

# sedos

## Bulletin 2003

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### SEDOS Open Seminar - 19/23 May 2003 -

*“Call to a New Vision of Others and Ourselves  
Through Interreligious Dialogue: Focused on Islam”*

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### *Painting Illustrated in the Front Cover* *“I seguaci di Dio”, Dolorès Puthod (1978)*

Often a painting expresses and describes a concept better than words. To express the “Universality of the Church”, French artist, Dolorès Puthod, painted (cm 400x300) a canvass to honour Pope Paul VI, a person who initiated and sustained dialogue at all levels in order to seek unity of all Christians and establish harmony and mutual respect among all religions. His role, during and after the Second Vatican Council, as well as his first Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesiam Suam*, are the best witnesses to his person and work concerning ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

In the painting, Paul VI, with his arms open to welcome everyone, is shown in St. Peter's Square. His shadow suggests a form of the Cross of Christ, a symbol of suffering which is common to all people who seek the Truth. The Pope is surrounded by world religions which are represented by their respective charismatic leaders, who are either living or dead. Their names, in order from right: the *Dalai Lama*, leader of Tibetan Buddhism, *Mahatma Gandhi*, a great exponent of Hinduism, *King Feisal*, Sovereign of Saudi Arabia and of Umma, i.e. Islamic religious leader, *Maha Thera Phra Buddhajnorot*, the Buddhist Patriarch of Laos and Cambodia, *Nikodim*, Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church, *Khoraiche*, Maronite Christian Patriarch of Antioche, Cardinal *Sergio Pignedoli*, then the president of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, the highest authority who, in Pope's name, promotes dialogue between religions, *Melitone*, exponent of Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, *Sandey Phra Varanat*, Buddhist Patriarch of Bangkok, *Athenagoras*, Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church, *Michael Ramsey*, Archbishop of Canterbury until 1975 and the Primate of the Church of England.

This imagination of the artist was concretely realized in the invitation by Pope John Paul II to the leaders of various Christian churches and communities and leaders of different religions to come to Assisi on 27 October 1986 to pray for peace in our World.

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# Editorial

## “On Common Ground”

This issue of the SEDOS Bulletin is a special one, as it contains most of the presentations of the well-appreciated 2003 Open Seminar on Interreligious Dialogue between Muslims and Christians, co-sponsored by the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue of the Union of Superiors General. The Seminar took place from 19 to 23 May 2003, during 5 afternoon sessions of about three hours, in the Aula Magna of the *Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum* in Rome. Thanks to the Augustinians for their hospitality.

We learned from the two previous SEDOS Residential Seminars (cf. *SEDOS Bulletin*, Vol. 33, No. 7/8, July/August 2001 and; Vol. 34, No. 6/7, June/July 2002) that interreligious dialogue is to be considered an important dimension and task of the Missionary Church of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium. For many religious orders and congregations, interreligious dialogue is still a relatively new area. Other religious institutes and ecclesial movements have communities in countries with large Muslim populations. The deep desire to better know people from other religions, to get closer to one another, to grow in dialogue in order to deepen and nourish one's respect for and understanding of the other faith traditions and one's own faith tradition, was strongly felt at the two previous Residential Seminars of SEDOS.

With this in mind, the Seminar Planning Committee (**Fr. Juan Antonio Flores Osuna, SX**; **Fr. David Fleming, SM**, **Fr. Michael McCabe, SMA**; **Fr. Chrys McVey, OP**; **Fr. Thomas Michel, SJ** and **Fr. Pierre-Paul Walraet, OSC**) choose as *motto*: “*Call to a new vision of others and of ourselves through Interreligious Dialogue: focused on Islam*”. Witnesses with lived experiences and various ways of dialogue between Muslims and Christians ran as a common thread through the programme. The aim of the Seminar was not to “talk” about interreligious dialogue (in a theoretical or doctrinal way) or to enter into academic debates and discussions between Christian theologians and Muslim scholars. Of course, this specific type of interreligious dialogue is of crucial importance. We choose for witnesses, experiences and reflections on interreligious dialogue as a way of life in which people consciously engage, with heart and mind. Dialogue in itself has a meaning. An overall insight that we gained is that a *shared* lifestyle among believers from various religions is an indispensable basis for interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

The content of this issue of the SEDOS Bulletin shows that we could count on a significant group of well-talented and respected Muslim and Christian woman and men who, as resource persons, served our Seminar. Their presence at the SEDOS Seminar has been a witness **of dialogue** in itself. The Seminar started with **Mgr. Khaled Akasheh**, (Palestinian and Priest of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem) recently nominated by Pope John Paul II as the head of the office for relations with Islam at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. His presentation (the Italian text will soon be published on the SEDOS homepage: [www.sedos.org](http://www.sedos.org)) focused on steps, undertaken at a global level, to grow closer between the Catholic Church and the Islam. One example: the Vatican Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has set up the *Nostra Aetate* foundation. The purpose of this foundation is to encourage and promote dialogue by providing funding to people from other religions who wish to study Christianity.

Three young Muslims, **Lejla Demiri** (Macedonia), **Betül Avci** (Turkey) and **Adnane Mokrani** (Tunisia), impressed the group by the stories of their personal *interreligious dialogue* experiences while living in Rome and studying Christian theology. You can read their witnesses in this Bulletin. **Fr. Claude Geffré, OP**, a well-known French Dominican theologian offered the audience a sound theological framework for interreligious dialogue. This issue opens with his theological reflections on religious pluralism. Religious pluralism is part of God's plan of salvation, which is reason for joy, for God and for his people on earth.

