, but he proclaimed the Kingdom, and he never pointed to himself but always to the Father. Yet I could not deny my faith; I really do believe Christ is the Incarnate God and that the Good News of Christ is meant for all people. It was primarily for this reason that I decided to focus my studies in missiology on the whole area of interfaith dialogue, concentrating on dialogue with Muslims and listening to women's voices within various faith communities. This for me was challenging and fulfilling, in terms both of my studies and of my missionary activity in Nigeria for the following number of years. It continues to inspire and challenge me today as I work in leadership in Ireland.

2. Interfaith dialogue as a path of Mission or Mission as Interfaith Dialogue?

Certainly, in the past fifty years, with documents such as *Ecclesiam Suam*, *Ad Gentes*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio*, Dialogue and Proclamation, and now the teachings of Pope Francis, much has evolved in Church teaching on mission *ad gentes* and on our attitude towards other religions. There is greater respect for not only cultures but also other faiths and the acknowledgment that people can be saved through them, in ways known only to God, without explicit faith in Christ.

Through the many discussions and studies on mission, we have moved from defining mission *ad gentes* to mission *inter-gentes*, or mission *ad extra* or even mission *ad altera*. Many of us who are international congregations *ad gentes*, with increasing members from the younger churches, focus now on mission *ad extra*, going outside our own national and cultural boundaries and witnessing through intercultural community living and ministry. We also emphasize mission *ad gentes* as being directed to the marginalised and vulnerable in our societies, witnessing and proclaiming Kingdom values through the promotion of human dignity and working for justice, reconciliation, and healing in today's fractured globalized world, with great attention now being paid to the promotion of climate justice. We speak about dialogue, which Stephen Bevans terms prophetic dialogue¹, being an essential component of all mission.

In the year 2000, Robert Schreiter, writing about the Challenges today to Mission *ad gentes*, addressing the ongoing nagging question of what is the specific identity of missionaries *ad gentes* in a changing world, said that missionary institutes who focus on *ad gentes* have some considerable tasks ahead of them so as to have a renewed sense of mission which is faithful to our calling, prophetic in our response and filled with hope

for the coming of God's Reign. He saw our task as primarily related to an understanding of the relation of dialogue and proclamation and the whole area of the theology of religions.² Almost twenty years later, I feel that challenge remains. I believe the answer can be found in a more sincere and concrete reflection on and involvement in mission to and with those who are not Christians (traditionally the '*gentes*') – that is deepening in an appreciation and involvement in mission *as* interfaith dialogue. I think the call is for missionaries to sincerely be, not so much development workers, but 'contemplatives in action' (RMI 88), contemplating with people of other faiths the greatness of God who has spoken to us through the ages, who we have heard in diverse ways, and who we are called to know more clearly, love more dearly and follow more nearly – together. I sincerely believe that it is with people of other faiths that we can grow in an understanding of what our mission is and it is together with them that we can live our mission in prophetic dialogue today. It is also in this way that we can not only grow in deeper knowledge of God who is Communion but we can more authentically witness to God as Communion. Thus we can say that interfaith dialogue is not one path of mission but rather Mission *ad gentes* is best understood and lived as Interfaith prophetic dialogue.

3. Reflections on interfaith dialogue based on my own experience

I wish to share some reflections on mission as interfaith dialogue, from my own experience as a missionary in Nigeria and in Ireland. I lived and worked in Northern Nigeria for seven years, very much engaged in the field of Muslim-Christian dialogue. I spent two years there doing research on the interreligious conflict regularly experienced there and focused especially on women's role in interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding. I have now been in Ireland for the past six

¹ Stephen Bevans & Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, Orbis, 2011.

² Robert Schreiter, Challenges today to Mission 'ad Gentes', available at https://sedosmission.org/old/-eng/-schreiter_1.htm

years, working as Provincial leader of my own congregation and very much involved with the leadership bodies of religious and missionaries as we seek ways of offering a relevant response as Church in Ireland today. In Ireland, I have only some small concrete involvement in interfaith dialogue, but I continue to reflect on this as a missionary priority.

Define the role of religion in a democratic state

I believe a major challenge today in the area of interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding is to find ways of developing together an understanding of the role of religion in society, particularly in a democratic state. On this question, we find quite different situations in Europe (Ireland) than we do in other parts of the world, including Nigeria. In Ireland (and in Europe) there is a growing disdain for religion of any kind, while in Nigeria and in Africa religion is taken *very* seriously. Hence, these bring with them similar but also very different challenges.

In Ireland (and throughout Europe), an increasing number of people see religion as an evil which has closed people's minds and curtailed their freedoms, indoctrinated them to narrow minded unscientific beliefs and delusions, oppressed and silenced women, and polarized peoples into opposing factions. We also hear of so much violence in the world, in the name of religion: the Syria conflict, the Sunni-Shiite divide, the ongoing rise of radical Islam, the Hindu-Muslim clashes in various parts, the issue of Palestine and the struggle in religious terms for this land, the divisions between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria and other parts, and so on. Therefore, on the surface, there is indeed justification for the growing belief that the world would be better off without religion.

With this negativity expressed daily towards the Church and religion, many Religious and Missionaries have lost not only the courage to be engaged outside their own walls but also the conviction that there is any need or right for them to be engaged, at least not in any openly faith-based way. Hence, I think a primary challenge in Europe is to be convinced ourselves of the value of faith, of institutionalised religion, and of its role as voice and witness in the public square and to find ways to ensure this is not silenced. In terms of religious pluralism, we are challenged to see the value, not only of our own Christian faith, but of all faiths in the public square and together, through interfaith dialogue initiatives, to make that voice heard and presence felt. In Nigeria, we find the contrary attitude towards religion: government funds are poured in to finance Muslims on pilgrimage to hajj in Mecca, Christians on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, state chaplaincies, and so on. The involvement of government in religious affairs and of religious figures in political affairs is increasing by the day. In Nigeria, with calls for the expansion of sharia law in Muslim-dominated states which sparked in 1999 and with so many of the other conflicts that continue to erupt there, it is obvious that the role and place of religion in society has not been sufficiently clarified. To follow in



Participants listening attentively to the lectures

the footsteps of France or even Ireland, in its attempt to purge all traces of religion from the public space, does not seem the best or even a possible response in a pluri-religious country such as Nigeria. Similarly, to allow religion have the major role it has

in political affairs and in the lives of so many citizens who cling to it as a life saver since all else has failed, is not the response either - and is not practical in a pluri-religious nation.

Given that religion is so much a part of everyday life in Africa and Africans are by nature religious people, it is said, and that in Europe attempts are increasing daily to remove any trace of religious involvement in schools and other public spaces, I believe much more discussion must be held so as to find the practical and acceptable way in which all religious adherents are given an equal playing field in all parts of our countries and the state ensures that the religious freedom of all citizens are respected. This can indeed be grounds for fruitful interfaith dialogue both in Europe and globally, but in all instances it will demand of us to be firm in our conviction that religion, all religions, do hold elements which are true and holy, and do have an important and necessary contribution to make to the political domain in our world today.

Specific Challenges to Muslim-Christian dialogue in Europe

Although Islam and Muslims have been present in Europe and even in Ireland for a very long time, and many Muslims today are of European origin, until maybe just ten years ago, in Falcarragh, my home village in Ireland, as in most parts of the country, I doubt anyone was really aware of their presence. However, today it is clear that Islam is part of Ireland's demographic and cultural landscape and Muslims are not just here as guests but they are Irish of Muslim faith who will remain a permanent part of Ireland's social and political fabric.

As Muslim communities in Europe have become more settled and assertive, and as Islam has become more visible, there have been varied responses from the wider public and these have often included confrontation and violence, and certainly an increasing distrust, in the European-Muslim relations. Islamophobia and Islamic Extremism are words well known to people of all religions and both are closely related with numerous and diverse, mostly negative, consequences. There are many reasons for this but primarily it is because of the violence done in the name of Islam, the fallout of political and social turmoil in so many parts of the world where Islam is dominant and which we know as the

Muslim world. It is also because of the obvious difficulties of integration faced by many migrants and their receiving communities. Unfortunately, questions on the relationship of Islam and Muslims to and in Europe tend to focus on mutual fears rather than on benefits that both parties can derive from this situation.³

Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim racism looms over all of Europe today and research indicates that this phenomenon is increasing rather than decreasing.⁴ Many Muslims speak of being perceived and judged not for themselves but for the actions of others who they never met and over whom they had no control. Today, we see laws being proposed and introduced in quite a few European countries in the name of liberalism or human rights, but they could equally be seen to be an overt form of anti-Muslim racism, such as injunctions against the construction of minarets, fines imposed for wearing *niqab*, debates about hijab, proposals to ban male circumcision, and so on.⁵

The spread and growth of Radical Islam associated with terrorism and violence is of course a matter of great concern and without any doubt its presence is felt in Europe and throughout the world today. Many of the attacks that happen in Europe are carried out by young people, some of them of European origin and others who are immigrants. Equally, many young people from Europe have gone to join ISIS. An obvious question to ask is why this is the case, what attracts these young people to abandon their lives in a free democratic society to join such seemingly narrow-minded vicious groups. As I said earlier, the fact that Muslims are so often at the receiving end of racism, experienced in hostility and abuse and suspicion, has the

³ Tariq Ramadan, 'Europeanization of Islam or Islamization of Europe' in Hunter ed., (2002), pp. 207 – 218.

⁴ Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims are coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*, Verso, London 2014.

⁵ Ahmed Moor: *Europe's Anti-Muslim Racism*, Online at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ahmed-moor/europesanti-muslim-racis_b_565651.html (accessed 23rd February 2018)

counter-effect of drawing young or dissatisfied people to search for meaning in this stricter, more community based, utopian, religiously framed, project of radical Islam.

The above realities, with these difficulties and challenges, of the European-Muslim relationship today speak loudly of the need for dialogue, especially interfaith dialogue, so that we can all grow in mutual knowledge and understanding and can learn to coexist as people of different faiths.

To Missionaries *ad gentes ad extra*, sent to proclaim the Good News of God's Reign of Peace and Communion to non-Christian peoples and nations, sent to go with audacity and faith beyond those frontiers which others do not want to cross, this situation in Europe undoubtedly presents a great challenge and opportunity for dialogue.

We are challenged to integrate all our immigrants and to accommodate Islam and Muslims within our cultural and social frameworks. Muslims, whether immigrants or not, are challenged to gain acceptance and become full European citizens while retaining their cultural and religious identity and their links to the countries they have left behind. It would of course be desirable that the same openness towards Christians would be shown in Muslim-dominated countries but whether or not this is the case, I think the Golden rule must be our guide: do unto others as you would have them do unto you (not as they do unto you!).

Dialogue is an imperative to help us all overcome our fears, to help us all, Muslims and Christians, grow in mutual understanding, to be enriched by each other's beliefs and perspectives, to open wide our own little narrow tents so as to make room for the other and learn from the other, to build together a society that is always growing and

being enriched, to enjoy the beauty of human diversity and to learn to live together in peace. Some efforts of dialogue are being made at political level, in universities, at local community levels, but many more are needed and I think here missionaries have an important contribution to make.

Interfaith dialogue for peacebuilding

While we speak of interfaith dialogue in theological terms and call on engagement in it to grow in our knowledge of God and appreciate what is true and holy in other religions, I think many people who engage in dialogue do not hold these as priorities, nor is this their motivation for engagement. Many people engage in interfaith dialogue because they know it is an absolute necessity for peace, while continuing to hold in their hearts negative attitudes towards the other religion and a conviction that their own is the only true and perfect faith. I think this self-examination is a primary challenge in any reflection on mission as interfaith dialogue.

In Nigeria, because of the political and social situation where religion is a key factor in ethnic identities and in conflict, interfaith dialogue of Muslims and Christians is promoted and practiced primarily as a means of conflict resolution towards peaceful coexistence. No doubt however, this

experience does lead one to also grow in appreciation both of God and of the other, and I myself can testify to that.

My own concrete involvement in dialogue in Nigeria was through the Women's Interfaith Council (WIC), which we established in May 2010 as a coalition

of the principal women's faith-based groups in Kaduna state. It began as a proposal which I made to the women leaders to work together



Interfaith Chanting in the Chapel

to face their common concerns, including poverty, voicelessness, early marriage, domestic violence, as well as religiously framed conflict and violence. In the nine years since it was first initiated, many women leaders have become convinced of its proposed vision: of a society where Muslims and Christians live together in peace, where the rights of women are respected, and where women are protagonists of peaceful coexistence. Many women faith leaders now share this vision and are fully committed to making it reality by pursuing the objectives of the Council and voluntarily promoting and participating in its activities. As a coalition of basically all the women's faith-based groups in Kaduna state, WIC is unique and is already highly respected by the women members themselves as well as by key stakeholders in the society.

Since its establishment WIC has carried out numerous activities. It has held many seminars on various themes, including conflict analysis, youth and peaceful coexistence, women and insecurity, violence against women, women of faith as instruments of reconciliation, women and the environment, and so on. To these seminars and workshops, women leaders and members of faith groups come and they also invite other relevant sectors of the public such as politicians, imams and pastors, security agencies, youth leaders, and so on. These can all be

considered forms of dialogue in action but also of theological dialogue since generally a topic is presented from a Muslim/Christian perspective and there is a growing awareness and appreciation of sameness as well as of particularities in each faith. In 2012, after a church bombing and some other polarizing

tragedies, WIC organised for women of both faiths to come together, all dressed in black, and march to the Governor's house to demand peace and justice. Annually, WIC holds a very moving interfaith solidarity prayer in which hundreds of women from both faiths pray together for peace. WIC also pays solidarity visits to the hospitals and to refugee camps of persons who had been injured and/or displaced as a result of conflict and/or bomb blasts, bringing relief materials and prayerful support. WIC also makes its voice heard regularly through the media. These and many other gatherings and activities, some planned and others in response to the too sporadic incidents of violence, have served to strengthen the resolve of women, leaders and members of faith groups, to work together and do what they can to bring reconciliation and peace to Kaduna. Together they also give a powerful witness of solidarity and communion.

Women's involvement in patriarchal culture and religions

As we know, in all major world religions, leadership and decision-making is primarily exclusive of women. Just as women's poverty and vulnerability in Nigeria, and we might say globally, is greater than that of men, due in great part to patriarchy which continues to dominate in most cultures, so too women's voices and their concerns are generally excluded from Government programs of

response and of mediation in times of conflict and in efforts at reconciliation and peacebuilding. Similarly, women are excluded from prominent interfaith councils and state-sponsored religious bureaus. If women are invited to any high-level event or program, it is usually as an afterthought and as a symbolic



Participants listening attentively to the speaker

gesture of 'gender awareness' but even at that, if a woman is invited to speak, it will be on 'women's issues'. Hence, in work with women and for women in peacebuilding, serious obstacles due to patriarchy are encountered. However, this makes the work even more urgent and satisfying: bringing women together in a way which would be difficult to do with men, gives a strong witness and helps to make women's voices heard. Seeking ways to be more inclusive of women in religious bodies as well as in interfaith initiatives certainly needs to be a priority.

Peacebuilding has become an industry and a flag

A major challenge I found in Nigeria, working in the field of dialogue and peacebuilding, is that peacebuilding has in fact become an industry. Nigeria is inundated with NGOs, established to bring peace and to promote harmonious coexistence. I imagine it is the same in many other troubled developing countries. Many NGOs do great work, undoubtedly. However, among the best wage paying institutions with which people dream of finding work are international development partners and aid agencies, and if not with these then with their partner NGOs and CSOs. People attend conferences and seminars and workshops on peacebuilding, are accommodated in good hotels, given sumptuous food and even get transport allowance and maybe per diem or seating allowance for having given of their time to come to receive the training. A favorite engagement of First Ladies and other politicians is to call for peace or to host peacekeeping events, often being little more than a political flag. Thus, peacebuilding is an industry and it is difficult to break this jinx. The Women's Interfaith Council tried to awaken a volunteer spirit: our women leaders are not paid for the many hours work they put into organizing and participating in events, we rent cheap venues and give simple food. The women participate and continue to be so very committed, at no personal gain. This approach is still rather unique, but it is a method I believe we must continue to use and promote.

I believe a way of ensuring this is to work to develop in people an awareness that working for peace is rooted in their faith commitment and encourage them to find and share inspiration found in their various faiths for such self-sacrifice. This too will help all of us grow in mutual appreciation of the faiths which inspire and strengthen us.

Overcome the bad reputation of religion

Religion has a bad reputation in relation to patriarchy and to gender equality and this reputation applies across the board to all religions. In what I think is a typical example of Orientalism, in the West Islam tends to be shown as the faith which is most demeaning of women, but I think the fact that women of all faiths are developing strong versions of feminist religious discourse speaks the truth more fully. The struggle for gender equality is generally thought of in terms of developments in secular discourse, a matter of legal provisions and so on and so forth. However, I am convinced that there will be no gender equality in many parts of the world without the intervention of religions, simply because religion is such an influential factor in women's recognized roles and rights in most developing societies. Hence, our involvement in women's or gender-focused theological is course and our support of that within the various religions is, I believe, a necessary engagement in our mission for peace. This is a delicate area; many of the women I worked with in Nigeria were not at all critical of their religions as taught or practiced. However, by looking together more closely at concrete experiences of women, and indeed recognizing that these experiences were common to women whether they were Muslims or Christians, then we began also to challenge interpretations and the women were encouraged to add their voice to learning or supporting more gender friendly interpretations in support of their rights.

Religion also has a bad reputation in relation to war and peace. Yet, as Hans Kung said, and I must totally agree with him, there will be no peace between nations without dialogue between the religions. This is for many reasons, the most obvious and pragmatic

being so much of the strife experienced in the world today, not only in Nigeria, is very much colored by religion. However, religion has been a positive source of hope, strength and inspiration for people to challenge and non-violently confront situations and structures of injustice; religion is a teacher of positive human values; and religion is for so many people and in many societies a moral authority of peaceful, just and right human relations. As missionaries, we are seen as people who propagate a faith, a religion. Hence, I believe we have a responsibility to believe in our religion and to ensure religion is taught and practiced as a positive and not a negative force.

Role of Religions in the Interplay of Power

In Abu Dhabi, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar signed a 'Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together' and said that "The pluralism and the diversity of religions... are willed by God". As we know, many people found this hard to digest, claiming that to suggest Islam or any other religion, apart from Christianity was willed by God is blasphemy! However, as Gerald O'Collins reminds us in his very brief but concise response to this reaction, published in the last edition of SEDOS, where he refers to statements from earlier Church teachings, the Spirit is present and active in all cultures and religions and Christianity, no more than Islam, is pure and positively willed by God in all its elements. To examine our own history as a Church, and to do so in humility and in truth, is an essential element of interfaith dialogue and is one which missionaries can continue to promote in the younger churches as well as in our home countries: to be firm in our faith and

missionary commitment but to also have a critical understanding of our past and a humble commitment not to repeat it.

The weight of our past and the association of Colonialism and the dominant Western nations, with Christianity, even today, is such that Muslims find it hard to believe that Christianity is a peaceful religion, a religion of morality and of right and just relations. The same argument can be made for Muslims and Islam. The challenge now is for people of both faiths to let go of any sense of superiority of religion or otherwise and to collaborate in areas of human development such as education, health and issues of social and climate justice.

Working together with people of other faiths on Justice and Development

Working for peace and working for development is not the responsibility of the Church alone but is one we can only carry out in respect and dialogue with people of other religions. Our definition of justice and of development, and indeed even of human or



Little Buddhist monks begging for food

women's rights, cannot be understood only within a Christian or a Western framework. Other peoples have their cultural understandings of development and these are shaped and influenced by their religious beliefs and by their faith communities. Hence, to work in mission towards

making present those values of God's kingdom, which we may speak of as indicative of development, necessarily implies respectful dialogue with people of other religions and cultures. As we are told in the document *Dialogue and Mission*: "any sense of mission not permeated by [such] a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of

the Gospel" (DM 29). In this context I would advise missionaries to ensure that all their development projects are done in dialogue with the people who are to be its beneficiaries and this must be done with respect for their cultural as well as their religious views.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, in Europe, and indeed worldwide, Christian-Muslim dialogue and indeed interfaith dialogue of people of all faiths, is not something that can wait. It is a need which must be pursued in the midst of and despite the tensions and conflicts of our time.

Similarly, if we truly believe that all religions hold seeds of God's Word and rays of God's Spirit, we also know that to enter more deeply into the Mystery of God, who can never be contained in any one religion or indeed in any human knowledge, interfaith dialogue is necessary. St Catherine of Siena said: 'You, eternal Trinity, are a deep sea, The more I enter, the more I discover, and the more I discover, the more I seek you... in whose depths the soul is satisfied, and yet remains hungry for you eternal Trinity, longing to see you with the light of your light' (D 167). God is a Mystery; may we help one another, as people of faith, to enter more deeply, together, into that Mystery which we have all sensed, have all been drawn to, and which we are all seeking to know, love and follow, within and through our religious beliefs and practices.

As I said at the beginning, my journey in theology and in mission led me to ask many questions which took me into the field of other religions and of interreligious dialogue. This in turn led to my involvement in the field of peacebuilding. This journey has been exciting, and it has been challenging in so many different ways. It is a journey for which I am sincerely grateful. Meeting people of different religions, especially Muslims, good-living people of deep faith; seeing the prejudices and the fears people have towards others simply because of the faith they profess; seeing women so terribly discriminated against on religious pretexts; seeing the hypocrisy of patriarchy and of

other selfish interests so easily disguised in religious cloaks; all greatly challenged the framework of my worldview and challenged me to reflect more deeply on what I truly believe. Who is God for me? What does it mean to be human and a member of the one human family? What is the purpose of my mission and why do I still feel that urgency?

Through it all I think one word became the defining characteristic of how I today understand God, humanity, the mission to which I have been called. That word is Communion. I believe Communion is what is greatly lacking in our world today where so much conflict and violence and poverty and marginalization still reign: lack of communion between nations, ethnic groups, religious groups, genders, economic classes...I believe it is through a deeper knowledge and love of God, who is Communion, that we will gradually move towards Communion in our world and move beyond all those many obstacles, such as patriarchy and religious bigotry and individualism and greed, which so much add to polarization and exclusion and oppression. God is Communion. We were created in God's image, a Communion of persons, diverse and called to be One.

We have allowed ourselves to box God into our religion. This journey has made me appreciate what John Paul meant when he said that a missionary is a contemplative in action.

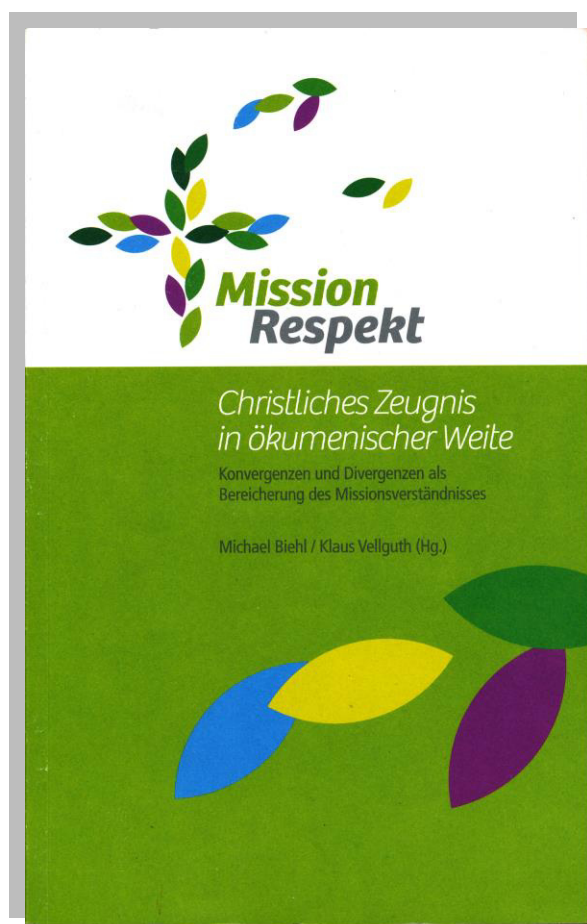
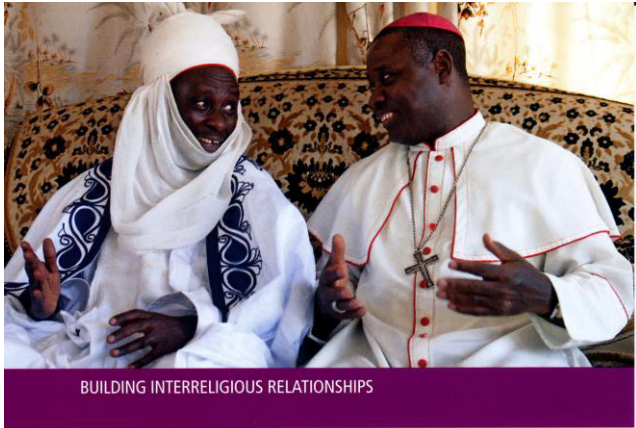
I believe it is that sense of God being so much bigger than the many boxes we have put, that I have been able to remain in the Church, as a missionary, committed I hope, recognising that dialogue is continuously needed within the Church, within all faith communities and between faith communities. It is a dialogue which must reach and include those who wear the shoes and know where it pinches' such as women and other marginalised groups. This dialogue requires patience, forgiveness, faith, hope, love.

