

DICASTERIUM  
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# *Pro Dialogo*

**Dialogue & Mission: 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (1984-2024)**  
**Reflections and Orientations**



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Number 176 of *Pro Dialogo* is dedicated entirely to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the document *Dialogue and Mission*. It begins with an introduction by the Cardinal Prefect, who reflects on the “Pentecost journey” — the document was originally published on Pentecost Sunday in 1984. The ongoing challenge of dialogue within the Church’s evangelizing mission is reinterpreted by Pope Francis as a “dialogue of friendship” aimed at building universal fraternity.

Following this introduction are two brief congratulatory messages from Presidents Emeritus Cardinal Francis Arinze and Cardinal Michael Louis Fitzgerald.

The first part of the Bulletin presents nine articles on the following topics:

1) Msgr. Indunil Kodithuwakku, Secretary of the Dicastery, offers a reinterpretation of the document in its three parts, explaining mission, dialogue, and the relationship between dialogue and mission, in the renewed context offered by Pope Francis’ magisterium since the encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), *Laudato si’* (2015), *Laudate Deum* (2023), *Querida Amazonia* (2020), up to *Fratelli tutti* (2020).

2) Prof. Steven Bevans, professor emeritus of the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, takes up and amplifies the theme of the theology of Mission, expanding the research on Interreligious Dialogue to the whole of Pope Francis’ magisterium, examining relevant implications such as “dialogue and peace,” “dialogue and religious identity,” “dialogue and commitment to a better world,” and, finally, “Dialogue and inculturation.”

3) Pim Valkenberg then discusses the theme of the spirituality of *Dialogue and Mission*, rereading it as “loyalty to self and others.”

4) H.E. Bertram Meier, Secretary of the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue of the German Bishops’ Conference, outlines the Church’s journey in Germany based on *Dialogue and Mission*. Since German is not accessible to everyone, *Pro Dialogo* presents here the most original elements of his contribution.

A serious commitment to dialogue is not an expression of disengagement with Christ; on the contrary, it reinforces it. Notably, the German bishops assert that mission presupposes the plurality of religions and seeks to reconcile missionary efforts with a positive attitude towards religious diversity. They consider four intrinsic elements of mission: universality, selfless orientation towards others, re-

spect for individuals capable of making their own decisions, and a commitment to complete religious freedom. These elements provide a framework for critically assessing conflicting understandings of mission.

Far from opposing dialogue and mission, the German bishops echo Pope Francis, emphasizing that the two elements “support and nourish each other” (cf. EG 251). Mission does not imply an insincere or tactical approach to dialogue, nor does it indicate a lack of appreciation for those who belong to other faiths.

5) H.E. Marco Mellino, Secretary of the Council of Cardinals, then explained the new missionary directives outlined in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, with which Pope Francis intends to pursue the reform of ecclesial structures: service, synodality, co-responsibility in communion.

6) Michael Driessen, from *John Cabot University* in Rome, explains the importance of dialogue as a tool for conflict resolution.

7) Lazar Stanislaus, SVD, delves into the intercultural dimension of mission as prophetic dialogue.

8) Rev. Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, Head of the “Ecology and Creation Office”, *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development*, addressed the topic of “ecological conversion” as an interreligious responsibility.

9) To conclude the series of articles, Jaino Jacob offers a contextual reading of conversion in Dialogue and Mission.

The second part of the Bulletin collects narratives of mission and dialogue experiences from the five continents: for Africa, from Nigeria (V. Ifeyinwa Onyeansi) and Ivory Coast (F. Gbortsu); for Asia, from Singapore (L. Chong) and Pakistan (S. F. Shaw); for America, from the United States (R. George-Tvrtkovic) and the Amazon (A. M. Bidegain); for Oceania, from Australia (Patrick McInerney); for Europe, from Albania (R. Scorsoni), and from the European experience of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (M. Nicolini Zani).

The volume closes with an essay by His Eminence Card. Jean-Marc Aveline on “Dialogue and Mission: a theology of encounter.”

Le 176<sup>e</sup> de *Pro Dialogo* est entièrement dédié au 40<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du document *Dialogue et mission*. En ouverture, une introduction du Cardinal Préfet rappelle que le « voyage de Pentecôte » - le document a été publié le dimanche de Pentecôte 1984 – met à jour le défi du dialogue dans le contexte de la mission évangélisatrice de l'Église, plus récemment réinterprétée par le pape François comme un « dialogue d'amitié » pour construire la fraternité universelle. Deux brefs messages de félicitations sont ensuite adressés par les Présidents émérites du Dicastère, le Card. Francis Arinze et le Card. Michael Louis Fitzgerald.

La première partie du Bulletin présente neuf contributions :

1. Mgr Indunil Kodithuwakku, Secrétaire du Dicastère, propose une relecture du document dans ses trois parties. Il y explique la mission, le dialogue ainsi que la relation entre le dialogue et la mission dans le contexte renouvelé offert par le magistère du pape François depuis *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), *Laudato si'* (2015), *Laudate Deum* (2023) et *Querida Amazonia* (2020) jusqu'à *Fratelli tutti* (2020).

2. Le Prof. Steven Bevans, professeur émérite de la Catholic Theological Union, de Chicago, reprend et amplifie le thème de la théologie de la mission en élargissant la recherche sur le dialogue interreligieux à l'ensemble du magistère du pape François. Il examine aussi des aspects pertinents, tels que « dialogue et paix », « dialogue et identité religieuse », « dialogue et engagement pour un monde meilleur » et, enfin, « dialogue et inculturation ».

3. Pim Valkenberg traite, quant à lui, du thème de la spiritualité de *Dialogue et mission* en fonction d'une relecture de « fidélité à soi-même et aux autres ».

4. S.E. Mgr Bertram Meier, Secrétaire de la Commission pour le dialogue interreligieux de la Conférence épiscopale allemande illustre le chemin de l'Église qui est en Allemagne, à partir de *Dialogue et mission*. L'allemand n'étant pas une langue accessible à tous, *Pro Dialogo* présente ici les éléments les plus originaux de sa contribution. Pour lui, un engagement sérieux dans le dialogue n'est pas l'expression d'un désengagement vis-à-vis du Christ, bien au contraire. Pour preuve, il est intéressant de noter que, selon les évêques allemands, la mission présuppose la pluralité des religions et se trouve confrontée à la tâche de concilier la compréhension missionnaire avec une attitude positive à l'égard de la diversité religieuse. En prenant en considération quatre éléments intrinsèques de la mission : l'univer-



salité, une orientation désintéressée vers les autres, une bonne disposition à l'égard de l'individu capable de prendre des décisions et un engagement en faveur d'une liberté religieuse totale, il est possible de procéder à une évaluation critique des conceptions conflictuelles de la mission. Loin d'opposer le dialogue et la mission, les évêques allemands se font l'écho du pape François chez qui les deux éléments « se soutiennent et s'alimentent réciproquement » (cf. *EG* 251), car « la mission n'implique pas une compréhension insincère ou tactique du dialogue, ni l'expression d'un manque d'appréciation pour ceux qui appartiennent à d'autres confessions ».

5. S.E. Mgr Marco Mellino, Secrétaire du Conseil des Cardinaux, pose pour sa part les nouvelles orientations missionnaires indiquées dans la Constitution apostolique *Praedicate Evangelium* par lesquelles le pape François entend poursuivre la réforme des structures de l'Église : service, synodalité, coresponsabilité dans la communion.

6. Michael Driessen, de la John Cabot University de Rome, développe l'importance du dialogue comme instrument pour la résolution des conflits.

7. Lazar Stanislaus, SVD, approfondit la dimension interculturelle de la mission comme dialogue prophétique.

8. Le Rév. P. Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, Chef du « Bureau de l'écologie et de la création », Dicastère pour la promotion du développement humain intégral, aborde, lui, le thème de la « conversion écologique » comme responsabilité interreligieuse.

9. Pour conclure la série de ces articles, Jairo Jacob offre enfin une lecture contextuelle de la conversion dans *Dialogue et Mission*.

La seconde partie du Bulletin rassemble quelques récits des expériences de mission et de dialogue sur les cinq continents : pour l'Afrique, le Nigeria (V. Ifeyinwa Onyeansi) et la Côte d'Ivoire (F. Gbortsu) ; pour l'Asie, Singapour (L. Chong) et le Pakistan (S. F. Shaw) ; pour l'Amérique, les États-Unis (R. George-Tvrtkovic) et l'Amazonie (A. M. Bidegain) ; pour l'Océanie, l'Australie (Patrick McInerney) ; pour l'Europe, l'Albanie (R. Scorsoni) et l'expérience européenne du Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique (M. Nicolini Zani).

Le Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline conclut cette édition par une réflexion sur « Dialogue et Mission : une théologie de la rencontre ».

Il numero 176 di Pro Dialogo è dedicato interamente al 40° anniversario del documento Dialogo e Missione. In apertura troviamo l'introduzione del Cardinale Prefetto, che rievoca il “viaggio della Pentecoste” – il documento fu pubblicato la domenica di Pentecoste del 1984 – attualizzando la sfida del dialogo nel contesto della missione evangelizzatrice della Chiesa, reinterpretata da Papa Francesco come “dialogo di amicizia” per costruire la fraternità universale. Seguono poi due brevi messaggi di felicitazioni dei Presidenti emeriti Card. Francis Arinze e Card. Michael Louis Fitzgerald.

La prima parte del Bollettino presenta nove articoli sul tema:

1) Mons. Indunil Kodithuwakku, Segretario del Dicastero, offre una rilettura del documento nelle sue tre parti, che spiegano la missione, il dialogo, e la relazione tra dialogo e missione, nel rinnovato contesto offerto dal magistero di papa Francesco a partire dalle encicliche *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), *Laudato si'* (2015) e *Laudate Deum* (2023), *Querida Amazonia* (2020) fino a *Fratelli tutti* (2020).

2) Il Prof. Steven Bevans, professore emerito della Catholic Theological Union, di Chicago, riprende e amplifica il tema della teologia della Missione, ampliando la ricerca sul Dialogo interreligioso all'insieme del magistero di papa Francesco, esaminandone risvolti rilevanti come “dialogo e pace”, “dialogo e identità religiosa”, “dialogo e impegno per un mondo migliore”, e, infine, “Dialogo e inculturazione”.

3) Pim Valkenberg tratta poi il tema della spiritualità di *Dialogo e Missione*, rileggendola come “fedeltà a sé stessi e agli altri”.

4) S. E. Bertram Meier, Segretario della Commissione per il Dialogo Interreligioso della Conferenza Episcopale tedesca, illustra il cammino della Chiesa in Germania a partire da *Dialogo e Missione*. Non essendo il tedesco una lingua accessibile a tutti, Pro Dialogo presenta qui gli elementi più originali del suo contributo. Un impegno serio nel dialogo non è espressione di disimpegno nei confronti di Cristo, al contrario. A riprova di ciò, è interessante rilevare che, secondo i Vescovi tedeschi, la missione presuppone la pluralità delle religioni e affronta il compito di conciliare la comprensione missionaria con un atteggiamento positivo verso la diversità religiosa. Prendendo in considerazione quattro elementi intrinseci alla missione: l'universalità, l'orientamento disinteressato verso gli altri, la buona disposizione verso l'individuo capace di prendere decisioni, e l'impegno per una li-

bertà religiosa completa, si può procedere a una valutazione critica delle concezioni contrastanti della missione. Lungi dal contrapporre dialogo e missione, fanno eco a papa Francesco i vescovi tedeschi, i due elementi “si sostengono e si alimentano a vicenda” (cf. EG 251), perché “la missione non implica una comprensione insincera o tattica del dialogo, né è espressione di una mancanza di apprezzamento per coloro che appartengono ad altre fedi.

5) S. E. Marco Mellino, Segretario del Consiglio dei Cardinali, ha poi spiegato i nuovi orientamenti missionari indicati nella Costituzione apostolica - *Prædicate Evangelium*, con i quali papa Francesco intende perseguire la riforma delle strutture ecclesiali: servizio, sinodalità, corresponsabilità nella comunione.

6) Michael Driessen, della *John Cabot University* di Roma, spiega l'importanza del dialogo come strumento per la risoluzione dei conflitti.

7) Lazar Stanislaus, SVD, approfondisce la dimensione interculturale della missione come dialogo profetico.

8) Il rev. Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, Capo dell' “Ufficio per l'ecologia e il creato”, Dicastero per la promozione dello sviluppo umano integrale, ha trattato il tema della “conversione ecologica” come responsabilità interreligiosa.

9) Per concludere la serie degli articoli, Jaino Jacob ha offerto una lettura contestuale della conversione in *Dialogo e Missione*.

La seconda parte del Bollettino raccoglie narrazioni di esperienze di missione e dialogo dai cinque continenti: per l'Africa, da Nigeria (V. Ifeyinwa Onyeansi) e Costa d'Avorio (F. Gbortsu); per l'Asia, da Singapore (L. Chong) e Pakistan (S. F. Shaw); per l'America, dagli Stati Uniti (R. George-Tvrtkovic) e dall'Amazzonia (A. M. Bidegain); per l'Oceania, dall'Australia (Patrick McInerney); per l'Europa, dall'Albania (R. Scorsone), e dall'esperienza europea del Dialogo Interreligioso Monastico (M. Nicolini Zani).

Chiude il volume il saggio di Sua Eminenza Card. Jean-Marc Aveline su “Dialogo e Missione: una teologia dell'incontro”.

## INTRODUCTION

H. EM. CARD. MIGUEL ÁNGEL AYUSO GUIXOT\*

Dear Readers of *Pro Dialogo*,

I am particularly happy to introduce this special issue of *Pro Dialogo* on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Document on *The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission (10 May 1984)*.

It was on Pentecost day of 1984 that the Secretariat for Non-Christians (known since 1988 as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue - PCID - and since 2022 as the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue - DID) published the document called *Dialogue and Mission*. The aim of this document was to place interreligious dialogue within the sphere of evangelisation. Evangelisation is presented as a complex process comprised of various elements, interreligious dialogue being one of them. Some of the elements of evangelisation are life witness, prayer and the contemplative life, works aimed at the development and progress of humankind, the fight against poverty and injustice, dialogue with other religions, and proclamation and catechesis (no. 13).

Another important thought presented by the document is that the Church is a community journeying towards the perfection of the kingdom of God together with other religions. If it were stated that the Church is the fullness of the kingdom of God, then there would be no relevance in the salvific value of other religions. Quoting *Lumen Gentium* no. 5, this document establishes that the Church is the seed and growth of the kingdom of God.

Because there are seeds of human and religious truths and goodness in other religions, it is the duty of the Church to bring about the unity of humankind in the journey towards the kingdom of God. Though many of them are different from Christian values, they deserve the respect of every Christian. Dialogue is the way that a Christian has available for absorbing these values (no. 26).

### *The Pentecost Journey*

It was not by chance that *Dialogue and Mission* was published at Pentecost, when “the promise of the Father” was fulfilled (Luke 24: 49; Acts 1: 4). Pentecost is simultaneously climax and beginning (cf. Acts 2). Christ is not dead or absent in

\* Prefect, Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.

some far-off spiritual realm. The kingdom he announced is not set aside to some future millennium, but rather enters a new era of fulfilment. His ministry is not concluded but universalized through his new body.

As when the Israelites felt a mysterious “violent wind”, which dried up the waters of the Red Sea (Exod. 14: 21) and whipped in their faces as they crossed to Sinai, God’s Spirit now again filled the house with a roar (Acts 2: 2). The play on words in the original language of the Bible makes this more obvious. Both *ruach* (Hebrew) and *pneuma* (Greek) have the double meaning of “wind” and “spirit”.

The symbolism of speaking and hearing in different dialects is also multifaceted. It most likely alludes to the confusion of languages at Babel (Gen. 11:7–9). The Spirit’s presence reverses Babel, and as Saint Paul said, in Christ there are no “barbarians,” that is, those of uncouth languages (Col. 3: 11). It also indicates the universality of the salvation message and therefore the mission and nature of the new people being formed. The connection with Exodus and Sinai is not so apparent until we learn that there was a Jewish tradition that the Mosaic Law had been given in seventy languages simultaneously, indicating the universal scope of its authority. Luke’s account of the new covenant being announced in many languages may well be a parallel to this Jewish tradition. And just as great signs accompanied Israel’s deliverance and formation into a covenant nation, so “signs and wonders done through the apostles” accompanied the birth of the new community of the Spirit (Acts 2: 43).

The Spirit of the ascended Christ now became the Spirit of his new body, the Church. Peter’s promise that following repentance and baptism they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) was not the promise of a “second experience” of like intensity but the announcement that it is within the community of the Spirit that the new reality is to be found.

Christians are sent to be witnesses and to make disciples of all nations (cf. Matt 28: 19). In other words, the Church is to be engaged with the world in winning the allegiance of increasing numbers of people away from the world and to Jesus as Lord and King. Its task is to win people not just to the Church but to the full kingdom and economy of God. This comes about through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in human lives. We are called to make disciples, not just converts, and disciples of the kingdom, not just of the Church. The Church is not merely to be in the world; it is to pursue the mission of God in the world. It is the agent of God’s kingdom in bringing all things under the headship of Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 1: 10).

The danger of a countercultural model is that it may lead inward, away from worldly engagement. The antidote to this danger is a deep consciousness that the Church exists for the kingdom. The notion of a contrast community is essentially negative, despite its positive possibilities. It is therefore an inadequate model by

itself. But as part of the total picture of what it means to be the Church in a hostile world, it is an important perspective. The Church can be free for the kingdom only if it is sufficiently detached and distinct from the world's culture to maintain obedience for the kingdom.

In most cultural settings, a Church as a kingdom community will be a contrast community. The more important point, however, is simply that the Church be faithful to the kingdom, whatever this means for its position in society. If the Church poses no threat to the enemy, its allegiance to Jesus Christ is deeply suspect. We are, after all, involved not merely with a religious organization but with the people of God, the community of the Spirit, and the kingdom of Jesus Christ, our sovereign Lord.

### *Dialogue and Mission in the view of Pope Francis: no mission without fraternity*

The orientation that Pope Francis has imprinted on his pontificate demands a decisive assumption of responsibility on the part of every Christian community. This, in essence, means that before 'going' (outgoing Church) 'to the periphery' (*locus par excellence* of the Mission) and thus being 'at the side of the poor', it is necessary to understand, with heart and mind, that the evangelising mission cannot disregard fraternity. It represents the *condicio sine qua non* for living the mission.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Bishop of Rome, at the beginning of his Petrine ministry, stated that "missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church's activity* [...] we "cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings"; we need to move from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry. This task continues to be a source of immense joy for the Church: "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (*Lk 15: 7*).

If evangelisation has as its goal the communion of all peoples in the one family of God, it is inevitable that the lack of full and effective fraternal communion among the protagonists of the mission will act as an impediment to a more effective and credible communication of the Gospel. It is certainly also for the unity of the missionary 'forces' that Jesus prayed: "As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us one, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (*John 17: 21*).

What is true of mission, is also true of dialogue. Interreligious dialogue by its very nature may be controversial: on the one hand it can be seen and lived as friendly dialogue and on the other hand - forcing it to pass through the inevitable crucible of confrontation with 'others' - it can turn into polemic. Dialogue - understood and practised as the projection of oneself and one's 'world' into another

conceptual horizon, into another doctrinal tradition, into another cultural sensibility, into another universe of values, while receiving someone else's 'world' - runs the risk of changing its orientation, becoming a quarrel. In this respect, interreligious dialogue is both an inescapable necessity and a simple possibility: it must be attempted, because there is nothing else reasonable left to do; but it can fail for a thousand reasons.

There remains, therefore, in the post-secular age, the need and indeed the urgency to re-comprehend and re-experience the plurality of conceptions and visions of God not as a reason for confrontation, but as a reason for encounter. It is to this new and healthy pluralism that interreligious dialogue points, and it is in this 'sense' (in this 'direction') that religions must once again be considered and experienced in our world as opportunities for fruitful confrontation.

As a consequence, we should all understand that dialogue is not about uncritically accepting what others think differently, but accepting that others think differently. This awareness must be continuously acquired and developed, but from the very nature of authentic religious experiences. For Christianity, for example, one must even admit the impossibility of thinking without the other, if we consider that the Christian Bible is composed not only of the Gospel of Christ Jesus but also of the ancient Scriptures of Israel.

### *Dialogue of Friendship*

Dialogue must push us outside the walls and be embodied in the witness of men and women who truly believe in what they do together. True 'Dialogue' is not possible without living fraternally .

If as Church we really want to make fraternity intelligible in the world, we must overcome within our communities the tendency or temptation to individualism. It is all too easy to realise how many in practice invoke and let their own charism and responsibilities prevail almost exclusively. The plurality of subjects is fruitful, but if it becomes competition or opposition, especially in the delicate field of evangelisation, it does no one any good, nor does it promote any progress for the kingdom of God.

To overcome these obstacles, Pope Francis and the Grand-Imam of al-Azhar pledged to 'adopt the culture of dialogue as the way; common collaboration as the conduct; mutual knowledge as the method and criterion' (*Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019). In order to build a peaceful world in a common coexistence it is necessary to strengthen the bonds of human fraternity. Pluralism, not only religious, but also as found in society in general, is a reality that invites us each to reflect on our own identity, which we must claim so as to participate in authentic interreligious dialogue.

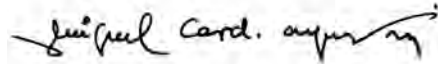
If *Dialogue and Mission* was a prophetic document that paved the way to a new understanding of evangelisation, it is nowadays clear that interreligious dialogue has an essential function to build civil coexistence, a society that includes and is not built on the culture of waste. In a dehumanized world, in which the culture of indifference and greed characterize the connections among human beings, a new dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world in order to shape our future as one human family.

### *Thanksgiving*

I wish to heartily thank all those who contributed to this special issue with theological articles and story-telling, and in a special way Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline for his essay on the Theology of Encounter.

I hope that *Pro Dialogo* readers may feel accompanied in re-discovering the prophecy of *Dialogue and Mission* and be ready to commit to interreligious even more in interreligious activities.

Rome, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Jean-Marie Card. Aveline". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail.



## FELICITATION MESSAGES

### *Joyful Mission Engagement*

It is a thing of joy and an encouraging initiative that the Dicastery for Inter-religious Dialogue is producing a special edition of *Pro Dialogo* to commemorate forty years of its document *Dialogue and Mission*.

The foresight and apostolic courage of this Dicastery four decades ago in producing this work and route indication and guidance document merits praise.

*Dialogue and Mission* in its 13<sup>th</sup> paragraph already acknowledged that the mission of the Church is a unified and complex reality. For four decades this Dicastery has undertaken many initiatives to explain, promote, practise and encourage interreligious dialogue and collaboration as part of the evangelizing mission of the Church. These persevering activities have in no small way enlightened and encouraged the local churches or dioceses around the world to pay more attention to this dimension of the total mission of the Church which the Lord Jesus sent to meet every human being.

May God bless and guide, and continue to bless and guide, all members of the Church who do their part to meet the followers of other religions.

*Francis Cardinal Arinze*  
*President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*

## *Dialogue and Mission*

Congratulations to the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue for commemorating the 40th anniversary of the document *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, usually referred to simply as *Dialogue and Mission*.

This first official document produced by the office for interreligious dialogue set up in 1964 by Pope Saint Paul VI is important.

This document finds mission on God's salvific love and situates interreligious dialogue firmly within the evangelizing mission of the Church. It contains a beautiful reflection on the Holy Trinity as a foundation and model for dialogue. It also lists the four forms of dialogue first presented by the Bishops of Asia: dialogue of life; dialogue of action; dialogue of discourse; dialogue of religious experience. It points to the importance of interreligious dialogue for the promotion of peace in the world.

*Dialogue and Mission* raised important questions which had to be answered, such as "Has proclamation of the Gospel become obsolete? Is dialogue the new name for mission?" Accordingly, it is to be read in conjunction with the other documents produced by the Dicastery: *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991); *Dialogue in Truth and Charity*, but it has not lost its relevance.

*Cardinal Michael Louis Fitzgerald*  
*President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*

## Revisiting and Reimagining the Document *Dialogue and Mission*

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### Introduction

Pope Benedict XVI called the declaration *Nostra Aetate* (NA) the *Magna Carta* of interreligious dialogue. NA officially invited Catholics around the world to enter into dialogue and collaboration with followers of other religious traditions. “The Church exhorts her sons [and daughters], that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men [and women]” (cf. NA 2). Furthermore, the document also gives reasons why the Church encourages interreligious dialogue. It is because various religions seek to answer the unsolved riddles of the human condition, as well as to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing ‘ways,’ comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites (cf.1-2). NA also relates interreligious dialogue to the Church’s wider mission: “In her task of promoting unity and love among men [and women], indeed among nations, [the Catholic Church] considers above all in this declaration what men [and women] have in common and what draws them to fellowship” (cf. NA 1). NA also adopts an appreciative and respectful stance towards other religious traditions. “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men [and women]” (NA 2). However, the document also reminds the Catholics of their duty to proclaim Christ “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), in whom “men [and women] may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself” (cf. NA 2).

Without a doubt, NA *laid a new foundation* for relations between Catholics and the followers of other religious traditions. This journey of dialogue motivated Catholics to establish sincere and constructive relationships with their religious neighbours. The Second Vatican Council was the first council to speak positively

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of other religions as well as to urge Catholics to enter into dialogue and collaboration with their followers. Yet, it nowhere affirmed that interreligious dialogue is an integral part of the evangelizing mission. As a result, in the course of this journey, there emerged various questions demanding more clarifications on the relationship between dialogue and mission. The 1984 document *Dialogue and Mission* (DM) sought to clarify this relationship better.

Let us examine how DM elaborates the place where interreligious dialogue occupies in the totality of mission.

### **1. Revisiting the document *Dialogue and Mission***

The Editorial of the Bulletin (Journal) of the Secretariat in 1984 mentions the origin and the evolution of the document entitled *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (DM). “Responding to an explicit request by the participants of the 1979 plenary, the Secretariat prepared a working document which subsequently went through four drafts (March 1981; June 1981; February 1982; February 1983) based on observations made by members, heads of departments of the Roman Curia, consultors, and other specialists” (Bulletin 1984-XIX/2, 56, p.117). It further notes, “The publication of this document signifies for the Secretariat the beginning of a new phase of dialogue which the church has undertaken with the followers of other religions since the Second Vatican Council” (*ibid*, p.118).

In addition, DM was published on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Secretariat for non-Christians (now the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue) as well as the publication of *Ecclesiam Suam*. Even though the main target group of the document was Christian communities, it also hoped that “Through this document, the members of other religions might also come to understand better how the church views them and how it intends to behave towards them” (DM 7). The main aim of the document was to reflect on the Church’s attitudes towards other believers, and especially on the relationship which exists between dialogue and mission (Cf. DM 5). The theological vision of this document is inspired by the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent magisterium (DM 6). Furthermore, its reflection is mainly pastoral in character (DM 6) and yet it invites theologians to undertake further discussion.

The general structure of the document has three main parts:

A. Mission (DM 9-19)

B. Dialogue (DM 20-25): This section examines dialogue under two aspects: foundations and forms of dialogue.

C. Relationship between dialogue and mission (DM 36-44) focuses on mission, conversion and dialogue for building the reign of God.

Let us now briefly deal with the above three pillars of the document.

#### *A. Mission (DM 9-19)*

The document bases its theology of mission on God who is love (John 4:8, 16) and whose saving love has been revealed and communicated to us in Christ and is present and active throughout the world by means of the Holy Spirit (cf. 9). It further affirms that the Church is the living sign of that love because she finds her source, goal, and way of continuing in Christ's own love. Each aspect and activity of the Church's mission must therefore be imbued with the spirit of love (DM 9). For every Christian, the missionary duty is the normal expression of his/her lived faith (DM 10). Mission is thus presented as a single but complex and articulated reality (DM 13). The dialogue in which Christians meet the followers of other religious traditions in order to walk together towards truth and to work together in projects of common concern is considered for the first time as one of the elements of the totality of mission (DM 13). The other elements are: i) simple presence and living witness of Christian life; ii) service of humankind for social development; iii) sacramental and liturgical life and prayer; iv) and proclamation. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Charles de Foucauld are presented as models of mission and dialogue (DM 17).

DM also highlights the importance of respecting the true freedom of the other person in carrying out the missionary activities by rejecting any form of coercion, especially when dealing with poor or uneducated people. "Such a manner of action would have to be considered an abuse of one's right and a violation of the rights of others (DH 4)" (DM 18). This section on mission ends with the initial theological affirmation of mission: God is love. "Christian mission can never be separated from love and respect for others, is proof for Christians of the place of dialogue within that mission" (DM19).

#### *B. Dialogue (DM 20-25)*

The second part of the document, dedicated to "dialogue", is divided into two: foundations and forms of dialogue. How does the document define dialogue? According to DM "Before all else, dialogue is a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, his modes of expression, and his values" (DM 29). Moreover, DM underlines that "dialogical spirit" is

indispensable to carry out the totality of Christian mission. “Dialogue is thus the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation” (DM 29). DM emphasises that a missionary approach contrary to the dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel (cf. DM 29).

Let us now briefly examine foundations and forms of interreligious dialogue as expounded in D&M.

### Foundations of interreligious dialogue

Mission which originates from the experience of the love of God is put into practice through interreligious dialogue as well. This dialogue is based on the following foundations.

- Dialogue does not grow out of the opportunism of the tactics of the moment but rather is based on personal and social needs (cf. DM 20).
- Mutual affirmation, reciprocal correction, and fraternal exchange lead the partners in dialogue to an ever greater maturity which in turn generates interpersonal communion (cf. DM 21).
- Religious experiences and outlooks can themselves be purified and enriched in this process of encounter (cf. DM 21).
- Dialogue is an instrument for human promotion and for pursuing the demands of peace (cf. DM 21).
- The Church feels itself called to dialogue principally because of its faith in the Trinitarian mystery which reveals to us of a life of communion and interchange of God. (cf. DM 22).
- The universe and history are filled with God’s gifts. The Church has the duty of discovering and bringing to light and fullness all the richness which the Father has hidden in creation and history (cf. DM 22).
- Jesus, the Son who is united to every person (cf. DM 23) and the Holy Spirit is at work “outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body” (RH 6; cf. LG 16; GS 22; AG 15). (cf. DM 24).
- The reign of God is the final end of all persons. The Church is called from the first to start out on this path towards the kingdom and, along with the rest of humanity, to advance towards that goal (cf. DM 25).

Thus, the foundations for interreligious dialogue provide us with horizontal (sociological) as well as vertical (theological) reasons for engaging in interreligious dialogue.

## i Forms of Dialogue:

Having laid the foundations for dialogue, the document then speaks how it could be applied. It proposes four distinct, yet connected forms of dialogue: namely, the dialogue of life, the dialogue of deeds, the dialogue of specialists, and the dialogue of religious experience. Since these forms of dialogue are well known, I will not analyse them here.

The last section of the document explains the relationship between dialogue and mission. Let us focus on this relationship now.

### *C. Dialogue and Mission*

The document underlines that the relationships between dialogue and mission are varied. Yet, it limits itself to two aspects: mission and conversion; and dialogue for building God's reign. Let us examine these two important aspects succinctly.

#### Mission and Conversion

The document underscores that "According to the Second Vatican Council, missionary proclamation has conversion as its goal" (AG 13; CIC 787 no. 2) (DM 37). Then it mentions two types of conversions. The first is the return to God, or a spiritual transformation, within the same religion and the second is the change of religion (DM 37). It emphasises that "no one must be constrained to act against his[her] conscience, nor ought he[she] to be impeded in acting according to his[her] conscience, especially in religious matters (DH 3)" (DM 38). It stresses that "In the Christian view, the principal agent of conversion is not man, but the Holy Spirit" (DM 39). It further notes that in the course of dialogue, sharing one's faith with one's brother or sister of another religion and vice versa, is natural.

#### Dialogue for Building the Reign of God

DM affirms that persons in dialogue collaborate in God's plan (DM 41), which is to reconcile persons to Himself by the work of His Spirit. God has a loving plan for every nation (Acts 17: 26-27). "The Church therefore wants to work together with all in order to fulfil this plan and by doing so recognize the value of the infinite and varied wisdom of God and contribute to the evangelization of cultures (cf. ES 18-20)" (DM 41). In this sense, dialogue for the promotion of universal peace excludes no one. Instead, it includes both friends and enemies (cf.

DM 42). “Since God the Father is the origin and purpose of all mankind, we are all called to be brothers and sisters. Therefore, if we have been summoned to the same destiny, which is both human and divine, we can and should work together without violence and deceit in order to build up genuine peace in the world” (DM 42). This dialogue thus becomes a source of hope and a factor of communion in mutual transformation (DM 43). All are called to work to build God’s kingdom. Moreover, it is the Holy Spirit who directs the carrying out of God’s design of uniting His dispersed children as one (DM 43).