**Mrs. Anita Mir**, a Pakistanian Muslim woman and journalist, and **Prof. Donna Orsuto** (USA), teacher at the Institute for Spirituality at the Gregoriana, animated the second day of the Seminar. From a woman's perspective, both voiced challenges of faith in the Post-Modern World. With an enthusiastic involvement of the audience, both women dialogued about hopeful strategies to meet the raised challenges. Such strategies of hope could be: gentle attitudes to each other, sound knowledge of the similarities and differences of one another's religious and cultural background... all this by an ongoing nourishing of the mystic-contemplative dimension of each one's faith life through a dedicated listening to the *music of eternity*.

The presentations of Mrs. Anita Mir and Prof. Donna Orsuto are published in this issue.

Mrs. Anita Mir and Prof. Donna Orsuto met one another for the first time in the context of our 2003 SEDOS Seminar. Throughout the Seminar experience, both could build up a relationship of dialogue and friendship. Two other speakers at the Seminar, **Sr. Lucie Pruvost** and **Maître Yamina Kebir** have been friends for many years. Sr. Lucie Pruvost from Algiers (city recently afflicted by devastating earthquakes) is a member of the religious community of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (MSOLA). At the Seminar she engaged in a dialogue with Maître Yamina Kebir, her Algerian friend of the Muslim religious community. Thanks to **Fr. Paul Hannon, MA**, who moderated this session. Both friends witnessed about the richness of their relationships of life and work, of mutual respect, esteem and friendship. During difficult times and experiences of violence, caused by fundamentalist forces, these relationships became even more stronger and reached deeper levels. You can read the inspirational interventions of Sr. Lucie Pruvost, MSOLA and Maître Yamina Kebir in this Bulletin.

Interreligious dialogue is already an integral part of life and ministry of various religious institutes. The same is to be said about the new ecclesial movements. Thus, the Seminar welcomed two representatives from the Focolare Movement, **Mr. Paul Lemarié** (Rome) and **Mrs. Jo-Ellen Karstens** (Chicago). In this Bulletin you can read about the dialogue experiences of these *focolarini* particularly with the American Society of Muslims, represented by **Imam and Judge David Shaheed**. Interreligious dialogue consists here in an intense and reciprocal exchange of spiritual experiences and insights between brothers and sisters of the Focolare Movement and those of the Muslim community. Interreligious dialogue promotes what is common between Focolare spirituality and Islam, particularly the praxis of mutual love as a way the One God is present among all people.

The exchange of insights and experiences about respective faith lives (what we believe, how we practice it and what transformation it brings about) and about one's personal inner spiritual life (personal relationship with God, vocation and commitment...) should be an essential part of the dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The importance of this dimension was also emphasized in the witnesses of **Fr. Thomas Michel, SJ** (Rome) and of his Turkish friend **Mr. Cemal Usak** (Istanbul), sharing their interreligious dialogue experiences with the Seminar audience.

The programme of the Seminar included a specific contribution from *Missio Aachen*, which – among various activities related to Church and Mission – runs a Human Rights Office in order to promote the awareness of Human Rights in various parts of the world. **Dr. Harald Suermann**, co-worker of *Missio Aachen*, stressed the importance for Muslim-Christian dialogue of the respect for human rights and their application, in order to promote a world of peace and justice. **Imam and Judge David Shaheed** responded to Dr. Suermann's paper and looked at the matter from a Muslim point of view.

The final part of this Bulletin is related to the closing afternoon sessions of the *2003 SEDOS Open Seminar*. Both presenters and participants looked towards the future. A panel of Muslims, with interventions from **Lejla Demiri, Betül Avci, Mrs. Anita Mir** and **Mr. Cemal Usak** (Facilitated by **Fr. David Fleming, SM**), reflected on prospects and hopes for future Muslim-Christian dialogue, including creative activities in view of promoting dialogue (e.g. including families, young people and children in activities of dialogue; organizing Muslim-Christian youth camps; studying together the great mystics and spiritual leaders of both Islam and Christianity...). Next, the same kind of reflection was done in language groups. By way of conclusion of the Seminar programme, **Fr. Claude Geffré, OP**, was asked to share some of his convictions, observations and hopes with regard to Muslim-Christian dialogue.

Outside the Seminar Aula, two other significant and well-appreciated events took place. On Wednesday 21 May 2003, our guests were welcomed by Mgr. Felix Machado and by him introduced in the activities of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The same morning, the group got the nice opportunity to take part in the weekly general audience with Pope John Paul II.

Through the overall experience of the *2003 SEDOS Open Seminar*, both presenters and participants have been enriched on human, spiritual and intellectual level. We felt that we were – by way of saying – “on common ground”. The Seminar has been a way to mutually help each other to become better believers: Muslims and Christians. We hope that you, through reading this issue of the SEDOS Bulletin, may taste something of the richness of this meaningful and life giving interreligious gathering, which has strengthened the respectful bonds between Christians and Muslims. May the reading of this issue be an impulse for a continued renewal of our vision of others and of ourselves ...

*Theological Framework for  
Interreligious Dialogue*



# Réflexions théologiques sur le pluralisme religieux

– Fr. Claude Geffré, OP –

En ce début du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle, le pluralisme religieux est devenu un défi majeur pour la théologie chrétienne. Au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, à une époque où la conquête missionnaire coïncidait avec la domination incontestable de l'Occident, l'Église portait un jugement plutôt pessimiste sur l'avenir des grandes religions du monde. Aujourd'hui, force est de constater leur vitalité et leur pouvoir de séduction bien au-delà de leurs lieux d'origine. C'est vrai de l'islam qui maintient son emprise en Afrique et en Asie et dont la présence, grâce aux flux migratoires, est de plus en plus importante en Europe où l'on compte déjà plus de 14 millions de fidèles. C'est vrai aussi de grandes religions de l'Asie comme l'hindouisme et le bouddhisme qui non seulement résistent fort bien au choc de la modernité technique mais compte aussi des milliers d'adeptes dans le premier Monde, en Europe et en Amérique du Nord.