As people of faith, Christians and Muslims, men and women, we are called to open to one another as gifts within and through which the mystery of God, God's Word, and the mystery of humanity, is continuously revealed. It is good to seek understanding outside our own camp, and marvel at God who is not limited to

the boxes we have created. From a Christian perspective, this will help us to reflect more visibly and more authentically the Trinitarian God of Communion made known to us in Christ. It will also lead us to discover more authentically the presence of Christ and the message of God's Kingdom in other religions and will help us to collaborate more authentically with people of other religions in incarnating God's Word in our today's world.

The *Lineamenta for the African Synod*, n. 35 stated as follows: "No nation can prosper in an atmosphere of insecurity. No meaningful development is sustainable in a society replete with mutual rancour, bitterness and hate.

Mutual prejudices hinder cooperation and exchange, and rob a people of a hope of a great nation." The post-synodal exhortation, *Africae Munus*, tells us that "If all of us who believe in God desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism" (AM 94). I pray we can continue to do so.

**» Other religions?
These are my partners.**

Christians should continue to build relationships marked by respect and trust with people of different religions, so as mutually to facilitate deeper understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.

**TO WHOM DOES MY FAITH IN GOD
CONNECT ME ACROSS BOUNDARIES?**

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Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World, Principle 12. Photo: Friedrich Stark

«Sèdeq sèdeq tirdòf: giustizia, giustizia perseguirai»



«Giustizia, giustizia perseguirai» (Dt. 16, 20) sono parole che Mosheh rivolge ai figli d'Israele prima del loro ingresso nella terra di Kenaan. Egli sa che non potrà

partecipare a questa nuova fase della storia ebraica perché la fine dei suoi giorni si sta avvicinando e con premurosa sollecitudine impartisce i suoi ultimi insegnamenti, tra i quali: «Giudici e funzionari porrai in tutte le tue città, che Ha-Shem il tuo Eloqim ti dà, per ogni tua tribù e giudicheranno il popolo con sentenze giuste. Non torcere il diritto, non avere riguardi e non farti corrompere perché il prezzo della corruzione acceca gli occhi dei sapienti e rende tortuose le parole degli saddiqim, dei giusti. Giustizia, giustizia perseguirai affinché tu viva ed erediti la terra che Ha-Shem il tuo Eloqim sta per darti» (Dt 16,18-20).

Ha-Shem sottolinea l'importanza della giustizia affinché il suo popolo si mantenga sulla retta via e possa ricevere la sua benedizione. Ma la sedaqah prima di essere un ideale politico e sociale è un attributo divino, insieme a quello di rah̄amim, misericordia. Il salmo 145 definisce D-o come Re, Mèlek (v. 1), paziente e misericordioso, hanum e rah̄um (v. 8), giusto, saddiq: «Giusto è Ha-Shem in tutte le sue vie, fedele in tutte le sue opere» (v. 17). Se vi fosse solo giustizia il mondo non durerebbe, e neppure se vi fosse solo misericordia, è nella dialettica tra le due che si situa la storia delle civiltà.

La sedaqah non è una esteriore conformità alla Torah, ma un'intima e fiduciosa relazione con Ha-Shem, di cui l'osservanza delle mišwot è l'espressione esteriore. È la penimiyut, l'interiorità, che dà valore alla h̄isoniyut, l'esteriorità: questa rende visibile quella.

Sedeq sedeq tirdof: perché mai la parola giustizia è ripetuta due volte? Dal momento che nessuna parola della Torah è inutile, se una parola compare due volte deve esserci un motivo. Il motivo è forse che occorre un tempo di riflessione, per chiedersi se veramente quella che si sta perseguendo è la giustizia, e non qualcos'altro che ne ha solo l'apparenza.

Vorrei proporvi una riflessione su questo tema presentandovi la vita e l'opera di due giusti del XX secolo: Simon Wiesenthal e Jules Isaac.

Simon Wiesenthal (Bučač 1908 - Vienna 2005) è nato nella Galizia polacca. La Galizia era la terra abitata da quei hassidim così ben descritti da Martin Buber, che erano guidati da grandi saddiqim, persone che dedicavano la loro vita alla sedaqah. Dopo essersi laureato in ingegneria all'Università di Praga viveva con la moglie Cyla Müller a Leopoli, che in seguito al patto Molotov-Ribbentrop fu occupata dall'URSS. Quando nel 1941 il Reich invase l'URSS, Wiesenthal e la sua famiglia furono catturati dai Tedeschi e avviati verso diversi Campi di concentramento e di sterminio, sfuggendo alla morte in svariate occasioni. Il 5 maggio 1945 egli venne liberato dalle forze statunitensi a Mauthausen. Appena liberato iniziò a raccogliere informazioni per i processi contro i crimini nazisti. Rendendosi conto di non poter più tornare a vivere in Polonia, Wiesenthal si trasferì in Austria e insieme ad altri volontari fondò a Linz il "Centro di documentazione ebraica". Ebbe così inizio un'attività che sarebbe continuata per quasi 60 anni, fino al 2003, quando Wiesenthal annunciò il suo ritiro.

Le informazioni di Wiesenthal furono di fondamentale importanza per la cattura in Argentina di Adolf Eichmann, il principale organizzatore della Endlösung, e di Karl Silberbauer, il sottufficiale della Gestapo

responsabile dell'arresto di Anne Frank, di Franz Stangl, il comandante dei campi di sterminio di Treblinka e di Sobibor, e di molti altri. Non riuscì invece ad assicurare alla giustizia Alois Brunner, il principale collaboratore di Eichmann, il quale trascorse i suoi giorni in Siria, protetto dal regime.

«Nessuno di voi rimarrà per portare testimonianza, ma se anche qualcuno scampasse, il mondo non gli crederà. Forse ci saranno sospetti, discussioni, ricerche di storici, ma non ci saranno certezze, perché noi distruggeremo le prove insieme con voi. E quand'anche qualche prova dovesse rimanere, e qualcuno di voi sopravvivere, la gente dirà che i fatti che voi raccontate sono troppo mostruosi per essere creduti: dirà che sono esagerazioni della propaganda alleata, e crederà a noi che negheremo tutto, e non a voi. La storia dei Lager, saremo noi a dettarla». Questo era il discorso che Wiesenthal aveva ascoltato dai suoi carcerieri, e che viene riportato anche da Primo Levi¹. Ricordare, portare testimonianza, era il dovere che Levi si era assunto nei confronti delle vittime, Wiesenthal ritenne suo dovere perseguire la giustizia.

È necessario tenere presente questo contesto per cercare di capire il fuoco che ha animato la vita di Wiesenthal e per avvicinarsi al problema posto dal suo libro *Die Sonnenblume, Il girasole*. Wiesenthal si trovava prigioniero in un lager vicino a Leopoli e un giorno vengono comandati a recarsi al Politecnico, dove Wiesenthal aveva studiato, ora trasformato in ospedale militare. Dovevano trasportare grossi bidoni di cemento sparsi nel cortile, pieni fino all'orlo di bende insanguinate. A un certo punto viene da lui un'infermiera e gli chiede se è ebreo. Wiesenthal si stupisce: conciato in quel modo, cos'altro avrebbe mai potuto essere? Allora lei lo conduce all'interno dell'edificio e attraverso scale e corridoi che a Wiesenthal suscitano ricordi della sua vita studentesca, lo introduce in una stanza dove nella penombra a

poco a poco scorge un letto bianco, e accanto un comodino. Qualcosa di bianco lo guarda dalle coperte. È un giovane di 22 anni che sta per morire, una SS, che gli racconta la sua vita e vuole il suo perdono, vuole essere perdonato da un ebreo. In particolare di una azione da lui compiuta: 150-200 persone rinchiusi in una casa, piante, urla, gemiti, alla casa viene appiccato il fuoco, muoiono tutti. La sera ai soldati venne distribuita acquavite, per aiutarli a dimenticare. Wiesenthal è preso da mille pensieri, tra l'altro teme che si accorgano della sua assenza, rischia di essere severamente punito, lascia la stanza senza dire una parola.

Nel lager la morte era una presenza quotidiana, quando arrivavano i nuovi prigionieri si liquidavano i vecchi prigionieri, a baracche intere, per far loro posto. In quella stessa notte, mentre Wiesenthal nei suoi incubi rivede quel soldato bendato, muoiono nella sua baracca tre prigionieri, portati stecchiti al mattino nella fossa comune. Wiesenthal è costretto a tornare a lavorare al politecnico trasformato in ospedale, anche se assolutamente non vorrebbe. L'infermiera del giorno prima gli comunica che la SS è morta, e gli ha lasciato i suoi averi: un fagotto con un biglietto sul quale è scritto l'indirizzo della madre. Wiesenthal dice all'infermiera di mandare tutto alla madre ma per una strana ragione, memorizza quell'indirizzo.

Finita la guerra, quando muoversi in Germania era ancora molto difficile, Wiesenthal vuole andare a trovare la madre del soldato a Stoccarda. Trova una donna anziana, che ha perduto il marito e il suo unico figlio che per lei era «un ragazzo così buono». Una foto del figlio è appesa all'ingresso: aveva allora 16 anni, era un bel giovane con grandi occhi chiari e luminosi. Quel buon ragazzo aveva poi deciso di entrare nella *Hitlerjugend* e in seguito nelle SS. Wiesenthal ebbe pietà della donna e non le disse che suo figlio era diventato un assassino e aveva preso parte attiva allo sterminio degli Ebrei d'Europa.

La questione della giustizia e del perdono non ha smesso di inquietare Wiesenthal che ha scritto questo libro, *Il girasole*, raccontando tutta la vicenda e ponendo ai

¹ J. Wechsberg, *Gli assassini sono tra noi*, tr. di G. Brunacci, Garzanti, Milano 1973, citato anche in [Primo Levi](#), *I sommersi e i salvati*, Einaudi, Torino 1991, p. 3.

lettori la domanda: che cosa avrebbe dovuto fare in quella circostanza? Che cosa avrebbero fatto loro, al suo posto? Si deve tenere conto del contesto dell'immediato dopoguerra: «Dopo la guerra, preti, filantropi e filosofi si presentarono per chiedere al mondo di perdonare ai nazisti. Erano per lo più anime belle, che non avrebbero mai perdonato a nessuno uno schiaffo ricevuto, ma che non trovavano difficile perdonare in nome di milioni di innocenti assassinati. I preti andavano predicando che questi criminali dovevano presentarsi un giorno al giudice divino, e che perciò la giustizia umana doveva lasciarli tranquilli. Naturalmente questo punto di vista tornava molto gradito ai nazisti, che non credevano in Dio e accettavano allegramente il giudice divino, mentre temevano la giustizia terrena»². Nell'ultima edizione italiana sono riportate 47 risposte, tra cui quelle di Jean Amery, Saul Friedländer, Abraham Heschel, Golo Mann, Gabriel Marcel, Herbert Marcuse e Jacques Maritain. Troviamo anche tre italiani: Paolo De Benedetti, Primo Levi e Stefano Levi Della Torre.

Ognuno di noi potrebbe chiedersi: io cosa avrei fatto al suo posto? Ma il punto è che nessuno di noi si trova nelle condizioni in cui si trovava Wiesel, che era circondato quotidianamente dalla morte. Ad esempio: la SS moribonda teneva la mano sopra l'ultima lettera di sua madre, la lettera cade a terra, Wiesel la raccoglie e la mette accanto alla mano del soldato, il soldato lo ringrazia, Wiesel è stupefatto: un *Herrenmensch* ringrazia un *Untermensch*? Erano anni che non accadeva! Poi pensa: io non riceverò mai più una lettera da mia madre, è stata uccisa all'inizio della guerra.

Dicono i *Pirqué Avot*: «Non giudicare qualcuno finché non ti sei trovato nella sua situazione».

«I cristiani perdonano, gli ebrei no»: questo è stato uno dei cavalli di battaglia della polemica cristiana antiebraica lungo i secoli. Ogni sera, prima di addormentarsi un ebreo recita lo *Shema*, che è preceduto da queste parole: «Signore del mondo! Io perdono tutti coloro che mi hanno fatto andare in collera, che mi hanno irritato, e che hanno peccato nei miei confronti ... facci coricare, Padre nostro, in pace e facci alzare, Re nostro, in vita serena e in pace, stendi su di noi la *sukkah*/capanna del Tuo *shalom*». Ognuno deve perdonare ciò che è stato compiuto contro di lui, non può invece perdonare ciò che è stato compiuto verso altri. Nel giorno più santo dell'anno ebraico, lo *Yom Kippur*, un giorno interamente dedicato al digiuno e alla preghiera, Ha-Shem perdona i peccati commessi contro di Lui, non può, neppure Lui, perdonare i peccati commessi contro gli altri uomini, ognuno deve andare, nei giorni di penitenza che precedono quel grande giorno, da colui che ha offeso e chiedere a lui il suo perdono.

Wiesel avrebbe potuto e forse dovuto perdonare il soldato se questi gli avesse chiesto il perdono delle colpe commesse nei suoi confronti, ma come poteva perdonare le colpe commesse nei confronti di altri? Se A dà uno schiaffo a B, potrebbe C perdonarlo?

Die Sonnenblume ha conosciuto uno straordinario successo internazio-

nale, possiamo chiederci perché. Riguarda la questione della colpa, della responsabilità, del perdono, della giustizia. La colpa è individuale e non collettiva, ognuno è colpevole delle sue azioni, e se ai tempi di Wiesel *gli assassini erano tra di noi*, ora non è più così. Se c'è ancora qualche sopravvissuto, è ormai troppo vecchio perché



One of the discussion groups during the seminar

² *op. cit.*, p. 83.

la giustizia umana possa occuparsi di lui, come lo stesso Wiesenthal dichiarava quando pose fine alla sua attività di “cacciatore di nazisti”. Diversa è invece la questione della responsabilità, che tutti noi abbiamo: fare sì che ciò che è accaduto non accada più e per fare questo non basta commuoversi ascoltando le sofferenze dei sopravvissuti, anche loro sempre più rari, ma occorre *studiare*, capire come sia stata possibile una simile catastrofe nel cuore dell'Europa da millenni cristiana. Chiedersi, anche, come sia possibile che neppure dopo la *Shoah* l'antisemitismo sia scomparso, e ricompaia invece in nuove e diverse forme.

Vorrei ora presentarvi l'altro personaggio: Jules Isaac (Rennes 1877 - Aix-en-Provence 1963), uno storico francese molto noto, un ebreo laico. Dopo quasi quarant'anni di insegnamento della storia, nella Francia occupata dai Tedeschi egli dovette abbandonare tutto e fuggire. Vide i suoi numerosi libri, frutto di una vita intera dedicata agli studi, finire al macero. Nascosto nella campagna francese con la moglie, la figlia, il genero e il figlio (che vennero scoperti e deportati nei campi di sterminio: solo il figlio farà ritorno) Isaac iniziò a chiedersi come fosse possibile nel cuore dell'Europa, nel cuore del Novecento una simile barbarie. Com'è stata possibile la Shoah nell'Europa da secoli cristiana? Non vi è dubbio che l'antisemitismo nazista è altra cosa rispetto all'antiebraismo teologico, ma la sconvolgente scoperta di Isaac è che l'insegna-mento del disprezzo, capillarmente diffuso per secoli, e che ha il suo culmine nel mito del popolo deicida, ha contribuito a preparare e rendere possibile la distruzione degli Ebrei d'Europa.

Terminato nel 1946 nella solitudine di un rifugio e pubblicato a Parigi nel 1948, *Gesù e Israele*³ è «il grido di una coscienza indignata, di un cuore lacerato». Il libro si compone di ventun argomenti e di una conclusione pratica, che così riassume:

1. La religione cristiana è figlia della religione ebraica.
2. Gesù è ebreo.
3. Ebraica è la sua famiglia, ebrea è sua madre Maria (Miryam), ebraico è l'ambiente nel quale vive.
4. Gesù è circonciso.
5. Il suo nome ebraico è Yeshua. Cristo è l'equivalente greco di Messia.
6. Il Nuovo Testamento è scritto in greco, ma Gesù parlava aramaico [e ebraico].
7. Nel I secolo in Israele la vita religiosa era profonda e intensa.
8. L'insegnamento di Gesù si è svolto nel quadro tradizionale dell'ebraismo.
9. Gesù ha osservato la Torah. Non ne ha proclamato l'abolizione.
10. È un errore voler separare il Vangelo dall'ebraismo.
11. La diaspora ebraica ha avuto inizio molti secoli prima della nascita di Gesù.
12. Non si può affermare che il popolo ebraico nella sua totalità abbia rinnegato Gesù.
13. Secondo i Vangeli, ovunque Gesù sia passato, salvo rare eccezioni, è stato accolto con entusiasmo.
14. Non si può affermare che il popolo ebraico abbia respinto il Messia.
15. Gesù non ha pronunciato una sentenza di condanna e di decadenza d'Israele. (Gli argomenti dal 16 al 20 sono dedicati al tema del popolo deicida: «In tutta la Cristianità, da diciotto secoli, si insegna correntemente che il popolo ebraico, pienamente responsabile della crocifissione, ha compiuto l'inesplicabile crimine del deicidio. Non vi è accusa più micidiale: effettivamente non vi è accusa che abbia fatto scorrere più sangue innocente».)
21. Israele non ha respinto Gesù né lo ha crocifisso. Gesù non ha respinto Israele né lo ha maledetto.
22. Conclusione pratica: necessità di una riforma (*redressement*) dell'insegnamento cristiano.

³ J. Isaac, *Gesù e Israele*, tr. di E. Castelfranchi Finzi, Marietti, Genova 2001.

Nell'estate del 1947 si tenne a Seelisberg, in Svizzera, una conferenza internazionale alla quale parteciparono un centinaio di delegati cristiani (di diverse confessioni) ed ebrei, provenienti da una ventina di Paesi. Isaac aveva preparato uno schema in diciotto punti, che vennero discussi, e infine fu approvata una dichiarazione conosciuta come *I dieci punti di Seelisberg*.

In quell'occasione venne anche fondato l'International Council of Christians and Jews. Aveva dunque inizio un'altra fase della vita di Isaac, il quale fu tra i promotori dell'Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de France (fondata nel 1948) e si adoperò per la costituzione della prima Amicizia ebraico-cristiana italiana (che fu fondata a Firenze nel 1950). Altri due libri vennero a completare il lavoro iniziato con *Gesù e Israele: Genèse de l'antisémitisme* (Paris 1956) e *L'enseignement du mépris* (Paris 1965).

Isaac incontrò due Papi: nel 1949 venne ricevuto da Pio XII e nel 1960 da Giovanni XXIII. Nel corso di questo secondo incontro consegnò un *Dossier* che il Papa affidò al cardinale Bea: sarebbe stato all'origine della Dichiarazione *Nostra aetate* del Concilio Vaticano II.

Jules Isaac e Simon Wiesenthal sono due grandi uomini che hanno saputo trasformare la tragedia in qualcosa che è divenuta la missione della loro vita. Wiesenthal ricercando con tutte le sue forze la giustizia, Isaac ricercando con tutte le sue forze di riportare giustizia nelle relazioni tra ebraismo e cristianesimo, in vista di una riconciliazione.

Dobbiamo dunque chiederci: in che modo possiamo pensare secondo *giustizia* la relazione tra ebraismo e cristianesimo? Papa Francesco, nel discorso rivolto ai partecipanti al convegno dell'«International Council of Christians and Jews» in occasione del 50° anniversario della dichiarazione, ha affermato che: *Nostra Aetate* «rappresenta il “sì”

definitivo alle radici ebraiche del cristianesimo ed il “no” irrevocabile all'antisemitismo [...] tra noi sono andate crescendo sempre più la fiducia e la fratellanza. Non siamo più estranei, ma amici e fratelli [...] Entrambe le tradizioni di fede hanno per fondamento il Dio unico, il Dio dell'Alleanza, che si rivela agli uomini attraverso la sua Parola. Nella ricerca di un giusto atteggiamento verso Dio, i cristiani si rivolgono a Cristo quale fonte di vita nuova, gli ebrei all'insegnamento della Torah».

Se, come afferma Papa Francesco «le confessioni cristiane trovano la loro unità in Cristo, l'ebraismo trova la sua unità nella Torah», resta da chiedersi quale sia il rapporto tra Cristo e la Torah. Cristo si sostituisce alla Torah? Vi è un detto di Yeshua che smentisce questa tesi: «Non pensiate che io sia venuto ad abolire la Torah e i Neviim. Non sono venuto ad abolirli ma a diffonderli nella loro pienezza. Amèn infatti vi dico che finché non passeranno i cieli e la terra, neppure una *yod* o

un *taam* saranno cancellati dalla Torah, fino al compimento di tutte le cose. Perciò chi scioglierà la più piccola delle *mitzvot* e insegnerà così agli uomini, sarà il più piccolo nella

Malkhut ha-Shamayim, chi invece le farà e le insegnerà sarà chiamato grande nella *Malkhut ha-Shamayim*» (Mt 5,17-19). Su questo punto c'è un grande lavoro da fare: il rapporto con la Torah è una delle questioni centrali che devono essere affrontate dalla teologia cristiana contemporanea.

Continuiamo a riflettere sulle parole di Francesco: «Entrambe le tradizioni di fede trovano il loro fondamento nell'unico Dio, il Dio dell'Alleanza, che rivela sé stesso attraverso la Sua parola». Ha-Shem è uno, ma le Sue alleanze sono molte, e non si sostituiscono l'una all'altra, ma sono eterne, rappresentano i molti modi attraverso i quali



Participants listening attentively to the speaker

gli esseri umani possono collaborare all'opera della Redenzione.

Non vi è una Nuova Alleanza che si contrapponga a una Vecchia Alleanza, non vi è neppure un'unica Alleanza Vecchio-Nuova che costringerebbe gli ebrei a farsi cristiani o i cristiani a farsi ebrei. Vi è un'unica *Torah* eterna che contiene molte Alleanze, i molti modi in cui il Santo, benedetto Egli sia, rivela il Suo amore per gli uomini e indica le vie per giungere all'incontro con Lui.

Come mostra *Nostra Aetate*, è rivedendo il proprio rapporto con l'ebraismo che la Chiesa si apre al dialogo con le altre grandi religioni. Ma Ha-Shem non si limita e non si lascia limitare nella sfera del religioso: Egli è il creatore dei cieli e della terra, il D. d'Israele è anche il D. dell'umanità: «Non possiamo invocare D. Padre di tutti, se ci rifiutiamo di comportarci da fratelli verso alcuni tra gli uomini che sono creati a immagine di D.» (*N. Ae.* § 5).

Il Santo, benedetto Egli sia, nella sua trascendenza è assolutamente inconoscibile. Di Lui possiamo conoscere ciò che Lui ha voluto rivelarci: la Sua volontà. La *Torah* è un libro *da fare*: 613 *mišvot* per gli ebrei e per chi voglia entrare nell'alleanza di Mosheh, 7 *mišvot* per chi voglia entrare nell'alleanza di Noaḥ, con la libertà di osservare, volendo, anche un certo numero delle restanti⁴. Aderendo alla Sua volontà noi ci avviciniamo

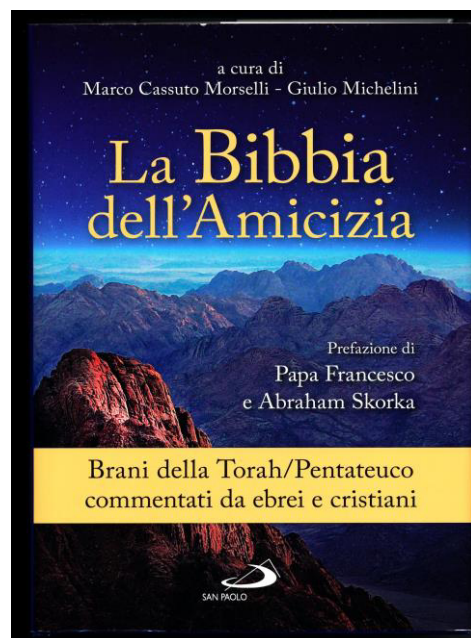
a Lui. Come Lui è santo, così noi cerchiamo di santificarci, anche nelle minute attività della nostra vita quotidiana. Ciò che la *Torah* ci indica, più che una ortodossia, è una ortoprassi. Il primato dell'etica non è un rifiuto della Rivelazione, ma proprio il contenuto della Rivelazione.