## 2. Reimagining *Dialogue and Mission*

We analysed above the content of the document DM. After 40 years, we now examine its relevance to our times. Interreligious dialogue is not an option but a necessity today. Pope Francis says that “We are not so much living in an epoch of change, but a change of epoch.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, global problems require global answers. Because, “No one is saved alone; we can only be saved together” (FT 32, 54, 137). The last Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (2022) made a fairly precise diagnosis of this crisis as follows:

We live in a world surrounded by contradictory forces: excessive riches and abject poverty, war and peace; forces of dividing and uniting, forces of wounding and healing, forces to protect our nature and to destroy it; forces that demonize migrants and forces that welcome them; forces to promote the family and to undermine it; forces that elevate women and girls and forces that discriminate against them; forces that promote global citizenship and multilateralism and forces that build ethno-religious nationalism; forces that foster dialogue and collaboration among followers of different religious traditions and those that spread religious fundamentalism, extremism and terrorism. We experience the globalization of disintegration and indifference, as well as hospitality, compassion and inclusion; we know those who work for peace education and those who promote violence through hate speech. Most disturbing, we see attempts to remove God from the world through materialistic philosophies and other means. Yet we also recognize persons and structures that remain open to the transcendent and to God.<sup>2</sup>

We are living in an era of paradigm shifts; Pope Francis tells us that “an authentic faith [...] always involves a deep desire to change the world” (EG 183).

<sup>1</sup> Address to the Fifth National Conference of the Italian Church, Florence, 10 November 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, “Post Plenary Assembly Report 2022,” <https://www.dicasteryinterreligious.va/did-publishes-plenary-assembly-report/>



Moreover, *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), *Laudate Deum* (4 October 2023), *Querida Amazonia* (2 February 2020), *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020) and the subsequent teachings of Pope Francis, seek to address social and environmental issues affecting all. In EG, Pope Francis notes that “The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him” (EG 264). He then adds the importance of the “periphery” and the poor and the marginalized. “Without the preferential option for the poor, ‘the proclamation of the Gospel,’ which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communication” (EG 199).

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis diagnoses the root cause for the ecological crisis: “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.” For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion (LS 217). To address this, he proposes transversal dialogue: Dialogue on the environment in the international community (LS164-175); Dialogue for new national and local policies (LS176-181); Dialogue and transparency in decision making (LS 182-188); Politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfilment (LS189-198); and Religion in dialogue with science (LS 199-20).

Likewise, *Fratelli tutti*, which is a social Encyclical (FT 6), deals with certain trends or dark clouds in our world that hinder the development of universal fraternity (FT 9-53). Despite these dark clouds, Pope Francis discusses many new paths of hope (FT 54). “Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all” (FT 8). To realize this, the Pope dreams of a missionary Church capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, times and schedules, languages and structures can be suitably channelled for evangelization of today’s world (cf. EG 27).

In this regard, for Pope Francis, dialogue signifies “Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word “dialogue” (FT 198). He also emphasizes that “If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue” (FT 198). Through dialogue, the Pope seeks to foster a culture of encounter. It “means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life. The subject of this culture is the people, not simply one part of society that would pacify the rest with the help of professional and media resources” (FT 216). Moreover, Pope Francis un-

derlines that interreligious dialogue is not a betrayal of our faith. “This has nothing to do with watering down or concealing our deepest convictions” (FT 282).

## **Conclusion**

The document DM bases its theology of mission on God who is love (John 4:8, 16) and whose saving love has been revealed and communicated to us in Christ and is present and active throughout the world by means of the Holy Spirit (cf. 9). It argues that “Dialogue is the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, [...]” (DM 29). In a time of a paradigm shift, Pope Francis proposes dialogue as an alternative social model to address *the* cry of the poor and the cry of the earth based on ‘soteriology of mercy’, or ‘revolution of tenderness’ which provides all with a common platform to foster a fraternal world. Accordingly, we can infer that ‘dialogue of mercy’ paves the way for ‘dialogue of action’ and ‘dialogue of action’ leads to ‘dialogue of hope’.

## *Theology of Mission and Dialogue in the Magisterium of Pope Francis*

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Dialogue is thus the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation . . . 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.<sup>1</sup>

These amazing lines from *Dialogue and Mission*—the document that this special issue of *Pro Dialogo* commemorates on its fortieth anniversary—sets the tone for this reflection on Pope Francis’s magisterium on mission and interreligious dialogue. DM was itself a commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI’s landmark encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*<sup>2</sup> in which dialogue was proposed as “the best of possible approaches” (ES 78) to the evangelization of the world of today. As we shall see in the pages that follow, Pope Paul’s and DM’s vision of dialogue has been enthusiastically taken up by Pope Francis, whose papacy has been marked not only by statements on the nature of dialogue, but also pervaded by a dialogical attitude in all he says and does. Several of Francis’s signature commitments—to the creation of a “culture of encounter,” his exhortations to universal brotherhood and sisterhood, and his efforts to renew the church with the practice of synodality—are rooted in his commitment to the practice of dialogue.<sup>3</sup>

In ES, Pope Paul indicated four “concentric circles” of dialogue—one that includes all of humanity, a second including all peoples of other faiths, a third of dialogue with other Christians, and a fourth of dialogue within the Catholic Church (ES 96-119). While acknowledging this broader understanding of dia-

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<sup>1</sup> Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (DM), <https://www.dicasteryearreligious.va/dialogue-and-mission-1984/>, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, Remarks on presenting DM, referring to Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (ES), [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_06081964\\_ecclesiam.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html).

<sup>3</sup> The research for this essay has been helped immensely by the wonderful collection of Francis’s words on interreligious dialogue offered on the website of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue: <https://www.dicasteryearreligious.va/holy-father/>. Citations from this collection will refer only to the place and date of Francis’s words.

logue, DM focuses on the second circle—the practice of *interreligious* dialogue, the focus of this essay.

DM recognizes that mission and interreligious dialogue are inextricably intertwined. Mission is indeed “a single but complex and articulated reality,” consisting of several aspects or elements. It is “constituted by the simple presence and living witness of Christian life,” working for justice, and participating in the church’s liturgical life and the practice of contemplation. “There is, as well, the dialogue in which Christians meet the followers of other religious traditions,” the proclamation of the gospel done in cultural sensitivity, and the deepening of Christian faith through catechesis. “The totality of Christian mission embraces all these elements” (DM 13), and all them overlap and interrelate with one another. Interreligious dialogue, therefore, is always connected to mission in DM’s wider sense.<sup>4</sup>

Francis’s magisterium on interreligious dialogue and mission is expressed in his (sometimes dramatic) actions as well as in his written and spoken words. A first section of our reflections will focus on some of these actions. A second will summarize his many teachings in his discourses and messages, and in his more formal writings.

### **Interreligious Dialogue in Action**

One of Francis’s most dramatic actions, expressing both his commitment to interreligious dialogue and its implications for mission, took place on Holy Thursday, 2013, when he washed the feet of two Muslim youths at the Casa del Marmo, a juvenile detention center on the outskirts of Rome. This was an action, just weeks after his election, that spoke volumes about the church’s outreach and inclusion not only of marginalized people like prisoners, but also of all faiths. Ten years later Francis celebrated the Mass of the Lord’s Supper once again at Casa del Marmo,

<sup>4</sup> In this reflection we will not include Francis’s teachings on *Jewish-Christian* dialogue. The reasons for this omission are found in the remarks in the document *The Gifts of God are Irrevocable*” *Romans 11:29*, published by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews within the (then) Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU) in 2015. It is fortuitous, the document states, that the statement is offered by the PCPU, “since the separation between Synagogue and Church may be viewed as the first and most far-reaching breach among the chosen people.” Indeed, Jewish-Christian dialogue is only interreligious dialogue by analogy. “Jews are instead our ‘elder brothers’ (Saint John Paul II), our ‘fathers in faith’ (Benedict XVI).” Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *God’s Calling and Gifts are Irrevocable, Roman 11:29*, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-cre/documenti-della-commissione/en.html>, 3.

and once more included a Muslim detainee in the powerful ritual symbolizing Jesus' life poured out in redeeming love and service.<sup>5</sup>

In 2014, Francis attended a ceremony at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in Rome to sign the *Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders against Modern Slavery*. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Walk Free Foundation, and the document was signed by Pope Francis, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, Dr. Machmoud Azab of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and Mr. Andrew Forrest, along with several other Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, and Orthodox leaders.<sup>6</sup> The declaration is a pledge to “do all in our power, within our faith communities and beyond, to work together for the freedom of all those who are enslaved and trafficked so that their future may be restored. Today we have the opportunity, awareness, wisdom, innovation and technology to achieve this human and moral imperative.”<sup>7</sup>

Popes John Paul II (in 1986 and 2002) and Benedict XVI (in 2011) both hosted leaders of the world's religions in historic meetings in Assisi, at which leaders of various religions prayed together in their own traditions for peace in the world. In September of 2016 Pope Francis did the same. In words that recalled the first three meetings in the city “where the memory of . . . St. Francis remains alive,” he noted that “without syncretism or relativism, we have . . . prayed side by side and for each other.” The prayers of the world's religious leaders were again for peace, but also for cooperation in the work of recognizing the sacredness of human life, and “for the care of creation, our common home.”<sup>8</sup>

In February, 2019, Francis traveled to the city of Abu Dhabi in the Persian Gulf state of the United Arab Emirates to meet with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Amad Al-Tayyeb. There both religious leaders signed *A Document for World Peace and Living Together*. It is, as it says in its introduction, “a document that invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in *human fraternity* to unite and work together that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture

<sup>5</sup> See “A decade later, pope returns to youth prison for Holy Thursday,” *Crux*, 6 April, 2023, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2023/04/a-decade-later-pope-returns-to-youth-prison-for-holy-thursday>.

<sup>6</sup> Program for the signing of the “Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders against Modern Slavery,” 2 December, 2014, [https://www.pass.va/content/dam/casinapioiv/pass/pdfbooklet/2014\\_booklet\\_declaration\\_religious\\_leaders.pdf](https://www.pass.va/content/dam/casinapioiv/pass/pdfbooklet/2014_booklet_declaration_religious_leaders.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Text of the Joint Declaration, [https://www.pas.va/en/events/2014/religious\\_leaders\\_slavery/final\\_statement.html](https://www.pas.va/en/events/2014/religious_leaders_slavery/final_statement.html).

<sup>8</sup> Address of Pope Francis, World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160920\\_assisi-preghiera-pace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/september/documents/papa-francesco_20160920_assisi-preghiera-pace.html).

of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.”<sup>9</sup> The document is a wide ranging call to people of all religions to avoid hate, to respect life—especially of children, the elderly, and the poor—to live in tolerance, and to bring the love of peace deep in all religions to a constant dialogue in service of the good of all humanity, and of all creation.

Francis’s journeys themselves are exercises in interreligious dialogue. He has travelled to many countries in which Christians are very small minorities and where religions like Islam, Buddhism, and traditional religions are widely practiced, among which are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kenya, Turkey, Albania, Jordan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Peru, Morocco, Mongolia, and Mauritius. In these countries he has met with leaders of these religions, and offered an appreciation of the local cultures and the religions practiced there, often taking local geography, artefacts, and poets to frame his discourses.<sup>10</sup>

### **Interreligious Dialogue in Pope Francis’s Writings and Discourses**

Each of these events, taking place over the course of Francis’s now decade-long papacy, capture much of Francis’s teaching about interreligious dialogue and how it is an integral part of the church’s mission. Each points to his deep commitment to human rights, peace, ecological integrity, and brotherhood/sisterhood that can only, in his understanding, can only be achieved in cooperation and dialogue. Each points to his deep respect for other peoples, cultures, and diverse faiths. And each points to his deep faith in human goodness, God’s love for all humankind, and for all created reality. Each offers dramatic witness to a conviction of the necessity of interreligious dialogue, a conviction that Francis expresses over and over again in his travels and in the numerous talks that he gives on those occasions, as well as in Rome. They offer dramatic witness as well to that conviction as it appears in the major teachings in his encyclicals and apostolic exhortations.

### **The Necessity of Dialogue**

Pope Francis emphasizes the *necessity* of interreligious dialogue over and over again in his writings, talks, and travels. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he speaks of interreligious dialogue “as a necessary condition for peace in the world,” and as a duty

<sup>9</sup> *A Document for World Peace and Living Together*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190204\\_documento-fratellanza-umana.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html).

<sup>10</sup> To cite a few of these: Azerbaijan, 2 October, 2016; Peru, 19 January, 2018; Morocco, 30 March, 2019, Kazakhstan, 13 September, 2022; Mongolia, 3 September, 2023.

both for Christians and other religious persons in the world.<sup>11</sup> In *Laudato Si'* Francis points out the necessity of dialogue among people of faith “to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity.”<sup>12</sup> In *Fratelli Tutti* he recognizes that the powerful statement on religious tolerance and human rights that was the result of his Abu-Dhabi meeting was “born of dialogue and common commitment,”<sup>13</sup> and a call to dialogue is one of document’s many calls for justice and peace, particularly on the occasion of his journeys to lands which are predominantly non-Christian. To cite only a few examples of this, he called for the practice of dialogue on his visit to Morocco: “In this land . . . I would like to affirm once more our need for cooperation in giving new impetus to the building of a world of greater solidarity, marked by honest, courageous and indispensable efforts to promote dialogue respectful of the richness and distinctiveness of each people and every individual.”<sup>14</sup> The same urgency of interreligious dialogue is expressed in talks in Bulgaria (2019), Mauritius (2019), Thailand (2019), Iraq (2021). In Kazakhstan in 2022, Francis remarked powerfully: “Interreligious dialogue is no longer merely something expedient; it is an urgent-needed and incomparable service to humanity, to the praise and glory of God.”<sup>15</sup>

## Dialogue and Peace

Early in his Pontificate, Francis reflected briefly on interreligious dialogue in his landmark Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG 250-254). He recognizes the hesitations that some Christians have, particularly in some areas of the world. Dialogue among religions is important, however, he says, “despite fundamentalisms on both sides” (EG 250). But it is a duty of Christians, essential to the church’s mission, because (as we pointed out above) “it is a necessary condition to peace in the world” (EG 250). Dialogue begins simply by learning “to accept oth-

<sup>11</sup> See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html#Interreligious\\_dialogue](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#Interreligious_dialogue), 250.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (LS), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html), 201.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (FT), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Meeting with the Moroccan People, the Authorities, Civil Society, and Diplomatic Corps, 30 March, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Address at the Conclusion of the Congress on World and Traditional Religions, 15 September, 2022.

ers and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking” (EG 250). From there Christians and people of other faith can move to working together for justice and peace in the world. We see here how Francis roots interreligious dialogue in what, from the earliest days of his pontificate, had called “the culture of encounter,” and would later speak in *Fratelli Tutti* of “social friendship.”<sup>16</sup>

Several days after the publication of EG, Francis addressed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at its 2013 Plenary Assembly. Here he emphasizes how the practice of interreligious dialogue can counter the impression that religions only kindle hatred and violence, and so religious convictions should not enter into relations between peoples. “It is widely thought that coexistence is only possible by hiding one’s own religious affiliation, by meeting in a kind of neutral space, devoid of references to transcendence.” Actually, however, the opposite is true. The future lies in living together in appreciation of people’s diversity, not in a “homologation to a single theoretical neutral way of thought.”<sup>17</sup> The simple witness, in other words, of working towards an honest, peaceful coexistence is, on the part of Christians, participation in the church’s mission.

This emphasis on dialogue for the maintenance and creation of peace appears several other times in Francis’s writings and in discourses as he travels throughout the world. It is noted in FT 281, 284, and 285, in his call for dialogue between Jews and Muslims on his arrival in Israel in 2014, and at an interreligious congress in Kazakhstan in 2022. Referring to his trip to Bahrain, also in 2022, Francis spoke of dialogue as the “oxygen of peace.”<sup>18</sup>

## **Dialogue and Religious Identity**

In EG, Francis speaks of the connection between dialogue and the proclamation of the gospel. When Christians enter into dialogue with another religious person, they do not give up their identity, or water down their doctrinal or moral convictions. Rather, “true openness involves remaining steadfast in one’s deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one’s identity” (EG 251). Reducing differences to a false sense of unity, Francis says, is actually depriving other religions of their own

<sup>16</sup> On the culture of encounter, see Diego Fares, SJ, *The Heart of Pope Francis: How a New Culture of Encounter is Changing the Church and the World* (New York: Crossroad, 2015); in FT, see esp. 198-224.

<sup>17</sup> Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 28 November, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Greeting to members of the Israeli government, 25 May, 2014; Address at the Conclusion of the Congress of World and Traditional Religions in Kazakhstan, 15 September, 2022; General Audience in Rome, 9 November, 2022.



integrity and the gifts they bring to the table. Because of this, “Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another” (EG 251).

The first part of his short address to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue referred to above repeats what he had written in EG. He emphasizes once again the importance of maintaining one’s religious identity in dialogue, and points to how such faithful dialogue can issue in deeper relationships on both sides, as well as mutual enrichment and witness to one another. Christians do not seek to impose anything, Francis insists. They do not “use any underhanded strategy to attract the faithful, but witness to joy and simplicity to what we believe and who we are.”<sup>19</sup> Anything else would be inauthentic and not result in the friendship that we seek to develop in dialogue.

Such an emphasis on the integrity of one’s identity in dialogue is expressed in FT 282, on his trip to Albania in 2014, and to Sarajevo in 2015. What Francis said in Albania is particularly striking: “Every one of us offers the witness of our identity to others and engages in dialogue with others. Then dialogue can move onto theological questions. But even more important and beautiful is to walk together without betraying our identity, without disguising it, without hypocrisy.”<sup>20</sup>

## **Dialogue and the Making of a Better World**

In LS, Francis emphasizes the importance of interreligious dialogue for the making of a better world. Since “the majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers,” religious people the world over should be spurred “to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity” (201). This needs to be in the context as well of a dialogue both among the sciences and the various ecological movements. “The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity . . . (201).

In his opening address to the Congress of World and Traditional Religions in Kazakhstan, Francis speaks of four challenges in the world today that can be met by engagement in interreligious dialogue, especially when religions work together and seek friendship among one another. First, religions need to work to ensure

<sup>19</sup> Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Religious Dialogue, 28 November, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Meeting with Leaders of Other Religions and Other Religious Leaders, Albania, 21 September, 2014; Interreligious and Ecumenical Meeting, 6 June, 2015.

solidarity among all the peoples of the world, and to help peoples recognize their human limits in the face of constant economic expansion. Second, as already noted above, there is the challenge of world peace. Francis asks urgently “how can we imagine the men and women of our time . . . can be inspired to engage in respectful and responsible dialogue if the great religions . . . are not actively committed to peace?”<sup>21</sup> A third challenge is to call nations to real concern for the suffering of humanity. Francis insists that “it is above all our task, the task of the religions, to remind the world of this.”<sup>22</sup> Finally, Francis says, there is the challenge of caring for our common home, planet earth. As religious people and leaders, how can we claim to serve God and allow God’s earth “to be polluted, mistreated, and devastated?”<sup>23</sup>

### Dialogue and Inculturation

In his *Motu Proprio* of 1 November, 2023, *Ad Theologiam Promovendam*, Francis calls for the development of a theology that is “fundamentally contextual,” rooted in the theology of the Incarnation. What this means, he writes, is that “theology cannot but be developed within a *culture of dialogue* and in an encounter between various traditions and forms of knowledge, and between diverse Christian confessions and diverse religions, engaging openly with all, believers and nonbelievers.”<sup>24</sup>

Francis had already given a wonderful example of this openness in his Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, written in response to the 2019 Pan-Amazonian Synod. In what may be an answer to harsh critics of the ceremonies led by indigenous peoples at the Synod, Francis defends Amazonian practices of popular religion, cautioning that other Catholics should not simply judge them to be “superstition or paganism.” They are rather, he says, “religious practices that arise spontaneously from the life of peoples.” While they may seem strange to us, the pope suggests that if we know how to distinguish the wheat from the weeds (referring to Jesus’ parable in Matt 13:24-30) we will “see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Address at the Opening of the Congress on World and Traditional Religions, 14 September, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Address at the Opening of the Congress . . .

<sup>23</sup> Address to the Opening of the Congress . . .

<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis, *Motu Proprio Ad Theologiam Promovendam*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu\\_proprio/documents/20231101-motu-proprio-ad-theologiam-promovendam.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu_proprio/documents/20231101-motu-proprio-ad-theologiam-promovendam.html), 4. My translation.

<sup>25</sup> Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia* (QA), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/>

Francis continues this line of thought in the following paragraph. “It is possible,” he says, “to take up an indigenous symbol in some way, without necessarily considering it as idolatry. A myth charged with spiritual meaning can be used to advantage and not always considered a pagan error.” Certainly, he says, such symbols and myths need gradual “purification and maturation,” but, as it were, they can exist side by side with Christian symbols, myths, and stories. The true missionary and pastoral worker will see that these expressions of indigenous religiosity and spirituality address real needs, even they are “at times imperfect, partial or mistaken religious expressions.”<sup>26</sup> Interreligious dialogue and inculturation can be, many times, interrelated in the church’s missionary efforts to preach the gospel in ways that prove that Christianity can never be “monocultural and monotonous” (EG 117).

## Conclusion

At the beginning of FT, as well as several other places in his teachings,<sup>27</sup> Francis refers to St. Francis of Assisi and his meeting with Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in Egypt. Here he connects St. Francis with both interreligious dialogue and mission. St. Francis “went to meet the Sultan with the same attitude that he instilled in his disciples: if they found themselves “among the Saracens and other nonbelievers,” without renouncing their own identity they were not to “engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake” (FT 3). St. Francis “did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God” (FT 4). In *these* words, Pope Francis captures the essence of mission. They are also words, I believe, that capture the essence of his teaching on mission and interreligious dialogue.

apost\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\_esortazione-ap\_20200202\_querida-amazonia.html.  
78.

<sup>26</sup> Pope Francis, QA, 79.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. in Egypt, 28 April, 2017; in Bahrain, 4 November 2022.

## *Faithful to Oneself and Others: The Spirituality of Dialogue and Mission*

DR. PIM VALKENBERG\*

In this contribution to the special issue of *Pro Dialogo* on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the document “Dialogue and Mission,” I want to reflect about the spirituality that is suggested by the document, more specifically by the combination of two words, “dialogue” and “mission,” that are often seen as representative of contrary, almost contradictory attitudes. I will start with an analysis of a passage from the document that I consider as a key passage to uncover the spirituality behind the combination of “dialogue” and “mission.” Next, I will elaborate a bit on a historical example of such a spirituality that is mentioned in the document, namely the encounter between Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik al-Kamil in Damietta, Egypt, in 1219. Finally, I will indicate how Pope Francis uses this example in his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.

The document that is usually known by the shortened name “dialogue and mission” has in fact a much longer title: “The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission.”<sup>1</sup>

The document begins with an important remark on the notion of ‘dialogue’: it “means not only discussion, but includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment” (2). This recalls Raimon Panikkar’s distinction between a ‘dialectical dialogue’ that remains within the orbit of logical reasoning, and a ‘dialogical dialogue’ that envisages a spiritual encounter behind the words.<sup>2</sup> In order to understand the spirituality of dialogue, the words “mutual understanding and enrichment” are essential. In a superficial reading, these words might seem to be in tension with the notion of evangelization that is, just

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<sup>1</sup> I have accessed the document on February 20, 2024 at [www.dicasteryinterreligious.va/dialogue-and-mission-1984/](http://www.dicasteryinterreligious.va/dialogue-and-mission-1984/). A printed version (with different headings for the paragraphs) may be found in *Interreligious Dialogue: the Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)*, edited by Francesco Gioia (Boston MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 1116-29. I refer to the document by paragraph numbers, and refrain from correcting the gender references to “man” and “his” in the document.

<sup>2</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*. Revised edition (New York - Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 28.

like dialogue, part of the Church's mission (7). Yet, in focusing on the so-called dialogue of experts, the document characterizes this as a type of encounter where "the partners come to a mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's spiritual values and cultural categories," and it adds that "[i]n this manner Christians can also work together for the evangelical transformation of cultures." (34) The same characteristic is used for the dialogue of religious experience where "persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute. This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals" of human beings. It "leads naturally to each partner communicating to the other the reasons for their own faith." (35) The way in which the incentive to mission is integrated in this dialogue is that Christians normally nourish in their hearts the desire of sharing their experience of Christ with their dialogue partners (40). Yet again, mutuality is key here: Christians normally expect others to share their faith as well. The strongest text on dialogue toward the end of the document speaks even of it as a "source of hope and a factor of communion in mutual transformation" (43), which seems to include the possibility for change guided by the Holy Spirit.

This relatedness of dialogue and mission can be seen as a red thread in the documents of the Roman Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council where a similar relation is emphasized.<sup>3</sup> In *Nostra Aetate*, for instance, the Church professes to have a high regard for the practices and doctrines of other faiths, while at the same time proclaiming that it is Christ through whom human beings find the fullness of their religious lives.<sup>4</sup> For many Catholics who work in the field of interreligious relations, this is a very frequent experience: your dialogue partner wants to know why you are interested in her or his faith, and therefore you bear witness about your own faith. Serious interreligious dialogue therefore brings with it elements of apologetics or witness of your own faith which at times can even contain elements of polemics.<sup>5</sup> The same close relationship between mission and dialogue can be found in the activities of religious orders such as the Franciscans

<sup>3</sup> See also William Cenkner, "Mission and/or Dialogue: A Roman Catholic Perspective," *Budhist-Christian Studies* 17 (1997), 130-139.

<sup>4</sup> *Nostra Aetate* 2. Similar words can be found in *Lumen Gentium* 16. For texts, see *Interreligious Dialogue*, nos. 5 and 23.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Polemical Dialogue. Research into Dialogue, Truth, and Truthfulness*, edited by W.G.B.M. Valkenberg and F.J.S. Wijzen. Nijmegen Studies in Development and Cultural Change, 24. Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik, 1997.

and the Dominicans.<sup>6</sup> The element that the document on *Dialogue and Mission* adds to this long-standing tradition, is the suggestion of mutuality.<sup>7</sup> Christians should be ready to give witness of the faith and the hope that is within them (I Peter 3:15), but they should also be ready to listen to the witness that others give of their faith. In what way this can be done will depend on the specific circumstances, including the history of Christian witness and mission in situations determined by Christian dominance. In that sense, mutual witness can be easier between traditions that both have a history of missionary claims, such as Christianity and Islam, than with traditions that have mainly been at the receiving end of Christian missionary history, as quite a few Jewish and Hindu dialogue partners have told me. Even though both witnessing and listening are necessary for a spirituality of mission and dialogue, the right order is important: first comes listening, next comes witnessing if the situation makes that possible. This is exactly the lesson that Saint Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) conveyed when he wrote about the situation of brothers going “to the lands of the Saracens.”<sup>8</sup> The text is quoted in *Dialogue and Mission* 17 as well: “The friars who ‘through divine inspiration would desire to go among the Muslims ... can establish spiritual contact with them (Muslims) in two ways: a way which does not raise arguments and disputes, but rather they should be subject to every human creature for the lover of God and confess themselves to be Christians. The other way is that when they see that it would be pleasing to the Lord, they should announce the word of God.’” The text seems to suggest that the first way, mission by presence, is the usual way to start, while the second way, mission by proclamation, can only be followed if God gives the opportunity to do so. The second example mentioned in *Dialogue and Mission* 17 also favours the mission by presence in the case of Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916), “who carried out mission in a humble and silent attitude of union with God, in communion with the poor, and in universal brotherhood.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For the Dominicans, see *Huit siècles de mission et de dialogue interreligieux dans l'ordre des Prêcheurs*, sous la direction de Mariano Delgado et Bernard Hodel. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Dupuis points out, in his book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1997) on page 165 that the suggestion of mutuality can be found in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* by Pope John Paul II (1990).

<sup>8</sup> This is the superscript of chapter 16 in the *Rule of 1221* or the *Regula non bullata* (rule without a papal seal). English translation in: *The Saint. Volume I of Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., J.A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M.Conv., William J. Short, O.F.M. New York: New City Press, 1999, 63-86.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of Charles de Foucauld's witness, together with similar Catholic voices in dialogue with Islam, see Christian Salenson, *Témoins de l'à-venir: Charles de Foucauld, Louis Massignon, Christian de Chergé*. Marseille: Publications Chemins de Dialogue, 2021.

It is remarkable that Pope Francis mentioned the same two models of the spirituality of dialogue and mission at the beginning and at the end of his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, given in Assisi on October 3, 2020.<sup>10</sup> Place and date of this encyclical clearly suggests that pope Francis takes saint Francis as his major source of inspiration, as did Pope John Paul II when he organized the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986. The choice of Assisi instead of Rome suggests that dialogue should begin at a place of humility and spirituality, not at the center of ecclesial power. At the beginning of the encyclical, Pope Francis connects the theory of missionary presence in the Rule of 1221 with the practice of Francis going to meet the Sultan in Damietta in 1219: “Francis went to meet the Sultan with the same attitude that he instilled in his disciples: if they found themselves ‘among the Saracens and other nonbelievers’, without renouncing their own identity they were not to ‘engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake.” (FT 3). At the end, Pope Francis comes back to the inspiration, not only of Saint Francis, but also of Charles de Foucauld whom he declared a saint in 2022. He describes him as a “person of deep faith who, drawing upon his intense experience of God, made a journey of transformation towards feeling a brother of all” (FT 286). The faith of Charles de Foucauld is characterized as “an ideal of total surrender to God towards an identification with the poor, abandoned in the depths of the African desert.” (FT 287).

The most important aspects for a spirituality of dialogue and mission that I gathered from these models are: silence, submission, devotion to the poor, humility, based on an intense experience of faith with God, and giving witness when God gives the occasion. This requires a combination of virtues that have often been mentioned by Christians engaged in interreligious dialogue: commitment and openness.<sup>11</sup> While commitment to our own religious background is required for any meaningful engagement in the field of mission-oriented dialogue, it is nourished through the mutuality of dialogue in which we learn more about the other, ourselves, and our relationship with God. But the mutuality can only really take shape if we approach the other with the attitude of openness. The Catholic theological tradition gives us some excellent models of this attitude of openness, com-

<sup>10</sup> The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* is quoted according to the English translation on the Vatican website [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). I made similar remarks in my introduction to a thematic issue on Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, and Comparative Theology in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 32 (2022) 1-6.

<sup>11</sup> See Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 378-381. Also, Eewout Klootwijk, *Commitment and Openness: The Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions in the Work of Stanley J. Samartha* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1992), and Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroads / Herder & Herder, 2008).

ing from persons who are called saints in the Catholic tradition, or friends of God in the Islamic tradition. Francis of Assisi has already been mentioned, but I want to point out a stunning instance of this spiritual openness, as related by Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Acre, who was present in the camp of the crusaders when Francis arrived there to meet the Sultan at Damietta in 1219. In a letter written shortly afterwards, he writes: “The head of these brothers, who also founded the Order, came into our camp. He was so inflamed with zeal for the faith that he did not fear to cross the lines to the army of our enemy. For several days he preached the Word of God to the Saracens and made little progress. The Sultan, king of Egypt, privately asked him to pray to the Lord for him, so that he might be inspired by God to adhere to that religion which most pleased God.”<sup>12</sup> One can imagine, even if the report by Jacques de Vitry does not mention it, that they both asked each another to pray in their own way to God so that God might guide them on the way that most pleased God. This is how the event has been interpreted by Franciscans and others as a model of interreligious friendship.<sup>13</sup>

Mutual prayer or the kiss of peace may be an ideal conclusion to an interreligious dialogue, but it begins with a spiritual preparedness to open oneself to another religious tradition. In this respect, a Christian spirituality of dialogue and mission can take its point of departure from an ancient Christian practice that Saint Augustine (354-430) calls the “rule of love”. In his book on Christian teaching, he says, “if it seems to you that you have understood the divine scriptures ... in such a way that you do not build up this twin love of God and neighbour, then you have not yet understood them.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, any right interpretation of Scripture should us bring closer in love to God and to our religious neighbour. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) adapted such a rule in his introductory remarks to a book about the differences between Western and Eastern traditions in Christian theology. He was aware that the Greek fathers of the Church sometimes expressed themselves in ways that would be unfamiliar to later theologians of the Latin tradition, yet he told his readers that they should proceed faithfully when explaining their sayings. Ecumenical relationships require that we presume that our partners speak in faith,

<sup>12</sup> English translation in John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian – Muslim Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Paul Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan* (New York: Doubleday, 2009); George Dardess and Marvin L. Krier Mich, *In the Spirit of Saint Francis and the Sultan* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis books, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Saint Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1996), book I chapter 40.



and therefore we should explain them faithfully.<sup>15</sup> The German Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa (1401-1464) tried to extend the same rule of *pia interpretatio* or “faithful interpretation” to the Qur’ān in his *Cribratio alkorani* or Sifting of the Qur’ān.<sup>16</sup> In the eyes of those who only see the element of faithfulness as openness to the other religious texts and traditions, such approaches must in the end be disappointing because they might not go far enough. But if faithfulness is seen as a principle that includes commitment to one’s own tradition as well, it may connect both elements of a spirituality of dialogue and mission.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, prologue to *Contra Errores Graecorum*. Aquinas uses expressions such as *reverenter* and *pia exponere*. See W.G.B.M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 18.

<sup>16</sup> See Wilhelmus G.B.M. Valkenberg, “A Faithful Christian Interpretation of Islam,” in: *Faithful Interpretations: Truth and Islam in Catholic Theology of Religions*, edited by Philip Geister, S.J., and Gösta Hallonsten. Foreword by Archbishop J. Augustine DiNoia, O.P. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 165-182, with further references in the footnotes.