Il n'est donc pas surprenant que la théologie des religions soit devenue un des chapitres les plus vivants de la théologie catholique. De même que l'athéisme a pu être l'*horizon* à partir duquel la théologie de la seconde moitié du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle réinterprétait les vérités centrales du christianisme, ainsi le pluralisme religieux tend à devenir l'*horizon* de la théologie du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle et nous invite à revisiter plusieurs chapitres de la Dogmatique chrétienne.<sup>1</sup> C'est la réponse à une situation historique incontestable. Mais c'est aussi la conséquence d'un acquis majeur du concile de Vatican II qui pour la première fois dans l'histoire du magistère romain a porté un jugement positif sur les religions non chrétiennes.

Dans le présent exposé, je voudrais réfléchir sur la difficile question que pose le pluralisme religieux à notre théologie traditionnelle. Et ce sera aussi le meilleur moyen d'assigner un fondement proprement théologique et pas seulement éthique au dialogue interreligieux. Je commencerai par rappeler la nouveauté du dialogue interreligieux qui coïncide avec l'âge planétaire de l'humanité. Nous pourrions alors nous interroger sur l'énigme du pluralisme religieux à l'intérieur du dessein de Dieu et rechercher le fondement théologique du dialogue interreligieux tel qu'il est désormais encouragé par l'Église. Un tel dialogue franc et loyal avec les autres religions nous

conduit nécessairement à insister sur la singularité du christianisme comme religion de dialogue. Dans un dernier temps, je me permettrai d'évoquer l'urgence du dialogue islamo-chrétien qui doit favoriser notre solidarité dans la défense de valeurs communes qui sont d'un grand prix pour l'avenir de la communauté mondiale.

## *La nouveauté du dialogue interreligieux*

Le dialogue interreligieux est une nouveauté et une chance surtout si on veut bien se souvenir de la longue complicité des religions avec la violence de l'histoire. Mais il n'est pas fortuit que cette nouveauté coïncide avec ce que certains désignent comme le quatrième âge de l'humanité, son âge *planétaire*, celui où tous les êtres humains ont conscience d'appartenir à la même famille dans ce minuscule canton de l'univers qu'est notre «village planétaire». Pour la première fois, à cause de d'une maîtrise inédite dans l'ordre scientifique et technologique, l'humanité a conscience que son destin est entre ses mains. Il ne s'agit pas seulement des menaces qui pèsent sur l'avenir du génome humain. Il s'agit aussi des effets pervers des progrès fantastiques dont nous sommes aujourd'hui les heureux bénéficiaires. A plus ou moins long terme, ils peuvent dégrader notre environnement au point de rendre impossible toute vie humaine sur la terre.

Alors, en dépit de leur divergences fondamentales, les religions ne se sentent pas seulement responsables d'un salut au-delà de la mort en termes d'immortalité ou de vie éternelle. Elles découvrent aussi leur responsabilité commune quant au destin historique de l'être humain et cherchent donc à dialoguer pour mieux servir les grandes causes qui sollicitent la générosité des hommes et des femmes de bonne volonté. A l'âge de la mondialisation, nous ressentons le besoin d'une *éthique globale* qui bénéficie à la fois des ressources morales des grandes traditions religieuses et des exigences éthiques d'un certain consensus de la conscience universelle qui a trouvé son expression dans des chartes comme la Charte des droits de l'homme. Les religions doivent être prêtes à se laisser interroger par notre meilleure lecture des

aspirations légitimes de la personne humaine. Mais à l'inverse, une éthique séculière a grand avantage à écouter les leçons de sagesse des traditions religieuses. Surtout face aux graves ambiguïtés de la mondialisation, le dialogue interreligieux peut jouer un rôle tout à fait positif pour humaniser la mondialisation et remédier aux menaces d'une culture de plus en plus uniforme sous le signe de la recherche du profit maximum, du consumérisme et d'un hédonisme facile.

C'est dans ce contexte historique qu'il faut situer l'importance proprement historique de la nouvelle attitude de l'Église à l'égard des religions du monde. Dans la Déclaration sur les relations de l'Église avec les religions non chrétiennes (*Nostra aetate*), on trouve cette affirmation solennelle : «L'Église ne rejette rien de ce qui est vrai et saint dans ces religions» (n° 2). Et ce changement d'attitude a trouvé son illustration dans les gestes à haute portée symbolique de Jean-Paul II que tout le monde connaît, depuis la Rencontre d'Assise en octobre 1986 jusqu'au voyage à Jérusalem lors du jubilé de l'an 2000. Il suffit d'évoquer les conflits séculaires de l'Église soit avec le judaïsme, soit avec l'islam ou bien l'ignorance pratique dans laquelle elle tenait les autres traditions religieuses pour qu'il soit permis de parler d'une évolution proprement révolutionnaire.

Or quarante ans après le concile, force est de constater que la théologie catholique a encore beaucoup de mal à prendre vraiment au sérieux les implications proprement théologiques de cette nouvelle attitude de l'Église. Et pourtant, si celle-ci porte un jugement positif sur les autres religions, ce n'est pas seulement parce que nous vivons à l'âge de la tolérance et du respect de la liberté de conscience de chacun, quelle que soit son appartenance religieuse. Ce n'est pas non plus uniquement parce que nous avons une vision plus positive du salut en dehors de l'Église. On n'a pas attendu Vatican II pour avoir une interprétation moins rigoureuse du fameux axiome de saint Cyprien «Hors de l'Église point de salut» et pour ne pas plonger dans les ténèbres extérieures tous les hommes de bonne volonté qui sont dans une ignorance non coupable de Dieu et de Jésus-Christ. Mais il faut reconnaître que *Nostra aetate* proposait une certaine éthique du dialogue avec les autres religions mais ne fournissait pas un fondement théologique susceptible de justifier clairement le dialogue encouragé par l'Église. La Déclaration conciliaire prononçait un jugement positif sur les religions non chrétiennes, mais ne s'exprimait pas de manière explicite sur le rapport effectif que les diverses religions peuvent avoir à l'Absolu. Elle invoquait la doctrine patristique des «semences du Verbe», mais sans élaborer une véritable théologie des religions.