Poiché l'alleanza noachide non prescrive nessuna cultura, nessuna religione, nessun mito, nessun rito, è compatibile con tutte le culture e con tutti i diversi modi di essere umani: in questo senso è cattolica, ossia universale⁵. Scrive Rav Jonathan Sacks:

«L'unità in cielo crea diversità sulla terra. Lo stesso vale per le civiltà. Il messaggio fondamentale della Bibbia ebraica è che l'universalità - il patto con Noè - è solo il contesto e il preludio dell'irriducibile molteplicità delle culture, quei sistemi di significato tramite i quali gli esseri umani hanno cercato di comprendere il rapporto che li lega, il mondo e la sorgente dell'essere. L'affermazione platonica dell'universalità della verità è valida quando la si applica alla scienza e alla descrizione di ciò che è. Non lo è se la si applica all'etica, alla spiritualità e al nostro senso di ciò che dovrebbe essere. Vi è una differenza tra *physis* e *nomos*, descrizione e prescrizione, natura e cultura. Le culture sono come le lingue. Il mondo che descrivono è lo stesso, ma i modi in cui lo fanno sono quasi infinitamente variabili»⁶.

Gli ebrei attendono la venuta del Messia, i cristiani attendono il ritorno di Cristo. Elia Benamozegh affermava che il Messia non è (solo) venuto né (solo) verrà, ma sta venendo. Forse, come scrisse Hans Joachim Schoeps, al suo arrivo ebrei e cristiani potrebbero scoprire in lui gli stessi tratti del volto.

(English translation of article on website)



(Gift from author to SEDOS Library)

⁴ Qui trova il suo fondamento il tema della libertà del cristiano, ma si tratta di libertà nella Legge e non dalla Legge.

⁵ E' Rav Benamozegh a parlare della «cattolicità d'Israele» in *Israele e l'umanità*.

⁶ J. Sacks, *La dignità della differenza. Come evitare lo scontro delle civiltà*, tr. di F. Paracchini, Garzanti, Milano 2004, p. 66.

Dialogue and Justice: It's the Relationship that Matters



I was once asked the question, ‘What does it mean to be a woman of dialogue?’ I was surprised by the question because I hadn’t seen myself in this way. So, I found myself asking a different question, ‘Am I a woman of dialogue?’ This led to a period of reflection on how I live my life and how I communicate with others.

Today, I’ve been asked to speak about my ministry in light of my involvement in Jewish-Christian relations and how this speaks to justice. In response to this request, I initially began to consider ideas that linked directly to how I express my ministry. For example, I am indeed involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue, I facilitate groups in engaging with the Bible in light of Vatican II teaching and I support people as they explore their own personal and spiritual development in response to hearing the Word of God, I work as a counsellor where I come face to face with human vulnerability and limitations and our basic human need to be acknowledged and respected, and I work to raise awareness and action around various injustices present in our world. So, like each of us here, I had all the ingredients required to prepare for today at the level of what I do. However, new questions emerged for me in light of the topic I was asked to speak about at this conference; these new questions are: (1) What lies at the heart of all these ministries? (2) How does my purpose and mission, as a Sister of Sion, inform and transform my ministries? (3) How

does ministry affirm who I am while also inviting me to grow and develop?

These questions brought me to the realisation that all that I do is rooted in a desire for right relationships at all levels – with God, myself, others and the environment. I recognise that it’s the qualities necessary for right relationships to grow and flourish that also underpin dialogue and justice. Right relationships require a quality of relating that respects and supports human rights and protects the dignity of all creation. These qualities need to be continuously nurtured which requires firstly that I identify them and then support their on-going growth and development even as I am trying to live them out in practice.

I think these deeper, underpinning, levels to my ministries are areas we can all identify with, no matter what our contribution is in this world. I share my experience of Jewish-Christian relations and how it has informed my understanding of social justice with you as an invitation to you to join me this morning in reflecting on your own journeys, especially considering the qualities involved in ‘right relationships’.

My involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogue has transformed my life and, consequently, how I engage in my ministry. I share with you two reflections from my experience that touch on the qualities required in dialogue and justice and which, I hope, will also provide you with a platform for your own reflections.

My first reflection will be on dialogue and the qualities required for a meaningful, growth-promoting engagement with another person, especially someone whose core values are underpinned by their adherence to another faith tradition. My second reflection will explore justice through a Biblical lens.

Reflection 1 – Dialogue

1.1 Dialogue – meaning

Dialogue is dynamic – ever evolving and deepening. The word ‘dialogue’ itself has undergone change through various uses and various human experiences. At one level, it’s important to know what type of dialogue one is involved in and why? However, another level is always at play; a desire simply for right relationships. With this, all conversations, all dialogue, becomes an opportunity to relate well. Indeed, our motivation for dialogue can change according to our needs, desires and moods – sometimes it’s limited by a smaller view of life and sometimes it’s more spacious and inclusive. Sometimes we have too many words, as on this slide, with little or no clear space to become aware of what they are, let alone what they mean. For dialogue to have meaning and to be effective, whatever it’s starting point, the qualities of awareness and listening are essential.

1. Awareness includes:

- a. Self-awareness
- b. Awareness of the other and
- c. Awareness of how we’re engaging and relating – i.e., what is the quality of the space between me and the other person.

Shared reflection allows me to receive feedback from the other about how they experience me as a person, how they experience me as I express my beliefs and identity and how the faith traditions of my church impact on their lives. It is also an opportunity for me to give feedback based on my experience of them.

2. The quality of listening is also a skill that can be developed. My experience of dialogue tells me that:

- a. Initially, my emphasis is more on listening for knowledge about the other:
 - 1) Knowing about the other person’s tradition,
 - 2) Letting the other know about my tradition and
 - 3) This challenges me to know and under-

stand more my faith in order to share about it.

b. Then, as I engage more in dialogue and I become less frightened of getting it wrong or making a mistake that would cause ‘huge offense’, I relax more and I listen more to the story about the person and their experience of their faith and how it influences their lives:

- 1) I get to know the person behind the label
- 2) which reduces the potential for stereotyping or creating a ‘them and us’ approach.
- 3) This level of dialogue also allows me to know myself at a deeper level too and to express myself beyond the labels and stereotypes that may endeavor to define me.

Awareness and listening are essential to good communication and to supporting right relationships. We know from the world in which we live just how powerful the human voice is, perhaps the most powerful tool we have. It can hold hatred and even start wars ... it can also express love and compassion. It truly is an extraordinary gift we’ve been given. It can be very powerful, for good or ill. Consequently, listening to how we speak is a significant task in dialogue. How we listen informs what we’ll contribute to the dialogue. It is very important for us to pause to notice how we intend to listen. To increase our levels of awareness we might ask ourselves, ‘whose voice do I hear?’ and ‘why?’ and ‘whose voice do I not hear?’ and ‘why?’ These questions also raise, for me, further questions for my own life and how I experience openness, ‘where is God’s voice in my life?’ and ‘how can I support myself in hearing it with more openness and integrity?’ This involves hearing my own voice and the voices of others which involves a discerning attitude; this is crucial as so often we can get the most insight by noticing whose voice we’re trying to drown out – God’s voice, my own or others?

In dialogue, which is a mutual process, each person assumes responsibility for the quality of presence they bring to the dialogue. The openness of each person, the quality of their

presence, their levels of awareness and quality of listening, will determine the process of the dialogue and how supported all parties feel in being able to trust the interaction, the between place.

1.2 Dialogue changes the people involved.

Dialogue with Judaism has changed me and continues to transform me and this, in itself, hugely influences my ministry. Being involved in dialogue gives rise to much self-reflection as it calls me beyond what is familiar to engage with new perspectives. This sometimes affirms what is familiar to me and sometimes I experience it as challenging as it invites me beyond my comfort zone in order to connect with others. For example, societal expectations about what it means to connect have changed dramatically in recent decades. While social media is everywhere and can convey useful information, it does not however provide a platform for deeper social connection. So many people seem to be linked to so many other people yet there does appear to be a 'disconnect' – an engagement with others that doesn't run very deep and yet is often accepted by participants as satisfactory. Often though, what it is really doing, is covering the increasing levels of loneliness and isolation being experienced by so many people and which I hear about in my counselling work. On reflection, I find that my understanding of dialogue becomes a challenge to these social understandings of what it means to connect and, in particular, to how popular social media endeavors to shape our modern world. Dialogue with Judaism, for me, invites and requires a deeper look at what it means to really connect with another human being. And, with the rise of anti-Semitism throughout Europe especially, dialogue forms a basis for connection that will allow us to stand together to overcome this highly destructive form of disconnect.

Dialogue itself is more than tools, skills and pre-packaged processes for engaging with others. While these are all useful, especially in the initial stages of dialogue, I've grown to realise that dialogue moves us beyond so much of what we know and takes us into

unknown places ... unknowns about the other, unknowns within ourselves and unknowns about how the dialogue might develop. This requires a quality of presence that is also useful when we come up against the unknowns, or the mysteries, in our own faith and life experiences generally. Paradoxically, to move towards these unknown places, we must move through what is known and also have a strong sense of our own identity. We might ask ourselves, 'What happens to me in these 'unknown' moments and how do I navigate them?' For example, can I appreciate the uniqueness of myself and the other or does difference (and maybe similarity) cause difficulties in how I relate? Dialogue takes us to new places within ourselves and within our relationships – this is not always an easy experience, as we come face to face with our own resistance and where we experience struggles within ourselves and project them onto our environment and our relationships. As Richard Hycner says, these '... resistances are not defenses and drives nor an attempt ... to sabotage ... but rather are an expression of self-protectiveness or a self-striving, ...' The task of dialogue is to create an environment in which each person is supported enough to engage their own defenses in ways that allow for dialogue to be real and useful.

1.3 Attitude

Consequently, it's important to be aware of the attitude we bring to dialogue. Behind any dialogue lies a particular type of attitude. In real dialogue we're not trying to control the other or the outcome ... we're trusting that whatever surfaces in me and the other person in any given moment is part of an unfolding process. We are aware that dynamic psychological movements are at play in dialogue. For example, sometimes we long for connection, to recognise the familiar; we can just about manage what lies within our comfort zone, everything else is too much. At other times, we want to focus outwards and to actively engage with difference; we want to be stretched, to grow, ... How we manage all of this will determine our growth and development as relational human beings.

Dialogue allows us to see and reflect on the quality of presence we bring to the experience and this changes us.

Maybe we can pause for a moment here as we noticed in an earlier slide, too many words leave little space to even hear them let alone appreciate what they mean.

I invite you to take a moment to notice your breath ... without changing it, just simply notice it. If you wish, I invite you to either close your eyes or look at the screen as you reflect on the following questions:

- In your experience what attitude is required for good dialogue?
- What qualities help you to be open to another person?
- How might you nourish these qualities in your life?

Being aware of inner dynamics and listening to how these play out within ourselves, supports us in dialogue and in establishing right relationships. Equally, dialogue supports us in becoming more self-aware. Martin Buber, an Austrian-born Israeli Jewish philosopher best known for his philosophy of dialogue, contributes significantly to this point. He argues that dialogue ‘becomes the ground of self-realisation’. In Buber's view, the engagement with the other (or contact as he would word it) stands at the centre of psychological and spiritual development. Dialogue moves us to connect with the humanity of the other person and our own. We may each be strong in our own identity, but our engagement creates an opening for growth in becoming more fully who we are. We don't need to step back from this moment of engagement to keep our identity nor do we lose ourselves in drawing near.

Buber speaks of I-It and I-Thou relationships – both are needed as they complement and inform each other. At a basic level, I-It is where the person is involved in the aspects of life that contribute to gaining experience, learning about things, achieving goals and so on. There can be an objectifying of the other as someone who can contribute to my goals. When we hold this attitude in meeting people, we may move our agenda forward, but we can find ourselves in a situation where two monologues are taking

place rather than a dialogue. I-Thou, on the other hand, holds more of a relational quality that recognises the humanity of the other person – they are important in themselves in this present moment and are not a means to an end. This encounter, although it doesn't have a specific goal and often cannot be measured, is felt and provides an experience from which a person can live a more enriched quality of life where they feel connected and part of something bigger, while being accepted in their own uniqueness.

We move between I-It and I-Thou all the time. If I want to know something about Judaism, who better to ask than a Jew. It is an I-It moment but hopefully this is happening within an overall I-Thou relationship and even this I-It moment is underpinned by an I-Thou attitude. This often stands counter to our production-focused, fast-paced world today when achieving results holds little or no room for the relational I-Thou element which is essential for us as human beings. It allows us to experience ourselves in relationship and it also, without setting it as a goal, manages to address the isolation and dehumanising behaviours and attitudes that so many people are experiencing. As Anthony De Mello said, ‘It is a sobering thought that the finest act of love you can perform is not an act of service but an act of contemplation, of seeing. When you serve people, you help, support, comfort, alleviate pain. When you see them in their inner beauty and goodness, you transform and create.’ Actions are certainly important, but really seeing someone and accepting them as they are, does indeed ‘transform and create’.

For me, dialogue involves a willingness to enter more deeply into my own identity as a person (in any conversation) and my identity as a Christian in Jewish/Christian dialogue. A paradox emerges in that, as I become more confident in my own identity, the potential is there for me to grow and develop as a person, becoming more truly who I am as a human being and as a Christian.

1.4 Qualities

Dialogue requires certain qualities which are something innate in each of us and, at the

same time, they are areas which can grow and develop and so these qualities require nurturing support to fully awaken their potential.

Qualities of dialogue

For meaningful dialogue to occur, some key qualities are required. For example, high levels of awareness, a capacity to listen and to hear what is being said and what is not being said, a reflective attitude that allows the participants to remain connected within themselves even as they reach out to others; enabling an integration within even as there is an openness to others. There are other qualities, but I mention only one more – compassion – self-compassion and compassion towards the other. This has the most amazing impact on the experience of dialogue and its capacity to deepen relationships.

Aware of strengths and limitations and desiring to grow in integrity allows me to become aware of aspects of myself that I may find difficult to accept and so opens the possibility of being able to acknowledge these aspects. For example, maybe sometimes when I think I'm being open I become aware that I'm struggling to hear a person who thinks very differently to me. This has the potential to close down the dialogue. However, it doesn't have to be that way as I may also see this as an invitation to become more open and to recognise that this moment has within it a choice – there is the option of opening up more to the experience of dialogue once I become aware that I'm becoming smaller in some way within myself. How I manage this experience will affect who I am as a Christian and at the same time the quality of my presence and how I relate to others. The potential for integration is offered in terms of becoming more aware of parts of myself, e.g. my attitudes, my openness (or lack of openness) and my faith – what I actually

believe is possible within this moment. This in turn shapes my capacity to listen and show compassion. Nurturing integration offers me the potential for a stronger sense of myself as a Christian and, at the same time the potential for a greater flexibility, humility and grace in wearing this label.

Two quotations come to mind:

- The founder of my congregation, Theodore Ratisbonne asks us to '*Have hearts bigger than the world.*'

- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says, "*We should feel enlarged by the people who are different.*" (Jonathan Sacks, Website accessed 18.1.19)



Relaxing after the session

Both of these quotations remind me that much of the work involved in dialogue, paradoxically, is about our inner process. We bring ourselves to dialogue and something happens to us inside as we meet the other. We're changed and, at the

same time, we become more who we are.

The qualities of awareness, listening, compassion all form the basis of an attitude conducive to dialogue, connection and engagement, and they require self-awareness and self-management and self-care. In other words, how do I hold myself, my inner state and the space between me and another person. These qualities contribute to a level of communication where much of what is happening is at a level that cannot be seen, is not tangible, is not static, is not describable; rather it is something where we find ourselves touched in the invisible places of our hearts. For example, these qualities allow us to hear the person beyond the label, to hear the communication that lies beyond words. In the Bible, for example, when no one seems to hear Rachel, her tears become a language that God hears:

'Thus, says the LORD:

A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.' (Jeremiah 31:15)

Reflection 2 – Justice

My second reflection explores justice through a Biblical lens. I've chosen this example as my understanding of justice has been hugely influenced by developments in how the Roman Catholic Church has reflected on its approach to Biblical texts in light of Jewish-Christian relations.

2.1 Justice – meaning (Genesis 18:19)

When our relationships with God, others and the environment are 'right', there is a justice at work that embodies peace and harmony. Justice can be 'understood as a harmony that comes from remaining faithful to right relationships with God, other people and the environment. ... a just society is one that has structures that promote these right relationships so that human rights are respected, human dignity is protected, human development is facilitated, and the environment is respected and protected.' (SJI p3)

Through my dialogue with Judaism I've explored justice from a Jewish and Christian perspective. For example, there is a clear understanding of justice in the Hebrew Scriptures that supports and underpins right relationships at all levels; with God, self, others, and the environment. I will share just one example from my experience of studying a Biblical text within a Jewish-Christian context which demonstrates this. I offer this also as something that you may wish to reflect on for yourselves in your own lives and how you hear the Word of God.

זֶדֶקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט – Zedekah and Mishpat – Righteousness and Justice

Exercise:

What do you notice in the following three biblical texts?

1. 'No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing **righteousness and justice**; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.' (Genesis 18:19)
2. 'He loves **righteousness and justice**; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.' (Psalm 33:5)
3. 'To do **righteousness and justice** is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.' (Proverbs 21:3)

The phrase 'righteousness and justice' appears three times in the Tanakh/Hebrew Scriptures, only one of which is in the Torah/Pentateuch.

What do you notice in the following sample references from the prophets?

"But let **justice** roll down like waters, and **righteousness** like an ever-flowing stream. Learn to do good; seek **justice**, correct oppression; bring **justice** to the fatherless, plead for the widow's cause." (Isaiah 1:17)

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do **justice**, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

"For I the Lord love **justice**; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them." (Isaiah 61:8)

"I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, **justice**, and **righteousness** in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

The words appear:

- Separately within a sentence
- Near but generally not beside each other
- One or other in a sentence
- No particular order



Participants listening attentively to the speaker

Question: Why does the phrase 'Righteousness and Justice', in this order, appear only once in Torah and three times in the whole Bible considering the significance of both terms individually?

Genesis 18:19

In Genesis 18:19, we see Abraham's role as a father being developed. It requires that he act with 'righteousness and justice'. The terms righteousness and justice have a variety of possible meanings and can prove difficult to define both individually and when they appear alongside each other as in Genesis 18:19. Dictionary definitions for mishpat include: justice, judgment, rule, a legal act of deciding a case, an attribute of God and human being (i.e. the capacity to decide justly) and for tzedakah definitions include: right, righteousness, generosity, salvation (cf. Brown, Driver and Briggs, Harris and Holladay). In Genesis 18:19, righteousness comes first, i.e. the word whose meaning has a more qualitative, relational dimension. So again, the question, why does the phrase 'Righteousness and Justice', in this order, appear only once in Torah and three times in the whole Bible considering the significance of both terms individually? The message of the prophets is to ensure just behaviours while pointing towards the qualitative, relational dimension of Righteousness. The phrase 'Righteousness and justice' holds the ideal of Torah and justice and righteousness, as found in the prophets, points the way back to the ideal when people (the king, patron, society, individual) have turned away from God. The prophets turn the whole hierarchical system of their day on its head by pointing all the people, no matter what their role, to the acts of justice (doing justice) so that righteousness (right relationships) may also be present. For example, 'I shall make justice the measuring line, and right the plumb line' (Isaiah 28:17). The plumb line plays a much more important role in terms of the integrity of the building, while the measuring line is needed to achieve this balance and integrity. The structure of justice provides a framework within which people can reconnect with righteousness as found in Torah. The relational quality of

righteousness holds something of Buber's I-Thou and the justice encouraged by the prophets holds the qualities of I-It but the desire for righteousness underpins this. We can choose to ensure our acts of justice are underpinned by I-Thou qualities.

2.2 Who wants justice? All of us ...

For sure, justice is what we all want. Indeed, when was the last time you heard someone arguing for a world that is worse off or that promotes human suffering? Most people I know would say that they want peace in the world. The Hebrew word 'shalom' has four meanings: peace, good morning, goodbye and it's also the name for God. If we want peace we must work for justice as this returns us to right relationships, where we indeed find peace in ourselves, in our comings and goings, and we come to experience God's presence as peace too.

2.3 So where are we going wrong?

However, when we look around, we notice many things are happening in our world that suggest a different agenda is at play. We live in a world which presents the illusion that survival depends on striving to succeed over others ... this attitude and behaviour has become normalised in some cultures and work environments. Therefore, it may seem risky to allow ourselves to experience our vulnerability which may surface if we engage the relational qualities that underpin right relationships.

So where are we going wrong? We know that peace is not promoted through nations building walls to 'protect' themselves. And, if we really look closely enough, we may see how we may have contributed to the building of walls within and around ourselves? For example, regarding the environment, *Laudato Si* (para 14) notes that 'Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant

resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions.’

I would suggest that we also know people who have become indifferent or who feel disempowered as the issues seem to be so overwhelming (maybe this is the case for ourselves at times), especially when these issues are often supported by structures that have become corrupt and remain unchallenged. All the good will in the world will change little or nothing as long as the structures are wrong. If, for example, we wish to tackle climate change, we will have little or no impact unless we organise ourselves and our resources in a way that promotes the tackling of climate change. For example, too often we see Governments accepting the need to reduce GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions while at the same time taking policy initiatives that will increase these emissions. Their policies lack coherence. A good example of an incoherent policy can be seen in Ireland’s decisions a few years ago – on the one hand to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and on the other hand to increase Ireland’s GDP by increasing the country’s total number of cattle from 1 million to 1.4 million cattle. The latter has been very effective at increasing Ireland’s milk and beef production most of which, is exported. However, the development has also substantially increased GHG emissions. Two policies from the same Government but these policies working at cross purposes.

2.4 How do we create a more just world?

From a relational perspective, awareness is key to creating a more just world as this informs and is informed by our understanding of righteousness and justice ... awareness at all levels ... what we’re seeing, hearing, feeling, noticing ... within and around us. For example, when we pause long enough to notice we have ‘enough’ and are not living life in poverty or in need, ... dialogue can afford to lean more towards I-Thou as people are not facing an immediate threat to their well-being. While needs and threats to human beings and the environment need to be addressed by means of more just structures,

for a person and for the world to be more whole, an I-Thou relationship needs also to be nourished – this capacity to see, really see, the other so that we move, in the words of Richard Hycner, ‘beyond mere survival into the realm of humanity’.¹

How do we organise ourselves to ensure right relationships today as we live out the Word of God and seek to be in right relationship with God, self, others and the environment? I-It and I-Thou are both needed ... they complement and inform each other. For example, to get things done we engage in I-It relations but the levels of poverty, hunger and the associated miseries that accompany these are witness to the lack of underpinning I-Thou relations at a global level with others and with the environment.

While we all have a right to live life with dignity, our current conditions in the world indicate that this striving for more has established predominantly I-It relationships between us. These are underpinned and reinforced by fear ... fear that we’ll not have enough if we engage with others as equals, fear ultimately that we are not enough. This fear often leads to greed and accumulation for the sake of it ... all the qualities that reflect a sense of lack and which promote ‘I’ and ‘my’ and, at the same time, a sense of separation and isolation. With I-Thou on the other hand, we strive for growth in being integrated, in being whole human beings; but society often tells us that this will be achieved by growth in finances and possessions, that we will be happier, more fulfilled etc. the more we have. Experience, however, teaches us that this claim is false. There is little space for I-Thou in a context where there is a sense of ‘not enough’ and it is thought that only the brave or naïve that would engage in this way of relating.

However, there is a growing loneliness and disconnect when there is little or no I-Thou. Through my involvement in Jewish/Christian dialogue, I come face-to-face with the need we all have to make contact, to connect

¹ The Healing Relationship In Gestalt Therapy: A Dialogic/Self Psychology Approach by Richard Hycner & Lynne Jacobs.

whatever our faith tradition, our income, our circumstances. This is most apparent in the vulnerability of the Jewish community when they experience anti-Semitic comments or behaviours. They regularly mention how they cherish their experience of dialogue because, they say, it helps them to feel safe in a world that seems to be increasingly unsafe. In dialogue we find that a balance and mutual interaction between I-It and I-Thou is usually what's needed, between righteousness and justice. Changes are needed: We need a change of values (culture) so that the value and dignity of each human being is recognised. This would allow us to make decisions (political) about our resources (economic) so that quality relationships (social) are encouraged and resourced, i.e. in the first instance, everyone would have their basic needs met. Only then will we see progress on how we treat others and the environment. Only then will we move towards real, deep happiness and fulfilment ... in other words, right relationships.



‘Pope John Paul II called for a complete analysis to reveal unjust structures so that they may be examined and transformed to build a just earth’.² Because of our own limitations, inner resistances and vulnerabilities, sometimes we fall short of doing the right thing. Good structures ensure that the less well-off and our environment are not dependent on us having a good day, free of our limitations. Good structures can be a

resource that keeps us aware, open and compassionate.

Because so many of our structures are not rooted in right relationships, there are many injustices. We all know the voices in our world that are not heard today ... even as we watch our home, our planet impacted by climate change, its distress is still not heard by the international structures that maintain the status quo or deny that climate change is even happening. As we know, listening is a skill and as a human race we have been unable to fully hear the cry of the planet – the enormity of our global problems can overwhelm us to the point where we don’t know how anything we can possibly do will make a difference. This is why it’s important that, for example, *‘The commandment to give charity and support the needy is enforceable in the courts.’*³ Structures are indeed needed in order to prevent injustice when people and society have lost their relational sense – their connection with God, their own inner integrity, their openness to the health and wellbeing of everyone and the environment.