<sup>17</sup> See Pim Valkenberg, “The Missionary Purpose of the *Cribratio Alkorani*,” *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval* 26 (2019) 15-28.

## *Mission und Dialog- Reflexionen aus Deutschland*

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Mission ist der ureigene Auftrag der Kirche. Den christlichen Glauben über alle ethnischen, religiösen und kulturellen Grenzen hinweg zu verkünden und so die erlösende Kraft von Gottes Liebe und Barmherzigkeit zu bezeugen, die in Leben, Tod und Auferstehung Jesu sichtbar und erfahrbar wurde, das ist der Kern von Mission. In diesem Sinne ist Mission sowohl fest biblisch verankert als auch kontinuierlich in der gesamten Geschichte des Christentums immer wieder neu in persönlichen, gemeinschaftlichen und institutionellen Formen gelebt worden. Das Bemühen um die aktive Weitergabe des christlichen Glaubens wird nicht nur im Missionsbegriff reflektiert, sondern kommt - mit je eigener Akzentuierung - auch in Begriffen wie Evangelisierung, Verkündigung und Zeugnis zum Ausdruck. Der interreligiöse Dialog wiederum wird teils als gegenläufig, teils als Komplement zum kirchlichen Missionsauftrag verstanden. Je mehr die Kirche sich für den Dialog mit anderen Religionen öffnet und in ihnen auch Strahlen der Wahrheit<sup>2</sup> erkennt,<sup>1</sup> desto wichtiger wird die Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen Mission und Dialog.

### **Mission und Dialog in vatikanischen Dokumenten**

„Die Kirche macht sich selbst zum Wort, zur Botschaft, zum Dialog.“<sup>2</sup> Auf diese Formel hat Papst Paul VI. in seiner Antrittszyklika *Ecclesiam Suam* den dialogischen Charakter der Kirche gebracht. Ausgehend vom Gespräch zwischen Gott und seinen Geschöpfen, entwarf Paul VI. das Bild einer Kirche, die sich durch vielfältige Dialogformen auszeichnet, darunter auch der Dialog mit Anhängern anderer Religionen (vgl. *ES* 111). Der dabei zugrundeliegende Dialogbegriff geht von einem inneren Zusammenhang zwischen Dialog und Mission aus, ohne dass beide gleichgesetzt werden: „Die Pflicht, die dem von Christus erhaltenen Erbe einzig und ganz entspricht, ist die Verbreitung, Anbiederung und Verkündigung [...]. Diesem inneren Antrieb der Liebe, die danach strebt, sich zur äußeren

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<sup>1</sup> Vgl. *Nostra aetate* Nr. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Papst Paul VI., Enzyklika *Ecclesiam Suam* (*ES*), Nr. 67; in der lateinischen Fassung ist nicht von *dialogus*, sondern von *colloquium* die Rede, im italienischen werden *dialogo* und *colloquio* verwendet.

Gabe der Liebe zu machen, wollen Wir den heute allgemein gewordenen Namen ‚Dialog‘ geben.“ (ES 66).

Zwanzig Jahre später veröffentlichte das vatikanische Sekretariat für die Nichtchristen (der Vorläufer des heutigen Dikasteriums für den Interreligiösen Dialog) einige grundlegende ‚Gedanken und Weisungen über Dialog und Mission‘.<sup>3</sup> Bemerkenswert ist hier unter anderem der Verweis auf die Reziprozität: Ebenso wie der Christ im interreligiösen Dialog ‚seine Christuserfahrung mit dem Brüder aus der anderen Religion‘ teilen will, wünscht auch ‚der Andersgläubige etwas ähnliches.‘<sup>4</sup> Die grundsätzliche gegenseitige Missionsbereitschaft ist eine Erfahrung, die vor allem für den christlich-muslimischen Dialog prägend ist. Da beide Religionen über ein hohes Sendungsbewusstsein verfügen, stellt sich nicht nur für Christen, sondern auch für Muslime die Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen Dialog und Mission.<sup>5</sup>

In seiner Enzyklika *Redemptoris Missio: Über die fortdauernde Gültigkeit des missionarischen Auftrages* hat Papst Johannes Paul II. dargelegt, dass Dialog „eine besondere Bindung“ zur Mission hat und sogar Ausdruck davon“ ist (vgl. RM 55). Zugleich hat er jedoch klargestellt, dass der interreligiöse Dialog nicht einfach Mittel zum Zweck sein darf: Der Dialog entsteht nicht aus Taktik oder Eigeninteresse, sondern hat Gründe, Erfordernisse und Würde eigener Art. Er kommt aus dem tiefen Respekt vor allem, was der Geist, der weht, wo er will, im Menschen bewirkt hat.“ (RM 56) Für das Verhältnis zwischen der Achtung vor der menschlichen Gewissensfreiheit und der Notwendigkeit der Mission prägte Johannes Paul II. den Satz: „Die Kirche schlägt vor, sie drängt nichts auf.“ (RM 39)

## Die Missionsworte der deutschen Bischöfe 2004 und 2019

Daran anknüpfend haben die deutschen Bischöfe 2004 in ihrem Wort *Allen Völkern Sein Heil* darauf aufmerksam gemacht, dass Religionsfreiheit den missio-

<sup>3</sup> Üblicherweise wird das 1984 veröffentlichte Dokument mit dem Kurztitel „Dialog und Mission“ bezeichnet.

<sup>4</sup> *Secretariatus pro non christianis* (Hg.), *Die Haltung der Kirche gegenüber den Anhängern anderer Religionen*

- *Gedanken und Weisungen über Dialog und Mission*, Vatikanstadt 1984, Nr. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Vgl. hierzu Detlef Görrig, Seyed Abbas Hosseini Ghaemmaghami, „Den Glauben bezeugen: Zum Verhältnis von Dialog und Mission“, in *Handbuch Christlich-Islamischer Dialog*, aktualisierte Fassung 2023; und Christian Troll, „Mission und Dialog im Kontext der christlich-muslimischen Begegnung“, in Klaus Kramer/Klaus Vellguth (Hg.), *Mission und Dialog. Ansätze für ein kommunikatives Missions-Verständnis*, Freiburg: Herder 2012, S. 92-106.

narischen Auftrag nicht etwa einschränkt, sondern diesen erst ermöglicht.<sup>6</sup> Denn Mission spricht den Menschen als „Wesen der Freiheit“ an und darf daher nicht unter den Vorzeichen von Repression und Gewalt erfolgen. Diese Überlegungen wurden 2019 im Wort *Evangelisierung und Globalisierung* fortgeschrieben. Dabei haben die deutschen Bischöfe Säkularisierung und Pluralisierung als zwei Grundbedingungen ausgemacht, die bei der Reflexion über Mission und Dialog heute zu beachten sind. Zur Aktualität des christlichen Missionsauftrags unter sich ändernden Rahmenbedingungen wurde festgehalten: „Die Grenzen zu den anderen hin zu überschreiten und ihnen respektvoll das Evangelium Jesu Christi in Wort und Tat, bisweilen auch schweigend zu bezeugen, bleibt dringlich wie eh und je.“<sup>7</sup> In beiden Missionsworten fand auch eine Auseinandersetzung mit den Schattenseiten der Missionsgeschichte statt, die nach wie vor im Hintergrund mancher Kritik am Missionsbegriff stehen. Zudem haben beide Dokumente die Bedeutung des interreligiösen Dialogs als Teil des kirchlichen Evangelisierungsauftrags unterstrichen.

### **Zur Kritik am Missionsbegriff**

Die differenzierten theologischen Reflexionen des kirchlichen Missionsverständnisses haben - in Deutschland und andernorts - kaum zu einer größeren Akzeptanz des Begriffs geführt. Die Kritik richtet sich dabei auf konkrete Elemente, die mit dem Missionsbegriff verbunden werden: So wird Mission mit einer konfrontativen Haltung identifiziert, die einem Individuum nicht suchend und argumentativ, sondern wahrheitsgewiss und liberierend gegenübertritt. Ebenso wird Mission mit strategischen Überlegungen verbunden, die den Religionswechsel des Anderen zum Ziel haben und dabei Machtasymmetrien ausnutzen oder sogar bewusst herstellen. Hinter Erwartungen wie Befürchtungen steht oft ein dualistisches Weltbild, eine Privilegierung von Gruppen Zugehörigkeit vor individuellen Glaubenswegen und ein Bild von religiösem Erfolg als quantitativer Mitgliedersteigerung. Mission steht im Verdacht, die Gleichwertigkeit, Bedeutung, vielleicht sogar das Existenzrecht der anderen Religion zu bestreiten. Insofern stellt Mission auch in den christlich-islamischen Beziehungen ein Konfliktfeld dar. Missionarische Aktivitäten und Interesse am Dialog scheinen sich in dieser Perspektive zu widersprechen.

<sup>6</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Hg.): *Allen Völkern Sein Heil: Die Mission der Weltkirche*. Die deutschen Bischöfe Nr. 76, Bonn 2004, S. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Hg.): *Evangelisierung und Globalisierung*. Die deutschen Bischöfe Nr. 106, Bonn 2019, S. 26.

## Zum inneren Wert der christlichen Mission

Angesichts der kritischen Anfragen ist festzuhalten, was unabhängig von den unterschiedlichen Formen und Verständnissen den inneren Wert der christlichen Mission ausmacht. Zu nennen ist erstens der universelle und grenzüberschreitende Charakter der christlichen Botschaft. Mission ist durch die Geschichte hindurch mit dem Verlassen von Heimat und Hergebrachtem so wie Aufbrüchen in das bisher Unbekannte verbunden. Das Evangelium ist an keinen Ort festgebunden, mit keiner Kultur identisch. Bei tiefem Respekt vor kultureller und religiöser Vielfalt hält der christliche Glaube deshalb an der Universalität seiner Botschaft fest und tritt der Behauptung von unüberbrückbarer kultureller oder ethnischer Unterschiedlichkeit entgegen. Zweitens ist die Orientierung am Anderen zu nennen. Christlicher Glaube ist extrovertiert und auf die Note und Entwicklungschancen der anderen Menschen bezogen. Mission ist deswegen im Kern diakonisch und selbstlos. Nimmt man die Orientierung am anderen ernst, so ist Mission stets mit einer gewissen Absichtslosigkeit verbunden, die jeglichem Streben nach Hegemonie und Vorherrschaft entgegensteht. Drittens ist das dynamische Menschenbild einer ansprechbaren, sich verändernden und entscheidungsfähigen Person zu nennen. Mission geht mit persönlichen Lebensentscheidungen, Umbrüchen und neuen Ausrichtungen einher. Sie bejaht die Bedeutung des individuellen Glaubens für das Verständnis von Religion. Deswegen gehört die Möglichkeit zur Konversion zum christlichen Menschenbild hinzu. Zugleich wird deutlich, dass diese nur in Freiheit und religiöser Selbstbestimmung geschehen darf. Deswegen sind viertens Mission und der Einsatz für Religionsfreiheit eng miteinander verknüpft. Um die strategische Ausnutzung asymmetrischer Machtverhältnisse zu vermeiden, die die Echtheit der Glaubensüberzeugung beschädigen würde, beinhaltet die Religionsfreiheit auch den Einsatz für die Freiheit der anderen Religionen.<sup>8</sup> Mission setzt auf diese Weise die Pluralität der Religionen voraus und steht vor der Aufgabe, das missionarische Verständnis mit einer positiven Haltung zur religiösen Vielfalt zu vereinbaren. Diese vier Elemente des inneren Wertes von Mission Universalität, selbstlose Orientierung am Anderen, Ausrichtung an der entscheidungsfähigen individuellen Person und Einsatz für umfassende Religionsfreiheit - können auch dazu dienen, widerstreitende Missionsverständnisse einer kritischen Bewertung zu unterziehen.

<sup>8</sup> Vgl. dazu auch das Gemeinsame Schlusswort zum 3. *Gkumenischen Bericht zur Religionsfreiheit*: „Indem die Kirchen für die Religionsfreiheit eintreten, handeln sie nicht *pro domo* [...]. In der Logik universaler Freiheitsrechte gilt ihr Einsatz der Religions- und Weltanschauungsfreiheit *alter* Menschen.“ Gemeinsame Texte der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland Nr. 28, Bonn-Hannover 2023, S. 170.

## Mission und Dialog- eine produktive Spannung

Papst Franziskus hat es in *Evangelii Gaudium* auf den Punkt gebracht: „Die Evangelisierung und der interreligiöse Dialog sind weit davon entfernt, einander entgegengesetzt zu sein, viel mehr unterstützen und nähren sie einander.“ (EG 251) Mission und Dialog sind demnach nicht als Gegensatzpaar zu begreifen. Es bleibt jedoch eine theologische Spannung, die es auszuhalten gilt: zwischen der universalen Bedeutung des christlichen Glaubens sowie der individuellen Ansprechbarkeit auf der einen Seite und der ernsthaften Lernbereitschaft, die den Wert der anderen Religion auch für den eigenen Glauben erkennt und würdigt, auf der anderen Seite.<sup>9</sup> In gewisser Weise kann man von einem grundlegenden Paradoxon sprechen: Einerseits wünschen sich die christlich Glaubenden für die Anderen eine tiefe Erkenntnis Jesu Christi, die ihre ganze Existenz beansprucht. Andererseits hat die Andersheit der Andersgläubigen auch ihre Bedeutung für die tiefere Erkenntnis des christlichen Glaubens, ja, des göttlichen Willens für seine Schöpfung und Geschöpfe. Demnach lässt sich die Spannung von Mission und Dialog letztlich nicht vollends auflösen. Mission impliziert kein unaufrichtiges oder taktisches Verständnis des Dialogs und ist auch kein Ausdruck mangelnder Wertschätzung des Andersgläubigen. Ernsthaftes dialogisches Engagement wiederum ist kein Ausdruck eines halbherzigen Bekenntnisses zu Christus, ganz im Gegenteil.

<sup>9</sup> Vgl. hierzu Tobias Specker, „Nicht ohne die Anderen: Anerkennung der Anderen und Einheit in Christus - zum Verhältnis von Mission und Dialog“, in Mariano Delgado / Margit Eckholt / Klaus Vellguth (Hg.), *Evangelisierung und Geschwisterlichkeit in der pluralen Welt. Festschrift 400 Jahre Propaganda fide*. Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft, Sonderband 106. Jahrgang 2022, S. 232-241.

## Nuovi orientamenti missionari in *Praedicate Evangelium*:

S. E. MONS. MARCO MELLINO\*

Il titolo della Costituzione apostolica - *Praedicate Evangelium* (tratto dal versetto di *Mc* 16,15: il mandato affidato dal Risorto ai suoi discepoli) - è indicativo della prospettiva nella quale Papa Francesco ha inteso operare il riordino dell'assetto della Curia Romana, volto a promuoverne il servizio a favore dell'evangelizzazione ed operarne la conversione missionaria<sup>1</sup>. Al n. 3 del *Preambolo* è detto chiaramente che la riforma della Curia Romana deve essere intesa nel contesto della missionarietà della Chiesa e che “*questa nuova Costituzione apostolica si propone di meglio armonizzare l'esercizio odierno del servizio della Curia col cammino di evangelizzazione, che la Chiesa, soprattutto in questa stagione, sta vivendo*”.

San Paolo VI ha affermato che “*evangelizzare è la grazia e la vocazione propria della Chiesa, la sua identità più profonda. Essa esiste per evangelizzare*”<sup>2</sup>. Da ciò ne segue che la dimensione missionaria deve essere capace di trasformare ogni struttura ecclesiale. Lo stesso Papa Francesco ha affermato: “*La riforma delle strutture, che esige la conversione pastorale, si può intendere solo in questo senso: fare in modo che esse diventino tutte più missionarie*”<sup>3</sup>; diversamente la riforma sarebbe solamente una riorganizzazione dell'impianto funzionale ecclesiastico<sup>4</sup>. Ribadisce il Santo Padre: “*La missionarietà è ciò che rende, e mostra, la Curia fertile e feconda; è la prova dell'efficacia, dell'efficienza e dell'autenticità del nostro operare*”<sup>5</sup>.

Atteso, dunque, che la missionarietà è l'asse portante che struttura il testo della Costituzione apostolica in parola, ciò rende ragione della creazione del Dicastero per l'Evangelizzazione e l'ordine di posizione assegnatogli nel Titolo V riguardante i Dicasteri. A scanso di equivoci, è bene precisare che tutti i Dicasteri godono di pari dignità giuridica<sup>6</sup> e che tutti esercitano potestà di giurisdizione, pertanto l'ordine del loro posto nell'elenco non ha di per sé alcun valore giuridico, ma - almeno

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Curia Romana*, 21 dicembre 2019, in *AAS* 112 (2020), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> PAOLO VI, Esortazione apostolica *Evangelii nuntiandi* (8 dicembre 1975), 14, in *AAS* 68 (1976), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> FRANCESCO, Esortazione apostolica *Evangelii gaudium*, 27, in *AAS* 105 (2013), p. 1031.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. FRANCESCO, *Discorso ai Vescovi responsabili del Consiglio episcopale latinoamericano (C.E.L.A.M.) in occasione della riunione generale di coordinamento*, 28 luglio 2013, in *AAS* 105 (2013), p. 698, n. 3. Cfr. PE, *Preambolo*, 2 e 3.

<sup>5</sup> FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Curia Romana*, 21 dicembre 2015, in *AAS* 108 (2016), p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> PE, art. 12 § 1.

per i primi tre - è quanto meno significativo. Pertanto, la scelta di assegnare al Dicastero per l'Evangelizzazione l'ordine di precedenza esplicita la prospettiva della missionarietà nella quale è stata compiuta la visione generale della riforma curiale. Questa priorità e centralità è evidenziata altresì dalla voluta scelta che a presiedere il Dicastero sia il Papa stesso<sup>7</sup>.

Ciò non intende affatto preporre l'attività dell'evangelizzare alla stessa fede in Cristo. Questa scelta la si comprende bene alla luce del *cambiamento di epoca* che si sta compiendo e che richiede inevitabilmente alla Chiesa di affrontare sfide inedite, proiettandosi verso nuove frontiere sia nella prima missione *ad gentes*, sia nella nuova evangelizzazione di popoli che hanno già ricevuto l'annuncio di Cristo<sup>8</sup>. Lo ha affermato chiaramente il Santo Padre: *“Quando [la Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede e la Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei popoli] furono istituite, si era in un'epoca nella quale era più semplice distinguere tra due versanti abbastanza definiti: un mondo cristiano da una parte e un mondo ancora da evangelizzare dall'altra. Adesso questa situazione non esiste più... Tutto questo comporta necessariamente dei cambiamenti e delle mutate attenzioni anche nei suindicati Dicasteri, come pure nell'intera Curia”*<sup>9</sup>.

Il Dicastero per l'Evangelizzazione è costituito da due Sezioni: quella per le questioni fondamentali dell'evangelizzazione nel mondo e quella per la prima evangelizzazione e le nuove Chiese particolari nei territori di sua competenza<sup>10</sup>. L'intento è, dunque, duplice: da un lato sostenere lo sforzo dell'evangelizzazione facendo attenzione al contesto socioeconomico e ambientale dei destinatari, ai processi di inculturazione, al discernimento dei segni dei tempi<sup>11</sup>; dall'altro accompagnare le Chiese nate nei territori di prima evangelizzazione<sup>12</sup>.

Infine, è significativo il fatto che, nell'ordine stabilito, al Dicastero per l'Evangelizzazione seguono il Dicastero per la Dottrina della Fede e il Dicastero per il servizio della Carità, che non solo si affiancano, ma formano, ciascuno per la sua competenza, un tutt'uno nell'azione missionaria alla quale la Curia Romana è chiamata e costituiscono una triade che “dà il timbro” a tutto il testo della Costituzione apostolica. Alla luce di questa visione d'insieme, nella quale è stato ripensato lo spirito del servizio curiale, appare evidente la ragione per cui si sia voluto elevare

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. PE, art. 54.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. GIOVANNI PAOLO II, Lettera Enciclica *Redemptoris missio*, 30, in AAS 83 (1991), p. 276.

<sup>9</sup> FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Curia Romana*, 21 dicembre 2019, in AAS 112 (2020), p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> PE, art. 53 § 2.

<sup>11</sup> PE, artt. 56 § 1, 57, 1° e 2°.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. PE, art. 61.



l'Elemosineria Apostolica a Dicastero<sup>13</sup>. Esso va compreso come una diretta espressione della missione della Chiesa, che *“testimonia, in parole e opere, la misericordia che ella stessa gratuitamente ha ricevuto”*<sup>14</sup>, attraverso la sua vicinanza e cura nei confronti di quanti *“vivono in situazioni di indigenza, di emarginazione o di povertà”*<sup>15</sup>.

Atteso che il principio ispiratore della riforma è la missionarietà, la Curia Romana contribuisce all'opera di evangelizzazione della Chiesa nel modo che le è proprio, come indicato nei tre *principi-guida* a seguire.

### **1. La Curia Romana è a servizio**

La Curia Romana è per sua natura un organismo di servizio<sup>16</sup>. Essa è l'istituzione della quale il Papa si avvale ordinariamente nell'esercizio del suo supremo Ufficio pastorale e della sua missione universale nel mondo<sup>17</sup>. In ragione di questo servizio al ministero petrino, la Curia Romana si pone altresì al servizio dei Vescovi<sup>18</sup>. Pertanto essa *“è al servizio del Papa, successore di Pietro, e dei Vescovi, successori degli Apostoli”*<sup>19</sup>.

Questa concezione della Curia Romana, senza mutarne la natura giuridica<sup>20</sup>, evidenzia ed esplicita che il suo servizio si esprime nella dedizione al bene della Chiesa universale e allo stesso tempo delle Chiese particolari. La sua prospettiva d'azione si concentra, pertanto, sia sull'ausilio primaziale sia al servizio delle Chiese particolari, evidenziando in tal modo la centralità del ruolo dell'episcopato e volendo favorire l'integrazione e la complementarietà tra primato e collegialità.

Il concetto è ben espresso al numero 1 dei Principi e Criteri per il servizio della Curia Romana: *“La Curia Romana è in primo luogo uno strumento di servizio per il successore di Pietro”*. Con l'inciso: *“in primo luogo”* si ricorda l'identità della Curia stessa. A questo segue l'altra dimensione, formulata in questi termini: *“ad utilità anche dei Vescovi, delle Chiese particolari, delle Conferenze episcopali e delle loro Unioni regionali e continentali, delle Strutture gerarchiche orientali e di altre isti-*

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. PB, art. 193.

<sup>14</sup> PE, Preambolo, 1.

<sup>15</sup> PE, art. 80.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Curia Romana*, 21 dicembre 2017, in *AAS* 110 [2018], pp. 65 - 66. PE, art. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. PE, artt. 1, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. PE, Preambolo, 8; Principi e Criteri, 1, 5. Cfr. FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Curia Romana*, 21 dicembre 2017, in *AAS* 110 [2018], p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> PE, art. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. can. 360 CIC.

*tuzioni e comunità nella Chiesa*". Questa espressione: "ad utilità" non va solo riferita alla finalità e alla funzionalità, ma altresì all'efficienza e al carattere strumentale: la Curia Romana è uno strumento di cui si avvalgono sia il Romano Pontefice che l'episcopato. Questa dimensione, sebbene in parte sia già prassi, è fortemente sottolineata affinché nell'operato della Curia Romana l'episcopato non sia considerato semplicemente come un beneficiario passivo, bensì un collaboratore, come è ben indicato nell'art 21, 4.

La Curia Romana, dunque, è al servizio del Papa: esiste e agisce solo in quanto serve *il* Santo Padre e serve *al* Santo Padre; in suo nome e con la sua autorità adempie la propria funzione. Nello stesso tempo, nondimeno, la sua azione non può prescindere dal riferimento al ministero dei Vescovi, sia in quanto membri del Collegio episcopale, sia in quanto pastori della Chiesa particolare. Essa, infatti, è strumento di comunione e di partecipazione alle sollecitudini ecclesiali *nella misura e in cui lo è* il Romano Pontefice ed entro i limiti della Sua pur suprema potestà e missione<sup>21</sup>.

Proprio in forza di questo suo servizio collegato con il ministero petrino, la Curia Romana è, perciò, da una parte strettissimamente congiunta con i Vescovi di tutto il mondo, e, dall'altra, gli stessi Vescovi e le loro Chiese sono i primi e principali beneficiari della sua opera<sup>22</sup>. Essa esercita questo servizio nel rispetto di quella comunione gerarchica e sinodale cui partecipano tutti i successori degli Apostoli<sup>23</sup>. Da ciò si evince che il sostantivo che qualifica la Curia Romana - *servizio* - oltre a delinearne la natura esprime altresì lo spirito con cui è chiamata ad operare<sup>24</sup>, sia verso il Santo Padre che i Vescovi, nei riguardi dei quali, per tale ragione, nel suo agire, non deve mai condizionare, né tanto meno ostacolare i loro rapporti e contatti, bensì favorire tra gli stessi la comunione reciproca, affettiva ed effettiva<sup>25</sup>. La Curia Romana, dunque, non si colloca tra il Papa e i Vescovi, ma appunto si pone al servizio, ossia espleta il compito che le è proprio nei riguardi di entrambi "secondo le modalità che sono proprie della natura di ciascuno"<sup>26</sup>, senza lasciare adito ad equivoci ed incomprensioni da chi essa dipenda ultimamente e quali siano le sue competenze nell'ambito delle quali è chiamata a fare il suo servizio per il bene della Chiesa tutta.

<sup>21</sup> LG 13, 23, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. PB, Introduzione, 9. Cfr. FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Curia Romana*, 21 dicembre 2017, in *AAS* 110 [2018], pp. 67 – 68.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. PE, Principi e Criteri, Introduzione.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. PE, artt. 2 – 5: indole pastorale delle attività curiali; artt. 7 - 8: principi operativi della Curia Romana.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. PB, Introduzione, 8.

<sup>26</sup> PE, Preambolo, 8.

## 2. La sinodalità

La sinodalità è un tratto proprio e distintivo della Chiesa; è una dimensione costitutiva della stessa. Tocca la sua natura e la sua identità<sup>27</sup>, pertanto anima le strutture in cui la stessa si esprime in modo istituzionale<sup>28</sup>. Per la Curia Romana ciò significa che l'esercizio del suo servizio dev'essere sinodale<sup>29</sup>.

Tale sinodalità si sostanzia, secondo quanto è precisato nel *Preambolo*, nell'*ascolto reciproco*<sup>30</sup>, in modo da sviluppare prassi informate al dialogo e al confronto e così consolidare uno *stile*<sup>31</sup> atto a connotare l'azione pastorale di governo della Chiesa universale tale da rafforzarne l'unità interna.

Questa sinodalità *con i vari livelli dell'esistenza della Chiesa* - Chiesa particolare, Conferenze episcopali, le loro Unioni regionali e continentali e le Strutture gerarchiche orientali<sup>32</sup> - è posta in atto in molteplici articoli del testo costituzionale. Se ne richiamano alcuni:

- corsi di formazione iniziale e permanente per i Vescovi da parte del rispettivo Dicastero competente (artt. 64 § 3, 109 § 1);
- collaborazione con i Vescovi per ciò che riguarda il retto e fruttuoso esercizio del loro ufficio pastorale (art. 107 § 1);
- collaborazione nelle questioni più importanti (art. 36 § 1);
- preparazione dei documenti di carattere generale aventi rilevanza importante o quelli che riguardano in modo speciale alcune Chiese particolari (art. 36 § 2);
- Visita *ad limina Apostolorum*, durante la quale, mediante un dialogo franco e cordiale, i Prefetti consigliano, incoraggiano, danno suggerimenti ed opportune indicazioni ai Vescovi al fine di contribuire al bene e allo sviluppo della Chiesa intera, all'osservanza della disciplina comune e nello stesso tempo raccolgono dagli stessi suggerimenti e indicazioni per offrire un servizio sempre più efficace (artt. 38 - 42);
- Visita fraterna (art. 107 § 2): è un istituto che il Santo Padre ha voluto in-

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. PE, *Preambolo*, 4. Cfr. COMMISSIONE TEOLOGICA INTERNAZIONALE [CTI], *La sinodalità nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa*, 2018, n. 42; FRANCESCO, *Discorso ai fedeli di Roma*, 18 settembre 2021, in *AAS* 113 [2021], pp. 949-960.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. CTI, 70.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Curia Romana*, 22 dicembre 2016, n. 9, in *AAS* 109 (2017), pp. 43 - 44. Cfr. CTI, 102.

<sup>30</sup> PE, *Preambolo*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. FRANCESCO, *Discorso alla Curia Romana*, 23 dicembre 2021. Il testo in parola, al momento non ancora pubblicato in *AAS*.

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. *Principi e criteri*, 4.

serire ed affiancare alla Visita apostolica. Scopo della visita fraterna è quello di offrire, mediante un incontro di comunione, un aiuto per una verifica in merito alla circostanza oggetto della visita stessa, rilevando le cause di possibili criticità, conflitti e difficoltà venutesi a creare ed individuando, mediante un dialogo franco e fraterno, i possibili suggerimenti, consigli ed indicazioni da offrirsi per le soluzioni;

- collaborazione da parte del Dicastero per l'Evangelizzazione circa: le questioni fondamentali dell'evangelizzazione e dello sviluppo di un efficace annuncio del Vangelo individuandone forme, strumenti e linguaggio adeguati (art. 55 § 1); la collaborazione volta a promuovere e favorire la diffusione e l'attuazione del Magistero ecclesiale relativo alle tematiche dell'incontro del Vangelo con le culture (art. 57, 2° e 3°);
- stretto contatto da parte della Sezione Dottrinale del Dicastero per la Dottrina della Fede circa l'esercizio della missione propria dei Vescovi, quali autentici maestri e dottori della fede, per la quale sono tenuti a custodire e promuovere l'integrità della medesima fede (art. 72 § 1);
- assistenza da parte della Pontificia Commissione per la Tutela dei Minori nello sviluppare strategie e procedure opportune, mediante Linee Guida, per proteggere da abusi sessuali i minori e le persone vulnerabili (art. 78 § 2);
- valutazione e approvazione da parte del Dicastero per i Laici, la Famiglia e la Vita riguardo le proposte delle Conferenze episcopali relative all'istituzione di nuovi ministeri e uffici ecclesiastici da affidare ai laici, secondo le necessità delle Chiese particolari (art. 133);
- aiuto e collaborazione da parte del Dicastero per la Cultura e l'Educazione per la tutela e la conservazione del patrimonio culturale e storico (artt. 155 – 156) e sostegno per la promozione della identità cattolica delle scuole e degli Istituti di studi superiori (art. 159);
- sostegno da parte del Dicastero per lo Sviluppo Umano integrale nel campo della promozione umana integrale (artt. 163 § 3, 164, 165, 167, 169, 170).

### ***3. La corresponsabilità nella communio***

Al numero 2 dei Principi e criteri per il servizio della Curia Romana viene indicata la corresponsabilità nella *communio*. Ciò indica che il servizio della Curia Romana si attua anche nello spirito di un “*sano decentramento*”<sup>33</sup>, ossia nel saper

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. FRANCESCO, Esortazione apostolica *Evangelii gaudium*, 32, in *AAS* 105 (2013), pp. 1033 – 1034.

valorizzare le capacità locali nell'affrontare e risolvere questioni che non toccano l'unità di dottrina, di disciplina e di comunione della Chiesa<sup>34</sup>, al fine di garantire una più rapida efficacia dell'azione pastorale di governo dei Pastori agevolata dalla loro prossimità alle persone e alle fattispecie in loco che lo richiedono. È evidente, infatti, che quando l'autorità ha una conoscenza diretta e più vicina delle persone e delle fattispecie che richiedono un'azione pastorale di governo, questa, in forza proprio della prossimità, può essere di più rapida efficacia. Inoltre in ciò si rispecchia ancor più l'universalità condivisa e plurale della Chiesa, che comprende le differenze senza omologarle, garantite, per quanto riguarda la sua unità, dal ministero petrino proprio del Vescovo di Roma.

Questo criterio di "*sano decentramento*" risponde al *principio di sussidiarietà*, il quale, *in modo analogico*, può essere applicato all'interno della vita della Chiesa, che è insieme *mysterium* e *societas* (LG 8), senza pregiudicarne la sua struttura gerarchica<sup>35</sup>. Nella Chiesa, infatti, alla sussidiarietà è preminente il principio di "*comunione*", che regola i rapporti fra enti che non sono estrinseci e concorrenziali, bensì inscindibilmente immanenti l'uno all'altro<sup>36</sup>, sebbene con quella strutturazione gerarchica che è propria di ogni comunione ecclesiale. La Chiesa, infatti, è una comunione il cui livello gerarchico è insuperabile. Ciò significa, pertanto, che si può certamente invocare ed applicare, quando è lecito e possibile, una "sana decentralizzazione" nella vita della Chiesa, ma non meramente in nome di un rapporto sussidiario fra due entità estrinseche, bensì in nome di quell'*immanenza comunione* in cui fra i soggetti vige la norma del reciproco servizio e donazione, in cui la vitalità e il crescere dell'uno ricade a beneficio dell'altro.