Depuis quelques décennies, plusieurs théologiens s'efforcent de dépasser une théologie des religions qui ne serait qu'un prolongement d'une théologie du «salut des infidèles» et qui en resterait au plan des dispositions subjectives des membres des autres religions, sans prendre au sérieux le défi posé à la foi chrétienne par la pluralité des traditions religieuses considérées dans leur positivité historique. Elle tend donc à devenir une théologie du *pluralisme religieux* qui s'interroge sur la signification de cette pluralité à l'intérieur du Dessein de Dieu et qui se demande si, au-delà des intentions subjectives de leurs membres les grandes religions n'ont pas, dans leur historicité concrète, un rapport positif à l'Absolu (C'était tout le sens du livre disputé de Jacques Dupuis, *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*).<sup>2</sup> C'est le seul moyen en effet d'assigner un fondement théologique au dialogue interreligieux que les plus hautes instances de l'Église ne cessent d'encourager.

Déjà avant le concile, des théologiens comme Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar avaient esquissé une *théologie de l'accomplissement* selon laquelle les religions païennes apparaissent comme des préparations évangéliques lointaines de la seule vraie religion révélée, le christianisme. Cette théologie est d'ailleurs sous-jacente à la Déclaration *Nostra aetate* et au Décret *Ad gentes* sur l'activité missionnaire et se trouve en continuité avec la Constitution *Lumen Gentium* où il est dit à propos des non-chrétiens qu'«ils sont ordonnés au Peuple de Dieu... (et que)... tout ce qui se trouve de bon et de vrai, l'Église le considère comme une préparation évangélique et comme un don de Celui qui illumine tout homme» (nn. 16 et 17). Et Karl Rahner, lui-même, avec sa théorie des *chrétiens anonymes* et sa vision des religions comme des objectivations de la volonté universelle de salut de Dieu ne faisait que pousser à ses extrêmes la logique même de la théologie de l'accomplissement.<sup>3</sup>

Depuis plusieurs années, de nombreux théologiens sont de plus en plus conscients des limites d'une théologie de l'accomplissement qui ne favorise pas un dialogue interreligieux sur un plan d'égalité. Ce qui n'est pas pris au sérieux en effet, c'est l'altérité des autres traditions religieuses dans leur différence irréductible. A partir de l'universalité du mystère du Christ, on conçoit l'unicité du christianisme comme une unité d'*inclusion* qui englobe toutes les valeurs de vérité et de bonté dont les autres religions peuvent être porteuses. Ainsi, le courant le plus prometteur à l'intérieur de la théologie catholique cherche à dépasser une théologie de l'accomplissement dans le sens d'une théologie du pluralisme religieux qui sans mettre en question l'unicité du mystère du Christ,



c'est-à-dire un christocentrisme *constitutif* n'hésite pas à parler d'un pluralisme *inclusif* au sens d'une reconnaissance des valeurs propres aux autres religions. Mais pour ce faire, il faut commencer par prendre le risque de poser théologiquement la question du pourquoi de la pluralité des voies vers Dieu.

### *Le pluralisme religieux comme question théologique*

Vatican II, comme on l'a vu, a donc inauguré une ère nouvelle en théologie dans la mesure où il portait un jugement positif sur les religions non chrétiennes et reconnaissait qu'elles pouvaient être porteuses de valeurs salutaires. Mais le concile n'a pas été jusqu'à les considérer comme des «voies de salut» et il s'est bien gardé de porter un jugement théologique sur la signification du pluralisme religieux. C'est justement la tâche d'une théologie à orientation herméneutique de partir de l'expérience historique actuelle de l'Église et de chercher à réinterpréter notre vision du plan de salut de Dieu. L'Église fait aujourd'hui l'expérience d'un pluralisme religieux qui à vues humaines semble insurmontable et cela au moment même où, au seuil du troisième millénaire, elle a une conscience beaucoup plus vive de la particularité historique de la culture occidentale, celle-là même qui fut la culture dominante sous-jacente à sa théologie durant vingt siècles. Elle se trouve de fait de plus en plus confrontée à d'autres cultures très anciennes qui sont indissociables de grandes traditions religieuses. Il n'est donc pas étonnant qu'un certain nombre de théologiens, catholiques ou non, se demandent sérieusement si ce pluralisme religieux de fait ne nous renvoie pas à un pluralisme de principe ou de droit qui correspondrait à un vouloir mystérieux de Dieu.

Même si un théologien comme Karl Barth estimait qu'il s'agit là d'une mauvaise question théologique car l'Écriture ne fournit pas de réponse à une telle énigme, on peut penser que c'est une question inévitable et qu'elle est même d'une grande fécondité théologique car elle nous aide à élargir notre vision de l'histoire du salut. C'est en tout cas le seul moyen de rendre compte des intuitions-maîtresses de plusieurs textes du concile et de prendre la mesure de ce que j'appelais le dépassement de l'ancienne problématique du salut des infidèles.