To achieve the structural changes that support a more just society requires a just society requires a profound commitment to dialogue. Dialogue, as a forum for reflection on our own lives and how we relate to others, can be very enlightening. The relational quality of righteousness needs to shape the vision that informs the work of justice. The prophets deal with the reality of hierarchical systems wherein the exploited are not given a chance to decide for themselves how society ought to be ordered. When people are not heard – their voices are lost within unjust systems. This does not reflect the relational quality of Genesis 18:19. As *Laudato Si* (para. 14) states, *“We require a new and universal solidarity. ... Everyone’s talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation”*. All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.’ In order to concretely give witness to the relational vision of Genesis

² Pope John Paul II, 1981, *Laborum Exercens*, no. 2

³ Kirschenbaum, 1991:23

18:19, the structures that undermine God's Word need to be addressed, especially at the institutional level.

While we may not all be experts in specific areas of social justice (I certainly am not!), we know of organisations that are doing this work and we can contribute to their efforts. This involves having a vision of a transformed society and being involved in a dialogue that considers the voice and well-being of everyone and our planet, so that new structures are envisaged that are practical enough to bring about a new and better reality.

Justice, at its core, is about relationships, emanating from our primary relationship with God. '... and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6:8) The prophets plead with people to do justice. Acts of justice point to the bigger picture where right relationships become part of the structural fabric of society. The message of the prophets shows God as the source of justice (cf. Isa 28:17, 33:5; Ps 72:1, 99:4). They point to God's way, to Genesis 18:19, where God says, '... keep the way of the Lord, by doing what is right and just ...'. As Rabbi Sacks says, Righteousness is best translated as 'the right and decent thing to do' or 'justice tempered by compassion' (Sacks 2009).

Again, I suggest we pause ... At so many political, social, cultural and institutional levels today, the soil is not right for all people and our planet to be cared for ... only a certain few thrive. Where do you notice right relationships in your life and ministry? What one new thing can you do to nourish right relationships in your life and in the world at this time in your own situation?

We all know situations where injustices are blatant ... clearly wrong and need to be challenged ... we are lucky enough to have people who can do this in a way that is constructive – they challenge us all. For example, we have the Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, who is one such example. And she pays a huge price in that sometimes it's not just her views that are challenged by those who oppose her but also, she herself is undermined. She says, "Everyone believes

that we can solve the crisis without effort, without sacrifice." One teacher to have downed tools to join her protest is Benjamin Wagner, 26. He expects to lose three weeks' wages – and his job – as a result of his strike. He says, "Our inability to stop climate change is like the efforts to stop World War I – we knew for years it was coming, they arranged all sorts of conferences, but still they didn't prevent it."

'Laudato Si' (paras 13 & 14) states, 'Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded'. It 'urgently' appeals, 'then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.' The alternative is that 'we' all become destroyed by the 'them and us' split within ourselves and within society at so many levels and with so many manifestations.

Dialogue is not just words – it brings about change at all levels. It changes those involved – how we are in the world and how we behave in it.

2.5 Overall ...

Justice and dialogue both steer a fine but dynamic line when underpinned by the qualities of right relationships. On the one hand, we are called to challenge injustices and how we do this will be enriched in the longer term by adhering to the skills and qualities of dialogue. However, I would argue that dialogue in today's world of targets, speed and greed may seem a high-risk option requiring courage, patience and perseverance, as its potency is not always recognised, or maybe because it is recognised and so avoided. Dialogue, from the outset, requires making space for the other, a skill that seems lacking in our striving for 'progress'. Dialogue can be quite a challenge when 'walls' are often seen as safer options. Supportive and challenging engagement are both needed for structural and systemic

change to transform what is destructive and dehumanising and to cooperate in building structures that promote the reign of God.

In other words, I-It relating is needed and has qualities that move goals forward. However, we must be mindful of these qualities when they are not underpinned by an I-Thou relational attitude. There are many examples of injustice in our world today – wrongs done to others and to creation when I-It is not practiced within I-Thou relational parameters. One very big example of an injustice is the rise of anti-Semitism, to which I've already referred, and the behaviours resulting from those who hold this attitude. Some may hold this attitude and not show it while others have gone to extreme lengths in Europe and elsewhere to express it. Once we begin to have an attitude of 'them and us' we promote a dynamic within ourselves that can be applied in other situations, e.g. people living in poverty become 'them', people seeking refuge become 'them' ... Until we become resourced enough within ourselves to not create such splits, we remain fractured within and live our lives from our own brokenness. The dominant narrative at a social, economic, political and cultural level often normalises this fracture.

Anti-Semitism, as an example of this fracture, is being expressed in violence and killing even as survivors of the Shoah are still living and remind us of their experiences during WWII. When I look at what I'm doing in response to this it seems so small, so insignificant. But my hope is that any small step will make a difference in terms of how I grow and develop as a human being and the choices I will make in the future. I hope my choices and behaviours will have a positive influence within my environment. I'm reassured in this by the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who says, "Small acts of kindness can change and humanise our world." (Jonathan Sacks, Website, 18.1.19)

I'm also reassured knowing that my small steps contribute to the bigger vision for the world held by my own congregation, the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, and for this I'm very grateful for our structures that support the small steps I and so many of my sisters

make in the direction of right relationships. I've no doubt we all have people we know and admire who inspire us to make decisions that contribute to just structures and take us all in the right direction.

Sion's vision is part of the bigger vision of the Church, as is the vision of all our congregations.

One of the small steps I'm involved in is exploring Biblical texts in a way that supports people in being more aware of how we interpret texts according to our own attitudes and values. We look at how our capacity to limit ourselves and others has consequences for our relationship with God and often sets limits in our reading of the Biblical text. For example, for a long time, because of how Church history unfolded, our reading of the Biblical texts was, at times, through an anti-Semitic lens. However, with Vatican II, the Church recognised this reality and now encourages new ways of engaging with the Bible. Part of the Biblical study program I'm involved in involves working with the Jewish community. This supports an increased awareness of prejudices which may be so familiar in how we've traditionally read and understood texts that they go unnoticed. These programs are an attempt to support change in attitudes because my underpinning motivation is to highlight the need for, and to build, 'right relationships'. Again, the 2015 document encourages us to study together in this way. 'In the field of exegesis many Jewish and Christian scholars now work together and find their collaboration mutually fruitful precisely because they belong to different religious traditions.' (Paragraph 44, The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable)

Change at all levels may be difficult, but our experience tells us that it is possible. In my experience, at the heart of change lies a willingness to be true to ourselves and our own identity, while recognising our limitations where, for example, we may hold views that don't support a better world for everyone. We lead in terms of change when we know ourselves well enough to realise that our vision of a peaceful world where all have enough to live life with dignity and our planet is no longer under threat, is not matched by

our words and actions. Because when we know this, we are empowered to make alternative choices which are not defined by our limited selves, but which support a more spacious world which is big enough to embrace everyone. In being fully aware of our own human condition – our strengths and our limitations – we can choose to live in a more integrative way with openness and compassion towards ourselves and others.

This is the journey the Church has taken in recognising and consistently addressing the need for new ways of engaging with the Bible in light of the Shoah. For example, in its 2015 document ‘The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable’ (paragraph 47), it states: ‘Another important goal of Jewish–Catholic dialogue consists in jointly combatting all manifestations of racial discrimination against Jews and all forms of anti-Semitism, which have certainly not yet been eradicated and re-emerge in different ways in various contexts.’ Pope Francis has repeatedly stressed that a Christian can never be an anti-Semite, especially because of the Jewish roots of Christianity. (The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable, 2015)

Once ‘them and us’ attitudes are addressed in how we relate to God, ourselves, others and the environment, we create a space wherein we can make better choices for a more relational and just world. I quote again from the document ‘The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable’ which encourages such action. It states in paragraph 48, that ‘Justice and peace, however, should not simply be abstractions within dialogue, but should also be evidenced in tangible ways. The social-charitable sphere provides a rich field of activity, since both Jewish and Christian ethics include the imperative to support the poor, disadvantaged and sick.’ One example of this being played out in a practical way is by the Jewish community in Dublin. Recently, they invited people of other faiths to join them in celebrating Purim. The festival was explained and, as it’s a fun one, we also took part in a variety of creative activities.

Donations from the evening went toward their fundraising for charity.

3. Conclusion

And so I return to where I began this presentation. I have been in dialogue with Judaism in a variety of different ways for over 30 years. My experience of dialogue in Jewish-Christian relations holds a paradox at its core: my identity as a Christian has been affirmed and strengthened and, at the same time, it has grown and changed as a result of this dialogue. As I reflect on my ministry I realise, more and more, the significant influence my dialogue with Judaism has had on my involvement in justice. I have come to see how the qualities required in dialogue lie also at the heart of justice. For example, essential to developing just structures that overcome injustices is an awareness of such injustices, an analysis of their causes based on all voices within the structure, or affected by it, being heard and plans put in place to achieve an outcome that, at every level, holds the Biblical values of ‘righteousness and justice’. In this, how we listen to other people and our planet is crucial. It allows us to see the person behind the label; the home behind the planet.

There are challenges in being involved in dialogue and reconciliation, i.e. in my endeavouring to be a woman of dialogue; These include:

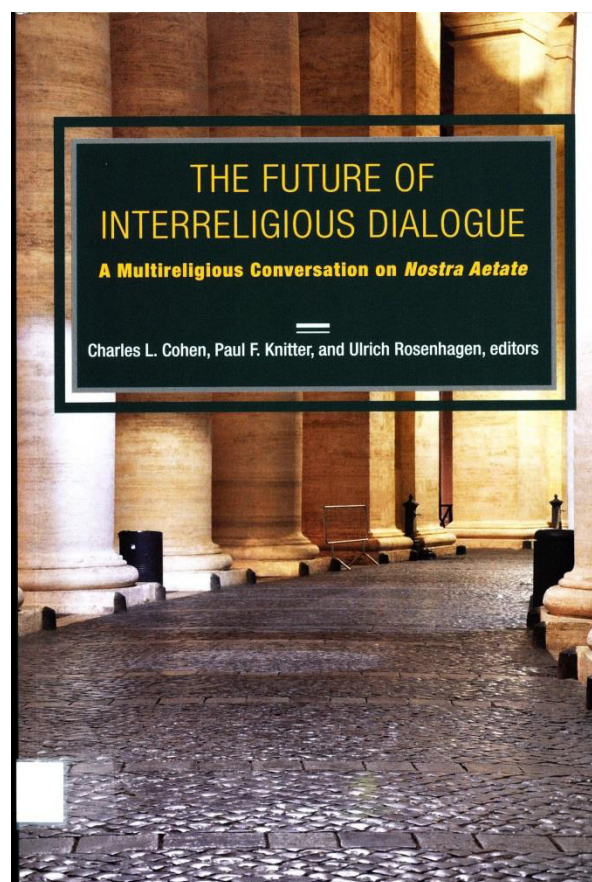
- Challenges to ask myself if I’m living up to this identity.
- Invitations to listen to others ... to make room for them in my life.
- Invitations to grow and develop.

If we are to travel this pathway, we are invited to look inwards ... to recognise and move beyond inner monologues and open to the potential of dialogue, where the parts of us that are aware and listening to others and to God’s Word, can truly inform us, as can the parts of us that are frightened, limited, and small.

So, am I a person of dialogue? Am I a person of justice? I really don't know how to answer these questions. Do I wish for dialogue and justice to be a greater part of our everyday reality? Yes! Do I wish for a reality where there is space enough within me and within the world for everyone? Yes! I, like everyone here, am working towards this reality. What fascinates and really concerns me is that this reality continues to remain tantalisingly outside our reach! But I take hope from a prayer of Thomas Merton:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and that I think I am following your will does not mean I am actually doing so. But I believe the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know if I do this you will lead me in the right road though I may know nothing about it. I will trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

I travel the road every day but, like Merton, I don't know if it's the right road or whether I'm travelling in the right direction. What I do know is that I am seeking right relationships at all levels on this journey. I'll leave it to God to answer the questions on whether or not I'm a woman of dialogue, a woman of justice.



(Gift from ORBIS Books to SEDOS Library)



A change of heart: Fragments on compassion and engagement

'As long as space endures, as long as sentient beings remain, until then, may I too abide to dispel the misery of the world.'
(Shantideva)



As the Conference prepares for the day's Seminar on 'Buddhism and Charity', the sound of a gong calls the participants to silence and intimate presence. The light is dimmed, the room quietens. A mediaeval Indian quote is projected on the screen for reflection. In four lines Shantideva's stanza expresses a core intention of Buddhism: open to and penetrated by the formless, empty quality of the Absolute (space), yet firmly grounded in the reality of this relative world (seeing the beings), we long to honour our inmost humanity by integrating both perspectives in serving the world and helping people.

1. Street Retreat

In mid-June an international group of volunteers, social activists and Zen practitioners will gather in Brussels, Belgium, for a spiritual practice called a 'Street Retreat.' During those four days we will hang out, eat and sleep together on the streets. We will collect cardboard for the night, we will beg for food and money, we will visit local homeless projects and go to soup kitchens. We will talk to professionals and those who run the shelters. We will meet homeless people, refugees, illegal immigrants, outcasts and gypsies. Our group will be together all day. We will walk a great deal. We shall not

shave or wash or take a shower. At the beginning of the Retreat, everyone's personal belongings will be stored in the lockers at the train station. Besides the clothes we're wearing, we shall only take a sleeping-bag. No books, no diaries, no money, no bank cards. No pen, no knife, no watch or cell phone. A Street Retreat is a plunge into the unknown. As a spiritual practice, it was designed by the American Zen teacher and social activist Bernie Glassman, who said that 'our practice is about being homeless and vulnerable.'

We shall live on the streets of Brussels with no resources other than our own, experiencing being on the streets first-hand, having to beg for food and money, finding places to sleep and shelter.

By bearing witness to the joy and suffering of the world, we will seek to heal the alienation from ourselves and others we sometimes experience, prompting the 'right kind of action'. Street Retreats are held in New York, Paris, Cologne, Helsinki and Brussels. Past participants found living on the street without money or certainty to be a deep and moving experience.

As an intensely spiritual practice it has changed many people's lives.

Last Sunday we met a circle of palliative care volunteers, called 'Open Group Living and Dying'. Inspired by a non-sectarian Buddhist approach to 'end of life' care, we meet regularly as a support group. We start with half an hour of communal silence (prayer, meditation). Then we are instructed in a contemplative exercise that fosters inner strength and nourishes resilience. After a tea break, we form a circle to listen to, and share each other's stories, in order to encourage and help each other.

Six weeks ago we visited Bosnia-Herzegovina with our local, inter-faith group from Ghent, our home town. This group in which Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Ba'hai, Buddhists and humanists participate has been active for twenty years in inter-faith and community building projects in the third largest city of Belgium. Dialogue, mutual respect, tolerance and solidarity are our core values that spur us to cooperate with our multicultural society. Our group on this field trip to Bosnia consisted of twenty-two participants, including a Catholic priest, a Bosnian-Belgian imam, a Protestant minister and a Buddhist roshi. We visited Sarajevo and Mostar and saw the scars of the civil war that in the 1990s set people of three different faiths against each other. We bore witness in Srebrenica, that terrible place of ethnic cleansing and genocide. During our stay we met Bosnian people from various religious backgrounds that are active in local inter-faith and peace-building projects including a professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, a representative of the Jewish Community, a Franciscan theologian, who started an interfaith choir. We met an Orthodox priest engaged in reconciliation, and we gathered with our local Muslim friends who are active in peace-making initiatives. As an imam, who trains young people from Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim backgrounds in peace-building, said: 'We don't fight mistakes, we support what is missing.'

2. Compassion

In Japan the Buddha's enlightenment is commemorated on 8th December in a ritual called 'coming down the mountain'. According to a pious legend The Enlightened One, after six years of asceticism and intense self-questioning 'at great heights', left the wilderness and descended to the valley 'embracing his heart full of love.' The Sage 'thus come' returns to our reality, into our

own lived space, to work for the benefit of the people down here. As the embodiment of insight, the descent represents Compassion.

To this day this core narrative resounds in the Japanese word 'unsui', the specific Zen term for a novice monk. 'Un' means 'cloud', 'sui' means water. Unsubstantial and light as a cloud, the spiritual seeker ascends up the slope of the mountain (of practice and inner work). Up there on the peak of non-separation, the wisdom of this transformative realisation paradoxically calls the pilgrim to go back, go down again. Searching for the lowest level, the water of compassion now flows towards the valley where the wayfarer may possibly be of help to the



people in the villages.

Throughout history people have questioned, debated and reformulated the content of the Buddha's enlightenment. However, from the earliest writings compassion has always been emphasized as a major element of the Buddha's Teaching. Compassion arises when love meets the pain of the world and is, as such, 'an encounter with the ultimate senselessness of existence itself'. Compassion has been defined as 'the emotion one experiences when feeling concern for another's suffering and desires to enhance that person's welfare'.

In Theravada Buddhism, compassion is considered one of the four 'boundlessnesses', along with love, joy and equanimity. In the old Pali Canon, there is a touching story of the practical compassion of the Buddha when caring for a sick monk.

'Now at that time a certain monk was sick with dysentery. He lay weltering in his own urine and excrement. Then the Buddha, on an inspection tour of the lodgings with Ananda as his attendant, went to the dwelling of that monk and, on arrival, saw the monk lying weltering in his own urine and excrement. On seeing him, the Buddha went to the monk and said, 'Monk, what is your sickness?' 'Venerable sir, I have dysentery.' 'Monk, do

you have an attendant?' 'No, venerable sir, I do not have one.' 'Monk, why don't the monks attend to you?' 'Venerable sir, I do not do anything for the monks, which is why they do not attend to me.' Then the Buddha addressed Ananda, 'Ananda, go and fetch some water. We will wash this monk.' 'Yes, venerable sir', Ananda replied, and fetched some water. The Buddha sprinkled water on the monk, and Venerable Ananda washed him. Then, with the Buddha taking the monk by the head, and Ananda taking him by the feet, they lifted him up and placed him on a bed. Then the Buddha, because of this event, had all the monks assembled. He asked them, 'Monks, is there a sick monk in that dwelling over there?' 'Yes, venerable sir, there is.' 'Monks, what is his sickness?' 'Venerable sir, he has dysentery.' 'Monks, does he have an attendant?' 'No, venerable sir, he does not.' 'Monks, then why don't the monks attend to him?' 'Venerable sir, he doesn't do anything for the monks, which is why they don't attend to him.' The Buddha then said, 'Monks, you have no mother, you have no father, who might attend to you? If you do not tend one another, who then will tend you? Monks, whoever would tend me should attend the sick' (Mahavagga).

In Mahayana Buddhism, compassion is one of the main two qualities, along with enlightened wisdom, to be cultivated on the path of the Bodhisattva, the embodiment of mercy and compassion. Like Kanzeon, the Bodhisattva of compassion, who postpones her own nirvana until all other people are enlightened. She has a thousand hands and eyes is able to really see the situation and to act as needed. In Zen, Kanzeon is considered to be the archetypal representation of an inherent, personal quality.

There is a well-known story of Tetsugen Doko, a Japanese Zen Master in the seventeenth century.

'Tetsugen decided to publish the sutras which, at that time, were only available in Chinese. The books were to be printed with wood blocks in an edition of seven thousand copies; a tremendous undertaking. Tetsugen began by travelling and collecting donations

for this purpose. A few sympathizers would give him a hundred gold pieces, but most of the time he only received small coins. He thanked each donor with equal gratitude. After ten years Tetsugen had collected enough money to begin his task.

It happened that at that time the Uji River overflowed. Famine followed. Tetsugen took the funds he had collected for the books and spent them to save others from starvation. Then he began his fund-raising again.

Several years afterwards an epidemic spread through the country. Tetsugen again gave away what he had collected.

He started his work a third time and after twenty years his wish was fulfilled. The printing blocks which produced the first edition of sutras can be seen today in Ōbaku Monastery in Kyoto.

The Japanese tell their children that Tetsugen made three sets of sutras, and that the first two invisible sets surpass even the last.'

3. Oneness of life

'Like a bird needs two wings to fly, Zen practice needs wisdom and compassion. Compassion without wisdom is blind. Wisdom without compassion is dead.'

(Genno Roshi)

Even years later, I still clearly remember the moment my teacher gently spoke these words to me, paraphrasing an old Zen saying.

In Zen we actually differentiate between three kinds of compassion.

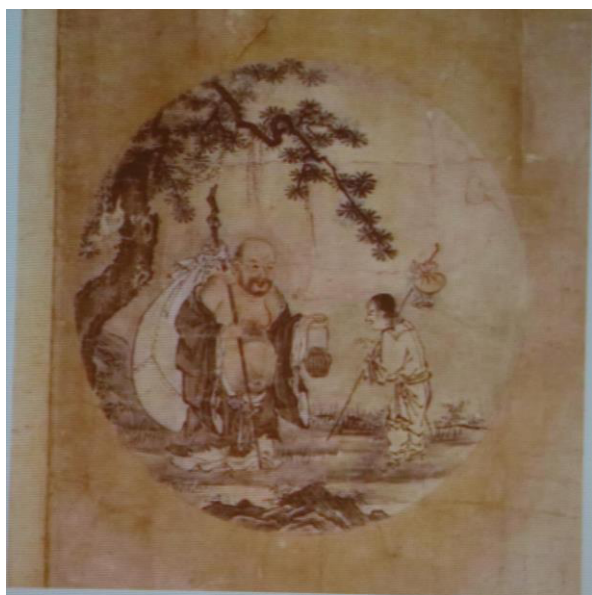
'The first is compassion toward beings, which is compassion as it is most commonly understood: on seeing others suffer, you want to do as much as you can to help them, both by relieving their suffering and by giving them comfort.

The second kind of compassion reflects a more advanced stage of understanding and practice: having wisdom, you see that beings and objects do not really exist in the usual sense, as something substantial and apart from you. Thus, to hope to do something to save them is also a delusion; yet having that

delusion, you still carry out the deluded work of saving others.

The last kind of compassion is the ideal one: having no particular relation to others, what you do spontaneously is beneficial to them. When you are truly selfless, it just happens that way.'

This non-referential compassion is understood to arise naturally and spontaneously from non-dual wisdom. For example, in the 'Ox-herding Pictures', a well-known didactic scheme of the stages of Zen practice, it is only at the tenth and last stage that the Sage is seen entering the marketplace.



Bernie roshi, my other teacher, tirelessly pointed out that to awaken is to realize the Oneness of life, and that the function of that awakening is to serve. He was also fond of quoting Kukai, the Japanese Saint, who said that we can tell the depth of a person's enlightenment by how they serve others.

In a way, from a mystical perspective, it doesn't make sense to wait for enlightenment before allowing oneself to do something in the world. If enlightenment is waking up to non-dual relationships, we can already start in good faith and with discernment to engage in this oneness. In doing so and humbly seeing that the degree of compassion we feel is always proportional to the understanding we have of ourselves, we will learn a lot about

our intentions, our actions and our relations. For sure, there will be ample opportunities to clarify and deepen our spiritual insight and our meditation.

Right here, a change of heart takes place.

4. Socially engaged Buddhism

In all the great Spiritual Traditions there is a creative tension between contemplation and charity. It is an understatement to say that the Buddhist Tradition has tended towards 'being', rather than towards 'doing'.

Buddhist Sister Cheng Yen from Taiwan recalls a discussion she had with three Roman Catholic nuns in 1966. While the nuns admitted the profundity of Buddhist Teaching, they noted that the Church had helped people around the world by building schools and hospitals. 'But what has Buddhism done for society?', they asked. That question made her realize that Buddhism had to do more than simply encourage the private cultivation of a person's heart and mind. Sister Cheng went on to found Tzu Chi, an organized Charity with Buddhist origins that is now one of the largest humanitarian organizations in the world.

The Dalai Lama is also known to have said that Buddhists can certainly learn a great deal from Christian service.

Already at the dawn of the twentieth century a number of Asian Buddhist leaders started rethinking and remodelling Buddhist practice in terms of social and societal needs. The Vietnamese monk and peace-activist Thich Nhat Hanh, who coined the term 'bouddhisme engagé', has been pivotal in bringing this awareness to the West. Since then 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' explores ways of integrating authentic Buddhist practice with social action. Buddhist communities and volunteers worldwide are now active in peace work, structural change, ecology and service. A new 'turning of the Wheel' seems to be manifest.

As Thich Nhat Hanh said: 'It's not Buddhism, if it is not engaged.'

Islam and Freedom

Religious Freedom

- “There shall be no compulsion in religion”
(2/256)
- “And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed- all of them entirely. Then, (O Muhammad), would you compel the people in order that they become believers”. (10/99)

Religious Freedom

- “To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation, but He intended to test you in what He has given to you, so race to good.”
(5/48)

(Texts from Koran chosen by speaker Cenap Mustafa Aydin)

Pourquoi tant de frustrations autour du dialogue interreligieux ?