La corresponsabilità nella *communio* denota, quindi, la coscienza della comunanza del compito ecclesiale e nel contempo indica un criterio di distribuzione delle incombenze che favorisce le istanze locali, rispondendo in tal modo pienamente sia alla scelta di missionarietà compiuta nel testo in parola, sia alla valorizzazione e/o riqualifica delle Conferenze episcopali<sup>37</sup> e Strutture gerarchiche orientali, alla loro indole pastorale, tenuto conto anche del fatto che molte questioni pastorali del tempo presente meritano di essere affrontate efficacemente a livello nazionale, regionale e a volte continentale<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. PE, Principi e Criteri, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. Pio XII, *Discorso ai nuovi Cardinali*, Concistoro 20 febbraio 1946, in AAS 38 [1946], pp. 144-145; Pio XII, *Discorso circa l'apostolato dei laici*, 5 ottobre 1957, in AAS 49 [1957], p. 927.

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. Costituzione dogmatica *Pastor aeternus*, III, in ASS 6 [1870-71], pp. 43-44.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. PE, Preambolo, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. PE, art. 107 § 2.

Un ulteriore aspetto in cui si applica tale principio è dato dal fatto che la Curia Romana, in forza delle conoscenze che gli vengono dal suo servizio alla Chiesa universale, è in grado di raccogliere ed elaborare la ricchezza delle migliori iniziative e delle proposte creative riguardanti l'evangelizzazione messe in atto dalle singole Chiese particolari, dalle Conferenze episcopali e dalle Strutture gerarchiche orientali, come anche del modo di agire di fronte a problemi e sfide, e così *favorire e promuovere lo scambio* di queste esperienze fra le diverse Chiese particolari e realtà ecclesiali<sup>39</sup>, valorizzandole, e rafforzando fra le stesse i reciproci legami di fraternità. In tal modo la Curia Romana compie non un mero servizio amministrativo e burocratico, bensì serve ed incrementa la comunione<sup>40</sup> in un vero spirito missionario.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. PE, Principi e Criteri, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Cfr. PE, art. 1.

## *Dialogue, a Tool for Peacebuilding and Conflict Management*

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### **Introduction**

Over the last twenty years, policy-makers and practitioners have supported the growth of multiple new interreligious peace-making initiatives, and scholars have sought to understand and evaluate their efficiency. In many ways, these efforts could be read as resulting from the “return of religion” to international relations and the critical shift, still in development, towards a “religious engagement” praxis within foreign policymaking, particularly in the West.

This article reflects on the role of interreligious dialogue in conflict resolution efforts that have emerged in this context. It begins by drawing from recent empirical research to outline several ways that scholars understand religion as being linked to conflicts. The article then considers how interreligious dialogue could be understood to serve as a conduit for conflict mediation and peacebuilding. Finally, the paper discusses several persistent criticisms that have been raised about interreligious dialogue as a model of conflict resolution and ends with some reflections about contemporary strategies for interreligious peacebuilding in light of them.

### **Religion, Conflict and Violence: Conflict Resolution Research**

Recent empirical studies in the field of conflict resolution have confirmed a growing number of religiously identified conflicts worldwide (Svensson and Nilsson 2018, Klocek and Hassner 2019, Toft, Philpott and Shah 2011). Using a variety of empirical measures, scholars have documented an increase in the number of conflicts which involve religious actors and ideas since the early 2000s; that these actors and ideas have been increasingly central (as opposed to peripheral) to conflicts; and that when this has occurred, conflicts have tended to be more deadly and last longer (Svensson and Nilsson 2018, Toft, Philpott and Shah 2011).

Some, but not all of these conflicts are interreligious in nature. This means that many religiously coded conflicts are fought between conflict parties from the same religion. There are also very different levels of conflict in which religion may be involved- from civil wars to inter-state wars to international, “extra-systemic” conflicts (Henne 2019). Finally, it is also important to remember that many conflicts which involve parties from two different religions are not fought over

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religious issues at all. Therefore, even where religion is involved in the conflict, it is always entangled in a web of other factors which could include economic insecurity or inequality, ethnic or political marginalization, international interference and vulnerable institutions, to name a few.

While scholars might agree on the apparent increase in religiously-identified conflicts across the globe, there is no consensus on why religious conflicts have become more frequent over the last twenty years; the extent to which religious motivations actually cause or complicate a conflict; or how and why the addition of a more overt religious dimension to a conflict might shift its length or kind of violence. Disentangling religious and non-religious causes from any conflict situation, therefore, is a difficult if not impossible task and scholarly analysis must proceed with caution.

As the number of religious identified conflicts has grown, so, too, have religious and interreligious efforts at peacebuilding. Thus, during this same time period, groups like the International Dialogue Center (KAICIID), Adyan Foundation, the Network for Traditional and Religious Peacemakers, the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum (formerly the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies), the Partnership on Religion and Development, among many others, were established. These new interreligious peacebuilding efforts added to those of pre-existing organizations and movements like Religions for Peace, the community of Sant'Egidio, Catholic Relief Services and others. The following section outlines several common ways that these and other organizations have employed dialogue as a tool for conflict resolution.

## **The Tools for Interreligious Dialogue**

Scholars have observed similar repertoires of action that religious peacebuilders have employed in conflict situations. Common religious peacebuilding efforts include facilitating track II diplomacy, channelling and mobilizing non-violent civil society action; challenging political and social injustices; and accompanying post-conflict reconciliation processes (Toft, Philpott and Shah 2011; Omer, Appleby and Little 2015; Abu Nimer 2015). Interreligious efforts have incorporated all of these tools and more in their work at various stages of conflicts. The following sections consider some of these efforts.

### *Interreligious Dialogue and Conflict Prevention*

In the prevention stage of conflict, one major push has been for the creation of interfaith leadership councils or national interfaith platforms, including by organizations like Religions for Peace and KAICIID (Williams 2023, Abu-Nimer et al. 2007, Bolton 2018). The creation of such councils recognizes the important



social and political influence that local religious authorities wield, especially in countries with high levels of religiosity. Interreligious dialogue initiatives among religious leaders in any country, especially in a religiously divided country, can serve to build bridges of trust and reciprocity among religious authorities who can then employ their influence to diffuse social and political tensions that may otherwise escalate into armed conflict.

These councils also offer a readily identifiable interreligious infrastructure which policy-makers can call on in times of tense interreligious relations. In this way, the councils might be part of wider interreligious efforts to “manage” internal religious diversity (Körs and Nagel 2018) in both organic ways and in partnership with state-run institutions. Although the causal relationship between religious pluralism and religious conflict has been notoriously difficult to establish (Henne 2019, Klocek and Hassner 2019), these initiatives often assume that managing religious pluralism can act as a preventative force against the politicization and polarization of religious differences and the negative and even violent consequences such polarization may entail (Hunter 2018, Kadayifci-Orellana 2013, Silvestri and Mayall 2015).

Similarly, interreligious action strategies have paid much attention to the role of healthy religious education programming in preventing armed interreligious conflicts from occurring (Abu-Nimer and Smith 2016, Abu-Nimer et al. 2016, Santoso and Khisbiyah 2021). Revising educational curricula so that they do not inculcate harmful stereotypes of religious others or repropose religiously justified narratives of exclusion or hate have been seen to be critical for overcoming social divisions at the heart of many armed conflicts. More broadly speaking, these and other initiatives seek to construct mutually reinforcing bonds of trust and solidarity among religious communities and diverse religious individuals. They also aim to generate religiously inclusive national narratives, built on an idea of unity-in-diversity, which re-propose religious plurality as a source of national pride rather than division.

In related ways, interreligious initiatives have participated in preventing and countering violent extremism programs (PVE/CVE) which seek to intervene in the process of radicalization of youth and other vulnerable individuals. In order to do so, interreligious organizations have offered a range of resources, training exercises and workshops aimed at delegitimizing religious narratives of violence. These programs do so by deconstructing exclusivist narratives and offering a counter narrative, based in appeals to religious authority and tradition, that the true aim of their religious call and system of belief is to peace, compassion, mercy, moderation and restraint.

The following section will raise a number of critiques that point to the limits of this and other interreligious approaches. Suffice it to note here that any

attempt at deconstructing religious narratives raises thorny questions about who has religious authority over the “authentic” interpretation of any religious message. Countering or preventing violent extremism programs are also often sponsored or financed by state actors and connected to state attempts to “securitize” potential religious threats through enhanced government surveillance and scrutiny. This has raised skepticism about the intentions of these efforts within religious communities themselves.

Finally, at a different level of conflict prevention, interreligious actors have engaged in efforts to sustain a “Dialogue among Civilizations” in order to prevent what Samuel Huntington feared could be a looming “Clash of Civilizations” (Kayaoglu 2012, Driessen 2023). Through UN programs like the UN Alliance of Civilizations and high-level interreligious dialogues and declarations like the 2005 A Common Word letter and the 2019 document on Human Fraternity, religious authorities, scholars and civil society members have attempted to identify common values rooted in their traditions which could jointly promote civilization cooperation rather than conflict.

### *Interreligious Dialogue and Conflict Mediation*

Once the prevention stage of a conflict has been surpassed and the conflict has escalated to violent, armed struggle, new interreligious considerations come into play. Many of the interreligious tools employed in this phase of the conflict build on those used in interreligious conflict prevention. Religious communities, thus, may resist calls to violence against their fellow, otherly-religious citizens or mobilize for non-violent civil society action (Day 2021) or publicly denounce violence in the name of religion (Mokrani 2022). The bonds of trust and reciprocity these communities and leaders have built during peacetime might make such denouncements more likely, more credible and more effective.

An example here could be the *Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi*, written by a senior group of Muslim religious leaders in 2014 following the rise to power of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The letter deconstructs the religious arguments adopted by the Islamic State to justify their violent offensive war. Notably, the letter would lead to further action by a number of the signatories, including the development of the *Marrakesh Declaration* in 2016, which denounced violence against religious minorities in the name of Islam. In writing the letter, these actors understood religious violence to require religious legitimacy from religious authorities in order to sustain itself. Interreligious peace efforts like the *Marrakesh Declaration* seek to take that authority away.

The theme of non-violence and “never again war” in the name of religion have been important elements of major, recent, interreligious efforts, including the

1993 Global Ethic and the 2009 Charter for Compassion. Drawing on the “golden rule” common to many religious traditions, for example, the Charter for Compassion states that, “any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred, or disdain is illegitimate” (Marsden 2018) and the Global Ethic declares a commitment to a “culture of non-violence” as the first of its “irrevocable directives.”

Similarly, in the Catholic Church, Pope Francis has repeatedly argued that war and violence are anathema to all religions (Appleby 2023). In his 2020 encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, he argued that the conditions regulating traditional Catholic understandings of just war theories were no longer possible given the destruction of modern military technologies. At the same time, religious authorities have drawn on traditional doctrines of restraint to minimize violence once it has begun. Hence, Pope Francis has also acknowledged the legitimate right to self-defence in both Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Pope Francis’ secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin has also recently used the just war criteria of proportionality to urge restraint in this conflict.

Interreligious leaders have also been involved in track II peace mediation efforts. The work of the community of Sant’Egidio has often been named in this regard (Toft, Philpott and Shah 2011), but the examples of the International Abrahamic Network in Israel (Kronish 2017) or the Muhammadiyah movement’s efforts to help mediate the conflict in the Mindanao (Anam and Surwandono 2013) could also be cited. In these settings, religious leaders sometimes possess an unusual combination of social credibility, moral authority, symbolic resources, political imagination and transnational networks of aid that can be effective in prodding and inviting warring parties to reimagine what is possible for a shared future.

Of course, just like in conflict prevention, religious efforts at peace mediation seldom if ever represent a magic solution. If, as likely, the conflict between two religious parties began or continued for a complex mix of issues – including economic inequalities, scarce resources, ethnic marginalization or insecure borders to name just a few- then that entails that there are limits to what any interreligious conflict mediation process may achieve. At best, interreligious leadership and communities may play a part in the mediation process, by lending or leveraging their moral authority for it and accompanying the mediation process or endowing it with spiritual urgency and dynamism.

### *Post-conflict Reconstruction*

Like conflict prevention, and unlike conflict mediation, the post-conflict reconstruction phase of a conflict seems to offer more possibilities for interreligious action and support. Some of the specific resources that religious actors possess seem to come particularly into play at this stage. Hence, interreligious actors have

been seen to facilitate processes of reconciliation as well as deploy deep reserves of symbolic resources and values and practices built up over the centuries to enable intersocial and interpersonal processes of healing (Toft, Philpott and Shah 2011, Philpott 2015, Phan 2016, Pinzón 2020). Critically, religious communities can work together to live in their diversity well (Haddad and Fischbach 2015, Abu-Nimer 2020, Marshall 2017). Their ideas can powerfully shape visions of what durable peace might look like, setting an ideal of the common good which is inclusive of religious diversity and invites multi-religious cooperation (Driessen 2023). In so doing, they can rebuild the social cohesion and solidarity necessary to make forms of social interaction and cooperation among formerly warring parties possible again (Bolton 2018).

Here a number of scholars and practitioners have reflected on the ability of interreligious dialogue to serve as a means for social and conflict transformation (Abu Nimer et al 2007, Bolton 2018, Schmid 2017, Neufeldt 2011, Hrynkow and Power 2018). In this approach, dialogue, as a method or tool, itself favours processes of mutual learning that can lead to enhanced and reciprocal understanding, healing, tolerance and trust. As an exercise, dialogue creates a certain personal, religious or social posture which primes participants towards open forms of communication and discovery (Schmid 2017, Hedges 2016). A number of interreligious dialogue initiatives have adopted transparent statements of their “theory of change” for their programs in order to name how they see such transformation processes occurring (Bolton 2018). Drawing on the work of Raimon Pannikar, for example, Abu Nimer et al. (2007) reflect on dialogue as a religious experience of discovery and emancipation. Discovery-through-dialogue can entail identifying and understanding patterns of past grievances and overcoming them with a jointly created identity of reconciliation where a new, shared truth emerges.

## **Critiques**

A number of important critiques have been raised about the assumptions undergirding some of the initiatives reviewed above. One persistent criticism has been that many of these initiatives, but especially those targeting or leveraging the moral authority of interreligious leadership, problematically skirt over questions of political power and religious authority. At a basic level, including certain religious actors into (multi) religious peacebuilding efforts could be seen to legitimize the authority and ideas of those religious actors. Religious authorities may involve themselves in processes of mediation precisely for this reason (Fahy 2018), even if those authorities may be complicit in the issues which started the conflict in the first place.

There is, therefore, immediately-raised questions about instrumentalization, both the instrumentalization of political power by religious authorities, as well as

the instrumentalization of religious communities and ideas by the state (Driessen 2023, Wolff 2020, Yilmaz and Barry 2020, Kayaoglu 2015, Yilmaz and Barry 2020, Griera and Nagle 2018). Dialogue activities may also serve some states as tools of propaganda and useful distractions from their authoritarian policies and projects.

In a similar way, as Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (2015) has argued, these initiatives often elevate Big “R” Religion- the official, formal structures of religious authority who are not necessary benign actors- at the expense of little “r” religion- the lived religion of everyday religious citizens and their myriad struggles for justice, equality, freedom and recognition. In doing so, as Omer (2023) has argued, interreligious dialogue initiatives have often disempowered local religious actors and knowledge. The interreligious dialogue peace nexus, in Omer’s version, is itself a product of Western humanitarian ideas and practices and has often reinforced neocolonial and patriarchal structures of religious power embedded within it.

At the same time, excluding these religious actors might make the dialogue less effective (Patton 2018). One of the reasons religious authorities may participate in dialogue processes in the first place is that they perceive them to be consonant with some project of religious renewal, one which is more or less in line with an orthodox religious reading of their traditions (Driessen 2023, Sopyan et al. 2020). They are, usually explicitly so, against any project that feels like it might facilitate religious relativism, syncretism or challenges to core traditional beliefs. In other words, many traditional religious leaders, who may have real moral authority in any given conflict setting, are unlikely to participate in processes explicitly designed to emancipate or transform their religious belief systems.

Hurd (2015) and Omer’s (2023) critiques, therefore, highlight an important tension between the various goals, aspirations and “theories of change” of interreligious initiatives and also reveal something important about how we think about interreligious dialogue as a process in and of itself. This tension divides more minimal versions of interreligious peace-making from more normatively substantive, “transformative” ones (Driessen 2020). In the more minimal version, religious or social transformation is not required or necessary. Interreligious dialogue and interreligious leadership councils and much of the structure of interreligious peacebuilding is simply built up to facilitate interreligious cooperation and prevent interreligious conflict. The risk in this version of interreligious peacebuilding is that it likely leaves some religious framings which facilitate social injustices untouched.

That is where transformative interreligious peacebuilding steps in, by arguing that some form of emancipation is necessary to get at the root problems of conflict and overcome them in the service of universal values (Knitter 2013). But as we began to hint above, the religious actors who might be most in need of participating in religious peacebuilding efforts might be those more resistant to change in the

first place. Or the most sensitive to perceptions of outside and foreign threats. Or they might have different ideas about what counts as a universal value.

A number of theories of change, therefore, may overestimate the transformative power of dialogue and the consensus about the content that any such transformation might be working towards. Many interreligious efforts, for example, espouse a range of more or less agreed upon international humanitarian goals, including advancing human rights, advocating for environmental change, protecting migrants and refugees and achieving the sustainable development goals. And yet it is not clear that mainstream religious traditions across the globe would fully ascribe to this entire package of values as a vision of religious or political emancipation. Once again, the question of religious authority must be raised. If interreligious dialogue is meant to be transformative, who is the final authority on what that transformation should look like?

Finally, it should be noted, a number of critics have questioned the effectiveness of interreligious engagement in light of the continued or worsening violence done in the name of religion (Markiewicz 2018). This is a particularly relevant with regards to the wars in Gaza and Ukraine. In both cases, a bitter sense of failure has cast a pall over decades of what appeared to be successful interfaith breakthroughs in both Eastern Europe, between the Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches and the Middle East, between Muslim, Jewish and Christian authorities and communities. The cusp of what seemed to be a new dawn of interreligious cooperation in both regions now appears in a dramatically changed light. In either case, major interreligious efforts did not prevent the renewal of armed conflict and have not been able to successfully mediate in the conflicts either. This has raised renewed scrutiny of the capacity of interreligious peacebuilding efforts as a project moving forward.

## **Reflections and conclusion**

While varying in their level of critique, it is interesting to note that none of these criticisms fully argue against interreligious dialogue. They might be seen, therefore, as inviting dialogue practitioners, scholars and leaders to a kind of purification of their practices in order to do dialogue better. At some level, many dialogue practitioners are aware of the risks involved in their work, and they have sought ways to minimize any harm linked to their activity. The task of peacebuilding and mediation between religious groups in conflict, as the first part of this essay reviewed, leaves little other option than to enter into dialogue of some kind with religious others, including, especially, with one's "religious enemies." Mercy, love, reconciliation, compassion – the real tools animating interreligious peacebuilding – always require dialogue of some kind with the "Other."

By way of conclusion, I would like to suggest that these critiques could also be seen as helping to liberate dialogue from overloaded expectations and refocus attention on the actual content and efforts and possibilities at hand. As Pasquale Ferrara has noted (2023), religion is not always necessarily the cause or the solution to a conflict, but it is simply part of the process, a contributing factor that diplomats and practitioners need to understand and engage with, but not over-essentialize either.

In terms of analysis, this might be understood as a counsel for modesty. For example, it is important to distinguish between different sets of specific dialogue movements as opposed to one master dialogue project. Different movements and different experiences have built up shared resources which have contributed to peace processes and, in doing so, navigated these risks in a variety of ways. Empirically it is helpful to simply map these projects out and evaluate and learn from them over time.

It is also helpful to observe that many of the conflict resolution possibilities associated with religious actors and communities are linked to long run developments as opposed to short term solutions. While religious leaders may have a role to play in denouncing violence in the immediate heat of battle, they are likely to have a more lasting impact on conflict (and its absence) through their capacity to generate and sustain life-giving visions of a peaceful society and mobilize communities for collective action in favour of them. Recent interreligious declarations in the Middle East calling for the development of inclusive citizenship and human fraternity are important examples in this regard (Driessen 2023, Petito et al. 2021). By appealing for spiritual solidarity, for religious social responsibility, for religious freedom and pluralism lived well, interreligious leaders can challenge the conflict at hand, appeal to society as a whole and set a credible, post-conflict vision of a durable peace. This will also require drawing on interreligious practices and experiences from within society which may serve as models of pluralism to build on. In this way, interreligious leaders and communities may engage together in a more comprehensive model of peacebuilding which serves and constructs peace in time.

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## *Mission and Dialogue for Intercultural Living*

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Interculturality is not new to social sciences, but it is gaining ground in the Church because the context of mission is ever changing. In today's context, the theology of mission and the approaches to do mission have evolved in multifaceted ways to respond to the context. In this context, this article studies the relation of dialogue, mission and interculturality.

### **Mission as Dialogue**

In the context of multicultural, multi-religious society with its social, economic and political situations, reflecting on the mission of Jesus bringing the Kingdom of God and transforming the world, making the whole universe to be united with God, dialogue is of paramount importance to the mission of the Church. One cannot transform the world without engaging in dialogue with others. "Dialogue is a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other."<sup>1</sup> The document on "Dialogue and Proclamation" states, "Dialogue can be taken as an attitude of respect and friendship, which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the Church."<sup>2</sup> When dialogue is a constituting element of mission, it is first and foremost listening – listening to oneself, to others, and most importantly to God.

Dialogue leads to personal encounter with the other, building trust and interpersonal relationships which enrich one another. That would help to build a just society. It is in dialogue that we are able to recognize "the signs of Christ's presence and the working of the Spirit" (RM 56). In dialogue, "We are called to acknowledge our own sinfulness and to engage in constant conversion, and that we witness to God's love by sharing our own convictions boldly and honestly, especially where that love has been obscured by prejudice, violence, and hate. It is clear that we do not dialogue from a neutral position, but out of our own faith."<sup>3</sup> One element cannot pursue itself without pursuing the other. Mission not only requires dialogue;

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<sup>1</sup> Pontifical Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, "Dialogue and Mission" 1984, Rome, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Pontifical Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, "Dialogue and Proclamation." 1991, Rome, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *In Dialogue with the Word*, No. 1, Rome: SVD Publications, 2000, 54.

it is an inherent component. Paul Knitter would say that mission is dialogue<sup>4</sup>, and Jose Maria Vigil says that mission is dialogue and only dialogue.<sup>5</sup>

A dialogically perceived mission must oppose any form of religious fundamentalism. As a dialogue cannot be conducted on a meta-level, it is not possible to “stand above the fray” or adopt an a-religious standpoint with other religions. “A fruitful dialogue can only come about if the parties confront each other on the basis of their respective existential roots in the absolute. However, the unconditionality of this rootedness does not mean denying the Other his relation to ultimate reality.”<sup>6</sup> The goal is the *missio Dei*. Thus, fruitful dialogue with other religions should lead us to continue the mission that is entrusted to the Church.

Pope Francis stresses in the encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* that sharing our faith and honestly understanding the truth in the world is mission. The dialogue is not just leading to consensus but to understanding the non-negotiable truth and being committed to it. (see FT 211-214). Pope Francis also insists that to continue our mission today will require “dialogue with states, dialogue with cultures and sciences and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church.” (EG 238). He says, “In each case, ‘the Church speaks from the light which faith offers’” (Ibid).

### **Mission as Prophetic Dialogue**

If mission is an act of dialogue, it is also prophecy, because God’s inner nature is dialogical and prophetic. Prophets are the ones who listen to God, who speak forth the message of God, speak against the evils, and show some alternatives. Prophets embrace suffering when it comes as a result of standing for the truth or doing what is right. Fundamentally, a prophet’s mission is obedience to God’s word and carrying out God’s will. The Spirit comes upon the prophets and anoints them to bring good news to the oppressed, healing to those who are discouraged, liberty to captives, release to prisoners, comfort to those who mourn, and condemnation to those who are not faithful (see Isa 61:1-4). Jesus in his ministry was prophetic, and he was an eschatological prophet who preached, demonstrated, and embodied the Reign of God and fulfillment of all the hopes of Israel, and he was following the will of God.<sup>7</sup> Mission as prophecy brings out what the Church

<sup>4</sup> Paul F. Knitter, “Mission and Dialogue,” *Missiology*, Vol 33, no. 2 (2005): 200-201.

<sup>5</sup> José María Vigil, “Mission is dialogue and only dialogue” in *Mission and Dialogue Approaches to a Communicative Understanding of Mission*, edited by Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth, One World Theology, Freiburg: Verlag Herder GmbH, 2012, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus Krämer, “Mission in dialogue,” 14 in *Mission and Dialogue*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, New York: Orbis Books, 2011, 41-42.

should be, doing the will of God in today's context of injustice, oppression, post-truth, fake news and manipulation of simple and ordinary people. Judette Gallares says that by understanding the conflicts, terror and tensions in today's world, the Church's mission is giving prophetic hope to the world.<sup>8</sup>

Mission as prophecy is a complex reality; it has several aspects intertwined. It is accomplished through words and deeds, through proclamation and witness, through showing directions and voicing the truth, and through firm articulations strongly opposing the untruth. Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder explain many aspects of mission as prophecy: speaking for without words: witness; speaking for with words: proclamation; speaking against without words: being a contrast community; and speaking against with words: speaking truth to power.<sup>9</sup> In practice, these can be dramatic like the Bishop Rolando José Álvarez opposing the dictator, the Christians speaking for their rights in India, living the faith in Nigeria, and so forth. Mission as prophecy has intercultural dimensions as well. A prophetic call for hope underlines the challenge of some of the cultural practices which need change. For example, the patriarchy, oppression of woman, the caste system, not respecting the indigenous people, and so forth, call the Church to give prophetic hope to challenge them as well as to give alternatives. In the context of affirming human dignity Pope Francis says, "The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised." (EG 218)

There is one mission – the mission of God that is shared, by God's grace, by the Church. Christian mission is participation in the dialogical life and mission of the Trinity. And this dialogue is also prophetic. The Church witnesses and proclaims, prays and celebrates, works for justice, peace and integrity of creation, enculturates the Gospel in the local culture, works for reconciliation, and is committed to interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. Its radical missionary nature is prophetic dialogue in today's changing and challenging world. According to the context, at times, more dialogue will be necessary; in other times, more prophecies will be needed. In doing mission in today's context, that prophetic dialogue is an apt way to bring forth the love of God with concrete implications. "*Prophetic dialogue*, ... is the phrase that best summarizes a theology of mission for today, keeping the church *constant* in this *context*."<sup>10</sup> *Catholic Sensibility* posted a short reflection

<sup>8</sup> Judette Gallares, RC, "Sowers of Prophetic Hope for the Planet. The Responsibility of Religious Life: A Biblical Perspective," UISG, 10 May 2019, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue* 43-38.

<sup>10</sup> Id., *Constant in Contexts: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Quezon City: Claretian Publica-

on “Mission as Prophetic Dialogue,” and it agrees with this thought-provoking aspect of our mission, and cautions that it should not devalue the announcing aspect of evangelization. It states, “Dialogue is not an end in itself – it is a how, whether the how of God’s revelation to us, or, consequently, the how of our own humble missionary efforts to spread the Gospel. The spirituality of dialogue must lead towards and nourish the speaking forth of the Gospel (which always includes the denunciation of injustice and oppression), however meekly and patiently, gently and slowly.”<sup>11</sup> David Bosch speaks of mission as done in “bold humility” or with a “humble boldness.” When we offer God’s love and mercy to the people, “we know only in part, but we do know. And we believe that the faith we profess is both true and just, and should be proclaimed.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, mission as prophetic dialogue offers an important aspect regarding how mission can be effective and transforming.

## **Interculturality**

The demographic framework and the ethnic groups of a community in the world are changing very fast due to globalization, migration, and trans-nationalization. Monoculture is slowly melting and giving way to multicultural society. Multicultural communities are becoming aware slowly that there is a need to grow towards intercultural community, although some ultra-right-wing groups are glued to the narrow nationalist mentality, sticking to a monocultural group.

Interculturality refers to the sustained interaction of people who are of different cultural backgrounds. Interaction of people implies learning about other cultures and their meanings, accepting good elements in other cultures, respecting one another, willing to be challenged by the other because some cultural elements may not be of good value or may not promote the principles of justice, equality, harmony, and so forth. Therefore, this interaction is also challenging one another to change for the common good and enrichment of one another. To define it, interculturality “is a sustained interaction of people raised in different cultural backgrounds that leads to mutually reciprocal relationships among and between cultures; people learn and grow together, mutually enrich one another by these learnings and integration, and challenge one another on the cultural value differences and practices that gear towards mutual transformation.”<sup>13</sup>

tions, 2005, 395. The authors explain that the constants are Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, salvation, anthropology and culture.

<sup>11</sup> <https://catholicsensibility.wordpress.com/2006/10/18/116120413062551312/>

<sup>12</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York: Orbis Books, 1991, 489.

<sup>13</sup> Lazar T. Stanislaus and Christian Tauchner (eds.), “Introduction” in *Becoming Intercultural:*

In a society where people of various ethnic groups, nationalities and religions live, there may be cultural conflicts and tensions due to various values and cultural practices. Intercultural living seeks to reinforce intercultural interaction as a means of building trust, openness and confidence as a necessary fabric of a community. Intercultural living recognizes the right of all cultures to the growth of the society in which they live.

Some of the components of intercultural living are the following: (a) It is intentional. People in a community understand the intricacies of intercultural living, and everyone makes an effort to build a community. It cannot be automatic; constant commitment to live together and interact with others needs personal effort and community orientation. (b) Striving to live in an intercultural community is not natural but supernatural. There is a need for seeking supernatural power – God. (c) If one relies on supernatural motives, faith is imperative. Intercultural living happens because faith in God demands that the community lives in peace and harmony. (d) Being in such a community is a challenge and needs sustained hard work to learn other cultures and interact with one another in a friendly atmosphere. (d) Being open to the goodness of other cultures helps the community to learn from one another and also appreciate and respect one another. (e) Intercultural living demands graciousness, diplomacy, compromise, serious dialogue, and the development of a common and sustaining vision. A vision helps to orient a community.

Intercultural living is not easy, and as said before, faith plays a crucial role in building intercultural communities. Certainly, there are a lot of challenges to interculturality. They are as follows:

- Ethnocentrism
- Prejudices and stereotypes
- Conflicts
- Self-victimization
- Majoritarian cultural insensitivity
- Rich countries and poor countries

### **Interculturality as Paradigm for Mission**

Intercultural living does not happen automatically; it takes constant effort. Building intercultural communities is more than tolerance of other cultures, and it is not just eating some other food or wearing some other cultural clothes. It is

appreciating other cultures and taking the good elements and appropriating them as our own. In this, there is enrichment for the cultures. We challenge the life-negating elements in other cultures. This is a difficult process. Some of them are very traditional and attached to emotions. But the evil elements and non-human practices must be challenged. This is done only within the spiritual and faith framework. We evaluate or judge the other cultural elements in the light of the gospel teaching. Everyone is created in the image of God; men or women, boys or girls are to be respected as they are the children of God. Being sensitive to the cultural elements and the education of a community for intercultural living would pave the way to understand culture in the light of the gospel teaching. This is Christian mission because we build communities of peace and joy and give witness to others that the Spirit dwells in this community.

Interculturality nurtures the ability to look at oneself through the eyes of other cultures and peoples. There are two dimensions: *ad intra* – intercultural living and *ad extra* – intercultural mission. “The *ad intra* dimension could be discerned from the perspective of mission as witness, while the *ad extra* dimension could be discerned from the perspective of mission as ‘dialogue.’”<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis in the section on “The Common Good and Peace in Society” in *Evangelii Gaudium* (217-236) opens up the way to build an intercultural community. He proposes “four special principles which can guide the development of life in society and the building of a people where differences are harmonized within a shared pursuit.” (EG 22). The four principles are: *time is greater than space, unity prevails over conflict, realities are more important than ideas, and the whole is greater than the part*. In summary, he points to building intercultural communities where there is peace, joy, fraternity and freedom for all cultures and peoples. As the context demands today, the Church’s mission is to build intercultural communities and to invite all Christians to be involved in the intercultural mission, interacting with the larger community and bringing God’s love through our ministries while giving importance to the cultural elements in the local place of the mission.<sup>15</sup>

The Church can promote interculturality in its mission in various ways. This needs conversion. I propose five conversions that can help the Church to be more missionary:

<sup>14</sup> Samuel N. Agcaracar, “Interculturality: A Resource for Communion,” in *Becoming Intercultural: Perspectives on Mission*, Lazar T. Stanislaus and Christian Tauchner, eds., New Delhi: ISPCK, 2021, 303.

<sup>15</sup> For detailed discussion and understanding see Lazar T. Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing (eds.) *Intercultural Living*, Part 1, and *Intercultural Mission*, Part II, New Delhi: ISPCK, 2015.



- Conversion from ethnocentrism,
- Conversion from egoism,
- Conversion from narrow nationalism to being open to other peoples,
- Conversion from consumerism to care for creation,
- Conversion from triumphalism to interreligious dialogue.

St. Paul says to the Galatians, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). In building intercultural community especially among religious congregations, Peter Narh rephrases this text in this manner: “There are no more religious from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania, for we are all one in Christ Jesus and are sisters and brothers – not in the sense of that individual loses his/her identity, but in the sense that living together is possible despite the different cultures.”<sup>16</sup> Today intercultural living is not only possible, but it is an imperative.