Je ne pense pas pour ma part qu'il faille écarter cette hypothèse théologique même après la publication de la Déclaration *Dominus Jesus* (6 août 2000). On sait en effet que ce Document de la Congrégation pour la Doctrine de la foi sur l'Unité et l'Universalité salvifique de Jésus-Christ et de l'Église condamne les théologiens qui acceptent de

distinguer un pluralisme de *fait* et un pluralisme de *jure* ou de droit (n°4). Cela nous surprend pas dans la mesure où le texte signé par le cardinal Ratzinger comprend le pluralisme comme une idéologie qui désespère de toute vérité et qu'il veut avant tout nous mettre en garde contre le relativisme de certains théologiens contemporains qui sous prétexte de favoriser le dialogue interreligieux en viennent à remettre en cause le caractère unique de la médiation du Christ et sont alors tentés de relativiser la révélation chrétienne comme révélation complète et définitive. Mais il serait aisé de montrer, textes à l'appui, que les théologiens qui acceptent de distinguer un pluralisme de fait et un pluralisme de droit ne sacrifient nullement à l'idéologie du pluralisme et ils seraient très surpris de découvrir que cette distinction conduit fatalement à considérer comme dépassées les vérités énumérées dans la suite du numéro 4 de la Déclaration, en particulier le caractère complet et définitif de la révélation chrétienne, l'inspiration des Écritures, l'unité personnelle entre le Verbe éternel et Jésus de Nazareth, l'unicité et l'universalité du mystère du Christ, etc... Sans prétendre connaître le pourquoi de la pluralité des voies vers Dieu, ils cherchent simplement à interpréter un pluralisme apparemment insurmontable à la lumière de ce que nous savons de la volonté universelle de salut de Dieu. Ce pluralisme ne peut être seulement la conséquence de l'aveuglement coupable des hommes tout au long des siècles, encore moins le signe de l'échec de la mission de l'Église depuis vingt siècles. Il est donc permis théologiquement de l'interpréter comme un pluralisme qui correspond à un mystérieux dessein divin. Plutôt que de dénoncer un pluralisme de *principe* ou de *jure*, il est préférable de reconnaître le *mystère* du pluralisme religieux.

Il reste vrai qu'on ne trouvera pas dans les Écritures de réponse claire à la question du pourquoi du pluralisme religieux. Elles témoignent seulement de l'ambiguïté profonde de l'histoire religieuse de l'humanité. Selon le numéro 16 de la Constitution *Lumen gentium* de Vatican II, les divergences religieuses peuvent être «la manifestation des évolutions, des chutes de l'esprit humain tenté par l'esprit du mal dans l'histoire», mais en même temps elles peuvent être aussi «l'expression du génie et des richesses spirituelles dispensées par Dieu aux nations» (cf. le numéro 11 du Décret *Ad gentes*). Chez saint Paul par exemple, on trouve des affirmations apparemment contraires : d'une part, il porte un jugement très négatif sur les païens qui n'ont pas reconnu Dieu dans sa création et qui sont tombés dans l'idolâtrie et la superstition (Rm 1, 18-22), mais d'autre part, il témoigne d'une attitude positive à l'égard des gentils comme l'atteste son discours aux

Athéniens : il admire l'esprit religieux des païens et leur annonce celui qu'ils adorent sans le savoir comme le Dieu inconnu (Ac 17, 22-34).

En tout cas, quoiqu'il en soit du jugement pessimiste de la Bible sur les religions païennes qui conduisent souvent à l'idolâtrie, on doit interpréter la diversité des phénomènes religieux à la lumière de l'affirmation fondamentale du Nouveau Testament concernant la volonté universelle de salut de Dieu, volonté qui s'étend à tous les hommes depuis les origines : «Dieu veut que tous les hommes soient sauvés et parviennent à la connaissance de la vérité (1 Tim 2,4). Et dans son discours aux païens, Pierre déclare dans les Actes des Apôtres : «Je me rends compte en vérité que Dieu n'est pas partial et qu'en toute nation quiconque le craint et pratique la justice trouve accueil auprès de lui (Ac 10, 43-45). Ainsi, le pluralisme religieux peut être considéré comme un dessein mystérieux de Dieu dont la signification dernière nous échappe. C'est ce que suggère un beau texte du concile qui, après avoir affirmé que l'Esprit-Saint offre à tous les hommes la possibilité de participer au mystère pascal du Christ, ne manque pas d'ajouter : «d'une façon que Dieu connaît» (*Gaudium et spes*, n° 22).

En dehors du témoignage ambigu des Écritures, on sera tenté aussi d'invoquer contre l'idée même d'un pluralisme religieux de principe le jugement très sévère des Pères de l'Église sur les grandes religions de leur temps. De fait, ils les considèrent comme des religions idolâtriques qui tombent dans la magie et la superstition et ils n'hésitent pas même à les considérer comme inspirées par le diable. Mais il convient de les resituer dans leur contexte historique. Par définition, ils ne pouvaient pas prendre position à l'égard d'une religion comme l'islam qui est née au début du 7<sup>e</sup> siècle et ils connaissaient très mal les grandes religions de l'Orient même si certains textes, d'Origène en particulier, attestent que le Brahmanisme avait pénétré jusque dans une ville comme Alexandrie. Il est plus intéressant d'observer qu'au moment même où ils ont une attitude très pessimiste sur les religions vivantes de leur temps, ils portent un jugement très positif sur ce qu'ils appellent volontiers «la sagesse des nations», c'est-à-dire en fait l'héritage de la philosophie grecque. Ils sont prêts à reconnaître dans la sagesse des philosophes des *semina Verbi* ou encore des reflets de la lumière du *Logos*, le verbe même de Dieu. On retrouve cette idée chez ces grands théologiens de l'Église d'Orient que furent Justin, Clément d'Alexandrie, Origène... Pour eux, ces semences du Verbe ou ces reflets de la Vérité éternelle sont comme une préparation, une préfiguration de la plénitude de la vérité qui coïncide avec l'avènement de Jésus-Christ.