Dans le cadre de cette brève contribution, qui s'appuie uniquement sur mon expérience du dialogue islamo-chrétien en Égypte, je voudrais proposer une clarification de différents types de dialogues interreligieux, pour argumenter qu'il est inefficace de les confondre en essentialisant *le* dialogue interreligieux. En effet, les six types de dialogues que je propose ici ont des présupposés différents, des objectifs différents, et des méthodes différentes pour atteindre ces objectifs. Leur point commun est que des croyants de différentes obédiences (ou des non croyants) parlent de religion, mais cela ne constitue pas, à mon avis, une discipline unifiée. Lorsque l'on parle de « dialogue interreligieux », au mieux nous n'envisageons qu'un seul de ces six types, et au pire, nous les confondons. Ma contribution voudrait montrer comment cette confusion (ou cette simplification) est une source de frustrations, à la fois pour les acteurs et pour les observateurs.

Six types (provisaires) de dialogue

1. Le dialogue institutionnel

Ses interlocuteurs sont des représentants des religions (ou de convictions non religieuses), qui parlent au nom des personnes qui partagent leurs convictions. Il s'agit d'un dialogue politique et diplomatique, au sens noble de ces termes, dont le but n'est pas de se mettre d'accord, ni même de discuter du contenu des croyances, mais de produire un effet symbolique, dans et en dehors des communautés représentées. Lorsque le pape François rencontre le shaykh Aḥmad al-

Ṭayyib, chacun a un message symbolique à faire passer. Par exemple, lors de la rencontre entre les deux hommes au Caire en avril 2017, le pape voulait faire passer le message que musulmans et chrétiens sont ensemble face à la barbarie, et qu'il n'y a pas de guerre de religions entre eux. Quant au shaykh, il voulait affirmer son autorité spirituelle parmi les musulmans du monde entier, se présentant comme le « pape de l'islam ».

Ce dialogue institutionnel n'a pas d'autre contenu que sa portée symbolique et énormément de frustrations naissent de ce que certains observateurs non avertis en attendent des « avancées » en termes doctrinaux ou éthiques. C'est exactement l'impression que l'on peut avoir en lisant la Déclaration commune, signée par le pape François et le shaykh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib à Abou Dhabi en février 2019. Symboliquement, c'est très important que le texte existe, c'est la première fois qu'un document est signé en commun par les deux autorités. Mais en terme de contenu, c'est extrêmement frustrant, voire scandaleux : déclarer que les religions n'incitent jamais à la violence est une déclaration de principe que l'observation contredit cruellement, pour l'islam et le christianisme, depuis des siècles. De même, réduire la religion à un appel à une humanité fraternelle, ni Corps du Christ ni *umma*, est d'une pauvreté dogmatique consternante. La seule chose à retenir (ou presque) de ce texte est son existence, le symbole extrêmement puissant et efficace qu'une parole est possible, même si, en termes de contenu, elle est assez creuse aujourd'hui.

Vous avez sans doute déjà expérimenté la même frustration lors de rencontres où l'on fait venir un imam, un prêtre et un rabbin, et où il ne se passe absolument rien. Ce qui se dit est d'une platitude navrante. C'est que l'on demande à ces rencontres ce qu'elles ne

peuvent offrir! Si les invités sont là, ce n'est pas parce qu'ils ont quelque chose à dire mais parce qu'ils représentent quelque chose. Symboliquement, ils représentent les musulmans, les chrétiens, les juifs... C'est une image forte, nécessaire, belle, mais ce n'est qu'une image. Les dignitaires religieux sont très loin d'avoir tous quelque chose de pertinent à dire de leur propre tradition religieuse !

2. Le dialogue académique

Ses interlocuteurs sont des théologiens, c'est-à-dire des personnes qui ont une approche à la fois croyante et scientifique de leur foi, qu'ils analysent avec les outils des sciences humaines : philosophie, herméneutique, histoire, anthropologie, sociologie, psychologie... (Notons au passage qu'il serait abusif de qualifier d'interreligieux le travail de chercheurs en sciences religieuses, c'est-à-dire de personnes qui n'ont pas une approche croyante de leur objet d'étude.) Le but du dialogue interreligieux académique est d'explicitier et de discuter la foi des interlocuteurs théologiens dans des catégories rationnelles qui leur soient communes, ou tout au moins d'explicitier les différentes rationalités à l'œuvre dans les discussions entre eux.

À la différence du précédent type de dialogue, les chercheurs ne sont pas là pour parler au nom des personnes qui partagent leurs croyances, mais pour leurs compétences académiques. Le but de ce dialogue n'est pas de se mettre d'accord sur la foi de l'autre mais bien plutôt de comprendre ce qui nous distingue et comment chaque croyance trouve sa cohérence interne. Lorsque des théologiens se rencontrent, la dimension symbolique dominante du dialogue institutionnel ne peut pas être niée et il faut sans cesse bien se rappeler que personne ici ne « représente » sa religion. C'est une différence principale avec le type précédent de dialogue interreligieux. Le théologien musulman ne « représente » pas la pensée musulmane, mais une pensée musulmane, la sienne. Idem pour le théologien réformé, juif ou catholique.

Par expérience, je sais aussi que ce type de dialogue est beaucoup plus intéressant lorsque

les interlocuteurs ont quelque connaissance sur la religion de l'autre. J'ai assisté à des séances exaspérantes entre théologiens musulmans et chrétiens où la plupart des malentendus auraient pu être évités si les intervenants ne connaissaient pas de l'autre que des clichés. Ceci est précisément lié au fait que le dialogue se situe entre intellectuels de champs spécialisés. Si je mets autour de la table des universitaires de domaines de compétences différentes, je n'ai aucune garantie que la discussion sera fructueuse. Les rencontres les plus intéressantes auxquelles il m'a été donné d'assister regroupaient des théologiens musulmans et des islamologues chrétiens. Et une fois j'ai assisté à une rencontre entre des théologiens catholiques et une christianologue musulmane. C'était fascinant. Se rajoutent à cette exigence la difficulté des traductions... je n'entrerai pas dans les détails ici, mais j'ai des anecdotes truculentes à ce sujet que je suis prêt à partager!

3. Le dialogue de projets communs

Ses interlocuteurs sont des activistes sociaux et politiques, membres d'associations ou d'ONG qui se sont donné des projets communs. À la bibliothèque de l'Idéo, notre équipe de travail se compose d'employés musulmans et chrétiens. Nous ne faisons pas de « dialogue interreligieux » mais le simple fait de travailler ensemble nous en apprend beaucoup sur les sensibilités les uns des autres. Le travail en commun est un lieu éminent de négociation d'échelles de valeurs et de prise de conscience de l'impact de nos croyances dans nos vies quotidiennes, sur nos échelles de valeurs.

Ce type de dialogue se déroule entre personnes qui ne sont pas des représentants de leur religion, comme c'était le cas dans le premier type de dialogue, et qui, à la différence du second type de dialogue, seraient souvent bien en peine de rendre compte rationnellement de leur foi. Cependant, les interactions entre les personnes impliquées dans des projets communs peuvent être l'occasion de « parler religion » et des discussions réellement

intéressantes peuvent alors naître, surtout dans le domaine éthique.

4. Le (pseudo-)dialogue de voisinage

Ses interlocuteurs n'ont pas de projet commun, sinon celui de vivre dans les mêmes quartiers, les mêmes immeubles. Ils se côtoient au quotidien et se voient vivre les uns les autres. Il peut surgir de cette proximité des situations de dialogue interreligieux, mais qui sont d'autant plus dangereuses que les personnes croient trop rapidement se connaître, en vertu de ce seul voisinage. Combien de personnes croient connaître l'islam parce qu'ils habitent dans un pays à majorité musulmane, ou parce qu'ils ont pour voisins de palier une famille musulmane! Ce type de « dialogue » est indigent parce qu'il est largement non verbal, non informé, et que ses interlocuteurs ne sont pas liés par un projet qu'ils doivent mener en commun. Il convient donc, pour ne pas être frustré de ses impasses, de bien se garder d'en tirer aucune conclusion.

Le nombre de personnes qui se permettent de juger l'islam (ou le christianisme) seulement parce qu'ils habitent dans un pays musulman, ou seulement parce qu'il y a une mosquée en bas de chez eux! Je mentionne ce dialogue de voisinage parce qu'il est fréquent et parce qu'il peut être l'occasion de nouer des amitiés, mais en tant que tel il recèle un piège dont il faut être bien conscient si l'on ne veut pas en faire une nouvelle source de frustration.

5. Le dialogue amical

Ses interlocuteurs sont des amis, ils se connaissent et s'apprécient, et cette amitié peut leur permettre d'aller très loin dans les discussions sur leur foi, leurs expériences spirituelles et leurs doutes. Même si les deux interlocuteurs ne sont pas formés dans l'étude de leur religion, ils peuvent se permettre d'échanger en profondeur, y compris au niveau mystique. Ce type de dialogue est extrêmement émouvant et ceux qui en font l'expérience ont malheureusement tendance à évaluer tout autre forme de dialogue interreligieux à l'aune de celui-ci, ce qui n'est pas seulement injuste mais aussi faux, car

chaque type de dialogue a sa pertinence et sa valeur.

Dans ce dialogue, les deux amis ne « représentent » par leur religion, même s'il est évident que leurs croyances les imprègnent. Ils ne sont pas non plus toujours très informés théologiquement, mais l'amitié et la volonté de comprendre et d'aimer l'autre permet de dépasser ce qui serait autrement indigent dans un dialogue académique.

6. Le dialogue en couple mixte

Ses interlocuteurs ont pour particularité de vivre ensemble, ce qui les distingue des simples amis. Ils ont aussi un projet en commun, ce que n'ont pas nécessairement les amis. On peut éventuellement discuter de la pertinence de distinguer ce sixième type de dialogue, mais le fait qu'en pratique et dans le travail quotidien des responsables du dialogue interreligieux en France (je pense au SNRM, le Service national des relations avec les musulmans, qui dépend de la Conférence épiscopale française) ce sont les couples mixtes qui posent le plus de questions interreligieuses impose, il me semble, de distinguer ce niveau. La question principale et la plus délicate qu'ont à se poser les couples mixtes est celle de l'éducation des enfants. Au moment de transmettre des valeurs et des croyances, les époux ont à faire des choix éthiques qui révèlent souvent des difficultés très profondes envers la religion de l'autre, questions qui ne se posaient pas de manière aussi brutale avant l'arrivée des enfants.

Confusio confusionum

Il me semble qu'il est nécessaire de distinguer ces types de dialogues (sans présumer leur exhaustivité à ce point de réflexion) si l'on veut pouvoir dire quelque chose de pertinent. Je ne crois pas que le dialogue interreligieux existe comme un seul concept cohérent et utile à la pensée, et de la confusion de ces différents types naissent des frustrations qui jettent finalement un discrédit sur le dialogue en tant que tel.

On ne peut qu'être frustrés des rencontres institutionnelles si l'on en attend plus que ce qu'elles ont à offrir : le simple fait que les responsables religieux se rencontrent et

s’embrassent devant les caméras. Pour avoir traduit de nombreuses rencontres officielles entre des responsables catholiques et musulmans au Caire, je peux assurer qu’à aucun moment des questions doctrinales ou éthiques ne sont discutées, et lorsque des points sensibles sont abordés (la liberté de conscience ou le respect des minorités par exemple), ce qui est important, c’est que les questions aient été posées.

C’est ailleurs, dans d’autres cadres, que des véritables discussions arrivent. Le Conseil pontifical insiste toujours pour que ces rencontres au plus haut niveau soient accompagnées de séances de travail entre théologiens, auxquelles j’ai aussi eu la chance de participer récemment. Les résultats de nos travaux ne filtrent pas à l’extérieur, non pas qu’ils seraient sensibles, mais tout simplement parce que nous abordons surtout des questions épistémologiques, comme il se doit, entre intellectuels, et que c’est inaudible pour le grand public. Celui-ci n’entend alors que ce qui s’est dit entre le pape et le shaykh et il finit par douter que le dialogue interreligieux a un quelconque intérêt, comme je le disais à propos de la Déclaration commune signée à Abou Dhabi.

Une autre source récurrente de frustration vient de ce qu’on pense spontanément que les responsables religieux sont capables d’une réflexion rationnelle sur leur foi, ce qui est rarement le cas. Tous les prêtres, tous les pasteurs, les imams ou les rabbins, n’ont pas des choses intelligentes à dire sur leur religion. Ou pour dire les choses autrement, on peut être un excellent pasteur et n’avoir qu’une capacité réflexive limitée sur sa propre tradition religieuse. On demande beaucoup trop rapidement à des croyants, leaders religieux ou non, de représenter leur religion et d’en dire quelque chose d’audible et de rationnel à des fidèles d’autres religions et à des non-croyants. Là encore, le public repart frustré et conforté dans l’idée que les religions n’ont rien de pertinent à dire, et qu’au mieux elles ne parlent qu’à leurs propres fidèles. Quoi qu’il en soit, elles n’auraient rien d’intéressant à se dire l’une à l’autre. En revanche, lorsqu’on peut faire se rencontrer de véritables théologiens, qui ont en outre

quelque connaissance de la religion de l’autre, le débat est absolument passionnant.

Je ne m’attarderai pas sur les frustrations qui peuvent naître des autres types de dialogues interreligieux, car ils n’ont rien de spécifique par rapport à toute forme de discussions : il faut se retenir d’attribuer des étiquettes aux interlocuteurs, ne pas projeter sur eux ses peurs et ses représentations, prendre le temps de s’écouter. Avec peut-être cette attention à sans cesse garder à l’esprit que l’autre ne représente que lui-même, et pas tous les croyants dont il partage la foi.

Conclusion

Il me semble que le dialogue interreligieux, et en particulier le dialogue islamo-chrétien, souffre d’une image déplorable parce qu’on confond des types de dialogue qui n’ont quasiment rien en commun, sinon que ses interlocuteurs sont de confessions différentes. Il me semble que parler de « dialogue interreligieux », sans autre précision, est aussi flou que de parler de « dialogue international » ou de « dialogue interculturel », qu’aucun chercheur n’aborderait, il me semble, comme s’il s’agissait de concepts définis. Je propose donc de systématiquement préciser de quel dialogue interreligieux nous parlons : institutionnel, académique, de projets, de voisinage, amical ou conjugal.

Je voudrais faire trois dernières remarques, que je soumets à votre discussion. Ma première remarque concerne les quatre types de dialogue interreligieux que l’on trouve dans *Dialogue et mission* (1984), et qui sont devenus canoniques (alors même que le texte ne les présente que comme les formes principales typiques) : le dialogue de vie, le dialogue des œuvres, le dialogue des experts, et le dialogue des expériences religieuses (DM 28–35). Le dialogue de la vie tel que décrit dans *Dialogue et mission* me semble être au croisement du (pseudo-)dialogue de voisinage et du dialogue d’amitié. Ne pas isoler ce (pseudo-)dialogue de voisinage me semble aujourd’hui naïf : nous avons malheureusement appris qu’il ne suffit pas de vivre côte à côte pour se connaître. La plupart du temps, quand on parle du « dialogue de

vie» on a en tête seulement les bonnes relations de voisinage, rien de plus, et il est très naïf en 2019 de croire que ce type de «dialogue» conduit à plus de paix. Le dialogue des œuvres de *Dialogue et mission* correspond à ce que j'ai appelé le dialogue de projets menés en commun, avec un vocabulaire plus contemporain. Le dialogue des experts de *Dialogue et mission* correspond à ce que j'appelle le dialogue académique. L'adjectif académique est là pour nous rappeler que la théologie est une science, avec ses propres méthodes de vérification et de cohérence. Le quatrième type de dialogue selon *Dialogue et mission*, le dialogue de l'expérience religieuse, me semble impossible s'il n'est pas enraciné dans l'amitié, et c'est pour cela que je préfère l'appeler dialogue de l'amitié. Je trouve cela essentiel à dire, pour éviter une fois de plus la frustration de constater que toute rencontre de moines et de soufis n'aboutit pas nécessairement à grand-chose. Et comment en serait-il autrement? Comment ouvrir son âme à l'autre, si une amitié et une estime réciproques ne sont pas déjà là entre nous? *Dialogue et mission* ne parle pas du dialogue de la vie de couple, mais je pense qu'il est important, au-moins d'un point de vue pastoral, de distinguer ce niveau. Quant au dialogue institutionnel, *Dialogue et mission* ne l'envisage pas du tout, et cela me semble typique sinon d'une époque pionnière du moins de l'impossibilité d'envisager le dialogue comme un outil diplomatique et symbolique. Ce qui m'amène à ma seconde remarque.

Nous sommes en effet probablement hypnotisés par des situations limites, situation pionnières, où les interlocuteurs ont été à la fois des responsables religieux, des théologiens qualifiés et des amis de longue date, impliqués dans des projets sur le terrain. La parole de ces témoins exceptionnels fausse notre compréhension et ne nous permet plus de penser les dialogues interreligieux pour ce qu'ils sont, mais elle les tue au moment même où elle les confond. Les grands «dialogueurs» — je pense à Massignon, au cardinal Newman, à Paul VI et Jean-Paul II, Martin Buber, Bruno Hussar ou encore à l'imam Mūsā al-Ṣadr et à Ali Elsamman — ne

rendent-ils finalement pas la tâche impossible aux gens normaux que nous sommes? N'ont-ils pas mis la barre trop haut en réunissant en eux-mêmes plusieurs facettes du dialogue dont nous avons parlé plus haut? Si *Dialogue et mission* n'envisage pas la possibilité que le dialogue puisse n'être «que» institutionnel, c'est peut-être parce que les pionniers du dialogue, qui avaient pour la plupart une stature institutionnelle, réunissaient aussi les autres qualités de ce qui fait qu'un dialogue peut être fructueux : un esprit critique, théologiquement informé, de l'amitié et du respect pour l'autre, sa foi et ses choix éthiques, et des projets dans lesquels s'engager ensemble, au quotidien. En attendant de réunir en soi toutes ces qualités, il me semble qu'il est prudent de bien distinguer les types de dialogue, afin de ne pas engendrer plus de frustrations.

Ma troisième et dernière remarque concerne une réflexion que j'entends systématiquement lors de conférences où je parle de dialogue interreligieux. J'entends souvent les gens se plaindre que le dialogue interreligieux ne sert à rien, qu'il ne porte aucun fruit. Les papes successifs ont multiplié les rencontres interreligieuses et nous avons l'impression de ne pas avoir avancé sur le terrain. Il est très important de dire que les six différents types de dialogue que je mentionne ci-dessus n'ont qu'une faible influence les uns sur les autres. Le pape François peut bien rencontrer le shaykh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib toutes les semaines, cela ne fera pas avancer la recherche théologique si les théologiens et les chercheurs ne prennent pas l'initiative de travailler ensemble. Aucun projet commun interreligieux ne sera lancé par le pape, ni par les universitaires : c'est aux acteurs de la société civile de le faire. Et tout cela risque de ne pas améliorer les relations avec mon épouse musulmane ou avec mes amis de confessions différentes de la mienne. C'est à chacun de prendre ses responsabilités : autorités religieuses, théologiens, citoyens, amis, etc. On peut effectivement rêver que les différents types de dialogue se fécondent mutuellement, mais à trop attendre, nous perdons un temps précieux!

(English translation of article on website)

Carità, *Karuṇā* / 慈悲 *Jihi*: insieme sulle vie del dialogo



Prima di tutto un sincero grazie a SEDOS, agli organizzatori di questo Seminario, in particolare a P. Peter Baekelmans, e a tutti voi presenti per avermi dato la possibilità di essere qui, oggi,

con voi a condividere alcune riflessioni su un tema che, come missionari, ci tocca sempre più da vicino. È vero che – come già scriveva Qohelet più di due millenni fa – «non c'è niente di nuovo sotto il sole» (Qoh. 1,9). Il mondo è sempre stato “plurale” o, meglio ancora, “multiforme” per la varietà delle sue culture, delle tradizioni religiose, degli ordinamenti politici, come ci attestano testimonianze storiche, culturali, archeologiche, antropologiche, ecc. Ciò nondimeno non possiamo negare che oggi – anche a fronte di un processo di globalizzazione sempre più aggressivo – la dimensione “plurale”, o meglio “multiforme”, del nostro mondo si impone con un'urgenza nuova e chiede risposte nuove.

La “via del dialogo”, intrapresa dalla Chiesa cattolica soprattutto dal Vaticano II in poi, vuole proprio essere una risposta al «concerto dissonante, volubile, complesso del mondo contemporaneo»¹ per citare quel grande Papa del dialogo che fu S. Paolo VI. Quale «arte di spirituale comunicazione» (ES 83), il vero «dialogo» - non un generico colloquiare ma il «dialogo della salvezza» che ha il suo fondamento nella «intenzione (*mens*) stessa di Dio» (ES 72) – esige “chiarezza”, “mitezza”,

“prudenza pedagogica” (ES 83.84); “sceglie i mezzi propri” “rifugge da vani apriorismi” (ES 88). Solo così - prosegue Paolo VI – «si realizza l'unione della verità con la carità; dell'intelligenza e con l'amore» (ES 85).

L'«unione della verità e della carità» già ci orienta nella riflessione di oggi che - dopo la trattazione di Giustizia (Giudaismo) e Libertà (Islam), ha per tema specifico proprio la «Carità» in rapporto al Buddhismo. Tema non facile da trattare che richiede grande cautela perché, come già scriveva il tibetologo francese Jacques Bacot (1877 – 1965), «niente è così ingannevole come la trasposizione di termini da una religione all'altra»².

Non solo questione di termini

Nel Buddhismo non troviamo un termine corrispettivo a «carità» inteso in senso cristiano, così come nel lessico cristiano non troviamo equivalenti di termini buddhisti quali, «*karuṇā*, *maitri*,

慈悲 *jihi*», generalmente tradotti nelle lingue europee con “compassione”, “benevolenza”, “misericordia”, “carità”. La diversa accezione di questi termini, infatti, rimanda non solo alla irriducibile particolarità di ogni lingua ma soprattutto al nucleo veritativo che le due Tradizioni custodiscono, e che questi termini intendono rivelare. Terreno sacro, dunque, quello della “verità”, per avvicinarci al quale è doveroso «toglierci i calzari» (cfr. Es. 3,5) e porci in un disarmato e sincero ascolto reciproco.

Quando il Cristianesimo affrontò per la prima volta il mondo greco romano dovette misurarsi – e non senza difficoltà – con la sfida linguistica. Analogamente, quando il Buddhismo, all'inizio del I sec. d. C, raggiunse la Cina, una delle grandi sfide che i

¹ Paulo VI, *Udienza generale*, Castel Gandolfo, 5 agosto, 1964 in w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/audiences/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_aud_19640805-.html. Cfr. anche *Insegnamenti*, II, p. 473.

² *Milarépa. Ses méfaits. Ses épreuves. Son illumination* (traduit du tibétain par J. BACOT), Fayard, Paris, 1971, 19.

Maestri cinesi dovettero affrontare fu proprio quella della traduzione di termini e concetti che non avevano un corrispettivo nella lingua cinese e il cui fraintendimento rischiava di alterare la genuinità stessa del Buddhismo. Nel IV secolo, il monaco e maestro Tao-an (312-385), particolarmente conscio di tale difficoltà e dei rischi che ne derivavano, mise a punto la cosiddetta teoria delle «cinque perdite e tre difficoltà» che condizionano ogni processo di traduzione e di mediazione culturale, proponendo alcune norme per ovviare a tale inconveniente. Tra queste norme, Tao-an propose quella di non tradurre, bensì di semplicemente traslitterare, alcuni termini chiave che sarebbero inevitabilmente impoveriti o traditi da qualsiasi traduzione. La saggezza di tale visione si impone da sé, soprattutto a fronte di termini che, nelle rispettive Tradizioni, hanno specifiche accezioni e connotazioni, come nel caso, appunto, di "carità" e *"karuṇā, maitri, jihi 慈悲"*.

Per cogliere la specifica valenza di questi termini, la loro forza evocativa all'interno del Buddhismo e del Cristianesimo, il loro vissuto e la loro fecondità ai fini di un genuino "dialogo della salvezza", permettetemi di partire dalla mia esperienza in Giappone.

“Voglio credere quello che crede quell'uomo”

Era il 1986. Ero arrivata in Giappone da poco più di un anno e ancora stavo studiando il giapponese a Kobe, una bella e vivace città nella regione del Kansai. Per praticare la lingua e familiarizzarmi con il mondo giapponese, partecipavo ad alcuni incontri che si tenevano in una parrocchia vicina. Un giorno, durante uno scambio molto informale, un anziano cristiano, originario di Hiroshima, ci confidò di essersi fatto cristiano per aver "visto" P. Pedro Arrupe. «Quando lo vidi - narrò - dissi a me stesso: "io non so cosa crede quell'uomo, ma voglio credere quello che crede lui"».

La sua testimonianza mi colpì particolarmente e rimase per me un punto di

riferimento costante del mio servizio missionario: «non so cosa crede quell'uomo, ma voglio credere quello che crede lui»! Mirabile forza della testimonianza, mi dissi!

P. Arrupe era stato missionario in Giappone per lunghi anni prima di diventare preposito Generale della Compagnia di Gesù. Era a Hiroshima durante il bombardamento atomico e, con le sue conoscenze mediche, si prodigò senza sosta per aiutare la popolazione colpita. Non fu questo, però, che impressionò l'allora giovanotto di Hiroshima.