### **Prophetic Dialogue and Interculturality**

David Bosch gives thirteen paradigms of mission and in the end concludes that “if everything is mission, nothing is mission.”<sup>17</sup> There is only one mission – *missio Dei*, and this can be done in diverse ways. In the above pages, one understands mission as prophetic dialogue, orienting the Church to proclaim Jesus and show witness to him in a prophetic manner, and that is the demand of the day. When interculturality has to be intentional, and the community evolves it with faith, there is hope and a purifying element because faith challenges the customs and practices of the people which are contrary to the Gospel values. In intercultural living and mission, when we live and do mission with prophetic dialogue, then the scope of transformation will be greater. I see three elements where mission can be enriched in the light of our reflection above.

### **Hospitality: Welcoming Strangers**

Often, intercultural living could be with strangers or newcomers in a society or even the migrants and refugees. Then, intercultural living is a challenge, beginning with accepting others, interacting, knowing and respecting others. Here, the virtue of hospitality plays a key role. Being open to others and welcoming strangers with the perspective of prophetic dialogue and interculturality will shape society

<sup>16</sup> Peter Claver Narh, “Intercultural Community Living,” in *Becoming Intercultural*, 123.

<sup>17</sup> David Bosh, *Transforming Mission*, 511.

with new challenges, but this is Christian mission. Like the Emmaus story (Lk 24), in welcoming the others, the role of host and guest are sometimes reversed, but there is a beautiful presence of God.

### **Communion: Prophetic Witness**

Interculturality demands building relationships among diverse cultures and nations. Interculturality helps people to have communion through dialogue, interaction, and with a common vision as children of God. This communion becomes attractive to others when the incarnate Word is manifested through their living and action. In the midst of war and tensions among tribes, clans and nations today, through intercultural living and doing mission with prophetic dialogue, the communion of the Church becomes prophetic witness. An interculturally oriented Church becomes a model or pathway giving witness which is extraordinary – prophetic witness.

### **Counter-cultural society: Living with Faith Vision**

A society built on interculturality and prophetic dialogue is not an ordinary community; its missionary activities cannot be simple, limiting oneself to sharing, talking, coming together for parties, and so forth. It becomes a counter-cultural community against the people who give merit to a passion for money, fame and name. This community is walking the talk of the faith that the people profess, and it is ready to take risks for the growth of the society and the good of the neighbouring countries, to welcome migrants and refugees, and to give up one's own progress and wealth for the sake of others. Faith impels the community to place others first. Others really matter.

A more intentional approach to prophetic dialogue, especially in intercultural living and mission, would enhance the way we do mission today.

## “Ecological Conversion” as an Interreligious Responsibility

REV. FR. JOSHTROM ISAAC KUREETHADAM\*

### 1. The Deeper Spiritual Roots of the Ecological Crisis

In the early decades of the growth of environmental awareness, the focus was mainly on the physical impacts of the ecological crisis on human health and on the ecosystems. The last few decades have witnessed a steady increase in public awareness of the moral dimension of the ecological crisis, as greater attention has been paid to the plight of the poor, the early and disproportionate victims of environmental degradation. Today, we are challenged to deepen our understanding of the ecological crisis as a profoundly spiritual and relational crisis. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr noted during his Rockefeller Foundation Lectures at the University of Chicago way back in 1966: “Because of the intimate connection between man and nature, the inner state of man is reflected in the external order.”<sup>1</sup> At a deeper level, “our ecological predicament needs to be recognized as an external unfolding of the spiritual crisis that afflicts us.”<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict pointed out with a ring of prophecy in the homily of the inaugural mass of his pontificate in 2005: “the external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”.<sup>3</sup>

The degradation of our surrounding environment is intimately and inextricably linked to the inner degradation within us. As Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn, a Sufi sage, affirms “the state of the outer world does not merely correspond to the general state of men’s souls; it also in a sense depends on that state.” Accordingly, “the corruption of man must necessarily affects the whole.”<sup>4</sup> A significant contribution of *Laudato Si’* has been that of shedding light on the deeper spiritual roots of the ecological crisis. Pope Francis writes: “The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil,

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<sup>1</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), 96.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, “The Eclipse of the Soul and the Rise of the Ecological Crisis,” *Spirituality Studies* 8/2 (2022), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily for the Solemn Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry* (24 April 2005): AAS 97 (2005), 710.

<sup>4</sup> Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn, *The Book of Certainty: The Sufi Doctrines of Faith, Vision, and Gnosis* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 21.

in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.”<sup>5</sup> Francis “sees the ecological crisis as a consequence of sinful attitudes and behavior, as a result of disordered heart. In other words: It is also ‘our inner home’ that is in disarray.”<sup>6</sup>

Many of the ancient religious traditions attribute the disarray of our inner life, reflected in the external environmental degradation, in deep seated human vices like *greed* (Pāli *raga*; Sanskrit *lobha*), *hatred* (Pāli *dvesa*; Sanskrit *dosa*), and *delusion* (Pāli *moha*; Sanskrit *moha*). Within the Islamic tradition, one reads: “Corruption has appeared on earth and at sea because of what the hands of men have wrought; thus does God make them taste some of the consequences of their actions, so that they might return” (*Qur’ān* 30:41). Our persistent sinful behaviour is preventing the healing of the land.

## 2. A Call to Repentance and Reconciliation

Since the root cause of the contemporary ecological crisis is human sin and human selfishness, what we need, in the very first place, is deep repentance, or *metanoia*. We may cite the ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in this regard:

The root cause of our environmental sin lies in our self-centredness and in the mistaken order of values that we inherit and accept without any critical evaluation. We need a new way of thinking about our own selves, about our relationship with the world and with God. Without this revolutionary “change of mind,” all our conservation projects, however well intentioned, will remain ultimately ineffective. For we shall be dealing only with the symptoms, not with their cause. Lectures and international conferences may help to awaken our conscience, but what is truly required is a baptism of tears.<sup>7</sup>

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis speaks of reconciliation with the rest of creation, a sort of universal reconciliation that needs to follow our repentance for our sins against creation. According to the Pope, “it is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Clemens Sedmak, “Traditional Concerns, New Language? Reflections on *Laudato Si’*,” *Heythrop Journal* 58 (2017), 946.

<sup>7</sup> Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, “Closing Address during the Concluding Ceremony for the Fourth International and Interreligious Symposium on the Adriatic Sea, June 10, 2002” in *Cosmic Grace Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew*, ed. John Chryssavgis (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 276.

rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence”<sup>8,9</sup>

Our true repentance for the precarious state of our common home can be measured to the extent that we are willing to own up our responsibility for the harm we cause to the planetary nest that shelters us. It begins with personal responsibility. As the biblical scholar Nicholas King points out, “it is a profoundly biblical instinct to recognize that ‘I am part of the problem’, as, for example, David is forced to do in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband”.<sup>10</sup> Human responsibility for the guardianship of creation is a common theme in all major religions. Reflecting God in caring for the world is fundamental to what humans are. It is our clear job description in the Bible as we read in the Genesis creation narrative. The *Qur’an* describes humankind as *khalā’if fi ‘l-ard*, agents held responsible for all they do on the Earth: “(God) it is Who has held you responsible on the Earth, and raised some of you by degrees above others, so that He might try you in that which He has bestowed upon you....” (6:165).<sup>11</sup> In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis invites each of us to see the truth of our responsibility for the state of the planet, “challenging us to acknowledge our sins against creation.”<sup>12</sup> The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew adds: “We must all—together, in partnership and collaboration and communion—humbly accept our responsibility for exploiting and destroying natural resources, while at the same time embracing our vocation to “serve and preserve” (*Gen 2:15*) God’s gift of Creation.”<sup>13</sup> A repentant acknowledgement of our responsibility in harming God’s creation and one another can truly lead to a profound ecological conversion.

### 3. Integral Ecological Conversion

We need today, what John Paul II called an “ecological conversion”, if we are to manage to “finally stop before the abyss”.<sup>14</sup> The needed “genuine conversion in

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bonaventure, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, VIII, 1, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, (New York: New City Press, 2000), 586.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas King, “*Laudato Si’*: A Biblical Angle,” *The Way* 54 (2015), 28.

<sup>11</sup> Othman Llewellyn, Fazlun Khalid et al., *Al-Mizan: Covenant for the Earth* (Birmingham, UK: The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, 2024), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Foreword” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, Ed. John Hart (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), p. xviii.

<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II, *General Audience Address* (17 January 2001).

ways of thought and behaviour”<sup>15</sup> is about learning to co-dwell in our common home of the Earth, with God the Creator, and with our fellow creatures, including humans. Our survival along with the rest of the biotic community is tied to humanity’s conversion in this regard. John Hart writes: “Humankind needs to undergo socioeconomic and socioecological conversion for its own survival and wellbeing, as well as the survival and wellbeing of the Earth and the entire community of living beings.”<sup>16</sup>

An integral ecological conversion is about establishing peace with the Creator and the rest of creation.<sup>17</sup>

First of all, ecological conversion calls for a return to the Creator. The ecological crisis is, at the deepest level, “a rebellion against God as source and mystery of all created life, and our wilful misuse of God’s creation”.<sup>18</sup> In this context, Seyyed Hossein Nasr had noted with great insight nearly half a century ago: “it is hopeless to expect to live in harmony with that grand theophany which is virgin nature, while remaining oblivious and indifferent to the Source of that theophany both beyond nature and at the centre of man’s being”.<sup>19</sup> In fact, faith traditions have always emphasized how in order to have peace and harmony with the natural world, one must be in harmony and equilibrium with Heaven, and ultimately with the Source and Origin of all things. Pope Benedict XVI speaks poignantly in this regard:

Is it not true that an irresponsible use of creation begins precisely where God is marginalized or even denied? If the relationship between human creatures and the Creator is forgotten, matter is reduced to a selfish possession, man becomes the ‘last word’, and the purpose of human existence is reduced to a scramble for the maximum number of possessions possible.<sup>20</sup>

Just as the consequences of human sin falls on the land, apart from befalling the human community and their relationship with God, the repentance of the people of God will and can also lead to the healing of the land. When people return to God and keep His covenant, then God will heal the land. As we read in the

<sup>15</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation* (1990), 13.

<sup>16</sup> John Hart, “Common Commons: Social and Sacred Space” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, ed. John Hart (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 472.

<sup>17</sup> See Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 359-62.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick Quinn, *To Heal the Earth: A Theology of Ecology* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1994), 26.

<sup>19</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London – Boston: Unwin Paperbacks, 1990), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *General Audience* (26 August 2009).

second book of the Chronicles: “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 *Chron* 7:14). Dave Bookless writes in this regard.

What is so significant is that healing the environment comes about not primarily by recycling, down-sizing or resource management, but by repentance and returning to God. The land can only be healed when its inhabitants recognize whose land it is, and repair their broken relationship with God and each other. If the ecological crisis is ultimately a spiritual crisis, then the cure is also a spiritual one.<sup>21</sup>

In second place, ecological conversion calls for a ‘turning’ to the creation itself. An ecological conversion is ultimately to the very Earth itself, the very *humus*, from where humans originated, and whose stewardship was the primary task entrusted to them. As the indigenous communities reminds us: “we must live in peace with each other and Mother Earth to ensure harmony with her natural laws and with the Creation”.<sup>22</sup>

In the face of the contemporary ecological crisis - as it was in the aftermath of original sin of Adam and Eve - the Creator’s command to humanity is to return to the earth, and to till the very ground from where they originally came.

... until you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.  
... therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden,  
to till the ground from which he was taken.  
(*Gen* 3:19,23)

A penitent return to the Earth is at the core of a genuine ecological conversion. The salvation of the earth is intimately tied to our humble return to it. Here is a very insightful passage from Scripture scholar Brigitte Kahl.

*Until you return to the earth. For from her you were taken.* Throughout the centuries,

<sup>21</sup> Dave Bookless, *Planet Wise: Dare to Care for God’s World* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 58.

<sup>22</sup> *The Declaration of the Alliance of Guardians and Children of Mother Earth* (November 28, 2015), cited in United Nations Environment Programme and Parliament of the World’s Religions, *Faith for Earth: A Call for Action* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2020), 15.

the “back to earth” of Gen. 3:19 has been almost exclusively remembered at the tombs of the dead. Its challenge to Christian life practices was seldom heard. But the text very explicitly talks about a change of direction, for the Hebrew word for *return* implies also the theological dimension of repentance, turning back to God. Taking the fruit of the forbidden tree has damaged the relationship not only between God and Adam, but also between Adam and *'adamah*, as the *thorns and thistles* demonstrate. When Adam is sent out from the garden, his task is to serve the earth is repeated by God.<sup>23</sup>

Ecological conversion is above all at the personal level. In fact, a single person can make a decisive difference. Pope Francis recalls in this regard the edifying story of Noah in the Old Testament, whose personal righteousness saved not only himself and his kin from the destructive flood waters, but in a representative manner the rest of the biotic community as well. “Although ‘the wickedness of man was great in the earth’ (*Gen* 6:5) and the Lord ‘was sorry that he had made man on the earth’ (*Gen* 6:6), nonetheless, through Noah, who remained innocent and just, God decided to open a path of salvation. In this way he gave humanity the chance of a new beginning. All it takes is one good person to restore hope!”<sup>24</sup>

However, Pope Francis is quick to note in *Laudato Si'* that given the grave and global nature of the precarious situation of our common home individual efforts are not sufficient in themselves. A collective or communitarian ecological conversion is also equally important.

Nevertheless, self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world to day. Isolated individuals can lose their ability and freedom to escape the utilitarian mindset, and end up prey to an unethical consumerism bereft of social or ecological awareness. Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. ... The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion.<sup>25</sup>

Ecological conversion is also about our basic responsibility towards future generations. As Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudate Deum*: “What is being asked of us is nothing other than a certain responsibility for the legacy we will leave behind,

<sup>23</sup> Brigitte Kahl, “Fratricide and Ecocide: Rereading Genesis 2-4” in *Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church's Response*, eds. Dieter Hessel and Larry Rasmussen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 57.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 219.



once we pass from this world.”<sup>26</sup> As faith leaders acknowledge: “*Future generations will never forgive us* if we squander this precious opportunity. We have inherited a garden: we must not leave a desert to our children.”<sup>27</sup> I conclude with the closing lines of the Joint Statement of the Global Faith Leaders held at Abu Dhabi on 7 November 2023:

As we stand at the precipice of history, considering the gravity of the challenges we collectively face, we remain mindful of the legacy we will leave for generations to come. ... The urgency of the hour demands that we act swiftly, collaboratively, and resolutely to heal our wounded world and preserve the splendor of our common home. In the process, we need to bring back hope for future generations. Together, we extend our open arms to all people, inviting them to embark on this journey toward a future of resilience, harmony, and flourishing for all life on Earth.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum: Apostolic Exhortation to All People of Good Will on the Climate Crisis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2023), 18.

<sup>27</sup> Joint Statement issued at the Meeting on “Faith and Science: Towards COP26” (Vatican, 4 October 2021). Italics as in the original.

<sup>28</sup> Global Faith Leaders Summit, *The Abu Dhabi Interfaith Statement for COP28* (7 November 2023): <https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/43930>. It is highly encouraging that faith communities are increasingly joining forces for the protection of God’s creation. The publication of *Laudato Si’* was followed by important statements in the area of creation care from major faith traditions. See the *Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis* published in June 2015 and signed by more than 330 Jewish Rabbis, the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change* released in August 2015 at the International Islamic Climate Change Symposium in Istanbul, the *Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders* issued by the Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective in October 2015, the *Jain Declaration on the Climate Crisis* issued by the Federation of Jain Association in North America in October 2019, *Bhumi Devi Ki Jai! A Hindu Declaration on Climate Change* released in November 2015, and *Al-Mizan: Covenant for the Earth*, published by The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences in February 2024.

## *A Contextual Reading of 'Conversion' in "Dialogue and Mission"*

REV. FR. JAINO JACOB\*

### **Introduction**

The Secretariat for Non-Christians, now known as the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, addressed "The Church's Attitude Towards the Followers of Other Religions" in 1984 and published the document widely recognized as *Dialogue and Mission*. Four decades after its release, this document remains a cornerstone of the contemporary Church's mission, particularly within the multi-religious context of India. It continues to serve as a guiding principle for the Church's interaction with other religions and its evangelizing mission. Given the current religio-political challenges in India, this is an opportune moment to reflect on the path outlined by the document, especially concerning 'conversion.' *Dialogue and Mission* not only continues to inspire the Church's mission but also fosters mutual transformation among adherents of different religions, urging missionary disciples to remain faithful to God's mission. This article examines the theme of conversion as promoted in the *Dialogue and Mission* document within the Indian context.

### **Indian response to the mission and conversion**

In India, the issue of conversion is a contentious one, involving constant clashes between religious and socio-political interpretations. This makes it a highly debated topic in contemporary Indian politics, society, and religion. The terms 'Christian mission, conversion, baptism' have acquired a negative connotation in the religious, cultural and political context of India. The concept of "conversion," which involves changing one's religion, has a long and complex history intertwined with cultural and religious identity. Conversion is often perceived as a highly undesirable act, tantamount to betraying the culture of the land. Western and Eastern worldviews differ significantly in their perceptions and approaches to conversion. In the Western perspective, conversion is generally seen as a personal and individual decision. In the East, particularly in India, conversion is deeply connected to the group, family, society, and culture. It is often viewed as a disruption of the 'cosmic order,' with every being, from birds to butterflies, snakes to fish, meant to remain

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as they are. Therefore, any act of conversion is perceived as an externally influenced deviation from one's nature, turning the world upside down.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity is often seen as abandoning one's own culture and embracing Western values. In the current political and social climate, missionary work and services are perceived by many as covert methods of converting people to the Church. This perception is fuelled by fundamentalist groups for their political agendas. Motivated by political ambitions and Hindu nationalism (Hindutva), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has introduced anti-conversion laws in various states across India. The anti-conversion laws have a complex political, cultural, religious, and historical background. These laws are based on two main assumptions: first, that people who have converted might not have done so out of their own free will, and second, that certain sects and classes of individuals are more vulnerable to coercion when it comes to conversion.<sup>2</sup> These laws challenge the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, such as Article 21, the right to life and liberty, and Article 19, which provides the right to free speech, expression, and association. They also violate the fundamental right to practice one's religion and the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate one's religion as per Article 25. In this Indian context, it is essential to explore the real meaning and process of conversion within the mission of the Church, based on the principles outlined in the document *Dialogue and Mission*.

### **'Conversion' in *Dialogue and Mission***

*Dialogue and Mission* emphasizes the importance of conversion as a vital part of the Church's mission. It describes conversion as a personal, deep, spiritual process of transformation (DM 37). Everyone has a natural desire to grow, and this growth and transformation occur in genuine dialogue. The Church desires that everyone comes to know God's love for them and experiences a conversion of heart. It is the Holy Spirit who opens a person's heart to conversion, making the Holy Spirit the principal agent of this transformation, not man (DM 39). The document outlines two distinct meanings of conversion. In the language of the Bible and Christian tradition, conversion refers to the return of a humble and penitent heart to God, with a desire to surrender one's life more generously to Him. This is an ongoing process (DM 37). The second meaning of conversion involves

<sup>1</sup> R.E. Frykenberg, *Oxford History of the Christian Church: Christianity in India from Beginning to the Present*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, 480.

<sup>2</sup> R. Garg, "Anti-conversion laws in India", *iPleaders*, <https://tinyurl.com/2hfc424v>, (accessed on 23 June 2024).

a person's voluntary decision to change their religious affiliation. In this context, one may choose to leave their previous spiritual or religious background to pursue another path. For example, from a particular love, the heart can open itself to a universal love (DM 37). In the process of conversion, the sovereignty of the law of conscience is emphasized (DM 38): "No one must be constrained to act against his conscience, nor ought he to be impeded in acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters." Thus, "Dialogue and Mission" underlines the importance of conversion as a vocation to all, free from any external forces.

## **Conversion and Dialogue**

According to the document *Dialogue and Mission*, the purpose of dialogue is not to convert the other party to Christianity but to facilitate a mutual deepening of conversion to God for both participants. Those who engage in dialogue do not change God or the religion they represent. Instead, they may deepen their understanding of God, who transforms them through the dialogue, thereby clarifying their comprehension.<sup>3</sup> Conversion is open to all, regardless of their religious traditions, and all people are continually called to this conversion (DM 37). The goal of dialogue is a deeper conversion of all to God. In the context of interfaith dialogue, reflecting on the spiritual conversion process is inevitable (DM 37). Any mission lacking a dialogical spirit would fail to respect human dignity and the teachings of the Gospel, which advocate for openness, understanding, and mutual enrichment (DM 29). Dialogue paves the way for understanding, convictions, and transformation. As dialogue cannot be separated from mission, so too, conversion cannot be separated from dialogue.

## **Missionary conversion**

Mission is always an invitation to the conversion of heart, a turning to God, and all are called to this conversion (DM 37). Conversion is an ongoing process that involves all areas of life. When we discuss conversion, we must consider the need for conversion in the mission itself. We cannot preach conversion unless we ourselves are converted anew every day (RM 47). We cannot invite others to conversion if we ourselves are not committed to a life of ongoing conversion.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Felix Machado, "Some Urgent Challenges to Interreligious Dialogue" in Catarina Belo – Jean-Jacques Pérennès (eds), *Mission in Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Michael L. Fitzgerald VI* (115-128), Peeters, Paris; Louvain 2012, 116.

<sup>4</sup> Frank J. Caggiano, "The Conversion of the Missionary: A Journey of Heart" Pastoral Reflection", in *Mission: An International Review* 51 (2023) 1, (11-18), 15.

Mission begins with the conversion of the missionary's heart to the values taught by Jesus.

The missionary must first undergo a personal conversion to Christ. Christ must become 'whole' of our lives, not just a part of them. Through this spiritual conversion, we can overcome the 'self-centredness' in our lives. For we are born self-centred, seeing ourselves as the centre of the world. The second conversion is intercultural understanding and awareness. We tend to feel superior to other people and cultures, thinking we are the best.<sup>5</sup>

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis says: "I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, schedules, language and structures can be channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for self-preservation (EG 27)." To be a missionary requires a radical change of thought, both for individuals and for whole communities. Let us not be afraid; with trust in God and great courage, "a missionary option" that is capable of transforming everything so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than to its self-preservation.<sup>6</sup> Conversion is needed at the theological level (*missio Dei*), at the personal level (I am a mission), at the ecclesiological level (a servant Church for the Kingdom of God), and at the sociological level (Integral transformation).

### Challenges of Conversion

In the Indian context, individuals who convert to Christianity face numerous challenges in their personal, family and community life. The decision to embrace Christianity often perceived as a betrayal of loyalty to one's family, caste and nation. Baptism, in particular, is often perceived as a renunciation of one's own cultural origins, with the implication of joining a foreign religion.<sup>7</sup> In India, conversion implies a change in one's social and community life; social isolation requires extraordinary courage and often results in the loss of family property, in-

<sup>5</sup> D.L. Whiteman, "The Conversion of a Missionary: A Missiological Study of Acts 10", in *Missiology: An International Review* 51(2023)1, (19-30)20.

<sup>6</sup> Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples Pontifical Mission Societies, *Baptized and Sent; The Church of Christ on Mission in the World, Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019*, San Paolo, Milano 2019, 11.

<sup>7</sup> J.A. Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, London 1999, 80.

heritance and a life of societal exclusion.<sup>8</sup> Under *Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act* 1956, a person who changes religion and joins other religious groups is considered ‘non-caste’ and loses the right to inherit property.<sup>9</sup> In *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II emphasises that every convert is a gift to the Church (RM 47), which places a great responsibility on the Church to care for them and be a living example for them. It is a real challenge for the existing communities to accept and empower the new members, at least in some regions of India.

## Religious freedom and conversion

Pope Paul VI, in the document *Dignitatis Humanae*, declares that every human person has a right to religious freedom based on the inherent nature and dignity of the individual. The Church urges nations to recognize religious freedom in their constitutional law to ensure it is protected and becomes a civil right for all citizens (DH 2, 6). Following the teachings of Vatican II, “Dialogue and Mission” emphasizes that mission must always respect individual freedom: “Mission must always revolve around a man in full respect for his freedom” (DM 18). In its evangelizing mission, the Church must promote and respect true freedom, rejecting any form of coercion, especially in the religious sphere (DM 18). “Dialogue and Mission” further underlines the importance of freedom, stating that “non-Christians be freely converted to the Lord under the action of the Holy Spirit who opens their hearts so that they may adhere to Him” (DM 37). The Church actively promotes and protects religious freedom in the modern world. Pope Benedict XVI referred to religious freedom as ‘the path to peace.’<sup>10</sup> The joint document “Human Fraternity,” signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, also highlights the importance of freedom.

Freedom is a right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action. Divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives. Therefore, the fact that people are forced to adhere to a certain religion or culture must be rejected, as well as the imposition of a cultural way of life that others do not accept.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> J. Saldanha, *Inculturation*, St Paul Publication, Bombay 1987, 93.

<sup>9</sup> S. Lourdsamy, *Religious Conversion in a Multireligious Context: Outlook on Civil and Canon Laws*, Media House, New Delhi 2011, 105.

<sup>10</sup> Benedict XVI, “Message for The Celebration of the World Day of Peace (1 January 2011)”, 15 in <https://tinyurl.com/3kmwpxjp>, (accessed on 22 October 2023).

<sup>11</sup> *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*. A Joint Document signed by Pope Francis and The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb (3-5 February 2019) in AAS 111 (2019) 391-477.

Anti-conversion law in India is known as the 'Freedom of Religion Act,' but in reality, it is promoted to restrict the religious freedom of people to adopt another faith according to their free choice and conviction. The principle of religious liberty is the cornerstone of human rights. Among all fundamental human rights, religious freedom is a place of primary importance (EN 39). Thus, freedom for an individual as well as a community to profess and practice their religion forms an essential element of a peaceful and harmonious society. The guarantee and the promotion of religious freedom constitutes a 'test' of respect for the rights of others and is realized when the different religious confessions insist on it as part of their teachings, as a guarantee of their respective identities and their freedom.<sup>12</sup> Conversion to other religions should occur according to the principles of religious freedom, freedom of conscience, human rights and dignity, and there should be no force or coercion (DM 18,19,37-39). The state has no right to suppress the religious freedom of the people; instead, it should control the abuse of the right to religious freedom.

### **Practical Implications for Conversion**

In the multireligious and cultural society of India, what is the need of time is a conversion in the personal relationship between the people as suggested in Dialogue and Mission: "Friendly relationship between believers of various religions is born of respect and love for one another" (DM 2). The Church needs to work together with all in order to fulfil the building of God's reign. The Church should help all the faithful respect and esteem the values, traditions, and convictions of other believers and create constructive relationships with others (DM 3). In this regard, the Synodal way of being the Church is very essential in society. Synodality has immense scope for travelling with people of other religions as well as developing a collective dynamic within the Catholic and Christian communities. Synodality with other religions takes expression in interfaith interaction and harmony among religious, national, and cultural communities.<sup>13</sup>

In its mission, the Church should read the "signs of the time" and collaborate with others for the promotion of social justice, peace, liberty and moral values (DM 32). DM advises us to be prudent, and discernment will teach us what is ap-

<sup>12</sup> Felix Machado, "Some Urgent Challenges to Interreligious Dialogue" in Catarina Belo – Jean-Jacques Pérennès (eds), *Mission in Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Michael L. Fitzgerald VI* (115-128), 125.

<sup>13</sup> M.D. Thomas, "Synodality with other Religions-Part II", in *Vidyajyothi Journal of Theological Reflection* 88(March 2024) 3, 167-183, 182.

appropriate in each particular situation: collaboration, witness, listening, or exchange of values. Each person has a task of particular witness in society (DM 5). Today, more than ever, all religions and all believers are called to collaborate so that every person can reach his transcendent goal, realize his authentic growth and help cultures preserve their own religious and spiritual values in the presence of rapid social changes (DM 12). A mission based on 'love' is the solution for the problems faced in the evangelizing mission of the Church in India. The Church is the living sign of the love of God. Our mission, which is the continuation of the mission of Christ, must be imbued with the spirit of love. Each activity of the mission of Christ must be based on love if it is to be faithful to Christ, who committed the mission and continues to make it possible throughout history (DM 9). Missionaries are asked to follow Jesus. The life of Jesus contains all the elements of the mission. Everything in Jesus was the expression of his love, and the missionaries were asked to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

Conversion is an act of God facilitated by the Holy Spirit, and everyone, regardless of their religion and culture, is called to this transformation towards the divine (DM 37). Dialogue, which occurs in the sharing of daily life, collaborative actions for peace and justice, the exchange of spiritual values, and formal theological discussions, paves the way for understanding, convictions, and mutual transformation. Any sense of mission not imbued with such a spirit of dialogue would be contrary to the demands of true humanity and the teachings of the Gospel (DM 29). At this time, the Church needs a missionary conversion. This conversion is necessary at the theological level (*missio Dei*), at the personal level ("I am a mission"), at the ecclesiological level (a servant Church for the Kingdom of God), and at the sociological level (integral transformation). As outlined in the document "Dialogue and Mission", conversion guides the Church's mission in India. When the Church's mission is criticized and misinterpreted as 'forceful conversion,' these challenges provide new energy to remain faithful to the mission call we have received. The mission becomes a matter of personal conversion and conviction. In the context of dialogue, mission becomes 'conversation,' and the final result is a transformative mission. The occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of "Dialogue and Mission" invites individuals and the Church to a missionary conversion, to submit their lives more generously to God and His mission, "*missio Dei*".



# NARRATIVES OF MISSION AND DIALOGUE

## *Africa -Nigeria*

REV. SR. VERONICA IFEYINWA ONYEANISI, OLA\*

### **Introduction**

In Nigeria, narratives of mission and dialogue have been integral to the country's socio-political and religious landscape. Missionary activities, dating back to the 19th century, have played a significant role in shaping religious beliefs and practices, as well as educational systems. Dialogue between different religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria has been both a challenge and a necessity. With a diverse population comprising Christians, Muslims, and adherents of traditional African religions, as well as numerous ethnic groups, the country has experienced periodic tensions and conflicts along religious and ethnic lines. Efforts at interfaith dialogue have been ongoing, facilitated by religious leaders, civil society organizations, and government initiatives. These dialogues seek to promote understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among Nigeria's diverse religious communities.

However, Nigeria's inability to engender dialogue among her citizens has resulted to religious extremism, particularly from groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP which have targeted both Christians and moderate Muslims perceived as not adhering to its extremist ideology. This has resulted to the current and sustained insecurity in the country constituting a threat to the country's stability and requiring greater efforts for dialogue and peaceful coexistence. 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 rancor, bitterness and hate. Mutual prejudices hinder cooperation and exchange, and rob a people of a hope of a great nation." Dialogue is not about judging, weighing, or making decisions, but about understanding and learning. Dialogue dispels stereotypes, builds trust, and enables people to be open to perspectives that are very different from their own. Dialogue is one sure way to heal memories and wounded hearts. In dialogue, education, formation, awareness and understanding are key words. Hence Dialogue becomes a necessity in promoting peace, justice and development.

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## **Mission as mandate of the Church**

The Church's mandate is Mission which states "Go out to the whole world and preach the gospel" Matt. 28: 20, in other-words, go out to proclaim the good news, to evangelize, to renew and to transform the world without limit or boundary. The Bishops of Nigeria at Ibadan in 2022

Eucharistic congress buttress this when they brought up the model of Church as Family of God on Mission with a publication of a book to the effect for the faithful.

The Church exists to evangelize as pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II strongly outlined in their various encyclicals, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Dives in Misericordia*. Mission is the essence of the Church and it is the task given to the people of God.

This mandate is for every baptized Christian and humanity which involves witnessing, service; collaboration, building community and solidarity with people of different faith through respect, peace and Justice. Our process of evangelization should be integral, permeating into all spheres of life-political, social, religion, culture, and economy. To achieve this in a diverse society requires dialogue. So, we cannot go about mission without dialogue. Dialogue is the necessary tool to evangelization. This should involve sincere dialogue and appreciation of our diversity and pluralism and the unique contribution of every group for the good of humanity and glory of God. Therefore, Evangelization, Mission and dialogue is integral part of our Christian calling.

## **Mission and Dialogue in Nigeria:**

God himself initiated dialogue as a process for better understanding and good relationship in Genesis 1 and Luke 1 and in many other passages in the Bible. The second Vatican Council exhaustively discusses dialogue. Also various Supreme Pontiffs dedicated their encyclical letters and Apostolic exhortations to this topic-Dialogue with people of other faith emphasizing the importance of Dialogue in our Mission of Evangelization for better understanding and collaboration with one another for peaceful coexistence and development.

In 2022, the department of Mission and Dialogue was created as a unique way the Church in Nigeria responded to the mandate of the second Vatican Council that dialogue is not an option but a necessary tool for Mission. The department promotes ecumenical dialogue within the Christian family and dialogue with other religious bodies. The department of Mission and Dialogue of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria seeks to interact with other believers, especially of the African Traditional Religion and the Islamic Religion. Continuous efforts are

made to build bridges, to recognize and act as people who believe in the supremacy of God, to cooperate in the promotion of the good of all in Nigeria and to cultivate the culture of respect for other people's religion or beliefs.