J'ai déjà noté que le texte de *Nostra aetate* fait directement référence à la doctrine patristique des

semences du verbe. Avec le recul, il semble légitime de dire que les Pères de Vatican II n'ont pas hésité à appliquer aux religions vivantes de notre temps un enseignement qui visait d'abord les trésors de la philosophie grecque. Il ne s'agit donc pas seulement des semences de vérité, de bonté et même de sainteté qui peuvent habiter l'âme et le cœur des hommes et des femmes de bonne volonté mais des valeurs positives qui peuvent se trouver dans les éléments constitutifs des religions non chrétiennes, qu'il s'agisse de doctrines, de rites ou d'attitudes morales. Le numéro 2 de *Nostra aetate* est particulièrement éloquent à cet égard : «L'Église considère avec un respect sincère ces manières d'agir et de vivre, ces règles et doctrines qui quoiqu'elles diffèrent en beaucoup de points de ce qu'elle-même tient et propose, cependant apportent souvent un rayon de la vérité qui illumine tous les hommes». On peut aussi citer cette affirmation particulièrement nette du Décret *Ad gentes* : «Tout ce que l'on découvre de bon semé dans le cœur et dans l'âme des hommes ou dans les rites particuliers et les civilisations particulières des peuples, non seulement ne périt pas, mais est purifié, élevé et porté à sa perfection pour la gloire de Dieu...» (n° 9). Et dans le Document *Dialogue et annonce* qui a été publié en 1991 à la suite de l'encyclique *Redemptoris missio*, on affirme au numéro 29 : «Selon la pratique sincère de ce qui est bon dans leur tradition religieuse, et en suivant les directives de leurs consciences, les membres des autres religions répondent positivement à l'appel de Dieu et reçoivent le salut en Jésus-Christ même s'ils ne le confessent pas et ne le reconnaissent pas comme leur Sauveur» (cf. *Ad gentes*, 3,9,11).

### *Le fondement théologique du dialogue interreligieux*

Finalement, le fondement théologique du pluralisme religieux et donc du dialogue interreligieux, c'est l'idée que l'économie du Verbe incarné est le sacrement d'une économie plus vaste qui coïncide avec l'histoire religieuse de l'humanité. Quand on cherche à justifier théologiquement le dialogue interreligieux, on en revient toujours au mystère de l'Incarnation. Il ne suffit pas de dire que l'histoire des hommes est depuis toujours le sujet des semences du Verbe éternel de Dieu et des inspirations de l'Esprit divin. Depuis que le Verbe a pris chair en Jésus de Nazareth, c'est le mystère du Christ, celui qui est passé par la mort et la résurrection, qui a une portée universelle pour toute l'histoire humaine. En d'autres termes, l'histoire des hommes n'a jamais été abandonnée à elle-même. Dès qu'on est en présence de ce seuil de l'évolution qu'est l'esprit humain,

l'histoire des libertés est une histoire de péché et de grâce et il est impossible de discerner ce qui est la part du génie religieux de l'homme et la part du don de Dieu.

L'histoire universelle est à la fois l'histoire de la quête par l'homme de cet Absolu que nous nommons Dieu et la recherche de l'homme par Dieu. Selon l'intuition de Karl Rahner, on peut considérer les religions comme des objectivations de la volonté universelle de salut de Dieu. C'est dire qu'en dépit de leurs limites dans l'ordre de la connaissance et de leurs imperfections dans l'ordre moral, elles peuvent être des tentatives maladroites et balbutiantes en quête du vrai Dieu. L'esprit créé se définit comme un degré d'être tout relatif à Dieu, non seulement le Dieu créateur, mais le Dieu qui fait grâce et cherche à se communiquer au maximum. Ainsi, la révélation historique qui coïncide avec l'histoire du peuple d'Israël et qui trouve son achèvement avec l'histoire du peuple de la nouvelle Alliance est le sacrement de cette révélation immanente qui est coextensive à l'histoire humaine.

Dès l'origine, le dessein créateur de Dieu est un dessein de salut en Jésus-Christ. A cet égard, le mythe de la tour de Babel (cf. Gn 11) est plein d'enseignements. On le comprend généralement comme le signe par excellence du mauvais pluralisme qui n'engendre que la confusion et remet en question toute prétention à une vérité transcendante. Mais c'est en rester à la face purement négative de Babel. Certes, Babel est le symbole de la confusion des langues comme châtiment de l'orgueil humain qui a cru pouvoir revendiquer une unité qui n'appartient qu'à Dieu. Mais c'est aussi le retour à la condition originaire de l'homme telle qu'elle a été voulue par le Dieu créateur. Le Dieu de la révélation biblique est un Dieu qui bénit la multiplicité, ne serait-ce déjà que la multiplicité de l'être humain qui est créé homme et femme. Dieu bénit la multiplicité des peuples, des langues et donc des cultures. Comment alors ne permettrait-il pas ce phénomène inévitable de la multiplicité des formes religieuses indissociables de la diversité des cultures ? Il est permis de penser que le miracle de la Pentecôte, à l'étape ultime de la Révélation, nous manifeste en clair que les diverses formes religieuses depuis des millénaires sont comme une pédagogie vers la découverte du vrai Dieu. En dépit de leurs erreurs et de leurs imperfections, les multiples expressions du phénomène religieux concourent à leur manière à une meilleure manifestation de la plénitude inépuisable du mystère de Dieu. Selon une formule chère au Père Schillebeeckx, «Dieu ne cesse de se raconter dans l'histoire».<sup>4</sup> Et dans son discours aux cardinaux qui a suivi la rencontre d'Assise, Jean-Paul II déclarait que l'engagement pour le dialogue interreligieux recommandé par le concile ne se justifiait que si les différences religieuses n'étaient pas nécessairement réductrices du dessein de Dieu.<sup>5</sup>

## *Le christianisme comme religion de dialogue*

La tâche difficile d'une théologie des religions est de chercher à penser la multiplicité des voies vers Dieu sans compromettre l'unicité de la médiation du Christ et sans brader le privilège unique du christianisme qui n'a de sens qu'en référence à Jésus-Christ qui est autre chose qu'un fondateur de religion puisqu'il est Dieu venant habiter parmi les hommes. Dans cette nouvelle étape de notre réflexion, je voudrais réaffirmer la singularité du christianisme qui témoigne de l'universalité du mystère du Christ. Mais en même temps, je voudrais exorciser toute menace d'impérialisme chrétien en faisant appel au caractère dialogal du christianisme.