I giapponesi sono, infatti, molto solidali tra loro e anche in quella tragica e drammatica situazione non mancarono gesti e atti eroici di solidarietà e di aiuto reciproco. Quando chiesi a quel venerabile anziano cosa l'avesse colpito al punto da voler credere quello che credeva P. Arrupe, mi rispose: «Non conoscevo P. Arrupe. Lo vidi solo agire, prodigarsi per gli altri con amore, un amore "diverso" non so spiegare. Agiva come mosso da una Presenza viva, benevola e luminosa, che traspariva in ogni suo gesto. Fu quello che mi affascinò e mi spinse a farmi cristiano. Volevo conoscere il segreto di quella "Presenza"».

Rimasi in silenzio, pensosa, mentre dentro di me riecheggiavano le parole di Gesù: «Da questo tutti sapranno che siete miei discepoli, se avrete amore gli uni gli altri» (Gv 11,35) e quelle di S. Paolo: «l'amore del Cristo ci spinge» (2 Cor 5,14).

“Non mi lascerò vincere dalla pioggia, né dal vento, non dalla neve, né dalla calura d'estate” (Miyazawa Kenji)

Terminato lo studio del giapponese, in agosto del 1987 mi trasferii presso il Centro di spiritualità e dialogo interreligioso Shinmeizan che stava allora nascendo. Fondato dal saveriano P. Franco Sottocornola con la collaborazione del Ven. Tairyu Furukawa, capo del tempio buddhista Seimeizan Schweitzer, Shinmeizan sorge sulle colline limitrofe a Nagomi, una cittadina della provincia di Kumamoto, nel Giappone occidentale.

Come Centro di spiritualità e dialogo interreligioso, in questi trent'anni Shinmeizan ha potuto instaurare numerosi rapporti di amicizia e collaborazione con le diverse componenti del mondo religioso giapponese e, in particolare, con il mondo buddhista proprio grazie alla mediazione del Venerabile Furukawa, scomparso nel 2000.

Nei primissimi anni della mia presenza a Shinmeizan, durante una delle giornate di studio che il Ven. Furukawa teneva regolarmente per i suoi discepoli e alle quali partecipava anche la nostra piccola comunità di Shinmeizan, fui particolarmente colpita da un aneddoto (probabilmente un koan dello Zen) che egli raccontò: "un Maestro buddhista era in cammino con un gruppo di discepoli quando il gruppo si imbatté in un anziano che, con grande fatica, sospingeva un pesante carretto lungo una strada in salita. Uno dei discepoli, istintivamente, si staccò dal gruppo e andò ad aiutare l'anziano che arrancava lungo la via. Giunti però a destinazione, il Maestro chiamò il discepolo e lo riprese con severità. Suo compito, in quel momento, non era quello di occuparsi del vecchio lungo la strada con la pretesa di aiutarlo, ma di seguire il Maestro e, indifferente a tutto, raggiungere il più presto possibile l'illuminazione, ossia la 'chiara visione delle cose'. Solo allora avrebbe potuto aiutare veramente gli altri".

Non nascondo che l'aneddoto, sul momento, mi lasciò perplessa e pensosa. Perché – mi chiedevo – veniva rimproverato l'unico discepolo che aveva dimostrato attenzione a una persona in difficoltà e prontezza nell'aiutarla? La perplessità cresceva pensando alle scelte di vita del Ven.

Furukawa, sempre pronto ad aiutare chiunque si trovasse nel bisogno, anche a costo di pagare di persona. Mi chiedevo, perciò, quale senso avesse quel racconto, certamente narrato non casualmente.

Nato nel 1920 nella provincia di Saga, a nord-ovest dell'isola di Kyushu, il Ven. Furukawa aveva vissuto in prima persona il dramma della

seconda guerra mondiale che aveva travolto anche il Giappone. Soldato di leva, a vent'anni era stato mandato in Manciuria da dove venne rimpatriato perché ferito. Rimessosi in salute, fu mandato dal padre, bonzo della Scuola Shingon, al Monte Koya, centro principale del Buddhismo Shingon, dove continuò il suo curriculum formativo e dove divenne monaco.

Tornato in Kyushu, cominciò il suo servizio di bonzo in un piccolo tempio di campagna della provincia di Saga dove cercava di dar corpo all'ideale che la poesia di Miyazawa Kenji (1896 -1933), "poeta-contadino" e fervente fedele del Buddhismo Nichiren, morto di stenti in solidarietà con la sua gente, gli aveva suscitato:

*Non mi lascerò vincere dalla pioggia
né dal vento, non dalla neve
né dalla calura d'estate [...]
A Oriente dove c'è un bimbo malato
andare e avere cura di lui,
a occidente dove c'è una madre affaticata
portare il suo covone di riso,
a sud dove c'è un uomo che muore
aiutarlo a non avere paura,
a nord, dove c'è una lite o un processo
portare la pace [...]*

Una poesia che il Ven. Furukawa amava citare spesso a memoria, come un mantra, e



Interreligious Meeting at Shinmeizan

che fu per lui di grande ispirazione. Stabilitosi poi a Tamana, nella provincia di Kumamoto, nel 1952 divenne cappellano delle carceri di Fukuoka all'interno delle quali vi era una sezione riservata ai condannati a morte. Avvicinando i detenuti e raccogliendo le loro confidenze, Furukawa presto si convinse dell'innocenza di due di essi: Takeo Nishi e Kenjiro Ishii, condannati per omicidio e rapina in seguito ad un incidente avvenuto a Fukuoka il 20 maggio 1947 durante il quale era stato ucciso anche un mercante cinese.

Si era all'indomani della fine del conflitto mondiale, il Giappone, nella situazione di Paese sconfitto e occupato, per evitare ulteriori tensioni con la Cina, aveva cercato di archiviare il caso il più presto possibile. Takeo Nishi e Kenjiro Ishii furono così condannati senza i dovuti accertamenti.

La certezza morale di trovarsi di fronte a due innocenti condannati a morte ingiustamente non dava pace a Furukawa che, dopo aver sollecitato la collaborazione di avvocati e giuristi, nel 1961 avviò una campagna nazionale per ottenere la revisione del processo e la liberazione di Nishi e Ishii. Diede inoltre vita a un movimento contro la pena di morte impegnando tutti i mezzi che aveva e riducendosi in povertà nonostante avesse figli ancora in giovane età. In seguito a tale campagna, Tadashi Mukai, Presidente dell'Associazione luterana Albert Schweitzer di Kobe, in possesso di una preziosa reliquia del dr Schweitzer, la consegnò al Ven. Furukawa come segno di condivisione e di appoggio alla difficile campagna intrapresa.

Profondamente commosso da tale gesto, Furukawa accolse la reliquia, tuttora conservata gelosamente nel Tempio Seimeizan che, da allora – in onore del missionario cristiano – prese il nome di Tempio Seimeizan Schweitzer.

Intanto, nel giugno 1974, il mite e taciturno Takeo Nishi, che passava il tempo trascrivendo sutra e dipingendo immagini di Buddha, fu giustiziato. Una grande prova per Furukawa che, per contro, intensificò gli sforzi per ottenere la liberazione di Kenjiro Ishii, al quale venne dapprima commutata la condanna a morte in carcere a vita e, successivamente, grazie all'amnistia concessa

in occasione della morte dell'imperatore Showa (7 gennaio 1989), venne rimesso in libertà. All'uscita dal carcere, fu accolto al tempio Seimeizan Schweitzer dove visse vari anni. Ho potuto conoscere personalmente Kenjiro Ishii e ascoltare più volte la sua testimonianza.

“Non posso fare a meno di piangere”

L'impegno solidale e "compassionevole" del Ven. Furukawa in favore degli ultimi non si esauriva nella pur difficile e contrastata campagna in favore della revisione del processo di Takeo Nishi e Kenjiro Ishii. Nel 1985, si presentò a lui un testimone degli orrori della II guerra mondiale pregandolo di collaborare a costruire, nei pressi di Tamana, un memoriale in ricordo delle centinaia di vittime cinesi morte in conseguenza dei lavori forzati nelle locali miniere di carbone. Profondamente colpito da tale richiesta, Furukawa non solo collaborò con la nascente Associazione, ma ne divenne ben presto presidente. L'anno successivo sul monte Shotai, prospiciente il luogo dell'ex campo di concentramento, fu eretta una stele in memoria delle vittime cinesi.

In quell'occasione, come Presidente dell'Associazione, Furukawa prese contatto con la Croce Rossa Cinese grazie alla mediazione della quale diede inizio a pellegrinaggi annuali di riconciliazione e di pace in Cina, soprattutto in luoghi particolarmente evocativi come il Ponte Marco Polo, a Pechino – dove aveva avuto luogo l'incidente" che portò all'aperto conflitto cino-giapponese – e a Nanchino, tristemente noto per l'eccidio perpetrato nel 1937 dalle truppe giapponesi. Scopo dei pellegrinaggi organizzati dal Ven. Furukawa era quello di pregare per le vittime di entrambi i Paesi e di favorire rapporti di riconciliazione e di pace tra il popolo giapponese e quello cinese. Dal 1989, alcuni membri della Comunità di Shinmeizan, P. Sottocornola, io stessa, insieme ad alcuni cristiani giapponesi, affiancammo il gruppo di buddhisti giapponesi che, sotto la guida del Maestro Furukawa, si recavano annualmente in pellegrinaggio di pace a Pechino e a Nanchino. Dopo alcuni anni, però, si sentì

l'esigenza di esprimere la volontà di riconciliazione, di amicizia e di pace tra i due Paesi anche con un gesto concreto e visibile. Nacque così l'idea di costruire insieme, cristiani e buddhisti, un Centro di riabilitazione per Bambini disabili a Fangshan, nei pressi di Pechino.

Dopo non poche difficoltà, nell'ottobre 1997, grazie soprattutto all'attivo coinvolgimento di P. Sottocornola che si era impegnato a trovare fondi e collaborazione per la gestione, presente anche il Ven. Furukawa, fu finalmente inaugurato il Centro di riabilitazione di Fangshan come segno concreto anche della collaborazione buddhista-cristiana.

La vera "grande compassione"

(大悲 *daihi*)

Questa impegnativa iniziativa fu un momento importante e fecondo del nostro cammino di dialogo, sia sul piano concreto della collaborazione sia, soprattutto, su quello spirituale della condivisione delle ragioni ispiratrici che l'avevano animata e sostenuta.

Convinto buddhista, il Ven. Furukawa credeva nel dialogo soprattutto con la Chiesa cattolica. Nelle sue conferenze ripeteva spesso che *Nostra Aetate* era una pietra miliare, non solo per la Chiesa ma per tutte le Religioni e auspicava che un analogo Documento vedesse presto la luce anche all'interno del Buddhismo. Nutriva una profonda ammirazione per Madre Teresa di Calcutta, che ebbe la gioia di incontrare due volte, e che considerava un *bodhisattva* dei tempi moderni. Non esitava a dire che la scelta incondizionata per gli ultimi di Madre Teresa era per lui un modello e una continua fonte di ispirazione.

Analogamente, di fronte all'infaticabile impegno del Maestro Furukawa, a mia volta mi sentivo provocata dalle sue scelte e dal suo esempio. Ciò accresceva in me il desiderio di

conoscere più in profondità la fonte ispiratrice del suo agire.

Un giorno si presentò l'occasione propizia e, ricordando l'aneddoto da lui narrato più volte del giovane discepolo rimproverato dal Maestro per aver aiutato un anziano in difficoltà, osai chiedergli il significato di tale insegnamento.

Con pazienza, il Ven. Furukawa mi spiegò allora che per il Buddhismo la suprema virtù è 慈悲 *jihi*, ossia la compassione e la benevolenza verso tutti gli esseri senzienti, indiscriminatamente. Il termine giapponese 慈悲 *jihi*, grazie alla forza evocativa degli ideogrammi, condensa in un unico lemma i termini sanscriti *karuṇā* e *maitrī* (Pāli, *mettā*) comunemente tradotti nelle lingue occidentali con: "compassione", "pietà", "empatia"; "amore", "benevolenza", "carità".

L'ideogramma 慈 *ji* – continuò il Ven. Furukawa che tra l'altro era un eccellente maestro di calligrafia giapponese – esprime affezione, tenerezza, benevolenza; l'ideogramma, 悲 *hi* esprime invece condivisione del dolore e della sofferenza altrui. Uniti insieme, questi due ideogrammi, esprimono il cuore benevolo, compassionevole del Buddha, vero ideale a cui ogni buddhista deve pervenire.

Per raggiungere questa meta, però, la via è lunga. Solo chi è giunto all'illuminazione, ossia alla "chiara visione del reale", può sperimentare la vera "grande compassione". Solo chi – guidato dal Buddha – comprende che tutto è "vuoto", impermanente, che tutti gli esseri non sono che

«una combinazione di forze o energie mentali e fisiche in costante mutamento»³, privi quindi di sostanza propria e perennemente esposti alla transitorietà del divenire, sente emergere in sé la vera "grande compassione".



Interfaith Chanting in Chapel

³ W. Rahula, *L'insegnamento del Buddha*, Paramita, Toma, 1994, p.

Lungo e graduale – mi spiegò il Maestro Furukawa - è il cammino verso questa meta. Non a caso, il Buddhismo parla di "piccola compassione", di "media compassione" e di "grande compassione".

La «piccola compassione» (*shōhi* 小悲) è quel sentimento/impulso che nasce istintivo nel cuore dell'uomo comune di fronte alla sofferenza altrui. Chi agisce sotto questo impulso non si rende ancora conto della vera natura delle cose, ossia della loro impermanenza e agisce, per così dire, ancora "in modo mondano". Il discepolo che si era allontanato dal Maestro e dagli altri compagni per aiutare il vecchio in difficoltà, era mosso da questa «piccola compassione».

La «compassione media» (*chūhi* 中悲), invece, anima l'agire dell'*arhat*, il monaco del Buddhismo primitivo, ossia di colui che avendo percepito l'impermanenza di tutte le cose, intraprende il cammino verso l'illuminazione durante il quale impara a guardare ogni realtà con distacco e libertà interiore, con "compassione" appunto.

Infine, la «grande compassione» (*daihi* 大悲) è quella dei Buddha e dei *bodhisattva* che – avendo contemplato la vacuità del tutto e avendo compreso che tutto è relativo e interdipendente, che nulla ha in sé la ragione del proprio esistere e che tutto ciò che nasce inevitabilmente muore - provano per tutti gli esseri senzienti, indiscriminatamente, un sentimento di compassione e di benevolenza, operando a che tutti giungano all'illuminazione, ossia alla "chiara visione" del reale.

Questa spiegazione fu per me una piccola "illuminazione" che mi aiutò a meglio comprendere come per il Buddhismo "vacuità" e "compassione" siano indissolubilmente legate e come non si possa comprendere rettamente l'una senza l'altra. Non a caso, gli studiosi buddhisti definiscono «cuore del Buddhismo» proprio l'intuizione di *pratītya samutpāda*, ossia la "suprema verità" (*paramartha*) del divenire interdipendente di tutte le cose, che folgorò Śākyamuni nella notte dell'illuminazione.

In quel momento, per contro, mi tornarono alla mente le parole dell'anziano cristiano di

Hiroshima riferite a P. Arrupe: «Agiva come mosso da una Presenza viva, benevola e luminosa, che traspariva in ogni suo gesto. Fu quello che mi affascinò e mi spinse a farmi cristiano. Volevo conoscere il segreto di quella "Presenza"».

"Vacuità" e "Presenza", "compassione" e "carità": termini, concetti e cammini diversi ma non divergenti, convergenti ma non uguali, che sentivo il bisogno di ricomporre in una nuova sintesi. Fu in quel momento che il Ven. Furukawa mi chiese di parlargli più dettagliatamente della carità cristiana.

“Dio è Amore/Carità” (1 Gv 4,10)

Non è facile riassumere in questo contesto il colloquio di allora. Sollecitata dal Maestro, cercai di spiegare come amore/carità sia al cuore del messaggio cristiano perché Dio stesso è "amore/carità". Come, infatti, scrive l'evangelista Giovanni nella sua prima lettera: «Dio è amore» (*Deus caritas est*). E ancora: «In questo sta l'amore: non siamo stati noi ad amare Dio, ma è lui che ha amato noi e ha mandato il suo Figlio. Carissimi, se Dio ci ha amato, anche noi dobbiamo amarci gli uni gli altri» (1 Gv 4,10).

Questo e non altro è il fondamento, la radice dell'amore/carità cristiano al punto che – scrive ancora S. Giovanni – «Se uno dicesse: "Io amo Dio", e odiasse il suo fratello, è un mentitore. Chi infatti non ama il proprio fratello che vede, non può amare Dio che non vede". (1 Gv 4,19 -20).

Gli spiegai come per esprimere l'irriducibile "novità" dell'amore cristiano, già il greco neotestamentario aveva dovuto fare un'accurata scelta di termini. Non *eros*, né *philia* bensì il poco usato *agape* fu scelto dagli evangelisti. Una scelta che il latino della Vulgata, a sua volta, rese non con *amor* bensì con *caritas*, termine legato al greco *karis* (grazia, dono), più adatto di "amor" a esprimere un amore gratuitamente ricevuto e gratuitamente donato.

Purtroppo il termine giapponese 愛 *ai*, utilizzato per tradurre la "novità" cristiana dell'amore/*agape/caritas* di cui parlano Gesù e il Nuovo Testamento, è molto ambiguo e crea non poche perplessità nel giapponese comune e, in particolare, nel buddhista per il

quale "ai" 愛 mantiene l'irriducibile connotazione di eros, di una passione egoista da cui liberarsi. È comprensibile, dunque, come l'affermazione: "Dio è amore" da cui deriva il "se Dio ci ha amato, anche noi dobbiamo amarci gli uni gli altri», suoni particolarmente problematica al Buddhismo che prescinde da Dio e che mantiene un rigoroso silenzio sulle grandi questioni metafisiche.

Riconoscendo l'inadeguatezza dei termini e del linguaggio, il Ven. Furukawa confermava indirettamente quanto scriveva il già citato Jacques Bacot e, cioè che «niente è così ingannevole come la trasposizione di termini da una religione all'altra" e, quindi, la necessità di un'adeguata mediazione culturale come base per un autentico e fruttuoso dialogo. Cammino lento che esige "chiarezza", "mitezza", "prudenza pedagogica", "gradualità" come dice S. Paolo VI nella sua *Ecclesiam Suam*, e che ci fa umili pellegrini verso la Verità. Un cammino che è ancora agli inizi ma che certamente darà i suoi frutti. Ne ho avuto anche recentemente una piccola conferma.

Da anni sono membro di un gruppo di dialogo cristiano/buddhista che si è formato a Fukuoka e che si riunisce periodicamente. Siamo, di fatto, un gruppo di "amici" che cercano di conoscersi meglio, al di là di ogni precomprensione. Al gruppo partecipano bonzi del Buddhismo Tendai, Zen, Jōdo Shinshū, cattolici e protestanti. Ogni anno scegliamo un tema comune che viene poi affrontato dalle diverse prospettive. L'anno scorso fu scelto il tema della dignità umana e a me fu chiesto di presentare la prospettiva cristiana.

Partendo dalla concezione biblica dell'uomo come "*imago Dei*", parlai della inalienabilità della dignità di ogni persona umana dal punto di vista cristiano. Nel dibattito che seguì, un giovane bonzo della Scuola Jōdo Shinshū disse: "ho bisogno di approfondire quello che hai detto perché ho capito che, come buddhista, non ho nessun fondamento dottrinale per fare un discorso sui diritti umani".

La sua osservazione mi colpì profondamente e mi fece comprendere come il vero dialogo debba saper e poter suscitare anche domande.

L'osservazione del Ven. Inoue tocca, infatti, un punto nevralgico del dialogo buddhista/cristiano e cioè la concezione dell'essere umano: "combinazione di forze o energie mentali e fisiche in perenne mutamento e trasformazione" o "persona" dall'insopprimibile unicità, soggetto auto-cosciente e libero, creato a immagine e somiglianza di Dio e, addirittura "*capax Dei*"⁴?

Solo tenendo conto di queste fondamentali differenze possiamo comprendere il riferimento ultimo della *karuna/jihi* 慈悲 buddhista e della "carità" cristiana. Da una parte, la visione del Vuoto, dell'impermanenza e della contingenza di tutte le cose, dall'altra la Presenza viva e vivificante di un Dio/Persona, che conosce ciascuno per nome, che chiama all'essere ogni creatura e la conserva nell'amore. Prospettive apparentemente inconciliabili che paradossalmente possono invece offrire inedite possibilità di dialogo nella misura in cui sono espressione della inesausta ricerca umana circa quei "reconditi enigmi della condizione umana" che sono alla base di ogni autentica esperienza religiosa. Come, infatti, autorevolmente ci dice la Dichiarazione conciliare *Nostra Aetate*:

Gli uomini attendono dalle varie religioni la risposta ai reconditi enigmi della condizione umana, che ieri come oggi turbano profondamente il cuore dell'uomo: la natura dell'uomo, il senso e il fine della nostra vita, il bene e il peccato, l'origine e lo scopo del dolore, la via per raggiungere la vera felicità, la morte, il giudizio e la sanzione dopo la morte, infine l'ultimo e ineffabile mistero che circonda la nostra esistenza, donde noi traiamo la nostra origine e verso cui tendiamo (NA 1).

(English translation of article available on SEDOS website)

⁴ *Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica*, cap. I

Note conclusive

È nel contesto di questa ricerca condivisa che si situa la bellezza e la sfida del dialogo tra credenti di diverse Tradizioni religiose alla ricerca della Verità: "Colui che crede", infatti, "è colui che cerca la verità e vive in base ad essa" ci dice il più recente documento emanato dal Pontificio Consiglio per il dialogo interreligioso: *Dialogo nella verità e nella carità* (2014), specificando che "nel promuovere il dialogo nella verità, i seguaci delle diverse religioni sono invitati a rendere esplicito il contenuto delle loro credenze" con "rispetto, attenzione, gentilezza, fiducia, umiltà, pazienza, perdono, l'accettazione reciproca dell'altro come membro della stessa famiglia umana e il desiderio di condividerne le gioie e i dolori".

Una sfida articolata e complessa per rispondere adeguatamente alla quale occorrono un'appropriata formazione e specifiche competenze. Come scrive, infatti, S. Giovanni Paolo II nella sua enciclica missionaria, *Redemptoris Missio*: «Tutti i fedeli e le comunità cristiane sono chiamati a praticare il dialogo, anche se non nello stesso grado e forma»⁵.

Non a caso, subito dopo le affermazioni appena citate, *Dialogo nella verità e nella carità* ripropone le quattro forme di dialogo già presentate sia in *Dialogo e missione*, emanato dall'allora Segretariato per i non cristiani, nel 1984, e, più recentemente, da *Dialogo e annuncio*, emanato dal Pontificio Consiglio per il dialogo interreligioso nel 1991. Sono forme, divenute ormai classiche, per mettere in atto le quali occorrono un'adeguata preparazione, competenze specifiche e interazione reciproca.

Vale la pena riprendere sinteticamente queste quattro forme di dialogo anche in questo contesto:

- Il dialogo della vita, dove le persone si sforzano di vivere in uno spirito di apertura e di buon vicinato condividendo le loro gioie e

le loro pene, i loro problemi e le loro preoccupazioni umane.

- Il dialogo delle opere, dove i cristiani e gli altri collaborano in vista dello sviluppo integrale e della liberazione della gente.

- Il dialogo degli scambi teologici, dove gli esperti cercano di approfondire la comprensione delle loro rispettive eredità religiose e di apprezzare i valori spirituali gli uni degli altri.

- Il dialogo dell'esperienza religiosa, dove persone radicate nelle proprie tradizioni religiose condividono le loro ricchezze spirituali, per esempio per ciò che riguarda la preghiera e la contemplazione, la fede e le vie della ricerca di Dio e dell'Assoluto.

La risposta alla «chiamata» ecclesiale del dialogo, nelle sue diverse forme non può essere lasciata al caso, o all'iniziativa di singoli. Deve essere assunta e coordinata dalla comunità in tutte le sue fasi in modo responsabile e graduale.

Ad esempio, la collaborazione e la condivisione di un impegno sociale a servizio della promozione umana, l'esercizio stesso della carità/*karuṇā/jihi* che può accomunare in molti modi Cristiani e Buddhisti a livello di dialogo della vita e delle opere, non esauriscono gli spazi del dialogo interreligioso, bensì lo stimolano ad orizzonti più ampi. Nel suo servizio all'essere umano, la carità/*karuṇā* non può limitarsi ad un aiuto solo materiale, ad una simpatia solo psicologica, ma deve saper colmare l'anelito più profondo dell'essere umano, la sua sete e fame di verità. A nulla, o a troppo poco, servirebbe una "compassione" o un "amore" per gli esseri umani che lasciasse inappagato il loro supremo anelito, e insoddisfatto il loro supremo bisogno di indagare «l'ultimo e ineffabile mistero che circonda la nostra esistenza» (NA 1).