### **Women's Interfaith Council (WIC) as a response to the Church's Mandate**

In 2010, the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles initiated the Interfaith forum of Muslim and Christian Women's Association a.k.a Women's Interfaith Council (WIC) in response to the Second Vatican Council mandate to promote and create platform for women and youth of different faith groups to come together in sincere dialogue and collaboration in the work of justice, peace, development, issues that concerns women and girls. Nigerians have gone through many faces of violent conflict, slavery and colonialism with women always on the receiving end without being involved in decision making and peace building processes to the extent that the value of trust has been replaced with prejudice, pre-conception and mutual suspicions. WIC through Dialogue has helped people to resolve long-standing conflicts and to build deeper understanding of contentious issues. In dialogue, we do not judge or make decisions, but create a conducive atmosphere for understanding and learning. In this process we discourage and dispel stereotypes, builds trust, and enables people to be open to perspectives that are very different from their own. Dialogue is one of the best ways to heal bad memories and wounded hearts. In dialogue, education, formation, awareness and understanding are key words.

### **Mission and dialogue in Nigeria my experiences**

Living out our mission of evangelization and dialogue through my commitment in the area of Interreligious Dialogue for peaceful coexistence draws inspiration from the Grace of God which gives me courage, strength, direction, wisdom and understanding.

Some schools of thought ask "would the world have fewer conflicts without religion?" This question has become critical as many conflicts and crises in the world today are linked to religion and extremism whereas many religions preach peace. This explains the thrust of my evangelical mission-to help people understand their religion and work for peace and love of one another.

Our mission within the dialogue framework is to contribute to the building of an informed society- religious adherents, discourage extremism and distortions by religious and political ideologies that are the case at the moment. The exposure

of women and youth faith leaders to the knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of Islamic and Christian beliefs, theories and practices of the two main religions in Nigeria become very necessary in countering these negative views for peaceful co-existence and social cohesion. This is the message Women's Interfaith Council (WIC) promotes with the aim of engineering unity in diversity and collective human development.

### **Involvement in Interreligious dialogue and peace building processes**

Women Interfaith Council (WIC) has been actively involved in interreligious dialogue in Nigeria especially in Northern Nigeria which is notorious for religious intolerance. Efforts are made at building trust amongst and between the major religions: Christians and Muslims. This while dissuading the use of religion to perpetuate violence also enables young people and children to grow up to become bridge builders in their communities. WIC underlines the commonality between and within the religions while enabling people to work at their differences. Through Dialogue WIC has helped people to resolve long-standing conflicts and to build deeper understanding of controversial issues.

### **Conclusion**

“That they may be one” was Jesus’ prayer for all humanity and this always stand out for me in my mission of evangelization through Interreligious dialogue and peace building processes. “That they may be one” does not literally mean every one becoming Catholic or one faith but that we may be one in our diversity, respecting one’s beliefs that values life and dignity of person in our society which is the fundamental teaching of the Catholic Church. The Interreligious dialogue has afforded me the opportunity of reaching out to people of different faiths and beliefs.

Inter-religious dialogue that is promoted in the modern time is basically aimed at achieving a better human relation, peace, tolerance and mutual respect while acknowledging doctrinal differences. Interreligious dialogue is therefore “a work desired by God,” “an integral element of the Church’s evangelizing mission,” which finds expression in the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

## Introduction

Selon le pape Paul VI, « l'abîme entre l'Évangile et la culture constitue le drame de notre temps ».<sup>1</sup> De cette phrase, nous avons tiré le besoin de l'inculturation surtout en Afrique subsaharienne. Nous osons dire que cette vision du pape Paul VI est la tâche même qui nous incombe. Il nous faut promouvoir les narratives des dialogues interreligieux et par conséquent, encourager les dialogues interculturels.

Notre réflexion s'appuie sur cette affirmation de Gerard Buakassa qui disait : « Aujourd'hui, la religion africaine n'existe nulle part, mais elle est partout, dans les consciences, dans les opérations spirituelles ou empiriques, dans les représentations, dans les attitudes, dans les gestes, dans les proverbes, dans les légendes, dans les mythes... Elle est partout, à la campagne comme en ville, dans les procès judiciaires comme les conventions politiques... »<sup>2</sup> L'expression de la religion traditionnelle africaine (ou ces religions) n'a été reconnue qu'à partir du 1965 lors d'un colloque à Bouake. Même l'ouvrage phare « Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent »<sup>3</sup>, paru en 1956 aux éditions de Cerf, n'a pas évoqué directement l'expression « la Religion Traditionnelle Africaine » (RTA). Ce terme a été officialisé, disait Tabard, au cours d'un autre colloque tenu à Cotonou au Bénin en 1971 sur « *Les religions africaines comme sources de valeurs de civilisation* ».

Quant à l'Église Catholique, nous pouvons dire que c'est la visite de sa Sainteté le pape Paul VI en Afrique subsaharienne qui a favorisé la rencontre du catholicisme et le RTA. Dès lors, le Conseil Pontifical pour le Dialogue Interreligieux avec sa charge « d'être le moyen par qui (l'Église) arrivera à un dialogue sincère et respectueux avec ceux qui « croient en Dieu » et l'adorent », donnera une autre

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<sup>1</sup> Exhortation apostolique *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, N° 20.

<sup>2</sup> Tabard, René. « Théologie des religions traditionnelles africaines », *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, vol. 96, no. 3, 2008, pp. 327-341. DOI : 10.3917/rsr.083.0327. Tabard lui-même a fait référence à Buakassa. [Gerard Buakassa, *Impact de la religion africaine sur l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui ? latence et patience*, in Colloque du Festival Mondial des Arts Négro-africain, Lagos, Janvier 1977.] Tabard ajoutait que "l'auteur (Buakassa) y développe les nombreux impacts des religions africaines traditionnelles sur l'existence quotidienne contemporaine des populations africaines."

<sup>3</sup> *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, Paris, Ed. Du Cerf, 1956, 281p.

dimension à la relation entre l'Église catholique et la RTA. Saint Jean Paul II continuera dans le pas de Paul VI. Ainsi, nous nous réjouissons de ce début timide qui a porté beaucoup de fruit et qui nous donne la possibilité de parler à propos des « narratives de dialogue » en Côte d'Ivoire.

### **Les narratives du dialogue avec la RTA**

Les narratives des dialogues avec les religions traditionnelles africaines RTA organisées sont rares principalement parce que les religions africaines ne sont ni animées par une vision universaliste, ni structurées hiérarchiquement à l'instar de l'Église catholique. Il faut une méthodologie bien élaborée pour comprendre et aborder ces dialogues. La méthodologie de dialogue proposée aux futurs prêtres catholiques et agents pastoraux dans l'enseignement à l'Institut Catholique Missionnaire d'Abidjan (ICMA) s'articule autour de trois termes et leur compréhension profondes dans la langue maternelle traditionnelle de chaque étudiant. Ces trois vocables sont : Dieu, religion, et morale (moralité ou éthique). Ceux-ci nous aident à approcher le dialogue dans trois dimensions : la compréhension du principe de Dieu ; Dieu et sa célébration rituelle comme une organisation religieuse, puis l'identification et la classification de ce qui est bien et mauvais dans la vie courante.

### **La compréhension du principe de Dieu**

Il est demandé aux étudiants de première année d'analyser le concept « Dieu » dans la langue maternelle de chacun. Nous rappelons que l'ICMA réunit en son sein une vingtaine de nationalités, un véritable foyer de mélange et laboratoire de recherche. Les analyses de ces étudiants venant des pays africains au sud du Sahara montrent que Dieu est l'unique créateur du monde rendant possible une base commune de la compréhension de Dieu.

Nous rappelons encore qu'au moins 75% des étudiants sont nés ou vivent en ville. Cet exercice de compréhension de Dieu dans leurs langues maternelles est un bon moyen d'entrer en contact avec leurs origines. L'exemple de trois étudiants est nécessaire ici. Certains de nos étudiants venant de la RDC, du Burundi et de Malawi ont eu à retourner sur le terrain visiter leurs villages pour valider ce cours, quant à ceux du Burkina Faso, du Mali et du Togo, ils ont eu à recourir aux appels téléphoniques pour palier à certaines lacunes. Nous avons constaté un engouement dans la manière de comprendre leur propre foi en lien avec les RTA.

## **Dieu et sa célébration rituelle comme une organisation et identité religieuse**

L'effort de dialogue interreligieux, surtout avec la RTA, que nous avons mené ici concerne la célébration quotidienne de Dieu dans chaque culture. Pratiquement, nous avons demandé aux étudiants d'identifier le mot ou groupe de mots qui correspondraient à l'idée de la "religion" dans les études classiques de la religion comparée. L'expérience du professeur Michel Meslin<sup>4</sup> nous sert d'exemple. Avec nos étudiants à l'ICMA, l'expérience de la compréhension dans leur propre langue du mot « religion » montre l'inséparabilité de l'expérience religieuse avec la culture et l'ethnie. La religion fait partie intégrante de l'identité culturelle et sociale. La dissociation n'est pas possible. La célébration rituelle expliquerait ainsi l'attachement à la RTA. Les narratives sont unanimes et montrent que le catholicisme doit donner une nouvelle identité à une nouvelle culture chrétienne. La religion célèbre alors l'identité de l'individu et ceci est très important pour nos étudiants.

## **L'identification et la classification du bien et du mauvais dans la vie courante**

En troisième position de notre méthode de dialogue avec la RTA vient la compréhension du mot « morale » ou éthique. L'exercice est couronné de succès. Dans la plupart de cas un simple mot ne suffit pas pour dire la morale ou l'éthique ; c'est plutôt un groupe de mots qui est utilisé. Ce que caractérise la morale relève de trois niveaux : obéissance à l'exigence culturelle et sociale de la vie en commun de l'ethnie, de bien parler surtout sa langue maternelle et d'avoir une bonne conduite de vie. Dans d'autres cas, la morale est assimilée à l'éducation traditionnelle et sa transmission surtout aux enfants et la génération future.

Dans tous les cas exprimés par les étudiants, éducation et la transmission de l'héritage religieuse à la génération suivante fait partie intégrante d'une bonne vie morale. Selon la recherche menée par nos étudiants sur le terrain dans un milieu traditionnel, la spécificité religieuse et culturelle de la morale favorise l'éducation des enfants et ceci doit être transmise pour garder sa place dans la société. Avoir une mauvaise morale est synonyme de ne pas respecter la manière de parler surtout

<sup>4</sup> Meslin Michel, *L'expérience humaine du divin : fondement d'une anthropologie religieuse*, Collection « Cogitatio Fidei », Paris, Le Cerf, 1988. Pour Meslin, la dimension culturelle de l'existence de l'être humain importe sur sa compréhension de la religion. Il a évoqué dans son ouvrage une question posée aux Yorubas durant un recensement au Nigeria. La question posée aux Yorubas d'indiquer leur religion était incompréhensible. Quand la question a été posée autrement mais cette fois en relation avec leur ethnie ils ont indiqué plutôt leur identité culturelle. Meslin a conclu que dans la plupart de temps l'identité religieuse est parfois liée à celle de l'ethnie et de la culture.

aux aînés, de ne pas transmettre la bonne éducation aux enfants et finalement d'avoir une conduite contraire aux mœurs locales.

On voit finalement l'agencement entre notre méthode de dialogue avec la religion traditionnelle et son application par nos étudiants sur le terrain. Une formation non pas seulement intellectuelle mais aussi pratique qui aide au dialogue interreligieux et en occurrence le dialogue avec la religion traditionnelle africaine.

## **Conclusion**

A notre avis, la compréhension de l'autre surtout dans sa situation sociale, religieuse et morale facilite un vrai dialogue. Dans la plupart de cas, les chefs de la religion traditionnelle n'ont pas le niveau académique de nos étudiants. Cette disparité de niveaux académique rappelle les paroles de *Nostra Aetate* et comment nous devons faire le dialogue malgré cette difficulté. La Déclaration Conciliaire *Nostra Aetate* pose le fondement profond du dialogue interreligieux et dit entre autres : « Elle (l'Église) exhorte donc ses fils pour que, avec prudence et charité, par le dialogue et par la collaboration avec les adeptes d'autres religions, et tout en témoignant de la foi et de la vie chrétiennes, ils reconnaissent, préservent et fassent progresser les valeurs spirituelles, morales et socio-culturelles qui se trouvent en eux. » Notre contribution à cette exhortation est la formation des futurs prêtres à l'engagement du dialogue avec la religion traditionnelle africaine. Ce dialogue a une chance unique de transformer la morale africaine en morale chrétienne africaine. Nous sommes engagés pour faire advenir ce rêve.



## *Asia – Singapore: A Lived Story from the Youth*

MR. LAWRENCE CHONG\*

SINGAPORE - It was hot and humid, but we did not mind as almost 200 of us, youth and religious leaders, walked in a meandering manner for peace towards our final meeting point, the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd. We were gathered as youths of different religions to be a sign of hope and unity in a march for peace, a rarity in Singapore. Amidst laughter and banter, we had spent three days together in a camp, getting to know each other. This event was a youth for peace camp held in 2000, organized by the Catholic Church to get to know young people of different religions and promote peace from the dialogue of life approach. For me, it was another eye-opener because while the Singapore government promotes harmony, religion remains a sensitive topic. As an issue, it is never discussed in schools, so meeting other young people of faith and dialogue freely through a fun activity like this is refreshing.

My interreligious journey began as a teenager when I met the *Focolare* Movement, a Catholic movement deeply involved in dialogue among religions. Because of this, I had the chance to meet other young Focolare members who were non-Catholics, such as Buddhists. This foundation helped prepare me as I got more involved in interreligious dialogue. In 2005, the Focolare movement sent me to Ambon for a summit of young religious leaders organized by *Religions for Peace* (RfP), the largest interreligious organization in the world based out of New York. There it opened my mind and horizon to know that interreligious dialogue can be a matter of life and death in many countries. For example, in Ambon, it was the site of religious conflict. Still, upon closer examination, it was clear that bad actors had used religion to incite violence in Christian and Muslim communities. By stirring mistrust and planting provocateurs, villages were burned, and lives were lost. Hearing their experiences was heart-wrenching and inspiring to learn how these communities have rebuilt trust to build lasting peace. I knew then that evil is by design, so to counter it, dialogue for peace and understanding has to be by design.

While at this youth conference, I met many other inspiring youth activists in interreligious dialogue, people like Rev. A. Elga Joan Sarapung, who is the Director of the Institute for *Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia* (INTERFIDEI) and coordinator of Indonesia Interfaith Network. She works tirelessly to unite youths of different faiths for common ground and understanding. As the conference went on, I became more informed of the greater work of Religions for Peace and was attracted

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to it. So when Deputy Secretary General of RfP Rev. Kyoichi Sugino asked me to be more involved, I agreed. Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, affectionately known as Sugino, would eventually become my mentor and change my life in various ways.

Being in *Religions for Peace* then took me on an unexpected adventure. My professional work was in change and strategy, so my skills became helpful in a large global movement such as Religions for Peace. Very soon, Sugino asked me to work towards reconciling the official two youth groups of Religions for Peace based in Asia, both linked to Religions for Peace. This situation existed as they were created in different periods of the movement, one a legacy issue, the latter is more inclusive and open to new blood. As part of this effort, in 2006, I was tasked to organize an Asian youth meeting to unite both sides in Singapore as an interfaith youth movement. I have never organized such a regional meeting, and what is even more challenging is that it is a religious one! At that time, Singapore had interfaith forums for youth in Singapore but not at a regional level as it could be risky. Such an event is considered dangerous as the government feared that the youths here could be influenced by certain extremist thinking when it is an event of a religious nature. The fear is not unfounded as extremist thinking rose sharply after 9/11. Terrorist groups did manage to infiltrate Singapore, nearly working to influence some people to attempt terrorism in Singapore. So, knowing what I knew, it was hard to find a way forward.

Fortunately, in Singapore, there is the *Interreligious Organisation* (IRO), which is on record as the world's oldest interreligious organization. Founded post-World War II in 1949, the organization started with a bold idea to creatively create a shared space for peace and understanding led by religious leaders. Since its founding until today, it has lived by this invocation, which is read at every meeting:

*O Lord, increase in us understanding and knowledge and set us free from the bondage of greed, hatred and ignorance, so that we may awake, arise and advance until the goal is reached, giving our bodies to work and our minds to the Lord.*

*May we work vigorously keeping within spiritual discipline to bring peace in our hearts, peace in our families, peace in our cities, peace in our planetary home, the world.*

*May we learn to master ourselves, sublimate our combative energies into creative channels, and freely offer ourselves in the service of our fellowmen, and our Lord.*

*Help us, O Lord, to ever strive to keep on these lines to promote peace on earth and goodwill among men.*

*By Thy grace, may we all prosper.*

So naturally, I went to IRO to ask for help. Mr. Harban Singh, a council member of IRO who was also involved in RFP, then introduced me to a wonderful

Zoroastrian leader in the IRO known affectionately as Mr. Russi. A wise and yet pragmatic man, Mr Russi warmly welcomes me. I explained what I was tasked to do and how new this idea was. He looked me in the eye and asked: “Are you prepared to go through with this all the way as it will be complicated? But the key is, it can be done!”

I did not know what I said yes to, but I said yes.

After that fateful meeting, over six months, Mr Russi patiently imparted wisdom and experiences on how to navigate a cacophony of issues, how to present to religious leaders, how to address government concerns, and where to involve the youth of Singapore for the event. He introduced me to anyone who mattered in government and religion.

In the end, in 2007, more than 120 youth religious leaders came from 30 Asian countries. It was the first time such an event happened in Singapore and youths involved in interreligious dialogue here had a chance to interact with their counterparts overseas. This event also sealed the unity of the two Asian youth groups in Religions for Peace. An election was held during the same conference, and I was humbled to be elected the Moderator for the newly unified Religions for Peace Asia Youth Network, the first Singaporean youth to have such a regional role in the interreligious world.

My experience thus opened the way for me to connect with many different leaders and youths serving in interreligious dialogue. It resulted in numerous other activities together with young people, such as organizing Arms Down, a global campaign to ask governments to convert 10% of their current military spending for poverty alleviation to meet *Millennium Development Goals*.

These deep personal relationships became useful when the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue wanted to organise a Christian-Taoist Colloquium in Singapore in 2018. This request came through to the Archdiocesan Catholic Council for Interreligious Dialogue where I serve as a Council Member. The council members at that time felt it could be challenging but my experience with the earlier conference made this one seem more effortless. So I took up this task with the secretariat.

But this time, with a lot more experience, I focused on bringing together a group of volunteers to build a spirit of fraternity; together with the help of Focolare members, it became more important to have an encounter of family rather than just a serious conference. This was meant to be a regional meeting, so there were Taoists and Catholic experts coming from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, and so on.

Over three days, 100 participants reflected on the theme of the colloquium, which was Christian and Taoist Ethics in Dialogue, by sharing concepts and personal experiences from both religious communities. It was an experience that enriched the minds and souls. Archbishop and now Cardinal Ayuso said something

beautiful towards the end of this colloquium, “it is the spirit of being family that best provides the conditions for dialogue.” I wholeheartedly agree, and in a time of division where it is easier to tweet hatred and preach division, we need a counter-generation for peace, to know how to be servants and actors for dialogue. In my own experience since 2005, it is critical that we intentionally create conditions for being a human family, always to favour dialogue for peace and the common good. Without this, humanity cannot prosper. Also, we must be realistic that evil is far more intentional than the people for good. So, truly, for a sustainable future, we need to be creative to shape movements and platforms for dialogue and understanding.

## *Asia – Pakistan*

H. E. MSGR. SEBASTIAN FRANCIS SHAW, OFM\*

Interfaith dialogue stands as a cornerstone for fostering peace and understanding among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. In the rich tapestry of Pakistan's religious diversity, this dialogue plays a pivotal role in promoting harmony and peaceful coexistence. Despite tragic incidents targeting Christians, the resilience and spirit of unity displayed through interfaith dialogue have led to positive outcomes, showcasing the transformative power of mutual respect and understanding.

### **Promoting Interfaith Harmony:**

In the midst of Pakistan's diverse religious landscape, interfaith harmony has been crucial since its inception, championed by leaders like Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah the founder of Pakistan. Despite challenges like nationalization of schools (1972) and the introduction of Islamic laws, Christian communities have remained vital to Pakistan's progress. Following 9/11, grassroots interfaith dialogue, spearheaded by the commission of Interfaith Dialogue sought to bridge divides and promote understanding.

In the years leading up to the 1980s, interfaith dialogue was vibrant and dynamic, serving as a vital conduit for fostering communal harmony and nurturing mutual respect among the diverse faith communities in Pakistan. It was a time when people from different religious backgrounds engaged in meaningful conversations, embracing the richness of religious diversity and celebrating the shared values that bound them together.

However, the landscape shifted with the rise of extremism, presenting unprecedented challenges to the fabric of communal harmony. The peaceful coexistence that once characterized interfaith relations was increasingly threatened by divisive rhetoric and acts of intolerance. Despite these adversities, the commission of Interfaith Dialogue has remained steadfast in its commitment to promoting interfaith harmony.

Since my appointment as Auxiliary Bishop of Lahore Archdiocese, through a series of concerted efforts, particularly through apostolates like education and health, the Archdiocese, has sought to address these challenges and uphold the values of peace, compassion, and understanding. In the realm of education, schools

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facilitated by National Catholic Education Commission have become beacons of inclusivity, fostering an environment where students from different religious backgrounds learn side by side, cultivating mutual respect and appreciation for each other's beliefs.

Similarly, in the field of healthcare, initiatives undertaken by the Catholic Church in Pakistan have aimed to provide quality medical care to individuals from all religious communities, irrespective of their faith. These efforts have not only addressed the physical needs of the community but have also served as platforms for promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding.

Despite the challenges posed by extremism, the Catholic Church has continued to advocate for peace and harmony, championing the cause of interfaith dialogue as a fundamental pillar of societal cohesion. These silent yet powerful efforts have played a significant role in bridging divides, fostering understanding, and nurturing a spirit of unity among communities.

In the face of adversity, the Catholic Church stands as a beacon of hope, demonstrating that through commitment, compassion, and unwavering dedication, interfaith harmony can prevail, paving the way for a future where religious diversity is celebrated and all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their faith.

It is through dialogue, understanding, and cooperation that lasting peace and prosperity can be achieved for all communities in Pakistan.

Role of National Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue & Ecumenism (NCIDE):

Established by Pakistan's Catholic Bishops, the NCIDE has been a beacon of hope in promoting peace and harmony between Muslim, Hindus, Sikh and Christian communities. Through targeted programs for children, youth, and women, the commission has instilled values of tolerance and respect. Initiatives such as value education programs for school teachers and students, and youth engagement for peace promotion, narrow the distance between different faiths.

### **Interfaith Dialogue in the Aftermath of Tragic Incidents:**

*Couple was burned alive in Kasur, Pakistan:*

A Christian couple who was burned alive in a brick kiln in Kasur in November 2014, stands as a stark reminder of the horrors of religious persecution. However, amidst the tragedy, interfaith dialogue emerged as a beacon of hope, fostering unity and understanding among diverse religious communities.

In the aftermath of this heinous act, local leaders from both religions joined

forces, unequivocally calling for justice and an end to the misuse of blasphemy allegations. Over 100 Islamic scholars visited the site of the crime, extending condolences to our Christian brothers and sisters and condemning the brutal act.

These collective efforts spurred greater awareness of minority rights, particularly in rural and remote areas. Through dialogue and mutual respect, communities bridged divides and fostered peace and harmony across different castes, creeds, colors, and beliefs.

#### *Easter Bombing in Lahore 2016:*

It was Easter Sunday when Christian Community after praying in the Churches visited the famous Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park in Lahore for family celebrations. Having the prior knowledge of Christian families getting together, a suicide bomber targeted them killing more than hundred Christians.

#### *2019 Sri Lanka Easter bombings:*

Following the bombings in Sri Lanka, Christian and Muslim leaders convened in the Archdiocese of Lahore, recognizing the need for dialogue and understanding. Through open and honest discussions, participants delved into the intricacies of their respective religions, seeking to better comprehend their own beliefs and appreciate the unique aspects of each faith.

The Commission for Interfaith Dialogue invited all the Sri Lankan Missionaries working in Archdiocese of Lahore for condolences and solidarity. Muslim members of interfaith Dialogue also joined the prayer service held at the Sacred Heart Cathedral Lahore.

#### *Burning of a Sri Lankan citizen in Sialkot, Pakistan:*

The brutal lynching of a Sri Lankan man in December 2021 in Sialkot, Pakistan, sent shockwaves across the globe, highlighting the urgent need for unity and understanding among different religious communities. In the wake of this tragic incident, interfaith dialogue emerged as a beacon of hope, paving the way for healing and reconciliation.

The Sri Lankan Council of Islamic Religious Scholars, All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), commended the Pakistani ulema for their swift condemnation of the Sialkot incident and their unwavering support for the Sri Lankan nation. In an appreciation letter addressed to Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Affairs and Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC), Hafiz Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, the ACJU expressed gratitude for the solidarity shown by Pakistani religious leaders.

### *Desecration of Holy Quran:*

Burning of the Quran in Sweden, in the months of July and August 2023 sparked widespread outrage and protests in Pakistan. In the face of escalating tensions and threats against Christian minorities, interfaith dialogue emerged as a crucial instrument for fostering peace and understanding among diverse religious communities.

The Christian community in Pakistan swiftly condemned the burning of the Quran, emphasizing that any act that violates religious sentiments is deeply offensive and intolerable. Through multiple press conferences and rallies, Christian leaders vehemently denounced the incident, affirming their commitment to respect the Holy Books of all Faiths.

This unified condemnation by Christian leaders played a pivotal role in diffusing tensions and restoring peace and security for vulnerable Christian communities across Pakistan. By standing in solidarity with their Muslim counterparts and advocating for mutual respect, Christians contributed to fostering a climate of tolerance and harmony.

### *Jaranwala incident of 16 August 2023 in Pakistan:*

The tragic Jaranwala incident of 16 August 2023, where a mob of 1200 people vandalized Christian settlements and churches, left a deep scar on the fabric of religious harmony in Pakistan. However, amidst the devastation, the power of interfaith dialogue emerged as a beacon of hope, fostering peace and understanding among diverse religious communities.

In response to this heartbreaking incident, the Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) and the International Interfaith Harmony Council (IIHC) took a bold stand by jointly observing a solemn 'Condemnation Day' across the country on August 19, 2023. This unified condemnation denounced the shocking desecration incidents of worship places in Jaranwala, emphasizing the urgent need for swift justice for the perpetrators.

After this tragic incident in Friday sermons, religious scholars unequivocally labeled those inciting violence as enemies of Islam and Pakistan, echoing a collective call to rid the nation of violence, terrorism, and disruption.

This inclusive dialogue brought together religious leaders of different faiths, members of civil society, activists, and journalists, fostering a space for open discussion and mutual understanding. Through constructive dialogue, misunderstandings that fuel tension, hate, and distance were addressed, paving the way for greater harmony and cooperation among communities. Together, these efforts marked a pivotal step towards healing and reconciliation in the aftermath of the



Jaranwala tragedy, reaffirming the collective commitment to a future free from the scourge of violence and division.

## **Conclusion**

These tragedies served as catalysts for positive change, inspiring communities to stand united against injustice and reaffirming the shared values of compassion and tolerance. Through ongoing dialogue and cooperation, these communities continue to strive towards a future where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Through sustained efforts and unwavering dedication to interfaith dialogue, Pakistan can chart a path towards a future where religious diversity is embraced and all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, irrespective of their faith.

The enduring resilience and unity exhibited in response to adversity underscore the pivotal role of interfaith dialogue in fostering peace and harmony in Pakistan. Through collective efforts to bridge divides, nurture understanding, and uphold mutual respect, communities are forging a path towards a future where religious diversity is embraced and every individual is accorded dignity and respect, irrespective of their faith. Despite these difficulties the Commission for Interfaith Dialogue of Pakistan continues to live the Gospel Values as Jesus said “Blessed are the Peace Makers”.

May God bless all of us to continue this noble mission of Interfaith Dialogue for the promotion of Peace in the world even in the tough situation.

## *America – U.S.A.*

PROF. RITA GEORGE-TVRTKOVIC\*

### **University Students in the United States: Two Narratives of *Dialogue and Mission***

“Mission is already constituted by the simple presence and living witness of the Christian life ... There is the dialogue in which Christians meet the followers of other religious traditions in order to walk together towards truth and to work together in projects of common concern.” (*Dialogue and Mission*, section 13).

In the above quote from the 1984 document *Dialogue and Mission*, the Catholic Church continued to build on the ideas of dialogue it first introduced in *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) and *Nostra Aetate* (1965). It did so by offering fuller definitions of dialogue and mission through concrete images such as: mission is “simple presence and living witness of the Christian life” and dialogue is “walking together towards truth” and “working together in projects of common concern.” In this brief note, I will share two narratives which show university students in the United States who are living out all three of these ideals of dialogue and mission in 2024.

#### **The first narrative**

The first narrative describes the interreligious dialogue that took place naturally during the course of a week-long service trip which is required of all junior-level honors students at Benedictine University, a Catholic institution in the suburbs of Chicago, where I teach. Participants in this year’s annual service trip to Baldwin, Michigan—a poor, rural, Catholic-majority region—were seven Muslim, seven Catholic, and two Protestant students from Benedictine University. The students went to help build houses for poor people in the area, so service, not interreligious dialogue, was the express purpose of the trip. And yet, the week-long project allowed the students to engage unexpectedly in the “dialogue of life.” For example, the Christians learned to consider Muslim dietary restrictions when planning their daily menus, and they also observed Muslims squeezing in their five daily prayers between installing drywall and painting fences. And in the long bus ride home, the Muslim students took the chance to ask their Catholic classmates to explain what the Eucharist means to them, and how the trip connects with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. The students already knew each other well from studying

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together for two years in the honours program, but a full week of 24/7 contact helped them to feel even more comfortable sharing very personal aspects of their respective faith lives. Returning from the trip, the students were surprised at how much they learned, not only about building houses and rural poverty in the United States, but also about the lived religion of their fellow honours students—people they thought they knew so well, but now understood and respected even more. Many of them truly “gave living witness” to their faith in various ways.

### **The second narrative**

The second narrative centers on three female student leaders (one Catholic, two Muslims) who organized two on-campus dialogues on a topic they chose: “Faith, Modesty, and Purity Culture in the US.” Two of the three students had participated in the service trip described above, plus they had taken my course in Interreligious Dialogue, so they were best suited to lead the dialogue, since they had both theoretical and practical experience. The students decided to divide their dialogue into two separate events. At the first event, a panel of three female scholars—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—were invited to address an all-female audience. The presence and witness of a female Jewish rabbi and female Islamic scholar on the panel was especially important, given that the dialogue took place a month after the Mideast conflict began in October 2023. At the second event, there was no panel of scholars; rather, the Muslim and Christian female students took the lead and moderated a dialogue on the same topic (modesty), but the audience consisted of both male and female students. The progression of these two dialogues one after the other showed very clearly the kind of “walking together towards truth” envisioned by the 1984 document *Dialogue & Mission*.

In the forty years since *Dialogue and Mission*, we have seen a flowering of efforts at both mission and dialogue in Catholic settings around the world, and particularly at Catholic universities and colleges in the United States. Theology departments, campus ministry, and university mission offices have embraced interreligious dialogue as an integral part of what it means to be a Catholic institution of higher education. The two narratives I have shared here demonstrate that students attending Catholic universities—be they Catholic, Muslim, or of different religions (or none)—recognize the value of learning about other religions and their own. Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, in contrast to many secular institutions, have been intentional in providing students of faith a safe space not only to learn and practice the skills of interreligious dialogue, but also to grow in their own faith and to give authentic witness to their identity as religious beings. In addition, another aspect of mission has emerged at American Catholic colleges and universities in recent years: preserving their *own* Catholic mission

and identity, for Catholics themselves. This relatively new stress on Catholic mission and identity (in tandem with interreligious dialogue) has become necessary on American college campuses, as the involvement of founding religious orders decreases, and as smaller institutions struggle to survive in the face of declining enrolments. Attention to both mission and dialogue is thus vital Catholic campuses in the United States.

And so, the journey of dialogue and mission continues among our students who will one day become professionals, parents, and community leaders, and at our American universities which continue to evolve to meet new realities. *Dialogue and Mission's* description of dialogue as “walking together” is thus apropos. It takes its own cue from the document it was celebrating in 1984, *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), which ends with the following exhortation which also uses journey language: “We rejoice and find great consolation in the fact that this dialogue, both inside and outside the Church, has already begun...but when we weigh the matter more closely we see that there is still a great way to go. In fact, the work which is beginning today will never come to an end.” And thus in 2024, we look back to 1984, and to 1964, to help us keep going on the journey of dialogue.

## *Narrativas de la Misión y Diálogo en la Amazonía*

ANA MARÍA BIDEGAIN\*

En estas líneas quiero compartir narraciones que tuve la fortuna de recibir de algunos de los co-protagonistas del cambio de la experiencia misionera en América Latina que más tarde nos llevan al sínodo de la Amazonía y se concatenan con narraciones recientes.

En 1971 tuve la oportunidad de participar como oyente de un encuentro de obispos latinoamericanos reunidos en el Instituto de Pastoral y Liturgia del CELAM, invitada por el Edgard Beltrán organizador del evento y por entonces secretario del Departamento de Pastoral del CELAM y por Monseñor Marcelo Mendiharat, obispo de Salto Uruguay. Allí conocí a varios de los obispos latinoamericanos que habían participado en el Concilio Vaticano II y en la Segunda Asamblea del Episcopado Latinoamericano reunida en Medellín en 1968.