## **La singularité chrétienne**

On doit recevoir la Déclaration *Dominus Jesus* comme un avertissement très sérieux adressé à certains théologiens qui sont tentés de remettre en cause l'universalité salvifique du mystère du Christ. Dans le désir d'établir un dialogue sur un plan d'égalité avec les membres des autres religions, ils adoptent volontiers une position dite *pluraliste* qui sacrifie un christianisme inclusif au profit d'un théocentrisme radical selon lequel toutes les religions, y compris le christianisme, tournent autour de ce soleil qu'est la Réalité dernière de l'univers.<sup>6</sup> Sous prétexte que «Dieu seul sauve», ils sont prêts à relativiser le salut en Jésus-Christ. Le Christ serait bien une voie *normative* pour les chrétiens, mais il ne serait pas la voie *constitutive* du salut.

Or selon l'enseignement le plus clair du Nouveau Testament, il nous est dit que depuis l'instant même de la création Dieu a voulu lier son dessein éternel de salut au Christ qui est l'Alpha et l'Omega. Cependant, il faut bien comprendre l'unicité de la médiation du Christ. Cela ne veut pas dire que la médiation du Christ soit exclusive d'autres voies de salut à condition d'ajouter aussitôt que ces autres voies de salut, en particulier les religions du monde ne sont que des médiations *dérivées* (*Dominus Jesus* parlera de médiations *participées*) qui n'ont d'effectivité salutaire qu'en référence à leur lien secret avec le mystère du Christ. C'est l'enseignement même de l'encyclique de Jean-Paul II sur les missions : «Le concours de médiations de type divers n'est pas exclu, mais celles-ci tirent leur sens et leur valeur uniquement de celle du Christ et ne peuvent être considérées comme parallèles ou complémentaires» (*Redemptoris missio*, n° 5).

Il est donc possible de concilier un christocentrisme *constitutif* et ce que l'on peut appeler un pluralisme *inclusif* au sens où conformément à

l'enseignement du concile on prend au sérieux les valeurs positives ou encore «les éléments de grâce et de vérité» (cf. *Ad gentes*, n° 9) qui se trouvent dans les autres traditions religieuses. Pour permettre le dialogue avec les autres religions, on n'est donc pas fatalement conduit à sacrifier le christocentrisme à un théocentrisme indéterminé. Certes, on pourra toujours objecter que la prétention du christianisme à l'universel trahit un certain impérialisme à l'égard des autres religions. Mais je crois que pour l'avenir, nous sommes invités à ne pas confondre l'universalité du christianisme comme religion historique et l'universalité du mystère du Christ.

La Déclaration *Dominus Jesus* a voulu, à juste titre, insister sur certaines dérives actuelles qui semblent compromettre le caractère complet et définitif de la Révélation chrétienne. Mais à l'encontre de toute fausse absolutisation, il faut maintenir son caractère historique et relatif, au moins en ce sens qu'elle demeure accessible à l'intelligence humaine. C'est Jésus lui-même qui insiste sur la dimension eschatologique de la révélation quand il assure que c'est l'Esprit qui conduira les disciples à la connaissance de la vérité tout entière (Jn 16,14). La Révélation dont témoigne le Nouveau Testament n'épuise donc pas la plénitude de richesses du mystère du Christ. On est ainsi en droit de dire que la vérité chrétienne n'est ni exclusive ni même inclusive de toute autre vérité d'ordre religieux. Elle est *singulière* et relative à la part de vérité dont les autres religions sont porteuses. C'est dire que les germes de vérité et de bonté disséminés dans les autres traditions religieuses peuvent être le don et l'expression de l'Esprit du Christ qui est toujours au travail dans l'histoire et dans le cœur des hommes.

C'est pourquoi il est abusif de parler valeurs implicitement chrétiennes selon la simple logique de la préparation et de l'accomplissement. Il est préférable de parler de valeurs *christiques*.<sup>7</sup> Elles témoignent en effet d'un certain irréductible dans l'ordre du religieux. Et c'est dans leur différence même qu'elles trouveront leur accomplissement dernier dans le Christ, même si elles ne trouvent pas leur explicitation visible dans le christianisme. De plus en plus, les théologiens chrétiens devront endurer intellectuellement l'énigme d'une pluralité de traditions religieuses dans leurs différences irréductibles. Elles ne se laissent pas facilement harmoniser avec le christianisme et ce serait méconnaître le prix unique de la Révélation chrétienne que de chercher à la compléter à partir des vérités partielles des autres religions. Mais plus nous connaissons les richesses propres des doctrines et des pratiques des autres religions, plus nous sommes en mesure de procéder à une réinterprétation enrichissante des vérités qui relèvent de la singularité chrétienne. Selon la pédagogie même de

Dieu dans l'histoire du salut, il y a une fonction prophétique de l'*étranger* pour une meilleure intelligence de sa propre identité. C'est vrai de la connaissance de Dieu qui est toujours plus grand que les noms que nous lui prêtons et c'est vrai de la relation à Dieu qui doit tendre à la perfection du culte en esprit et en vérité.

### Le caractère dialogal du christianisme

On peut regretter que la Déclaration *Dominus Jesus*, dans son souci légitime de pourchasser toute forme de relativisme obéisse trop à une logique d'absolutisation et tende à mettre sur le même plan l'universalité du Christ et celle de l'Église ou du christianisme. Je voudrais justement montrer que si le christianisme peut dialoguer avec les autres religions, c'est parce qu'il porte en lui-même ses propres principes de limitation. Pour ce faire, j'évoquerai successivement la dualité entre Israël et l'Église naissante, le paradoxe de l'incarnation c'est-à-dire l'union de l'absolument universel et l'absolument particulier, enfin la kénose du Dieu chrétien.