Va inoltre aggiunto che la consonanza di atteggiamenti e di comportamenti che abbiamo colto tra *karuṇā* e carità rimandano, di fatto, a concezioni del reale, dell'essere umano, della Realtà Ultima profondamente diverse. Sono proprio queste "divergenze" che, a ragione, sollecitano il dialogo dell'esperienza religiosa e degli scambi

⁵ Giovanni Paolo II, Lettera Enciclica *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 dicembre 1990, n. 57

teologici perché il dialogo della carità non può rinunciare al dialogo della verità. È piuttosto chiamato ad aprirgli la strada e a facilitarne il percorso. Come scrive, infatti, Benedetto XVI nella sua enciclica *Caritas in veritate*: «Difendere la verità, proporla con umiltà e convinzione e testimoniarla nella vita sono forme esigenti e insostituibili di carità»⁶.

Analogamente, però, anche il dialogo della verità non avrebbe alcun valore se non fosse promotore del dialogo della carità.

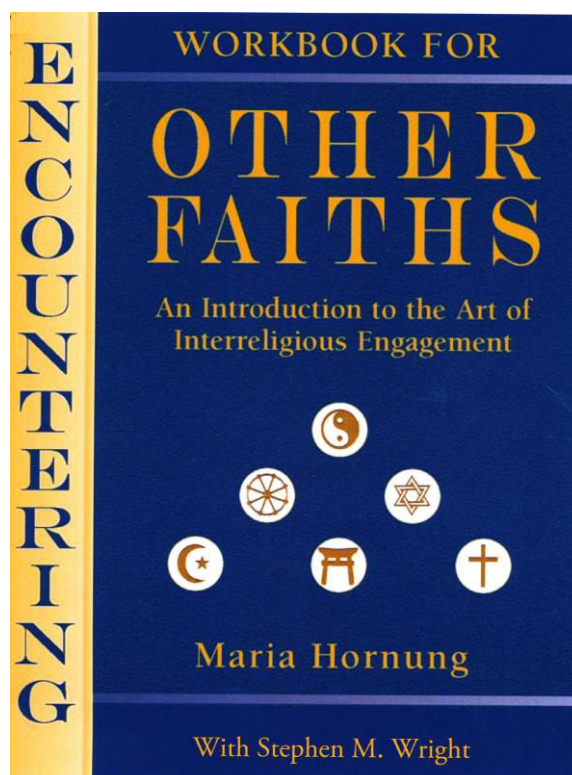
Proprio le radicali differenze sul piano antropologico e metafisico aprono il dialogo cristiano/buddhista ad orizzonti inediti la cui esplorazione richiede, oggi più che mai, operatori preparati e consapevoli da ambo le parti.

Il dialogo interreligioso – che non può assolutamente essere lasciato all'improvvisazione e alla buona volontà dei singoli – esige infatti una formazione adeguata dei suoi operatori, soprattutto all'interno della vita religiosa e missionaria. Il 63° incontro semestrale dell'Unione Superiori Generali, tenutosi a Roma dal 26 al 29 novembre 2003, aveva avuto per tema: *Il dialogo interreligioso, compito prioritario della vita consacrata*. In quell'occasione – a partire dalla Esortazione Apostolica *Vita consacrata* di S. Giovanni Paolo II - fu ribadita non solo l'importanza del dialogo come parte della missione evangelizzatrice della Chiesa, e conseguentemente il dovere degli Istituti di vita consacrata di impegnarsi in questo campo secondo il rispettivo carisma, ma anche l'urgenza di una adeguata preparazione da avviare «nella formazione iniziale e nella formazione permanente, come pure nello studio e nella ricerca, dal momento che in questo non facile settore occorre profonda conoscenza del cristianesimo e delle altre religioni, accompagnata da fede solida e da maturità spirituale ed umana»⁷.

A distanza di sedici anni, però, per non rimanere prigionieri di slogan e di mode di pensiero del momento, penso sia doveroso

interrogarci sui passi fatti in questa direzione e chiederci in che misura il dialogo interreligioso è stato realmente assunto come compito prioritario della missione evangelizzatrice della Chiesa e in quale misura gli istituti religiosi e missionari hanno investito personale, forze e mezzi per promuoverlo. Il convegno attuale con le sue stimolanti tematiche può essere una provvidenziale occasione per riconsiderare e riprendere le felici intuizioni e le opportune proposte di quel convegno. Un altro motivo per ringraziare nuovamente gli organizzatori e i partecipanti all'incontro di oggi. Con l'augurio di più concreti risultati!

*(English translation of article
available on SEDOS website)*



(Workbook by Sr. Maria Hornung, MMS)

⁶ Benedetto XVI, Lettera Enciclica, *Caritas in veritate*, 29 giugno, 2009, n. 1

⁷ Giovanni Paolo II, Esortazione Apostolica *Vita Consacrata*, 25 marzo 1996, n. 102.

Le dialogue comme un art

Une «histoire de la vérité» reste certainement encore à écrire, une histoire qui prenne en compte l'évolution du concept, son étendue, ses différentes définitions. Les philosophes et les mystiques, et chacun d'entre nous, bien qu'inconsciemment en général, a sa propre définition de la vérité, au moins en tant que concept opérationnel, une définition pratique. Que je définisse pour moi-même la vérité comme l'adéquation entre ce que je ressens et ce qu'on m'a appris, ou bien comme le contenu de la révélation, même si cette révélation ne couvre pas tous les champs du savoir, ou encore comme un mystère insondable connu de Dieu seul, chacun a besoin pour vivre au jour le jour de s'être forgé consciemment ou inconsciemment, sa définition pratique de la vérité. C'est par ce biais que je voudrais aborder la question du dialogue comme un art, en construisant avec vous ma définition pratique de la vérité. Ni plus, (je ne prétends évidemment pas donner une définition unique et définitive), ni moins (j'ai l'intention de proposer des outils intellectuels utiles aux acteurs du dialogue interreligieux, surtout dans sa composante théologique et académique).

1. Quatre types de vérité

La question de la vérité est fondamentalement liée à l'autorité de sa validation. Qui valide la vérité d'un énoncé donné? Sur le plan pratique, dans les discussions interreligieuses, on peut distinguer quatre types d'énoncés, selon quatre types différents d'autorités de validation de ces vérités. Cela signifie que nous sommes confrontés à quatre types de vérité dans les énoncés que nous échangeons dans nos discussions sur Dieu et sur la religion. Il y en a évidemment beaucoup d'autres, je ne prétends pas les épuiser, mais sur le plan pratique et dans un contexte de dialogue

interreligieux, j'ai trouvé efficace de distinguer les quatre types suivants, en fonction de leur autorité de validation.

a. Énoncés dogmatiques/théoriques

Les énoncés dogmatiques, théoriques, sont validés par une autorité religieuse (le Vatican, par exemple), par un consensus de chefs religieux, de croyants ou d'universitaires. Chaque religion, chaque confession a sa propre façon de valider ou d'invalider des énoncés dogmatiques donnés. Par exemple, si je dis que Marie n'est pas restée vierge après la naissance de Jésus parce qu'il est dit dans le Nouveau Testament que Jésus avait des frères et sœurs, cette affirmation est fausse du point de vue dogmatique catholique, mais peut être vraie (ou neutre) du point de vue d'un autre dogme chrétien. Il est intéressant ici de se demander qui valide ce genre d'énoncés dans une religion ou une confession donnée. La question est particulièrement délicate dans le cas de l'Islam, où l'autorité est très diffuse. Elle existe, bien évidemment, mais elle est gérée très différemment du catholicisme, de manière beaucoup plus horizontale. Est-ce le cas dans toutes les confessions islamiques? Comment les individus font-ils face à cela? Où retournent-ils pour vérifier la validité d'un énoncé dogmatique donné?

L'énoncé suivant fait clairement partie du dogme islamique: «Muhammad est l'envoyé de Dieu, son prophète», mais qui vérifie cet énoncé? Peut-on être musulman et ne pas tenir cet énoncé? On ne peut clairement pas être catholique et tenir que le Christ n'est pas réellement présent dans les espèces consacrées, même après la fin de la célébration eucharistique. Mais dans le cas du catholicisme, il est plus facile de vérifier le contenu du dogme que dans l'islam. Et dans les autres religions? Il est tout à fait légitime, dans une discussion avec des croyants d'autres religions, de leur demander qui valide

les dogmes, s'il y a un corpus de dogmes ou non, et il est tout à fait légitime de vérifier si ce qu'ils annoncent correspond à la réalité. Si par exemple un bouddhiste vous dit qu'il n'y a rien à croire, pas de dogme dont la vérité serait validée par un processus donné, et que vous entendez un bouddhiste en corriger un autre sur un point de doctrine, vous pourrez légitimement demander ce qui se passe.

b. Énoncés historiques/scientifiques

Les énoncés historiques/scientifiques sont validés par un processus qui doit être reproductible et par des sources qui doivent être vérifiables. Paradoxalement, c'est le type de vérité le plus faible, car de nouvelles données, de nouvelles expériences, de nouvelles sources découvertes obligeront à reconsidérer l'énoncé. Par exemple, nous pouvons dire au niveau historique que le christianisme primitif s'est répandu en Égypte à travers les communautés juives, mais de nouvelles découvertes pourraient remettre en question cette vérité scientifique. De même, à propos du lien entre l'alphabet arabe et la mise par écrit du Coran, dont on pense actuellement qu'ils se sont développés parallèlement. Si l'on découvrait des inscriptions arabes dans un alphabet « coranique » mais antérieurs au VII^e siècle, il faudrait reconsidérer le lien entre le Coran et l'alphabet arabe.

Mais c'est aussi un type d'énoncé extrêmement puissant, car tout le monde peut se mettre d'accord dessus. Si l'on se met d'accord sur la valeur des sources et sur la méthode d'analyse de ces sources, on peut arriver à un consensus qui dépasse nos différences dogmatiques. Tout est objet de science : on peut étudier le dogme scientifique, son histoire, ses développements. De même on peut étudier les énoncés suivants

(culturels ou sentimentaux) de manière scientifique et historique. Cependant, le prestige dont jouissent les énoncés scientifiques ne doit pas faire oublier que ce qui fait qu'ils sont scientifiques, c'est qu'ils sont réfutables. Il n'y a pas de vérité scientifique définitive, par définition. Si de nouvelles preuves sont apportées, de nouvelles sources mises à jour, ou si de nouvelles expériences sont faites, la vérité scientifique devra évoluer. Elle n'est pas l'objet d'une décision humaine ni d'une révélation, qu'il faudrait accepter sans preuves reproductibles, sur la seule parole de ceux qui la contrôlèrent

c. Énoncés culturels/symboliques

Les énoncés culturels, ou symboliques, sont validés par la pratique collective, par la recherche sociologique, par les sondages d'opinion, etc. Au niveau dogmatique, l'Islam peut enseigner que le *hijāb* est un devoir religieux (vérité dogmatique), et historiquement, il est possible d'étudier la manière dont le *hijāb* a été effectivement porté par les femmes dans les différentes régions islamiques, à différentes époques. Mais il est également possible de dire que la culture occidentale considère généralement le *hijāb* comme un outil de discrimination à l'égard des femmes. La valeur symbolique du *hijāb* dans différentes cultures peut varier considérablement : modestie féminine,

oppression des femmes par les hommes, symbole de féminité, etc. Certes, la culture évolue et les valeurs symboliques ne sont pas éternelles,

elles peuvent être remises en question, mais ignorer l'autonomie de ce niveau et sa propre vérité conduit généralement à des malentendus dans le dialogue, surtout le dialogue interreligieux.



Message from Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue distributed on the month of Ramadan

De même, si l'on veut prendre un exemple dans le domaine chrétien, on peut parler de l'eucharistie d'un point de vue dogmatique (présence réelle, par exemple), du point de vue historique (l'invention de la messe quotidienne, par exemple), ou d'un point de vue symbolique. Symboliquement, les chrétiens peuvent considérer le mystère de l'eucharistie comme une inhabitation de Dieu en l'homme, ou comme le symbole du don de sa propre vie que Jésus fait aux hommes, ou encore comme un symbole du festin éternel. Mais on pourrait aussi considérer l'eucharistie comme une anthropophagie symbolique. Le champ symbolique et culturel a sa propre autonomie. Les théologiens et les historiens ne contrôlent pas ce que la culture véhicule. Il est tout à fait intéressant et utile de dialoguer aussi à ce niveau.

d. Énoncés personnels/sentimentaux

Le dernier niveau est le niveau personnel, sentimental. Si je vous dis que j'aime mon père, quelle est la vérité de cette affirmation ? Je suis la seule autorité de validation possible. Vous pouvez peut-être me prouver que j'ai tort, selon la façon dont j'interagis avec mon père. Vous pouvez être choqués de me voir le traiter très durement. Mais en fin de compte, c'est à moi de décider de la vérité de cette affirmation. Vous pouvez m'interroger sur cet amour un peu brutal, mais si je dis que je l'aime, c'est ma vérité. Dans le dialogue interreligieux, les sentiments jouent un rôle énorme et il est urgent de reconnaître leur rôle.

Il est possible de discuter de manière très intéressante sur les dogmes musulmans ou chrétiens, sur le contenu de la foi (niveau théologique et dogmatique). Il est passionnant d'étudier l'histoire de ces dogmes, des croyances, de leurs manifestations réelles dans l'histoire. Il est très important de ne pas négliger le niveau symbolique, culturel de tous ces phénomènes, qui peut parfois être assez différent d'une culture à l'autre. Mais si l'on oublie le niveau personnel, sentimental, la discussion risque fort d'aller dans le mur. Par exemple, si l'islam me fait peur, si je suis mal à l'aise devant une femme en niqāb, si l'appel à la prière musulmane me stresse... il

est important à un moment ou à un autre de pouvoir le dire. Le risque de taire ce niveau personnel est qu'il ne pourrisse toute la discussion, en faisant surface dans tous les non-dits.

2. Distinguer pour mieux dialoguer

Maintenant que cette simple typologie de quatre types d'énoncés est mise en place, il me faut insister sur le fait qu'il est inefficace de répondre à un niveau différent de celui de mon interlocuteur. Par exemple, si quelqu'un remet en question la valeur symbolique de hijāb dans sa culture (c'est un outil de domination masculine), il est totalement inefficace de répondre sur un plan dogmatique (c'est un devoir religieux) ou sur un plan personnel (je suis mal à l'aise face à une femme en hijāb). Une fois que nous sommes conscients de l'existence de ces différents niveaux de vérité, il est crucial d'essayer de les distinguer et non de répondre à un autre niveau. Dans notre exemple sur la valeur symbolique du hijāb dans une culture donnée, il faut interroger la culture, les représentations culturelles, artistiques ou littéraires. On peut même en faire l'histoire et en mesurer les évolutions.

Si quelqu'un partage des informations dogmatiques sur sa religion, sur des éléments auxquels il croit, le dialogue aura pour but d'explicitier ces informations, d'en étudier le contour, de vérifier qu'elles font vraiment partie du corpus de croyances que les croyants de cette religion sont censés croire et pas uniquement du sentiment personnel de la personne qui parle. Un chrétien fondamentaliste peut dire que l'Église catholique croit en l'existence réelle, physique d'Adam et Ève, mais il est facile de vérifier que le catéchisme est muet sur cette question et que notre interlocuteur se trompe quand il le croit. Il peut être intimement, personnellement convaincu qu'Adam et Ève ont réellement existé, mais ce n'est pas un dogme catholique. Peut-être ce chrétien n'est-il pas catholique. Peut-être cette vérité fait-elle partie de son corpus dogmatique. Tout cela est passionnant. Peut-être ce chrétien est-il catholique et il ne s'était jamais posé la

question en ces termes : il n'avait jamais pensé que son sentiment n'était qu'un sentiment et pas un dogme.

Une grande partie du contenu du dialogue interreligieux au niveau académique consiste à expliciter ces niveaux, à se mettre d'accord sur le niveau dont relève telle ou telle affirmation. C'est donc avant tout de l'épistémologie. Cela n'est pas le cas du dialogue interreligieux au niveau institutionnel ou au niveau des projets communs, par exemple, car dans ces deux cas, il ne s'agit pas de « parler religion ».

3. Le principe de non-contradiction revisité

Les énoncés peuvent être vrais (ou faux, ou neutres) en même temps et à différents niveaux. Ou encore, certains énoncés peuvent être faux (ou neutres) à un niveau mais vrais à un autre niveau. Par exemple, il est objectivement faux pour un non-musulman de dire que Muḥammad est Prophète, mais l'énoncé devient historiquement vrai si le même non-musulman dit que les musulmans croient que Muḥammad est prophète. Alors qu'il est historiquement prouvé que les musulmans croient que Muḥammad est prophète, il n'est pas historiquement prouvable qu'il l'est réellement, parce que c'est impossible à prouver (de même que c'est impossible à réfuter). La prophétie de Muḥammad est une vérité dogmatique et, en tant que telle, elle a son propre processus de vérification. On peut se poser la question dans l'autre sens : que faudrait-il pour prouver historiquement, scientifiquement que Muḥammad est prophète ? Il faudrait une définition sur laquelle tout le monde s'entend de ce qu'est un prophète, il faudrait ensuite des éléments confirmants que Muḥammad remplit ces conditions, et, comme il est mort depuis quatorze siècles, des sources vérifiables et acceptables par tous qu'il remplit ces conditions.

Un autre exemple est l'origine des êtres humains. Quelle est la vérité de l'énoncé suivant : « Les humains sont les fils d'Adam et Ève » ? Peut-on le prouver historiquement ? Ou plutôt, quel genre de preuve scientifique

peut-elle établir scientifiquement cette vérité ? Si j'en crois les dernières recherches scientifiques, il semblerait qu'il y ait plusieurs foyers de peuplement humain originels, et pas un foyer de peuplement unique. Homo sapiens a évolué à plusieurs endroits à la fois. De même, aujourd'hui, dans l'état actuel de nos connaissances, le darwinisme est l'explication scientifique la plus probable pour l'origine de l'espèce humaine, pas celle d'une descendance d'Adam et Ève. Si l'on reprend l'énoncé « Les humains sont les fils d'Adam et Ève », est-il vrai dogmatiquement ? Cette question peut être reformulée ainsi : existe-t-il une institution religieuse qui exige de ses croyants qu'ils croient en cette vérité ? Si cet énoncé n'est pas vrai dogmatiquement pour un catholique, et s'il n'est pas non plus vrai scientifiquement, il semble qu'il ait une certaine valeur dans le champ symbolique, qu'il puisse même avoir une certaine vérité symbolique qui pourrait se formuler ainsi : nous sommes tous, en tant qu'êtres humains, frères et sœurs, fils et filles des mêmes parents. Le christianisme est certainement porteur de cette vérité symbolique et ce serait idiot de le nier au nom d'un scientisme étroit qui ferait de la science le seul critère de toute vérité.

Prenons un autre exemple. Suis-je le fruit de l'amour de mes parents ou le résultat de la fécondation d'un ovule par un spermatozoïde ? La question elle-même n'a pas d'objet, car je n'ai pas à choisir entre les deux, entre le niveau biologique et le niveau sentimental. Me forcer à choisir entre les deux possibilités est aussi stupide que de me forcer à choisir entre Darwin d'un côté et Adam et Ève de l'autre. La réalité est beaucoup plus complexe et ne peut pas être réduite à un seul niveau.

Un énoncé peut donc être vrai à un niveau et faux à un autre, et deux énoncés apparemment contradictoires peuvent être vrai chacun en son registre. Une grande confusion se produit lorsque les niveaux sont mélangés ou lorsque nous faisons semblant que ces différents niveaux n'existent pas.

4. La beauté mortelle du fondamentalisme

Cela m'amène à ma définition personnelle, pratique, de l'extrémisme, qui est la négation de la simple existence de différents niveaux de vérité. C'est une définition que je ne me risquerais à appliquer rétrospectivement à saint Augustin ou à saint Thomas d'Aquin, auxquels on ne peut certainement pas reprocher une épistémologie différente de la nôtre. Un fondamentaliste refuse la simple idée que le récit dogmatique peut différer du récit scientifique, qu'éventuellement les personnes ont des sentiments contradictoires — ou n'étant pas en adéquation parfaite — avec les dogmes. Les catholiques croient que l'hostie et le vin se transforment réellement en Corps et Sang du Christ et que la présence sacramentelle demeure même après la fin de la messe. C'est une vérité dogmatique. Sur le plan scientifique, le pain et le vin restent du pain et du vin, ni plus ni moins. Rien n'a changé et il serait fondamentaliste de dire le contraire, de prétendre que d'un point de vue scientifique quelque chose a changé. D'un autre côté, je suis peut-être un catholique très pieux, mais je ne sens pas dans mon cœur la présence du Christ, présence que ma foi proclame être dans les espèces consacrées. Et ce serait fondamentaliste — selon ma définition pratique — de me forcer à ressentir ce que je professe ou de m'accuser d'apostasie parce qu'il y a une différence entre mon sentiment et ma foi.

La simple idée que quelque chose peut être vrai à un niveau, non pertinent à un autre, et faux à un troisième niveau est odieuse pour les fondamentalistes. De la même manière, les fondamentalistes n'aiment pas l'idée de ce qui peut apparaître comme des vérités « parallèles ». Cependant, je crois fermement que nous devons distinguer ces niveaux, et bien d'autres encore, afin d'avoir un dialogue fructueux entre nous, d'une manière non fondamentaliste.

Mais le fondamentalisme a sa beauté : il cherche l'unité. Son problème est qu'il le fait en passant outre la diversité originelle des niveaux, et en imposant une unité simplifiée

aux dépens de la diversité intérieure affinée de la réalité.

5. La vérité comme Dieu

La recherche de l'unité de la vérité ne peut se faire que d'une manière radicale. Cette quête est radicale, parce que la question de la vérité est à la racine de ce qui fait vivre nombre de nos contemporains, mais c'est certainement un défi énorme que d'essayer d'intégrer ces dimensions mentionnées ci-dessus, surtout dans un monde qui devient de plus en plus complexe, avec de plus en plus de données à traiter. À cet égard, l'approche fondamentaliste ne peut produire aucun résultat, car elle prétend apporter une réponse rapide et simple à une réalité de plus en plus complexe, au fur et à mesure que les connaissances augmentent.

Dans de nombreuses traditions religieuses, Dieu est considéré comme la vérité ultime et sa validation ultime. C'est certainement le cas dans l'Islam, où al-Ḥaqq est l'un des Noms de Dieu, et c'est certainement vrai dans le christianisme, où, dans le cadre de l'Incarnation, Jésus dit de lui-même qu'il est la vérité.

Cela fait de la quête d'une vérité unifiée une quête spirituelle, une quête spirituelle radicale. Nous entendons trop souvent des expressions telles que « musulmans modérés » ou « chrétiens modérés ». Or ce n'est pas de modération dont nous avons aujourd'hui besoin. Nous avons besoin de musulmans et de chrétiens « radicaux », radicalement dévoués à la quête d'une vérité unifiée, vérité qui nous tient, plus que nous ne la tenons, quête de toute une vie. En d'autres termes, le fondamentaliste peut penser qu'il détient la vérité, mais le chercheur radical sait que c'est la vérité qui le tient et qui ne lui laisse aucun repos. Alors que le premier peut parfois se penser comme un soldat de la vérité, le second en est plutôt un mendiant.

Lors d'un colloque au Pakistan où j'exprimais ces idées, certains participants se sont émus de l'expression « mendiants », très certainement connotée positivement dans ma tradition dominicaine, mais visiblement pas dans la culture pakistanaise. Ils proposaient de

parler plutôt de « protecteurs » de la vérité, ou d'« avocats » de la vérité. Je ne suis pas d'accord. Si le mot de « mendiant » n'a pas de connotation positive pour l'un ou l'autre, peut-être préféreront-ils le mot de « témoin ». La vérité n'est pas quelque chose que je peux protéger ou même défendre, parce que cela impliquerait au final que je la connaisse, que je puisse avoir la main haute sur elle alors même que je la cherche. Peut-être que certains chrétiens pensent que si Jésus n'a pas répondu à la question de Pilate « Qu'est-ce que la vérité », c'était par modestie, car il n'a pas souhaité répondre « Moi ». Je crois plutôt que, d'un point de vue humain, la vérité est une quête, un processus, pas un résultat qui pourrait être répété, protégé ou transmis. Pas plus que Dieu ne peut être protégé, mis dans une formule ou dans un temple, la vérité ne peut être possédée, utilisée contre quelqu'un. Elle ne peut être qu'aimée et recherchée, scrutée et contemplée, attendue et goûtée. Jamais brandie, parce que cela supposerait qu'on puisse la tenir.