Entre ellos estaban Monseñor Gerardo Valencia Cano, obispos de Buenaventura, Colombia y presidente del Departamento de Misiones del CELAM y Monseñor Samuel Ruiz Obispo de San Cristóbal, Chiapas, México para entonces miembro de dicho departamento. Recuerdo mucho lo que comentaban sobre el Concilio y de la reunión preparatoria a la conferencia de Medellín, del departamento de Misiones realizada en Melgar, Colombia en abril de 1968. Ya me interesaba la historia de la iglesia y con mis 21 años estaba como una esponja, absorbiendo todo lo que los pastores y expertos decían y que hoy me atrevo a compartir como narrativa, porque años después, los mismos relatos han sido consignado en entrevistas y trabajos realizados por otros colegas.<sup>1</sup>

Monseñor Valencia, para entonces tenía una importante experiencia misionera. Un hombre introspectivo, de hablar suave. Recién ordenado sacerdote fue enviado como misionero a las selvas del Vaupés, en Mitú, en la Amazonia Colombiana y nombrado poco después, Prefecto Apostólico. Allí descubrió la cultura

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Ruíz y Carlos Torner “*Cómo me convirtieron los indígenas*” Salamanca, Sal Terrae 2002. Michael LaRosa, *De la Izquierda a la derecha: La iglesia católica en la Colombia contemporánea*, Bogotá, Planeta 2000.

Carlos Torner “Tatic Samuel: “Fue un trabajo pastoral a la inversa: cómo está Dios ya presente en las culturas indígenas. Sin el Concilio esa inversión nunca habría tenido lugar” en Ana María Bidegain, ed. *Obispos de la Patria Grande: Pastores, Profetas y Mártires*. Bogotá, CELAM, 2018

Michael La Rosa “Gerardo Valencia Cano: Obispo y Profeta de Buenaventura, Colombia” en Ana María Bidegain, ed. *Obispos de la Patria Grande: Pastores, Profetas y Mártires*. Bogotá, CELAM, 2018.

Tucana. Conviviendo con ese pueblo se empeñó en buscar nuevas estrategias misioneras que le permitieran un acercamiento real con esa comunidad para poder comunicarles el mensaje de Jesús. Por eso aceptó la ayuda de antropólogos que trabajaban en el área, para comprender mejor los desafíos a los que se enfrentaba. Al mismo tiempo, y muy tempranamente vio la necesidad de incorporar al laicado al trabajo misionero y en especial a las mujeres y poco después fundó la Unión de Seglares Misioneros, que hicieron presencia desde la Amazonía hasta el Pacífico, y otras regiones del país, al igual que en Venezuela, Panamá, México.

Monseñor Samuel Ruíz, era obispo de Chiapas, lo recuerdo como uno de los más jóvenes, conversadores y alegres. De hecho, fue nombrado obispo con sólo 36 años y había llegado a Chiapas, según comentó, sin ser consciente de la importancia de la población indígena en su diócesis. Estaba muy impactado por las cuestiones realizadas por los obispos africanos durante el Concilio cuando se debatió el documento *Ad Gentes*. Demandaban que se respondiera de manera creativa a las cuestiones levantadas por los investigadores sociales sobre la manera que las culturas eran consideradas en el proyecto pastoral, hasta entonces, y que era imprescindible revisar los métodos de evangelización reconociendo la presencia de Dios en esas otras culturas con toda su dignidad.

Recordaban que el Evangelio no nació en Occidente, sino en Oriente, pero se encarnó en Occidente y su cultura particular. De hecho, comentaban con otro de los comensales, Enrique Dussel (quien era uno de los peritos invitados a la reunión), sobre ese momento decisivo en la historia de la Iglesia, cuando en el primer Concilio de Jerusalén debate si los nuevos conversos deben adoptar la cultura judía o más bien como lo propuso Pablo que el misterio divino hace posible la catolicidad y que el mensaje de Jesús está abierto a los gentiles y todas las culturas. Pero que, sin embargo, la estrecha relación que se estableció con el Imperio Romano Occidente y el devenir histórico de los siglos posteriores se identificó a la cultura de occidente con el cristianismo y la evangelización terminó propiciando la imposición cultural o aculturación.

Lo conectaban con lo que había sido planteado en la reunión de Melgar, poco tiempo antes, y la importancia de respetar no sólo las culturas de manera abstracta, sino a cada ser humano como lo que era, portador de respeto y dignidad y al mismo tiempo portadores de la presencia salvífica de Dios. Por eso no se trataba asimilarlos a la cultura dominante del estado nacional, sino que el papel de la misión era acompañarlos en el proceso de ser sujetos de su propia historia en la cual descubrían la presencia de Dios.

Como resultado de los esfuerzos de los departamentos de misiones y de pastoral del CELAM en muchas prelaturas y diócesis se hizo un gran esfuerzo por poner en práctica lo propuesto por el Concilio Vaticano II y en la Asamblea de Medellín. En la región Amazónica que la componen 9 países, aunque Brasil ocupa

el 60% de la misma, se recuerdan los trabajos de muchos misioneros como el de los Carmelitas, liderados desde 1970 por Monseñor Gonzalo López Maraño en Sucumbíos, Ecuador, o de Monseñor Alejandro Labaka quien junto con la religiosa Terciaria Capuchina Inés Arango, quienes fueron asesinados por los Huaorani, en 1987, cuando intentaban advertirles a esta comunidad, que se preparaba una milicia pagada por compañías petroleras y madereras para exterminarlos. Lamentablemente no comprendieron el mensaje que les traían y la religiosa y el obispo y fueron martirizados

En 1972 se fundó el Consejo Indígena Misionero CIMI -articulado a la Conferencia Nacional de Obispos de Brasil CNBB con la intención de servir a los pueblos de la Amazonía brasileña, quienes para entonces estaban muy amenazados por los proyectos de infraestructura y de explotación de recursos naturales de compañías privadas, auspiciados por la dictadura brasileña que propugnaba abiertamente la asimilación a la cultura dominante de todas estas naciones y pueblos indígenas Amazónicos. El objetivo general del CIMI. Era testimoniar y anunciar proféticamente la Buena Nueva y ponerse al servicio de los proyectos de vida de los diversos pueblos, denunciando las estructuras de dominación violencia e injusticia, practicando el dialogo intercultural e inter-religiosos y ecuménico, propiciando alianzas entre los pueblos y con los sectores populares que habitan la Amazonía, para la construcción de un mundo más igualitario, democrático, pluricultural y en armonía con la naturaleza. Como sucedió en otros países amazónicos los pueblos indígenas y misioneros en la Amazonía brasileña se enfrentan a múltiples violencias orientadas a su exterminio, y es impactante el alto número de misioneros y laicos hombres y mujeres que han conocido el martirio por la defensa de los pueblos, su cultura y la naturaleza.<sup>2</sup>

En 1974, los obispos peruanos, también preocupados por la realidad de los pueblos y naciones que habitan la región crearon el Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica -CAAP. Sustentados en el dialogo entre fe y culturas, respetando la propuesta indígena del “Buen Vivir” los orientadores de CAAP comprometidos con el bienestar y desarrollo sostenible para consolidar un proyecto social basado en la equidad, la interculturalidad, la defensa de los derechos humanos y del medio ambiente dan apoyo y asesoría a las comunidades indígenas y de misioneros en el área.

En 1998 el Sacerdote Jesuita Claudio Peranni crea el Equipo Itinerante que nació para escuchar y caminar con los pueblos amazónicos particularmente aque-

<sup>2</sup> Conselho Indigenista Missionario. *RELATÓRIO Violência Contra os Povos Indígenas no Brasil Dados de 2021*. <https://revistachilenadederecho.uc.cl/index.php/bjur/article/view/52959> doc. Consultado 18 de junio, 2024

llos donde están más marginalizados y sus derechos y su entorno socio ambiental están más amenazados. Es un espacio interinstitucional e inter congregacional con fuerte participación de congregaciones religiosas femeninas y con el reconocimiento que no se podía avanzar sin la unidad de las diversas iniciativas misioneras, en el conjunto de la Amazonía. A partir de la itinerancia y el trabajo entre varias instituciones con una visión geopolítica común y actuando de manera conjunta en el territorio amazónico han propiciado la escucha a las comunidades locales y mediante el diálogo intercultural, la defensa de la justicia socio ambiental, solidaria y de los derechos humanos se ha ido gestando una conciencia eclesial sustentada en la territorialidad y sus particularidades.<sup>3</sup>

También se han producido errores en el proceso de evangelización amazónico como fue el caso de la entrega en 2011 de la prelatura de Sucumbíos a los Heraldos del Evangelio, sin tener la necesaria preparación y experiencia para trabajar en la región amazónica, que han tenido que ir emendando errores y superando las disputas entre los proyectos pastorales.

Así de los errores y aciertos se fue propiciando el camino para construir primero una red pan amazónica de todas las iniciativas misioneras en el conjunto de toda la Amazonía superando las barreras nacionales y que se han buscado en varias instancias pero que cristalizaron recientemente.

Como parte de esa caminata misionera de la iglesia en América Latina y el Caribe, emergió el proyecto Pan Amazónico al asumirse la importancia de la territorialidad, entidad inseparable de la cultura de un pueblo y del diálogo entre las diversas culturas que lo habitan.

Caritas Ecuador encomendó en 2010 a Mauricio López,- laico mexicano formado en la espiritualidad ignaciana, profesionalmente, administrador con enfoque hacia la gestión social y con una maestría en ciencias sociales y desarrollo territorial- propiciar una reforma pastoral para organizarlo en función de la territorialidad en el espacio ecuatoriano y partiendo del trabajo de muchos hombres y mujeres que trabajan en sitios donde nadie llega , haciendo la diferencia con muy escasos recursos, pero muy insertos en las regiones más necesitadas sustentando su trabajo, en los fundamentos de la teología de la encarnación y las ciencias sociales. Partiendo de la experiencia acumulada se divide la territorialidad en tres grandes regiones, Costa, Sierra y Amazonía.

Al enfocarse en la Amazonía ecuatoriana percibió que los vicariatos trabajaban en el área de manera muy compartimentada y fragmentada focalizados en los territorios encomendados, pero desconociendo que para las comunidades la biosfe-

<sup>3</sup>Equipo Itinerante Amazonia PDF (theo.kuleuven.be) [https://theo.kuleuven.be/en/research/centres/centr\\_lib/ei-projetos-versoes/2007-08-v06-proyecto-equipo-itinerante-esp.pdf](https://theo.kuleuven.be/en/research/centres/centr_lib/ei-projetos-versoes/2007-08-v06-proyecto-equipo-itinerante-esp.pdf)



ra, los ríos, su vida cotidiana trasciende absolutamente los límites propuestos por la mirada pastoral antigua. Además, las vicarias todas dependientes de las comunidades encomendadas a diversas congregaciones cuyas casas matrices y soportes financieros que se encuentran en Europa, solo sustentaban los proyectos particulares de cada una de las congregaciones. Los Capuchinos, Salesianos, Josefinos, Carmelitas, Franciscanos y Dominicos financiaban sus obras, pero todo de manera fragmentada y sin tomar en consideración la colaboración y complementariedad entre ellas. El trabajo fue entonces que se hiciera el esfuerzo de una pastoral de conjunto como se propone en Aparecida en 2007 y paulatinamente se vio que la fragmentación del trabajo no era solo en Ecuador, sino que era necesario repensar una pastoral en el conjunto del territorio Amazónico, compartiendo recursos como ya lo había percibido el propio Francisco desde la reunión de Aparecida, pero lo novedoso es que el proceso no arrancó en 2007, no desde del CELAM sino desde la experiencia de la pequeña Amazonía Ecuatoriana en 2010.<sup>4</sup>

Prácticamente desde la periferia de la Amazonía surge una propuesta que escucha tanto a las comunidades, como a las experiencias misioneras anteriores, para repensar la territorialidad y sumar esfuerzos. En 2013 el Cardenal peruano Pedro Barreto- presidente del Departamento de Justicia y Solidaridad del CELAM, quien apoyó pastoralmente la realización de un encuentro Pan amazónico en Puyo, Ecuador, con una pequeña contribución financiera de la Fundación Pórticos. Esto permitió invitar al Equipo Itinerante, que ya había avanzado con la noción del trabajo pan amazónico- y los obispos ecuatorianos del área amazónica y el obispo responsable de Cáritas y miembros de Cáritas de la Amazonía de Bolivia, Perú, Venezuela y de Brasil. A pesar de las desconfianzas y experiencias diversas se logra por primera vez en esa reunión la creación de la Red Eclesial Pan Amazónica (REPAM). Poco después el mismo Cardenal Barreto, y el patrocinio del CELAM cita para una segunda reunión en Perú y la REPAM se va consolidando en el área de países amazónicos hispanohablantes. En ese mismo año, Mauricio López, P. Alfredo Ferro S.J y Pedro Ruíz, fueron a Manaus a un encuentro de la comisión episcopal para la Amazonia Brasileña, en representación del Cardenal Barreto. La presidió el Cardenal *Cláudio* Hummes y toda la temática de la reunión se centra en la realidad de la Amazonía brasileña y a pesar de sus intentos los delegados de la naciente REPAM no logran hacer avanzar la reflexión sobre la realidad Pan Amazónica. Al final de la reunión y en vistas que en la conclusión no se logra hacer avanzar la perspectiva Pan Amazónica, Mauricio López, se dirige al Cardenal Hu-

<sup>4</sup>Entrevista a Mauricio López Oropeza. Miami, 28 de febrero, 2024.

Mauricio Lopez Oropeza: *Discernir la voz de Dios en este Kairos ecclesial*. Bogotá, Comercializadora PPC ISBN13 - 978958558590

mes y le dice: “Cardenal usted le dijo al Papa no te olvides de los pobres, y de ahí le vino el nombre de Francisco. Nosotros países pequeños les decimos, no se olvide de la Pan Amazonía, nosotros también somos Amazonía” El cardenal Humes vio la importancia del tema y les pidió a los representantes de la REPAM que escribieran dos párrafos sobre el tema para ser incorporados en el documento final y para 2014 se oficializa la fundación de la REPAM con el envío de una carta personal del Papa Francisco celebrando la creación de la red y animando a que continúen sus esfuerzos de seguir escuchando y acompañando a los pueblos y trabajando unidos en el conjunto del territorio Amazónico.<sup>5</sup>

El cardenal Pedro Barreto consideró que para seguir adelante era importante que el Cardenal Humes la presidiera y que Mauricio López fuera su secretario con el apoyo de las religiosas Lysette e Irene del Equipo Itinerante. El Papa ve potencial al proceso y les encomienda que desarrollen la red y preparen el terreno para una experiencia inédita con participación territorial: el Sínodo Pan Amazónico. Un Sínodo Especial que permitió una organización diferente. Esta caminata permitió la escucha de 87.000 moradores de la Amazonía por medio de la REPAM y abrió las puertas para que no sólo la voz de los obispos se hiciera sentir durante el Sínodo.

Este proceso permitió que algunas comunidades indígenas que aunque evangelizada en décadas anteriores, se habían distanciado de la iglesia por la falta de apoyo en los procesos de luchas por la defensa de sus derechos y de sus territorios sagrados, como es el caso del pueblo Kichwa del Sarayaku, Ecuador, liderado por Patricia Gualinga, se reintegraran a la iglesia y se comprometieran con el proceso, actuando Patricia Gualinga como auditora en el Sínodo y representando a los pueblos amazónicos.<sup>6</sup>

Como resultado del Sínodo Pan Amazónico nació la Conferencia Eclesial Amazónica CEAMA encargada de avanzar con las demandas y propuestas realizadas en el Sínodo. Con marchas y contramarchas el proyecto misionero ha continuado a lo largo y ancho de la región y paulatinamente ha emergido una nueva pastoral de los pueblos afro-latinoamericanos y caribeños y teologías que muestran la riqueza de la experiencia de Dios en las comunidades eclesiales nacidas en los pueblos y naciones que desde milenios pueblan lo que hoy llamamos Amazonía.

<sup>5</sup> Idem.

<sup>6</sup> <https://adn.celam.org/patricia-gualinga-con-el-sinodo-amazonico-la-iglesia-escogio-de-que-lado-esta-no-al-lado-del-poder-sino-al-lado-de-los-que-sufren/>

## *Oceania - Australia*

REV. DR. PATRICK MCINERNEY\*

### **Introduction**

The Catholic Church in Australia comprises 28 dioceses, 5 eparchies, and 2 ordinariates. What follows will necessarily be snippets from various sources rather than fully developed treatments.

### ***Dialogue and Mission***

*Dialogue and Mission* answered urgent questions that were being asked in the 20 years after the revolution in the Church's attitude towards the followers of other religions at Vatican II, especially *Nostra Aetate*. The document clearly affirms that dialogue is one of "the principal elements" of mission (DM, 13). However, the title of the document - Dialogue and Mission" - and the structure of the document - a first section on "Mission", a second section on "Dialogue", and a third section on "*Dialogue and Mission*" - give the impression that "dialogue" and "mission" are separate activities! The 1991 document, "*Dialogue and Proclamation*", resolved this ambivalence by defining terms and using them consistently. Naming these categories correctly is very important because it affirms dialogue as an essential element of the church's mission. Without this inclusion, dialogue can readily be dismissed as of little concern to the church.

### **Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

First Peoples first! The first point to make is that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived here for 65,000 years. They are the oldest continuous living culture in the world. They spoke more than 250 languages and 600 dialects. They formed many nations with a variety of cultures and spiritualities shaped by the various landscapes and climes. Consequently, cultural and religious diversity is deeply imbedded in Australian history. It is in our national DNA.

Overlaying this Aboriginal diversity is our current multi-cultural, multi-religious society. Nearly one third of Australians (over 7 million; 27.6%) were born overseas; and if you add one or both parents, the figure jumps to nearly half (48.2%). Australians identify with more than 270 ancestries. More than 350

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languages are spoken in Australian homes. Australians follow over 120 different religions or spiritualities.<sup>1</sup>

While Christian mission to the Aboriginal peoples has a contested history, it is my conviction that we can only successfully address the complex issues of our current multi-religious society when we reconcile with the multi-religious diversity of the Aboriginal peoples whom we dispossessed and whose lands we colonised. In Australia, reconciliation and interfaith must go hand-in-hand.

This link between interreligious dialogue and reconciliation with the indigenous people is yet to be developed. I will give one example. In recent years it has become customary to do a formal observance of Aboriginal custodianship of the land at the start of official civic and religious events: “Welcome to Country” is done by an indigenous person who was born on that land. “Acknowledgement of Country” is done by a person who was born elsewhere. The values of respect and recognition behind these Aboriginal protocols could enliven Christian attitudes towards followers of other religions.

### **Structures for Interreligious Dialogue**

In Australian Catholic practice, interreligious dialogue has mostly been structured in (ecumenical and) interfaith commissions at diocesan level, most of which are in state capitals, but are few and far between in regional and rural areas. This accords with society demographics, where most cultural and religious diversity is concentrated in the cities, but this too is changing. There is also a Bishops Commission at the national level. Catholic religious participate in interfaith events. The Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations has a high profile.<sup>2</sup>

Other Christian churches have developed similar structures for educating and practising interfaith relations. Other religions participate in interfaith relations, but usually do not have formal structures for dialogue. However, there are some national and state organisations such as the Council of Christians and Jews. Scholars from different religions engage in interfaith at an academic level and theological faculties offer courses in ecumenism and interfaith. Across all these sectors, interreligious dialogue is carried out mostly by charismatic individuals who are passionate about interfaith relations rather than a normal part of church life.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics per <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/cultural-diversity-census/2021>.

<sup>2</sup> For details see <https://www.columban.org.au/our-work/interfaith-relations/christian-muslim-relations>

## **A Secular Society?**

Australia is often said to be ‘a secular society’. This is not accurate. We are a diverse or pluralist society with a secular form of government. All religions are free to practice within the law. No religion is established. Government is obliged to serve the common good of all. Besides the variety of religions and spiritualities mentioned above, this diversity includes a rapidly increasing number who are not affiliated with any religion. While an ideological form of ‘secularism’ that denies the transcendent is toxic to religion, that ‘secularisation’ which acknowledges and respects the autonomy and relatedness of the secular and religious spheres is what enables our flourishing multicultural, multi-religious society.

While there are important social and moral issues on which the church and government differ, when it comes to social cohesion, local, state, and federal governments are often allies for religions. Federal and state governments have policies that promote multiculturalism, and bureaucracies such as Multicultural NSW and the Victorian Multicultural Commission implement social cohesion. This includes grants for religious, interfaith, multi-faith, and civic organisations and projects that build social resilience. Local governments also have interfaith organisations and provide grants for promoting social harmony at the local level. In addition, international NGOs such as Religions for Peace have national and state organisations. All these structures ensure the participation of a broad cross-section of society in interfaith activities.

## **Interreligious Dialogue is marginal**

Despite these supportive religious and civic structures, interreligious dialogue remains marginal in the Australian church. The Catholic Church’s rich teaching on interreligious dialogue is rarely preached from the pulpit and remains a hidden treasure (cf. Mt 13:44). Interreligious dialogue is not vital part of mainstream church apostolate but is carried out mostly by interfaith activists on the fringes.

In 2018 the Australian Catholic Bishops announced a Plenary Council.<sup>3</sup> In the first ‘listening and dialogue phase’, individuals and groups representing more than 222,000 people made 17,457 submissions which were condensed into a 314-page report. It is significant that interreligious dialogue was not mentioned. The writing committees remedied this omission and developed 6 Thematic Papers for the ongoing process of discernment in the First and Second Assemblies. I am de-

<sup>3</sup> For details see <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/>.

lighted to report that the Plenary Council endorsed interreligious dialogue (Art. 3, Decree 3). This gives Australian Catholics a formal foundation on which to build.

In 2023 Bishop Long convoked a Diocesan Synod, the first in Parramatta and the first local synod in Australia<sup>4</sup>. The diocese covers western Sydney and the Blue Mountains and is a hub of religious diversity. It was not surprising that inter-religious dialogue was affirmed in the *Synod Decree*, 6E.

These official church pronouncements provide a basis for ongoing development of the interfaith apostolate in Australia but need to be implemented in diocesan and parish pastoral plans.

### **The Sydney Statement**

“The Sydney Statement” is an interfaith charter for “Building Bridges Between Different Religions”.<sup>5</sup> It was generated and authorised by Youth PoWR (Parliament of the World’s Religions), a network of young adults from different religions.<sup>6</sup> The 3-year project was an initiative of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, carried out in partnership with Western Sydney University, overseen by a Steering Committee of religious leaders, funded by a grant from the NSW Government through Multicultural NSW, and underwritten by St Columban’s Mission. It involved four consultations with youth across the north, south, east, and west of Sydney, multiple drafts, and regular consultations with the Youth PoWR Committee and network, the Steering Committee, and other religious leaders. It was launched in March 2021 on the anniversary of the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, an image of which forms the logo for the *Statement*. Because of its name, some think that it is for Sydney only. However, it is a world-class document and is relevant to any multicultural, multi-religious society.

### **COVID-19**

COVID-19 had a dramatic impact on interfaith relations. Because of lockdowns, people could not meet, places of worship were closed, and most civic and religious life had to be done from home. Interfaith is best done face-to-face but stalled due to enforced isolation. However, interfaith activists kept contact by phone, e-mail, and online meetings. I commend Multicultural NSW who, recognising the important role of religious leaders in migrant communities, hosted

<sup>4</sup> For details see <https://parracatholic.org/synod/>.

<sup>5</sup> For details see <https://www.thesydneystatement.org.au/>.

<sup>6</sup> For details see <https://www.columban.org.au/our-work/interfaith-relations/youth-powr/>.

weekly briefings to update them on the rapidly evolving situation and to provide them with information for relaying to their communities. With the lifting of COVID restrictions, faith and interfaith activities are still recovering but are not yet at the same level as they were pre-COVID.

### **Interfaith Responses to Violence**

The terrorist attack resulting in the murder of 51 Muslim worshippers in two mosques in Christchurch on 15 March 2019 shocked most Australians, especially as the perpetrator was an Australian. However, for those who had experienced islamophobia and were aware of the rise of white supremacists, the attack was inevitable. Muslims in Australia were traumatised by the event, fearing that they too could be victims at any time. As one Muslim commentator put it, “We are sitting ducks. They know when we pray.” Australians of good will expressed solidarity and support and made visits of condolence.

Whether the victims were Christian or Muslim, such exchanges had taken place for other terrorist actions in Australia and overseas, such as the Lindt Café siege in central Sydney in December 2014, or the Easter Sunday church bombings in Sri Lanka in 2019. The current Israel-Hamas war has traumatised Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It has stretched—and in some cases broken—interfaith relations. We hope and pray that in time, deep mutual listening, respect, and care will ravel the frayed relations.

### **Conclusion**

Interreligious dialogue in Australia is a sapling. Many more Catholics need to be involved so that it grows into a tree where followers of all religions can feel at home (cf. Mt 13:32). While Australia generally does multiculturalism and multi-religious well, the rising waves of antisemitism, islamophobia, and white supremacy remind us to be ever-vigilant, to protect our hard-won gains, and to develop an ever-stronger, resilient, harmonious, multicultural, multi-religious society.

## *Europe -Albania*

REV. DON RICCARDO SCORSONE\*

### **Quando dialogo ed evangelizzazione suonano la stessa “armonia”**

“Quanto accade in Albania dimostra [...] che la pacifica e fruttuosa convivenza tra persone e comunità appartenenti a religioni diverse è non solo auspicabile, ma concretamente possibile e praticabile. [...] Possa l’Albania proseguire sempre su questa strada, diventando per tanti Paesi un esempio a cui ispirarsi!”. Con queste parole, Papa Francesco salutava le autorità albanesi, in occasione del suo viaggio apostolico nella “Terra delle aquile”, il 21 settembre 2014, il primo all’estero dopo la sua elezione al soglio pontificio. Tra le motivazioni che hanno indotto il Santo Padre a scegliere l’Albania c’è sicuramente la *harmonia ndërëfëtare* (“armonia interreligiosa”), denominazione cara al mondo orientale e così popolarmente chiamata anche dagli albanesi, credenti e non, una realtà viva e concreta da custodire e promuovere. A questa motivazione, penso si aggiunga anche il particolare contesto storico e geografico che, ad oggi, fa dell’Albania una terra di missione nel cuore di un’Europa ormai sempre più indifferente alla proposta cristiana. Il sud del Paese, in particolare, si presenta come un vero e proprio contesto di *missio ad gentes*, in cui la preoccupazione pastorale principale è l’evangelizzazione, intesa come primo annuncio del Vangelo a coloro che non conoscono Gesù o ne hanno sentito parlare in modo distorto e derisorio durante gli anni della violenta propaganda comunista. L’armonia interreligiosa e l’evangelizzazione rappresentano, quindi, le coordinate principali entro cui si muove l’azione missionaria della Chiesa in Albania oggi. Si tratta di due vie complementari che concorrono, ciascuna a suo modo, alla realizzazione dell’unica missione salvifica della Chiesa<sup>1</sup>. L’esperienza albanese attesta che queste due realtà non solo coesistono pacificamente, ma si contaminano a vicenda, dando credibilità all’esperienza religiosa dell’uomo a lungo repressa dal regime e fecondità al comune impegno di promozione umana e sociale.

Quella dell’Albania è, fuor di dubbio, una realtà *sui generis* rispetto a tutti gli altri luoghi del mondo a maggioranza musulmana. L’armonia interreligiosa nel Paese ha delle radici storiche e geografiche che trascendono e, al contempo, fondano la buona volontà di dialogo e collaborazione da parte dei leader e delle singole comunità religiose. Tra queste, ritengo che due siano veramente degne di nota.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Dialogo e Annuncio*, 82.



L'Albania, parte dell'antica Illiria, ha accolto fin dall'inizio la predicazione apostolica (cf. *Rm* 15,19). A motivo della sua posizione geografica che la rende "ponte" tra Oriente e Occidente è stata da sempre una terra di transito, come attesta la *Via Egnatia* che, tagliando il Paese dalla costa adriatica a sud-est, rappresentava un canale commerciale privilegiato tra Roma e i paesi dell'Egeo settentrionale. Proprio per questa ragione fu presa di mira da grandi potenze coloniali, quali l'Impero ottomano che la occupò per più di cinquecento anni (1385-1912), procurando la quasi totale islamizzazione del Paese. Gli albanesi, forgiati dal tempo e dagli eventi, andarono sviluppando un legame sempre più costitutivo con la terra, la lingua e la cultura, consolidando e difendendo la loro appartenenza identitaria. Su questa scia, il poeta e scrittore scutarino Pashko Vasa poté affermare che "la religione degli albanesi è l'albanesità"<sup>2</sup>, espressione poi assunta e manipolata dal regime comunista per inculcare l'ateismo e orientare il sentimento religioso unicamente verso i valori della patria. Rimane un dato di fatto che, oggi, l'appartenenza all'unica famiglia albanese, con le sue tradizioni e i suoi simboli, è così forte e costitutiva da trascendere ogni differenza e risolvere la maggior parte dei conflitti religiosi nel loro nascere. Ciò che veramente conta è avere *gjak shqiptar* ("sangue albanese"), anche solo per adozione, a prescindere da quanto una persona sia credente, praticante o dottrinalmente competente.

Il secondo fattore più recente che ha contribuito involontariamente al consolidamento dell'armonia interreligiosa in Albania è la persecuzione comunista (1944-1991). L'odio e la violenza del regime di Enver Hoxha contro ogni espressione religiosa, incentivate dalla proclamazione dell'ateismo di Stato nel 1967, sortirono un effetto non ricercato: la comunione tra i credenti. Sebbene la Chiesa cattolica abbia pagato il prezzo più alto, a motivo della sua unanime fedeltà alla Sede apostolica e della preparazione intellettuale del clero, la furia del regime si abbatté anche contro ortodossi, musulmani e bektashi (sufismo di stampo albanese): chiese e moschee vennero rase al suolo o destinate ad usi profani, mentre il clero venne condannato ai lavori forzati o torturato e ucciso, a seguito di veri e propri "processi farsa". Sono tanti i racconti di preti e imam imprigionati nella stessa cella che preferivano morire abbracciati piuttosto che deridere l'uno la religione dell'altro, come avrebbero voluto le guardie della *Sigurimi*. Tutt'oggi nel Memoriale di Scutari è possibile vedere incisioni di croci e mezzelune nelle pareti, insieme a brevissime preghiere rivolte a Dio da parte di cristiani e musulmani che si trovavano nella stessa cella, soffrendo e sperando insieme. Tutti i credenti, quindi, si sono ritrovati uniti nella persecuzione e nel contrastare quel "comune nemico" che pretendeva di

<sup>2</sup> *O Moj Shqypni*, 1878.

cancellare il senso di Dio dal cuore dell'uomo. Molti di essi hanno versato insieme il loro sangue, offrendo la più bella testimonianza di fede e amicizia interreligiosa<sup>3</sup>.

Questo è il terreno fertile in cui dialogo e missione si incontrano e si arricchiscono a vicenda in Albania. I fattori appena descritti, se da un lato hanno prodotto la convivenza pacifica delle diverse comunità religiose, dall'altro, non possono ritenersi esaustivi e vanno continuamente completati da un dialogo a tutto campo<sup>4</sup>. Durante gli anni del mio servizio missionario nella regione di Korçë, nell'Amministrazione Apostolica dell'Albania Meridionale, ho toccato con mano la bellezza e la fatica dell'evangelizzazione e del dialogo interreligioso. In tutta l'Amministrazione, che ricopre circa il 60% del territorio nazionale, i cattolici sono appena tremila e vivono in un contesto a maggioranza musulmana (sunniti e bektashi) e, in parte, ortodossa. Oggi, dopo quasi cinquant'anni di cultura atea, l'appartenenza religiosa di molte famiglie è legata unicamente alla tradizione familiare degli avi e raramente si trova chi conosca bene il proprio credo o partecipi ai riti religiosi. Questa condizione favorisce sì l'annuncio e l'accoglienza del Vangelo, ma non giustifica l'armonia interreligiosa nel Paese, come molti ritengono; innanzitutto perché questa coinvolge soprattutto leader e rispettivi credenti, poi perché l'ignoranza è sempre generatrice di incomprensioni, giudizi, conflitti e mai di armonia.

Evangelizzazione e dialogo interreligioso nel sud Albania sono accomunati anche dal ruolo centrale delle relazioni interpersonali. Tutto si gioca nel rapporto "uno ad uno" che può diventare, a seconda degli interlocutori, canale privilegiato di annuncio evangelico o strumento potente di dialogo e collaborazione interreligiosa. Di fronte alle profonde ferite umane e spirituali del popolo albanese, l'impegno più grande dei missionari è quello di tessere relazioni di comunione e di fiducia, non ricercando i grandi numeri, ma accompagnando i singoli con attenzione e dedizione. Percorrere diverse ore di strada, tra le montagne, per raggiungere una famiglia o un piccolo gruppo di donne cattoliche per una breve visita che si trasforma in occasione di ascolto e condivisione della Parola è missione quotidiana. Coraggio e creatività permettono che ogni attività, dagli incontri con i poveri ai giochi in piazza con i bambini, diventi un canale di annuncio che risponda alla "sete di Dio" presente nel cuore di tanti albanesi. Nel sud del Paese si fa davvero esperienza di una Chiesa giovanissima, piccola nei numeri ma profumatissima di Vangelo, e della potenza della Parola che genera alla fede e conduce al battesimo. Ogni anno sono trenta/quaranta gli adulti e i giovani, prevalentemente di tradizione musulmana che, dopo aver completato il percorso del catecumenato, ricevono i

<sup>3</sup> Cf. D. RANCE, *Albania. Hanno voluto uccidere Dio*, Roma 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Dialogo e Missione*, 28-35.

sacramenti dell'iniziazione cristiana, diventando testimoni gioiosi e convinti della loro scelta di fede.

Sentendo tutto ciò, alcuni mi chiedevano: “Cosa dice il tuo amico Muftì di questi battesimi?”. Rispondevo con le sue stesse parole: “In Albania abbiamo fedi diverse, ma suoniamo una comune armonia”; poi raccontavo della nostra sincera amicizia che si nutriva di dialoghi e confronti attorno ad una tazza di caffè, spazio irrinunciabile di condivisione fraterna per la cultura albanese. L'esperienza diventava ancora più avvincente quando, il più delle volte, ci raggiungevano altri amici: il Prete ortodosso, il Pastore evangelico e il Derviscio bektashi. Parlavamo delle nostre famiglie, delle sfide della società albanese, delle tradizioni religiose di ciascuno, dei progetti futuri di collaborazione, sperando che il seme buono della nostra amicizia germogliasse sempre più nel cuore dei nostri fedeli. Si trattava di un dialogo a tutto campo che spaziava dalla vita alla teologia, approdava a gesti concreti di fraternità a favore della giustizia sociale, della pace, della libertà religiosa, e, nel frattempo, rinsaldava sempre più i nostri legami. Accanto a questo dialogo quotidiano, ci sono stati e continuano ad esserci gli eventi ufficiali di testimonianza e di scambio degli auguri nel giorno delle rispettive festività, in cui ci si visita gli uni gli altri, al di là di ogni sterile formalismo<sup>5</sup>.

L'Albania insegna al mondo che dialogo interreligioso ed evangelizzazione possono camminare insieme e che il frutto del loro incontro è la pace.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Dialogo nella Verità e nella Carità*, 69.

## *Europe –Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*

MATTEO NICOLINI ZANI\*

Christian monastic life has its true essence in dialogue. As a potentially unceasing conversation with God in the secret of one's heart and a daily exchange in fraternal love and the mutual service to community life modeled after Jesus Christ's example and the teachings of the Gospel, monastic life *is* dialogue. This intrinsically dialogic lifestyle naturally becomes the particular witness and the only mission proper to the monastic vocation in the Church. Therefore, the core affirmation of the document *Dialogue and Mission* that dialogue, and particularly the dialogue with followers of other religions, is the form and the style of the Church's mission could not but deeply resonate with the essence of the Christian monastic life.

On this basis, in the last forty years since the publication of *Dialogue and Mission*, the DIM·MID<sup>1</sup> has brought forward the spirit of the document by promoting, encouraging and supporting the dialogue of Catholic monks and nuns with monastics and spiritual practitioners walking on different religious paths. Structured at present in six continental/regional commissions (North America, Europe, India/Sri Lanka, Australia, Korea, Africa), this international organization works both on the global and the local level. The European Commission presently comprises nine regional sub-commissions.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the impetus given by them, many European monastic communities of men and women have regular contacts with neighboring Buddhist and Hindu monastic communities and also with Muslims, particularly those belonging to Sufi confraternities, whose religious practices are strikingly “monastic.”

In the last four decades, the European DIM·MID groups have been engaged mainly in two of the four forms of dialogue that *Dialogue and Mission* lists as “the most important and typical” (§ 28), namely the *dialogue of life* and the *dialogue of the religious (or spiritual) experience*. Since, as the 1984 document states, “dialogue implies concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other”, monastics involved in the DIM·MID activities in Europe have found in that particular dimension of life that is *hospitality* the more natural and suitable door through which engaging in di-

\* European Intermonastic Dialogue.

<sup>1</sup> This is an acronym for *Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique-- Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the origins, organization, and activities of DIM·MID, as well as for access to *Dilatato Corde*, a journal of the dialogue of the religious experience published by the same organization, see the DIM·MID website (<https://www.dimmid.org/>).

alogue with followers of other religious traditions. By extending to them the same kind of expansive and non-judgmental welcoming offered to all guests who visit the monastery, Catholic monks and nuns recognize and honor the Christ present in the witnesses to other religious beliefs. They regard them as fellow seekers and for this reason listen “with an expanded heart” (*dilatato corde*)<sup>3</sup> to the voice of the Holy Spirit who is at work in their spiritual quest and “accompanies them on the secret path of hearts towards the truth”, as *Dialogue and Mission* reminds us (§ 24).

By sharing for a certain time the inner space of their monasteries with monastics and spiritual seekers of other faiths or by being welcomed in monasteries of other religious communities, Christian monastics have repeatedly experienced that hospitality makes possible a friendly conviviality. Promoting interreligious friendship at the service of dialogue is one of the main reasons that gatherings sponsored and organized by DIM·MID take place in a monastery, a place where people live, pray, eat, and work together. The schedule of these interreligious gatherings is built around the monastery’s horarium and includes opportunities for participating in the community’s daily life, especially its liturgical services (*opus Dei*) and its meals. In meetings with Buddhists, ample time is provided for common meditation.<sup>4</sup> In meetings with Muslims, their set times of daily prayer (*salāt*) are also included in the schedule.<sup>5</sup>

Dialogue rooted in hospitality invites people to speak to one another from the heart, to engage in dialogue about their deepest aspirations and about the convictions that sustain their hopes. In such atmosphere, “a meeting of mind and heart can take place, a meeting characterized by a shared sense of brotherhood in the one human family that opens the way of ever deeper spiritual dialogue.”<sup>6</sup> Through hospitality, the “welcoming of persons of different religious traditions helps to advance with spiritual anointing ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.”<sup>7</sup> By sharing similar patterns of daily life and similar sets of ascetic rules, monastics who walk on different religious paths quite naturally enter in a deep dialogue at the level

<sup>3</sup> *The Rule of St Benedict*, Prologue § 49.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the DIM·MID’s engagement in the dialogue with Buddhists, see W. Skudlarek, “The History of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue with Buddhists,” in *Building a Culture of Compassion. Essays Celebrating 25 Years of the Vesak Message to Buddhists*, edited by I. J. Kodithuwakku K., Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2020, pp. 59-74.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the DIM·MID’s engagement in the dialogue with Muslims, see W. Skudlarek, “Monastic-Muslim Dialogue,” in *Concilium* 56:4 (2020), pp. 47-55.

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Address to the Participants in the “East-West Spiritual Exchanges”* (9 September 1987), available on the Vatican website (<https://www.vatican.va/>).

<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Address to Participants at the Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum Symposium* (8 September 2018), available on the Vatican website.

of religious experience. In this way, they practice that “deeper level” of dialogue that *Dialogue and Mission* recommends in a paragraph that can be considered the “identity card” of the monastics involved in the DIM·MID:

At a deeper level, persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute. This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals of man. It leads naturally to each partner communicating to the other the reasons for his own faith. The sometimes profound differences between the faiths do not prevent this dialogue. Those differences, rather, must be referred back in humility and confidence to God who “is greater than our heart” (John 3:20). In this way also, the Christian has the opportunity of offering to the other the possibility of experimenting in an existential way with the values of the Gospel (§ 35).

Sharing in the life of the host monastic community in a movement “directed at mutual understanding and enrichment”, with the hope of being “anointed” by the gift of “the mysterious and silent Spirit [who] opens the paths of dialogue [...] in order to [...] bring mutual enrichment”, as *Dialogue and Mission* wishes (§§ 3; 44)—this is a prominent feature of a program sponsored by the European Commission of DIM·MID and known as “East-West Spiritual Exchange.” This program has been ongoing since 1979 and brings alternatively groups of Japanese Zen Buddhist monastics to experience Christian monastic life in European monasteries and groups of Western Christian monastics to experience Zen monastic training in Japanese monasteries.<sup>8</sup> The two most recent exchanges were held in 2019 and 2023. In 2019, four monks and two nuns from Zen monasteries in Japan stayed for twelve days in monasteries in Belgium and France.<sup>9</sup> Four years later, the sixteenth spiritual exchange brought two monks and two nuns from Catholic monasteries in Germany, France, and Belgium to live for two weeks in Zen monasteries in Kyoto and Nagoya.<sup>10</sup> The form of dialogue between Buddhist and Catholic monks and nuns who participate in these spiritual exchanges is distinguished by four characteristics:

<sup>8</sup> A bilingual documentary film, *La voie de l'hospitalité / Strangers No More*, highlights these exchanges. It can be found in the Video section of the DIM·MID website.

<sup>9</sup> Reports on this spiritual exchange can be found in *Dilatato Corde* 10:1 (2020).

<sup>10</sup> See M. Scheiba, “Two Weeks in Japanese Zen Monasteries: The Sixteenth East-West Spiritual Exchange Program”, in *Dilatato Corde* 13:2 (2023).

(1) Dialogue in this setting is not primarily verbal, but consists of being *immersed* in a completely different environment that allows monastics to engage in a *silent* and often very *deep* exchange.

(2) Such extended stays are organized for monks and nuns who are experienced in the monastic way of life and are thus able to *welcome and engage with* a newly discovered spiritual practice at the level of their own developed spiritual life.

(3) Such exchanges are *reciprocal*, taking place alternately in Buddhist and Christian monasteries, which enables the participants to recognize that the essence of the monastic spiritual quest lies *beyond the differences* in traditions.

(4) From the beginning these exchanges have been organized in agreement with religious authorities, both Buddhist and Christian; such agreement makes these exchanges *official* and allows them to contribute to the overall development of interreligious dialogue.<sup>11</sup>

The statement of a Zen monk who had participated in one of the spiritual exchange programs and had lived for two weeks in a Trappist monastery shows that these experiences of a “shared silence” can lead to a deep and intense encounter: “The monks work hard. They don’t eat very well, nor do they get a lot of sleep. So where does this joy come from that I see in their faces?” The difficulty of communicating did not allow for a satisfactory response, but “it was clear that during his silent stay in that monastery, without receiving any explanation, he experienced the essence of their life.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, he was silently given “an account of the hope” that is in the Christian believer (1 Peter 3:15) and he experienced a reflection of that form of Christian witness that is interreligious dialogue.

By practicing “sacred hospitality” and going deeply into other spiritual spaces<sup>13</sup>, striving to see how God’s creative and transforming Spirit is active in those spaces, Christian monastics engaged in interreligious dialogue have contributed to realize the spirit of *Dialogue and Mission*.

<sup>11</sup> See P.-F. de Béthune, “Note sur les échanges spirituels est-ouest depuis les origines”, in *Dilatato Corde* 2:1 (2012).

<sup>12</sup> P.-F. de Béthune, “Monastic Inter-Religious Dialogue,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-religious Dialogue*, edited by C. Cornille, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2013, p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> See P.-F. de Béthune, *Interreligious Hospitality: The Fulfillment of Dialogue*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN 2010; B. Standaert, *Sharing Sacred Space: Interreligious Dialogue as Spiritual Encounter*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN 2009.

## CONCLUSION

S. EM. CARDINAL JEAN-MARC AVELINE\*

*Dialogue et mission* : une théologie de la rencontre. Le 17 mai 1964, à l'occasion de la Solennité de la Pentecôte, le pape Paul VI annonçait la création d'un secrétariat pour les non-chrétiens<sup>1</sup>. Cette décision illustrait l'enjeu du travail des Pères rassemblés à Rome pour le deuxième Concile du Vatican, celui d'ouvrir l'Eglise à un dialogue nouveau avec le monde, non seulement avec la science et la culture, mais aussi avec les grandes traditions religieuses de l'histoire humaine. Paul VI rappelait à cette occasion, entre deux sessions conciliaires, la vocation de l'Eglise à la catholicité : « Un cœur catholique, c'est un cœur aux dimensions universelles. Un cœur qui a vaincu l'égoïsme, l'angoisse radicale qui exclut l'homme de la vocation à l'Amour suprême. Cela signifie un cœur magnanime, un cœur œcuménique, un cœur capable d'accueillir le monde entier en lui-même. Cela ne veut pas dire que le cœur sera indifférent à la vérité des choses et à la sincérité des paroles ; il ne confondra pas la faiblesse avec la bonté, il ne placera pas la paix dans la lâcheté et l'apathie. Mais il pourra palpiter dans l'admirable synthèse de saint Paul : *Veritatem facientes in caritate* (Ep 4, 15). »<sup>2</sup> Cette décision sans précédent permettra au pape Jean-Paul II, quelques années plus tard, de prendre l'initiative d'une rencontre inédite des grands dignitaires religieux du monde, le 27 octobre 1986 à Assise. Cette démarche, qui ne fut pas sans soulever quelques inquiétudes, donna lieu à une minutieuse clarification de la part du Saint Père, le 22 décembre de cette même année : « En vous proposant ces réflexions sur l'extraordinaire événement qui s'est déroulé à Assise le 27 octobre dernier, je voudrais avant tout que cela soit une aide pour mieux nous préparer à recevoir encore une fois ce Verbe en qui "toutes choses ont été créées" (cf. Jean 1, 3) et par qui tous les hommes sont appelés à "avoir la vie et à l'avoir en abondance" (Jn 10, 10), ce Verbe divin qui "a voulu habiter parmi nous" (cf. Jean 1, 14) et qui, par sa venue, sa mort et sa résurrection a voulu "récapituler en lui toutes choses, celles du ciel et celles de la terre" (cf. Hb 1, 10). »<sup>3</sup> La

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<sup>1</sup> La Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae* en définit ainsi la vocation : « Rechercher les méthodes et les voies permettant d'instaurer le dialogue avec les non chrétiens. Il veille donc à ce que les chrétiens connaissent bien les non chrétiens et les estiment comme il se doit, et à ce que ces derniers puissent également connaître et estimer la doctrine et la vie chrétienne. »

<sup>2</sup> Paul VI, *Homélie pour la fête de la Pentecôte*, Rome, le 17 mai 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul II, *Discours à la Curie romaine*, Rome, le 22 décembre 1986, § 12.



théologie de la « rencontre » était, pour ainsi dire, née dans cette petite ville d'Assise où, un peu moins de huit siècles auparavant, la rencontre d'un lépreux avait bouleversé le cœur du futur saint François. Cette théologie assume l'heureuse synergie qu'il y a entre la vie de l'Alliance, l'horizon de la Promesse et la Récapitulation de toute chose dans le Christ. La théologie missionnaire du Pape François, qui s'inscrit à l'aune de cette orientation fondamentale, souligne constamment l'unité des deux commandements qui n'en font qu'un : « Dieu est relation et souvent, il nous rend visite à travers des rencontres humaines, quand nous savons nous ouvrir à l'autre, quand il y a un tressaillement pour la vie de ceux qui passent chaque jour à nos côtés et quand notre cœur ne reste pas impassible et insensible devant les blessures de ceux qui sont les plus fragiles. »<sup>4</sup> Plus qu'une théologie, c'est une « culture de la rencontre » que le Pape François invite à construire : « Nous demandons que l'art de la rencontre prévale sur les stratégies de l'affrontement, qu'au déploiement des signes de pouvoir menaçants succède le pouvoir des signes d'espérance. »<sup>5</sup>

Si la rencontre est un art, elle est surtout et d'abord une expérience, celle de Dieu qui ne cesse de venir au-devant de sa créature pour entrer en dialogue avec elle. C'est ainsi que le peuple d'Israël comprit qu'il fallait dresser une tente, à l'écart du camp, pour entrer en dialogue avec Dieu. Sous cette « tente de la rencontre », Moïse parlait avec Dieu comme un ami parle à un ami : « Moïse prenait la tente et la plantait hors du camp, à bonne distance. On l'appelait : tente de la Rencontre, et quiconque voulait consulter le Seigneur devait sortir hors du camp pour gagner la tente de la Rencontre... Le Seigneur parlait avec Moïse face à face, comme on parle d'homme à homme. » (Ex 33,7.11) Cette rencontre, à l'abri des regards et à hauteur de visage, constitue l'homme dans sa dignité d'image de Dieu. A l'intime de sa conscience, l'homme n'est pas « soliloque » mais bien « dialogue ». L'hôte qui frappe à sa porte l'invite à sortir de lui-même, à s'exposer à celui qui lui rend visite, à se confier à lui comme à en recevoir les confidences. « Je me tiens à la porte, et je frappe, si quelqu'un m'ouvre, j'entrerai » (Ap 3,14). Ainsi en est-il de la Sagesse qui va et vient, apparaissant « au détour des sentiers, avec un visage souriant, venant à notre rencontre dans chacune de nos pensées » (Sg 6,16). Le pape Benoît XVI le rappelle : « À l'origine du fait d'être chrétien, il n'y a pas une décision éthique ou une grande idée, mais la rencontre avec un événement, avec une Personne, qui donne à la vie un nouvel horizon et par là son orientation décisive »<sup>6</sup>.

Dans l'expérience de la rencontre, nous prenons conscience que nous sommes invités à « co-répondre », c'est-à-dire à répondre ensemble à l'appel de Dieu,

<sup>4</sup> Pape François, *Homélie au Stade Vélodrome*, Marseille, le 23 septembre 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Pape François, *Discours aux évêques*, Bari, le 7 juillet 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Benoît XVI, Encyclique *Deus caritas est*, § 1, le 25 décembre 2005.

comme le disait Christian de Chergé : « Les années écoulées depuis l'indépendance nous ont fait découvrir une autre voie par où, dans le cadre limité et modeste de nos relations, peut être signifié et mis en œuvre le Royaume de Dieu, dont nous croyons, par ailleurs, qu'il nous déborde de toute part : l'amitié fraternelle. Amitié humble, purifiée, désintéressée. Non pas communion et rencontre dans le sacrement ritualisé, mais pourtant signe et réalité de la faveur de Dieu, sacrement qui n'appartient en propre ni aux chrétiens, ni aux musulmans, mais à tous deux perçus par chacun selon son mode, route parcourue en portant les fardeaux des uns et des autres, nous aidant mutuellement à comprendre, à nous transformer à servir, à être fidèles »<sup>7</sup>. L'appel s'adresse aux uns par les autres, dans une inlassable réciprocité où nous sommes appelés à recevoir les complémentarités de nos identités. Pour le dire autrement, « on découvre Dieu dans les rencontres qu'il suscite », selon la belle formule de Michel de Certeau<sup>8</sup>.

La foi chrétienne serait incomplète, voire dévoyée, et la théologie deviendrait lettre morte, si l'une et l'autre ne mettaient au centre de leur attention l'expérience première de la Visitation. A la parole de l'ange qui annonce le mystère du Verbe fait chair succède immédiatement la rencontre des deux femmes qui s'annoncent mutuellement la vie et la joie : « D'où m'est-il donné que la mère de mon Seigneur vienne jusqu'à moi ? » (Lc 1,43). L'essence de la vérité est d'être « en partage » comme le montre l'itinéraire singulier de Franz Rosenzweig<sup>9</sup>. Ainsi, depuis que l'Église s'est résolument engagée à vivre sa relation au monde comme un « dialogue de salut »<sup>10</sup>, ses relations avec les autres, croyants ou non, ne sont plus tout-à-fait comme avant. L'Église pense d'un même mouvement l'indéniable *unité* de la famille humaine et l'étonnante expérience d'une *différence* donnée *en partage*, c'est-à-dire à la fois en signe d'incomplétude et en appel au dialogue. Elle recueille de cette expérience vécue à hauteur de visage, sa fécondité christique et spirituelle, ce qui lui permet de relire des grands traités de sa dogmatique non seulement à l'aune des *disputatio* d'hier, mais surtout à la lumière des événements inédits de son compagnonnage avec les peuples. « Il faut, avant même de parler, écouter la voix et plus encore le cœur de l'homme ; le comprendre et, autant que possible, le respecter et, là où il le mérite, aller dans son sens » soulignait Paul VI<sup>11</sup>. L'Église reçoit sa vitalité au contact des peuples rencontrés sans lesquels elle ne peut accomplir sa

<sup>7</sup> Cité dans H. TEISSIER, *Eglise en Islam*, Centurion, Paris, 1984, p. 124.

<sup>8</sup> M. DE CERTEAU, « La conversion du missionnaire », *Christus* n° 40, 1963, p. 516.

<sup>9</sup> FRANZ ROSENZWEIG, « L'étoile de la Rédemption » Seuil, coll. Esprit, 1982, p. 490

<sup>10</sup> Paul VI, Encyclique *Ecclesiam suam*, le 6 août 1964, § 75 : « Le dialogue du salut est parti de la charité, de la bonté divine : "Dieu a tant aimé le monde qu'il lui a donné son Fils unique" (Jn, 3, 16) ; seul un amour fervent et désintéressé devra susciter le nôtre. »

<sup>11</sup> Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, § 90.

mission de recueillir « les dons et les présents » cachés dans le monde par l'Esprit Saint et promis à la Cité Sainte<sup>12</sup>. « La seule méthode efficace – rappelait le Cardinal de Lubac - pour discerner le vrai qui se cache et pour ne pas étouffer le bien qui voudrait éclore, ne consiste-t-elle pas dans une volonté systématique d'étudier avec sympathie les pensées qui nous sont les plus lointaines et de s'attacher dans cette étude aux cas privilégiés, si rares qu'ils puissent être ? C'est par ses sommets que l'humanité doit être comprise. »<sup>13</sup>

L'intelligence théologique de la création et de la rédemption, comme celle de l'ensemble du mystère chrétien, s'illuminent constamment par cette « leçon de choses » que nous offre chaque rencontre. Ce ne sont pas les idées qui prévalent sur la pensée théologique, mais bien les événements de l'histoire qui lui donnent progressivement sa consistance. Jean-Paul II s'en explique à la suite d'Assise : « Dieu "veut que tous les hommes soient sauvés et arrivent à la connaissance de la vérité. Car Dieu est unique, unique aussi est le médiateur entre Dieu et les hommes" (1 Tm 2, 4-6). Ce mystère éclairant de l'unité du genre humain dans sa création et de l'unité de l'œuvre salvifique du Christ qui porte avec lui la naissance de l'Église, comme ministre et instrument, s'est manifesté clairement à Assise, malgré les différences des professions religieuses, en rien cachées ou atténuées. »<sup>14</sup> Le défi était immense pour l'Église. Il s'agissait de vivre ce qu'elle avait le mieux compris d'elle-même : « Etre dans le Christ, en quelque sorte le sacrement, c'est-à-dire à la fois le signe et le moyen de l'union intime avec Dieu et de l'unité de tout le genre humain »<sup>15</sup>. Et Paul VI de préciser : « Quand l'Église se distingue de l'humanité, elle ne s'oppose pas à elle ; au contraire elle s'y unit »<sup>16</sup>.

Cette manière évangélique d'habiter le monde, cette attitude dialogale d'écoute et de réciprocité, furent indéniablement la boussole de nombreux missionnaires. Jean-François Gerbillon à la cour de Pékin au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle ou Charles de Foucauld chez les Touaregs à l'aube du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, Albert Peyriguère au Maroc ou Jules Monchanin en Inde, chacun vivait le mystère de l'incarnation continuée en pratiquant le bel évangile de l'amitié, en l'annonçant par le dialogue. Plus proche de nous, lors de la décennie noire algérienne, on découvrit combien la vie des bienheureux martyrs d'Algérie étaient tissées de ces amitiés simples, fruits de leurs rencontres ordinaires. Se dégage de leur témoignage la vocation de l'Église à la

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Concile Vatican II, Constitution dogmatique *Lumen Gentium*, § 13, Rome, le 21 novembre 1964.

<sup>13</sup> H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicisme. Aspects sociaux du dogme*, Cerf, Paris 1938, p. 257.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Paul II, *Discours à la Curie romaine*, Rome, le 22 décembre 1986, § 4.

<sup>15</sup> Concile Vatican II, Constitution dogmatique *Lumen Gentium*, § 1.

<sup>16</sup> Paul VI, Encyclique *Ecclesiam suam*, § 65.

catholicité qui n'est pas une question de chiffre mais un appel à se trouver sur les lignes de fracture : « L'Église accomplit sa vocation quand elle est présente aux ruptures qui crucifient l'humanité dans sa chair et son unité. En Algérie, nous sommes sur l'une de ces lignes sismiques qui traversent le monde : Nord/Sud, Occident/Islam, Riches/Pauvres. Nous y sommes bien à notre place car c'est ici que s'entrevoit la lumière de la Résurrection et, avec elle, l'espérance d'un renouvellement du monde. »<sup>17</sup>. Quand un disciple du Christ rencontre un visage, rien de ce qui est important pour lui ne lui est étranger, rien de ce qui a du prix pour lui n'est négligeable.

Cette attention et cette écoute, loin de mettre en péril l'identité chrétienne, l'ouvrent à des dimensions inédites du travail de l'Esprit Saint. Parce que le chemin de conversion des disciples du Christ n'est jamais terminé, les rencontres vécues sont un appel à mettre en partage les dons que chacun a reçus. L'Église, n'ayant pas encore tout découvert de ce Dieu qui se donne à connaître dans les rencontres qu'il suscite, se veut inlassablement en sortie d'elle-même, à la rencontre de tous. Sa modalité ordinaire d'existence, parce qu'elle est gardienne du trésor de la foi et servante de la charité divine, la conduit à voir en toute personne, surtout la plus fragile, un frère ou une sœur en qui Dieu est présent et sans qui elle ne peut devenir elle-même. Tendue vers le Christ dont elle croit qu'il est tout en tous, alpha et omega, elle ne craint pas de prendre l'initiative du dialogue. Elle sait que le climat du dialogue est l'amitié parce que celle-ci garantit la sincérité des intentions. Elle ne considère par l'altérité comme un obstacle au devoir d'identité, mais y reconnaît son chemin d'accomplissement<sup>18</sup>. Les différences qu'elle découvre et respecte reçoivent un sens divin selon le dessein bienveillant de Dieu qui ne veut ni confusion ni uniformité, mais qui trouve sa joie dans l'unité et la communion. Tel est le *co-esse* trinitaire<sup>19</sup>, l'être-ensemble divin, que Jules Monchanin voulut révéler à l'Inde si éprise d'une unité dans laquelle aucune altérité n'était concevable.

On le sait, l'Église s'engage à vivre des rencontres jusqu'aux extrémités du monde, mais elle n'oublie pas la première rencontre que Dieu a suscitée au commencement de sa mission, celle qu'elle vécut dès le premier siècle avec le peuple juif, compagnon de sa marche parmi les nations. « Dieu de nos pères, tu as choisi Abraham et sa descendance pour que ton Nom soit apporté aux peuples. Nous sommes profondément attristés par le comportement de ceux qui les ont fait souff-

<sup>17</sup> P. CLAVERIE, *Le lien* n°229, février 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Pape François, *Discours à l'occasion de la rencontre interreligieuse*, Abu Dhabi, le 4 février 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Y. VAGNEUX, *Co-esse. Le mystère trinitaire dans la pensée de Jules Monchanin - Swâmi Paramârûbyânanda (1895-1957)*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2015.

frir, eux qui sont tes fils. En te demandant pardon, nous voulons nous engager à vivre une fraternité nouvelle. »<sup>20</sup> Cette prière, déposée par le Pape Jean-Paul II dans une petite fente du mur occidental le 26 mars 2000 à Jérusalem, exprime la démarche de repentance de l'Eglise pour ce dialogue interrompue pendant des siècles, la tristesse d'une rencontre manquée et d'une souffrance infligée à ces frères et sœurs aînés. L'enjeu de la rencontre entre les juifs et les chrétiens, rendue possible par le pardon et la bienveillance, au-delà de la connaissance mutuelle qu'elle permet, reconduit les uns et les autres à leur vocation propre. Cette rencontre ravive la perception de l'altérité constitutive du peuple qui appartient à Dieu et ne peut avoir le visage d'une uniformité totalisante. Saint Paul énonce ce grand mystère qui oblige juifs et chrétiens à se tenir la main sur l'horizon d'une promesse qu'ils ont en partage (Rm 9 – 11). La conversation et l'amitié qu'ils engagent sur cet horizon orientent les pas des pèlerins de la vérité qu'ils ne peuvent être qu'ensemble. La vie de l'Eglise, à la faveur de cette rencontre, devient l'acceptation joyeuse des différences. Dans l'infini respect d'une irréductible altérité et l'audacieux engagement à une réciproque et fraternelle interpellation, cette rencontre est garante d'une espérance qui ne déçoit pas. Les rencontres interreligieuses qui s'en inspirent échappent alors aux sirènes d'une tolérance uniformisante ou d'une condescendance ambigüe. Elles s'inscrivent dans « le travail lent et ardu qui exige de se laisser intégrer, et d'apprendre à le faire au point de développer une culture de la rencontre dans une harmonie multiforme »<sup>21</sup>. On puise alors « aux sources les plus profondes et les plus vivifiantes où la conscience se forme et sur lesquelles se fonde l'agir moral des hommes »<sup>22</sup> pour devenir l'unique peuple de Dieu. C'est ensemble que juifs et chrétiens travaillent à l'accomplissement de la promesse faite à Abraham en faveur de l'unique famille humaine.

Façonnée par les rencontres qui jalonnent son histoire, l'Eglise comprend mieux combien les « éléments religieux et humains précieux »<sup>23</sup> qu'elle estime dans les traditions religieuses non-chrétiennes, les « éléments de vérité et de grâce »<sup>24</sup> qu'elle recueille dans toutes les nations, sont indissociables de la vie des personnes et des peuples qu'elle rencontre. Il n'est question ni de syncrétismes ni de querelles idéologiques, mais d'une démarche proprement théologique, celle de la rencontre de Dieu par les rencontres qu'il suscite. Les « rayons de vérité qui

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Paul II, *Prière déposé au mur occidental*, Jérusalem, le 26 mars 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Pape François, Exhortation apostolique *Evangelii Gaudium*, § 220, Rome, le 24 novembre 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Paul II, *Discours d'accueil*, § 2, Assise, le 27 octobre 1986.

<sup>23</sup> Concile Vatican II, Constitution pastorale *Gaudium et Spes*, § 92, Rome, le 8 décembre 1965.

<sup>24</sup> Concile Vatican II, Décret *Ad Gentes*, § 9, Rome, le 7 décembre 1965.

éclairer tous les hommes »<sup>25</sup> apparaissent à la faveur des amitiés nouées et de la fraternité vécue. Rappelons ce critère cher au Pape François : « *La réalité est supérieure à l'idée*. Ce critère est lié à l'incarnation de la Parole et à sa mise en pratique... Il nous porte à nous souvenir de nos saints qui ont inculturé l'Évangile dans la vie de nos peuples »<sup>26</sup>. Une théologie de la rencontre place au premier plan la relation à l'autre où s'édifie « l'amour dans la vérité, cette force dynamique essentielle du vrai développement de chaque personne et de l'humanité entière »<sup>27</sup>. Paul VI revient sur cette propriété native de l'Église, sa vocation qui respand dès le jour de la Pentecôte : « Ouverture à toutes les âmes, offrande à toutes les langues, invitation à toutes les civilisations, présence à toute la terre, pétition à toute l'histoire »<sup>28</sup>. Et d'ajouter : « Il est nécessaire d'écouter l'écho incessant de la vocation mystérieuse et aimante de Dieu qui appelle tout le monde, tous les hommes et toutes les femmes à rencontrer sa miséricorde et qui, par cet appel, forme le peuple nouveau, son peuple, appelé précisément le peuple convoqué, la *congregatio fidelium*, l'Église. Comme le disait saint Augustin : *Dilatentur spatia caritatis* »<sup>29</sup>.

La foi chrétienne ose affirmer que c'est Dieu lui-même qui nous a aimés (1Jn 4,10), qui est venu à la rencontre de l'homme par amour, non pour le condamner, mais pour entrer en dialogue avec lui et le sauver, et cela, non pas avec force et éclat, mais dans la simplicité d'une vie partagée, insérée dans les multiples réalités sociales, culturelles et religieuses de son peuple. Un Dieu qui vient à la rencontre, demande l'hospitalité, engage la conversation. Le dialogue, moyen de la révélation, devient le chemin de la mission, la modalité ordinaire de l'annonce de l'évangile. De ce fait, l'Église, fidèle à la mission reçue du Seigneur, « entre en dialogue avec le monde et se fait conversation »<sup>30</sup>, elle participe à l'avènement de la fraternité qui a sa source profonde non pas en nous, mais dans la paternité de Dieu.

<sup>25</sup> Concile Vatican II, Déclaration *Nostra Aetate*, § 2, Rome, le 28 octobre 1965.

<sup>26</sup> Pape François, *Evangelii Gaudium*, § 233.

<sup>27</sup> Benoît XVI, Encyclique *Caritas in veritate*, § 1, Rome, le 29 juin 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Paul VI, *Homélie pour la fête de la Pentecôte*, Rome, le 17 mai 1964.

<sup>29</sup> Paul VI, *Homélie pour la fête de la Pentecôte*, Rome, le 17 mai 1964.

<sup>30</sup> Paul VI, Encyclique *Ecclesiam suam*, § 67.

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