6. Conclusion

Ces quelques réflexions retracent en partie le chemin que j'ai moi-même suivi dans ma compréhension de ce qu'était le dialogue interreligieux. Avec quelques idées simples et beaucoup d'expérience je suis arrivé à la conclusion que le dialogue interreligieux pouvait être à la fois la chose la plus frustrante et la plus bouleversante. Frustrante, quand le dialogue conduit à plus d'incompréhension, plus de jugement, plus de violence. Bouleversante, quand on se rend compte qu'un Autre nous tient dans sa main et que l'amour qu'on a les uns pour les autres lui rend gloire. À ce moment-là, la méfiance réciproque laisse place à la contemplation de la beauté du frère, de la sœur en humanité. Qu'il soit croyant, athée, agnostique, indifférent ou en rébellion, sage ou aventurier, la découverte que je fais, moi qui suis croyant, que Dieu nous tient ensemble dans sa main, qu'il n'en préfère pas un à l'autre, qu'il nous aime l'un et l'autre avec la même folie, cette découverte est bouleversante.

Quels sont les fruits que l'on peut espérer d'un dialogue honnête avec des personnes dont on ne partage pas les convictions ? Tout d'abord, élargir ses propres horizons. Si je me mets vraiment à l'écoute de mon interlocuteur, que je le prends au sérieux et que j'essaie réellement de me mettre à sa place et de voir le monde comme il le voit, ma perspective change et je peux intégrer des réalités plus nombreuses et plus diverses à ma vision des choses, qui s'affine alors. Si je comprends mieux l'autre, ses motivations, son univers, je peux devenir plus libre par rapport à mes peurs, mes fantasmes, mes idées toutes faites. Plutôt que de me sentir agressé ou mis en difficulté dans la relation, je peux me situer sur un pied d'égalité avec des personnes différentes. Cette liberté me permet aussi de mieux vivre ma foi, de mieux comprendre ce en quoi je crois, pourquoi j'y crois ou je n'y crois pas, dans quelle mesure et à quel niveau de langage les choses auxquelles je crois sont vraies. Plus de réalité, plus de liberté, et de nouveaux amis.

(English translation of article available on SEDOS website)



(One of the books written by Jean Druel)

Christian Mission in a Pluralistic World

The Vision of Pope Francis



It is a great pleasure for me to take part in this residential seminar entitled, *Mission in a Pluralistic World*.

I thank Fr. Peter and the organisers for extending me an invitation to participate in this seminar. It was really an enriching experience for me. I also bring to you, the greetings of the entire staff of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The theme of the SEDOS Residential Seminar, *Mission in a Pluralistic World* is particularly important because of the rapid changes of the religious landscape in the world due to globalization, secularization and migration. The "Christian West" and "non-Christian East" no longer exist. Thus, in this era of globalization, religions cross many boundaries and the inter-religious and intra-religious encounters continue to produce mixed results. "Enlightenment mentality" of modernity, "death of God" and "disappearance of religion" has been replaced by "return of religion". The politicised religious revival with religio-political parties has become a social phenomenon in the domestic and international politics. The religious-politics nexus has disturbed the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural fabric of many countries generating intolerance, religious and secular violence and militancy. Relativisation, politicization and polarization of religions as well as mission, interreligious dialogue and cooperation are social phenomena in this epoch of globalization.

This seminar is also of great significance because of the celebration of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October

2019 in the centenary of the promulgation of the Apostolic letter "*Maximum Illud*" on the Activity of Missionaries in the World. Pope Francis notes "I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion that cannot leave things as they presently are. 'Mere administration' can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission.' Let us not fear to undertake, with trust in God and great courage, 'a missionary option capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to *go forth* and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself" (*Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis, for the Centenary of the Promulgation of the Apostolic letter "Maximum Illud" on the Activity of Missionaries in the World*).

My presentation is divided into five parts

1. Mercy as the core message of the Pontificate of Pope Francis
2. Pope Francis and the Decalogue of Dialogue
3. Pope Francis and Dialogue of Action
4. Turning the Pope's Call of Dialogue into Action
5. Who do they say I am? Religious Thinkers Engage with Recent Papal Initiatives

1. Mercy as the core message of the Pontificate of Pope Francis

It is no exaggeration to say that the core message of the Pontificate of Pope Francis is mercy, “revolution of tenderness.” His theological-pastoral path, thus, calls the universal magisterium to live the Church’s mission from within the new historical process of social change. Mercy is the engagement with the struggles of the poor majority for a better world, one that is more brotherly/sisterly and livable. Besides, according to Pope Francis the vision of mercy and “a poor Church and a Church of the Poor” are interrelated. Cardinal Bergoglio taking the name of Francis reveals his vision for the Church as well as the world. The Pope recalls, “[...] thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were still being counted, till the end. Francis is also the man of peace. That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation; [...]. He is the man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man ... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!” (cf. *Audience with the media representatives, 16 March 2013*).

2. Pope Francis and the Decalogue of Dialogue

Let us turn to words and actions of Pope Francis to find out his approach to dialogue and cooperation. Accordingly, I have discovered ten approaches.

● **Dialogue is for the common good:-** Mercy needs to be translated into action. “Dialogue is about seeking the common good. Discuss, think, and discover together a better solution for everybody.” (*León Condou Stadium, Colegio San José Asunción (Paraguay) Saturday, 11 July 2015* (n.2).

● **Common good through triple dialogue:-** Dialogue is indispensable for works of mercy and justice. “Evangelization also involves the path of dialogue. For the Church today, three areas of dialogue stand out where

she needs to be present in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society – including dialogue with cultures and the sciences – and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 238).

● **Dialogue and identity: -** Dialogue does not water down religious convictions. “Dialogue must be built on something, an identity. [...] We sometimes meet to speak and share our points of view, and everyone speaks on the basis of their own identity: ‘I’m Buddhist, I’m Evangelical. I’m Orthodox, I’m Catholic.’ Each one explains their identity. They do not negotiate their identity. This means that, for there to be dialogue, that fundamental basis of identity must exist.” *León Condou Stadium, Colegio San José Asunción (Paraguay), 11 July 2015* (n. 2). On another occasion, the Pope underlines “Three basic areas, if properly linked to one another, can assist in this dialogue: *the duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others, the courage to accept differences, and sincerity of intentions*” (*Al-Azhar Conference Centre, Cairo, 28 April 2017*).

● **Friendship and Respect: -** Dialogue of friendship and respect aims at a greater cause. “The Catholic Church is conscious of the importance of promoting friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions.” Then, the Pope adds “There is much that we can do to benefit the poor, the needy and those who suffer, and to favour justice, promote reconciliation and build peace” (*Audience with Representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the Different Religions, 20 March 2013*).

● **Bridging differences through dialogue: -** Pope Francis invites all - Christians and others - to build bridges not walls to promote peace. “One of the titles of the Bishop of Rome is Pontiff, that is, a builder of bridges with God and between people. My wish is that the dialogue between us should help to build

bridges connecting all people, in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister to be welcomed and embraced” (*Diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See*, March, 22, 2013).

● **Dialogue is a two-way communication** – It involves: speaking and listening; giving and receiving and mutual growth and enrichment. Pope Francis stresses on the importance of dialogue, “of listening, of not arguing immediately, of asking questions: this is dialogue, and dialogue is a bridge. Do not be afraid of dialogue. ... It is about agreeing on proposals for forging ahead together. In dialogue everybody wins, and no-one loses. In arguments there is someone who wins and someone who loses, or both lose. Dialogue is gentleness, it is the capacity to listen, it is putting yourself in the other person's shoes, and building bridges” (*Summary of Bulletin, Holy See Press Release*, 30.05.2006).



● **Dialogue as a means of conflict resolution:** - The Pope says, “we are invited to embrace conflict. If we don’t embrace conflict, saying to ourselves, “this is a headache, let him go home with his ideas, and I’ll go back to mine with my ideas”, then we will never be able to dialogue. This means that we have to “face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 227) *León Condou Stadium, Colegio San José Asunción (Paraguay) Saturday, 11 July 2015* (n. 2).

● **Be promoters of a culture of encounter:**
- **Because, it is an antidote for exclusion and “throw away culture”.** Pope Francis notes “True cultures are never closed in on themselves – cultures would die if they closed in on themselves – but are called to meet other cultures and to create new realities. There are no first, second, third, fourth categories of

persons: they are all of the same lineage.” *León Condou Stadium, Colegio San José Asunción (Paraguay) Saturday, 11 July 2015* (n. 2). He further affirms that “when people unite there is social friendship, fraternal friendship; and there is a culture of encounter, that defends us from any type of “throwaway culture” (*Summary of Bulletin, Holy See Press Release*, 30.05.2006).

● **The diplomacy of dialogue:** - Pope Francis always calls for dialogue to resolve world crises, placing the peace of dialogue at the heart of his papal diplomacy. The alternative to encounter, as the Pope says, is continued conflict. “For the only alternative to the civility of encounter is the incivility of conflict; there is no other way” (*Al-Azhar Conference Centre, Cairo, 28 April 2017*). Here, we can also

mention the historic Abu Dhabi document, apostolic journeys etc.

● **Prayer and dialogue:** - Pope Francis invites all followers of religions to pray and work together for peace. He notes that “prayer inspires and sustains our efforts for peace, because it helps to deepen our reciprocal respect for each other as persons, strengthens the bonds of love between us, and spurs us to make decisive efforts towards promoting just relations and fraternal solidarity” (*To the Venerable Koei Morikawa Supreme Priest of the Tendai Buddhist Denomination, 18 July 2017*).

The above examined magisterial teachings of Pope Francis clearly indicate a roadmap for a “Liberative solidarity” with all. He clearly highlights that human suffering, especially the cry of the poor provide the followers of different beliefs and all people of goodwill with a common platform to collaborate for the common good.

3. Pope Francis and Dialogue of Action

There are four kinds of dialogue: dialogue of life, a dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience. It seems to me that Pope Francis focuses more on dialogue of action pointing to the open wound of the great problems of humankind, those that affect the majority and are caused by a minority. Pope says “Even today, after the second failure of another world war, perhaps one can speak of a third war, one fought piecemeal, with crimes, massacres, destruction”.

He also often says “The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. ... And you have to start from the ground up.”

The new developments he brings to dialogue of action can be enumerated as follows:

- **Dialogue and popular movements:** The words of Pope Francis to the participants of the Popular Movements reveal how he envisions the dialogue of action. “Some of you said that this system cannot endure. We must change it. We must put human dignity back at the centre and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need. This must be done with courage but also with intelligence, with tenacity but without fanaticism, with passion yet without violence. [...] I know that you are persons of different religions, trades, ideas, cultures, countries, continents. Here and now you are practicing the culture of encounter, so different from the xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance which we witness so often. Among the excluded, one finds an encounter of cultures where the aggregate does not wipe out the particularities” (*World Meeting of Popular Movements*, 28 October 2014).

- **Care for Our Common Home and**

- Inclusive dialogue:** The appeal from Pope Francis addressed to every person living on this planet is to enter into an inclusive dialogue to safeguard our common home. He notes, “we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor* (*Laudato Si*, n. 49).

- **The Poor and Dialogue:** The First World Day of the Poor celebrated on November 19, 2017, was new in the Catholic calendar. It was created by Pope Francis, who invited Christians and people of all beliefs to observe it. “This Day is meant, above all, to encourage believers to react against a culture of discard and waste, and to embrace the culture of encounter. At the same time, everyone, independent of religious affiliation, is invited to openness and sharing with the poor through concrete signs of solidarity and fraternity. (*First World Day Of The Poor 33rd Sunday In Ordinary Time, 19 November 2017, Let us Love, Not With Words But With Deeds*).

- **Women and dialogue:** - Pope Francis invites us to include more women to dialogue table. “Women are engaged, often more than men, at the level of the “dialogue of life” in the interreligious sphere, [...]. But women are also able to fully integrate in exchanges at the level of religious experience, as well as in those at the theological level and not only on the Catholic side. This means that women’s contribution must not be limited to “feminine” topics or to encounters only among women. Many women are well prepared to take on encounters of interreligious dialogue at the highest levels. Dialogue is a journey that men and women must undertake together. Today more than ever, it is necessary that women be present.” (*To Participants in Plenary Assembly of the PCID*, June 9, 2017, n.3).

- **Mercy and Dialogue:** - Pope Francis is the first Pope to hold an interreligious general audience to celebrate mercy with believers of other religions. “May the religions be wombs of life, bearing the merciful love of God to a wounded and needy humanity; may they be doors of hope helping to penetrate the walls erected by pride and fear” (Pope Francis, *Interreligious audience*, 3 November 2016).

- **Actions speak louder than images and words:** - In 2016, during the Holy Thursday mass at a refugee center in Rome, Pope Francis knelt down before twelve refugees and washed their feet. He said “all of us, together: Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, Copts, Evangelicals, but brothers and sisters, children of the same God, who want to live in peace, integrated.[...] He further explained “as I perform the same act as Jesus by washing the feet of you twelve, we are all engaged in the act of brotherhood, and we are all saying: “We are diverse, we are different, we have different cultures and religions, but we are brothers and sisters and we want to live in peace” (*Holy Thursday*, 24 March 2016).

- **Concern for Migrants, Displaced people, Refugees and Victims of Human Trafficking:**

Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating migrants and refugees. “This is a great responsibility, which the Church intends to share with all believers and men and women of goodwill, who are called to respond to the many challenges of contemporary migration with generosity, promptness, wisdom and foresight, each according to their own abilities, (Message of Pope Francis, for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 14th January 2018, “*Welcoming, Protecting, Pro-*



moting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees”).

The particular hermeneutic that Pope Francis has applied to his entire magisterium is: “we must go to the periphery, that’s what God does.” The Pope underscores that “Changes not driven from the center, but rather must come from the peripheries, whether existential and social or political and religious” (A. Spadaro, “Wake Up the World!” Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life” in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1 (2014) “ [notes 47 – pgs. 55-61].

Turning the Pope’s Call of Dialogue into Action: How does this –going to periphery- imply for interreligious dialogue?

- **The challenge of reaching out to interreligious peripheries:** - This will help those at the center to become acquainted with reality by experience; to spend time walking on the religious periphery in order really to become acquainted with the life experience of the followers of other religions. If this does not happen the interreligious-dialogue then runs the risk of being abstract.

- **The gap between center and periphery in interreligious dialogue:** - In inter-religious encounters often the voices of the periphery is seldom heard. How can we bring the voices of the periphery to the dialogue table by overcoming language, academic, cultural barriers? The interfaith dialogue has remained too much the province of religious elites. How can laypeople, women, and youth from different traditions become more involved? The model of interreligious dialogue needs changes.

- **Theological dialogue and human**

suffering: - For Pope Francis both are inseparable. "The questions of people, their suffering, their battles, their dreams, their trials, their worries possess an interpretational value that we cannot ignore if we want to take the principle of the Incarnation seriously. [...] We cannot therefore ignore our people while engaging in theology (*Video Message*, Buenos Aires, 3 September 2015). How can we incarnate the outcome of meetings, conferences, books, articles, final statements etc. on interreligious dialogues?"

- **New Religious Movements:** - NRM have emerged worldwide over the past several centuries and in the recent history. Often, they are branded as syncretistic and pluralistic or sects and cults *en masse* without proper study or analysis. There is a need for a critical study on the NRM as well as a critical evaluation of our approach toward the NRM. Because, Pope Francis says that "Dialogue is gentleness, it is the capacity to listen, it is putting yourself in the other person's shoes, and building bridges" (*Summary of Bulletin, Holy See Press Release*, 30.05.2006). At the same time, there is a need to pay attention to the challenges posed by both neo-gnosticism, and neo-Pelagianism.

- **Dialogue, Identity and Dual/multiple multiple religious belonging:-** "*Dialogue must be built on something, an identity*" so says the Pope. How can we theologically respond to dual religious belonging, for example "I am a Buddhist-Christian?"

Who do they say I am? Religious Thinkers Engage with Recent Papal Initiatives

The book *Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue, Religious Thinkers Engage with Recent Papal Initiatives* edited by Herold Kasimow and Alan Race presents the reactions of the leaders and scholars of other religions to Pope Francis's interreligious dialogue. I will cite a few examples below to demonstrate the support of other religions to Pope's dialogue of action.

Forward: Who is Jorge Bergoglio? Rabbi

Abraham Skorka : "One day as we sat in his little office in Buenos Aires, Cardinal Bergoglio and I spoke about leadership and the multiple conflicts in many places around the world. We discussed the attitudes that a real leader has to have in order to implant in people the values of peace, justice, and spirituality. When he was elected pope, I knew that a great opportunity was beginning for the Church to renew itself and to give a special message, not only for its own worshippers but for the whole humankind."

Cautious Hope: Hindu Reflections on

Pope Francis, Jeffery D. Long: "It is the mission of Hindus to support Pope Francis as an agent for positive change in his church and, by extension, in the world: to make the world a place that is more pluralistic, more inclusive, and more accepting." (*Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue, Religious Thinkers Engage with Recent Papal Initiatives*, Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue, Switzerland, 2018, pgs.196-7).

Do We Have a Religious Need for Each Other? Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue Anantanand Rambachan:

"Hindus will welcome Pope Francis's call for interreligious dialogue and cooperation centred on the pursuit of peace and justice and the overcoming of suffering. [...] This dialogue will only grow deeper through humility that acknowledges the limits of our knowledge in relation to God and which truly opens our hearts and minds to receive from and be enriched by the gifts of each other" (*ibid*, p. 215).

Pope Francis's Compassion, Amineh A.

Hoti: "One of the ways to work towards a peaceful and more inclusive world is not only to empathize with people of other faiths and cultures but also to step into their shoes. The pope did this on two occasions. The first was when he washed the feet of female Muslim refugees who had been rejected by humanity and had travelled through hardships to get to Europe where some were hostile in accepting

them. [...] The second outstanding incident was when Pope Francis went to meet the Rohingya Muslim refugees –no country in the world has accepted them- yet he begged their forgiveness on behalf of humanity. For me, both acts of compassion and mercy reflect the characteristics of Prophet Muhammad [...] (*ibid.* pgs. 164-165).

Pope Francis, Islam, and Dialogue,

Ataullah Siddiqui: “Pope Francis has brought a fresh outlook during his papacy, a papacy that opens more opportunities for cooperation and action than perhaps previously anticipated. [...] In this light, there is a case for Christians and Muslims to revisit their theologies and search for a meaningful “co-witness” in a world that cries for greater justice” (pgs.169).

Conclusion

To understand the commitment of Pope Francis and his papacy to inter-religious, ecumenical and intercultural dialogue, we need to examine his responses to the phenomenon of globalization. He is of the view that the world needs to be healed and humanized anew by reaching out to the peripheries “which need the light of the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 20). He further highlights “This is the human paradigm on which our following of Jesus must be based on, because, “the proposal offered by Jesus is a concrete one and not a notion. It is concrete “Go and do the same” he says to the man who asked “who is my

neighbour?” (Sports field of St Mary’s School, Nairobi Kenya, 26 November 2015). Accordingly, the salvation takes place in history. The alternative social model of Pope Francis is based on soteriology of mercy, “revolution of tenderness” which takes place through intercultural socio-political dialogue as well as ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Therefore, we can say “dialogue of mercy” paves the way for “dialogue of action” and “dialogue of action” leads to “dialogue of hope.”

Let me conclude with the words of Pope Francis pronounced during the Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Geneva for the 70th anniversary of the founding of the World Council of Churches, last November, where he laid a clear and solid foundation for ecumenical collaboration: “Let us see what we can do concretely, rather than grow discouraged about what we cannot. Let us also look to our many brothers and sisters in various parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East, who suffer because they are Christians.” He further noted “The Lord, the Good Samaritan of mankind (cf. *Lk* 10:29-37), will examine us on our love for our neighbour, for each of our neighbours (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46). So let us ask ourselves: *What can we do together?* If a particular form of service is possible, why not plan and carry it out together, and thus start to experience a more intense fraternity in the exercise of concrete charity?” (*Ecumenical Meeting in the Visser’t Hooft Hall of the Geneva Ecumenical Centre*, 21.06.2018).



Four Dimensions of Listening

In recent years we have seen the rise of xenophobia – the fear of foreigners – and its exploitation for political gain. I'm reminded of how difficult dialogue is in the face of fear. On Sunday we watched Jesus and the Samaritan woman transcending fear and by this each one's thirst was met. Kathleen McGarvey noted that the attitudes of both the woman and Jesus were changed. This is an example of *conversion*, according to Marco Morselli's definition; "the reorienting of a person's life more fully in the direction of God". Dialogue is not about a change of religious affiliation. Rather, dialogue takes us into the profound experience of human encounter, where we meet God so fully.

In the Gospel we heard "*he who is born from heaven, speaks in an earthly way*". The Incarnation is a dialogue. We can know God, because God knows what it is to be us. A Christian icon for this dialogue is the *Vesica Piscis*, the lens shape formed by the intersection of two circles, in such a way that the centre of each lies on the perimeter of the other. In Italian the centre is called a *mandorla* because it is almond shaped. In dialogue there is a respectful overlapping of two circles, the other's, and mine, without losing the integrity of either. Jesus is dialogue. Word enfleshed. In Galatians 3 we read, "*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (cf. 3:26-29).

The first Reading from the Acts of the Apostles says, "*Obedience to God comes before obedience to men.*" Our practice of dialogue begins in our obedience to God, which properly understood is an active engagement of listening and responding.

Lecturer in organisational transformation, Otto Scharmer, reflects on four dimensions of listening. In **habitual listening** we come with a full water jar and listen for what we can add to our already full water jar. What we want to hear is what confirms our already held convictions. The *voice of judgement* within us limits what we hear. An *open mind*, an empty water jar, allows dialogue. In **factual listening** I listen for facts. I gain interesting information about the other. The *voice of cynicism* however limits my moving from seeking information to listening to persons. To dialogue with persons I require an *open heart*. **Empathic listening** challenges me emotionally to hear the person behind the words. It requires vulnerability and non-defensiveness. The *voice of fear* disconnects us. An *open will* connects us. Willingness to go beyond fear leads to transcendence of the personal level. In **generative listening** those in dialogue find themselves moved to another dimension in which they stand on the common ground of the *Vesica Piscis*. Our circles overlap to the extent that the distinctions between the one and the other are transcended but not lost. There are no longer foreigners, just people we do not know yet. One loses one's need to defend oneself. Here is the obedience of the Gospel. One hears the *voice of love* that transcends political or personal gain and one is enriched by diversity.

Cenap Mustafa shared with us Rumi's words, "*Your task is not to seek love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.*"

Yesterday Venerable Frank De Waele, reminded us of the attitude of dialogue in the story of the farmer visiting a church, "*I stand and gaze at him, until he gazes back at me.*"

(Homily by Fr. Chris Chaplin, MSC for the conclusion of the SEDOS residential seminar).

Interreligious Dialogue: An Asian Perspective

Talk given at the meeting of Asian Ambassadors to the Holy See at the Pontifical Urban University, 18 June 2019

Asia has a long-standing tradition of respect for other religious traditions. This peaceful coexistence of different religions is partly thanks to certain teachings that have promoted unity and harmony among these religions. We think here, for instance, on the Indian continent with its many religious expressions of *Hinduism* living peacefully together. This unity has been taught from the Rig Veda, the oldest Hindu scripture, up to modern times:

“To what is One, sages give many a title.”

(*Rig-Veda*)

“However men approach me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is mine.”

(*Bhagavad Gita*)

“Hinduism is a living organism liable to growth and decay and subject to the laws of nature. One and indivisible at the root, it has grown into a vast tree with innumerable branches.”

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Also in China, the *Three Teachings* of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism exist in harmonious relationship. So much so that when upon entering a temple, one does not know immediately to which religion this temple is dedicated. These religions live in such a harmonious relationship that one wonders how this came about. The reason can be found in the Chinese mind that has been moulded through the years by the teachings of their wise elders.

“There are two particular features of Chinese thought, which might be summarized by the words ‘harmony’ and ‘tradition’.”

(Mel Thompson)



Lao-Tse and Confucius caring for little Buddha

Also in Japan, *Buddhism* and *Shintoism* have accepted each others deities, which is called *shinbutsushugo*, a syncretism of *kamis* and *buddhas*. The theory behind this way of life is known as *Honji Suijaku*, a theory that originated in the 9th century according to which Japanese Shinto gods (*kami*) were considered to be emanations of buddhas, bodhisattvas or devas who mingled with human beings to lead them to the Buddhist Way. Kukai Kobo Daishi, the Founder of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism in Japan, was one of the first to promote this open attitude towards other religions. He prayed to the local Shinto god at the foot of Mount Koya to allow him to start his Buddhist center on the top of the mountain. His teaching was also in this line:

“Kukai, while respecting the religion of every person, taught the important source of salvation, hidden in their teachings.”

(Ryuko Oda)

This open attitude (“*positive syncretism*”) towards the divinities, teachings, and theologies of other religions, positively furthers the dialogue among the different religions. For instance, freedom of religion is better understood; people are more ready to accept the presence of different religious traditions among their kin; scholars are more interested in comparing the different religious leaders and religious teachings; it furthers dialogue and peace among religions.

“The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language, are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings.”

The Roman-Catholic Church is graced with many theologians, especially missionaries who have been set free to deepen their knowledge of other religions in view of dialogue. However, besides the study of another religion, some

History of Religion (study)

Theology of Religion (faith)

&&&&&&&&&&&

(Gift from ORBIS Books to SEDOS Library)



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