1. La question d'Israël est d'un enjeu décisif pour une théologie chrétienne des religions. Le «schisme originaire» que constitue la séparation d'Israël et de l'Église naissante est l'indice d'un dialogue originaire qui est inscrit dans l'acte de naissance du christianisme. Depuis le concile, la plupart des théologiens s'accordent pour affirmer qu'en dépit de la réprobation divine, Israël demeure toujours le dépositaire de l'élection des promesses de Dieu. En d'autres termes, Israël représente un *irréductible* qui ne se laisse pas facilement intégrer dans l'Église historique. On parlera d'un face à face d'Israël et de l'Église jusqu'à la fin des temps. Ainsi, à l'encontre d'un certain absolutisme catholique qui fut dominant dans la théologie contre-réforme, on doit être prêt à reconnaître ce que Hans Urs von Balthasar appelait la «non-catholicité» de l'Église dans sa dimension historique.

C'est à partir de l'irréductible d'Israël que l'on peut chercher à penser l'*irréductible* des grandes religions du monde. Il est permis en effet de découvrir une certaine analogie entre le rapport du christianisme naissant au judaïsme et le rapport actuel du christianisme aux autres religions. Il faut tenir à la fois et sans contradiction que les promesses du peuple de Dieu trouvent leur accomplissement dans le peuple de la nouvelle Alliance et qu'à parler strictement l'Église ne se substitue pas à Israël.

Il s'agit plutôt d'une dilatation de l'unique peuple de Dieu. Cela peut nous aider à réinterpréter dans un sens non totalitaire la notion incontestable d'accomplissement. Jésus n'a pas voulu substituer une nouvelle religion à l'ancienne. Il a élargi à l'ensemble



des nations païennes un héritage qui était le monopole exclusif du peuple élu. Est-il alors trop téméraire de considérer la relation de l'Église primitive au judaïsme comme exemplaire du rapport actuel de l'Évangile aux autres religions et cultures ? De même que l'Église n'intègre pas et ne remplace pas Israël, il faut reconnaître que le christianisme n'intègre pas et ne remplace pas les valeurs positives des autres traditions religieuses. C'est pourquoi, comme on l'a vu, nous sommes théologiquement fondés à parler d'un pluralisme religieux de principe et pas seulement de fait.

2. Pour manifester le caractère dialogal et non impérialiste du christianisme, il faut revenir au centre même de la foi chrétienne, à savoir le paradoxe de l'incarnation dans son sens le plus réaliste.

Pour reprendre la belle expression de Nicolas de Cuse, il s'agirait de déployer toutes les implications du mystère du Christ considéré comme *Universel concret*. Depuis vingt siècles, les chrétiens confessent Jésus de Nazareth comme Christ. Cela veut dire que Jésus nous a révélé l'amour de Dieu pour tous les êtres humains pas simplement, par son message mais dans son humanité concrète. Cette identification de Dieu comme Réalité transcendante à partir de l'humanité concrète de Jésus est le trait distinctif du christianisme. Selon le mot si fort de Paul : «En lui habite toute la plénitude de la divinité, corporellement» (Col 2, 9). Jésus doit être contemplé comme la manifestation de l'amour absolu de Dieu. Mais du même coup, Dieu ne peut que se manifester en termes non divins, c'est-à-dire dans l'humanité contingente d'un homme particulier.

Jésus est bien l'icône du Dieu vivant à un titre unique et nous ne devons pas attendre d'autre médiateur. Mais nous devons nous garder d'identifier l'élément historique et contingent de Jésus et son élément *christique* et divin. C'est justement la loi de l'incarnation de Dieu par la médiation de l'histoire qui nous conduit à penser que Jésus ne clôture pas l'histoire des manifestations de Dieu. Selon notre manière humaine de comprendre, l'humanité particulière de Jésus ne peut être la traduction adéquate des richesses contenues dans la plénitude du Christ glorifié. Jésus ne serait plus une icône mais déjà une idole. L'identification de Dieu à partir de l'humanité de Jésus nous renvoie à un Dieu invisible qui échappe à toute identification. Le christianisme n'est donc pas exclusif d'autres religions témoignant d'expériences religieuses qui identifient autrement la Réalité transcendante de l'univers. Même s'il ne s'agit que d'une analogie, il est permis de dire que de même qu'il n'y a pas totale adéquation entre le livre des Écritures et la Parole absente de Dieu, il n'y a pas non plus adéquation entre l'humanité particulière de Jésus de Nazareth et la plénitude inexprimable du mystère de Dieu.

Ainsi, c'est justement le caractère originaire du christianisme comme religion de l'incarnation qui fonde sa nature essentiellement dialogale. Aussi étrange que cela puisse paraître, c'est en insistant sur la *différence* chrétienne que l'on se trouve en meilleure position pour contribuer à la désabsolutisation du christianisme. C'est en tant même que religion de l'incarnation que le christianisme est la religion du paradoxe absolu. Selon la vision du théologien Paul Tillich, la personne de Jésus comme manifestation concrète du Logos universel réalise l'identité entre l'absolument universel et l'absolument particulier.<sup>8</sup> Le Christ est bien l'élément concret à travers lequel les croyants ont accès à l'Absolu. Mais il est soumis lui-même au jugement de l'inconditionné pour autant qu'il prétendrait s'identifier à l'Absolu. Il en va de même pour le christianisme comme religion historique. Dans la mesure même où il revendique à juste titre d'être la religion de la *révélation finale* sur Dieu, il exclut toute prétention à l'inconditionnalité de la part d'une voie de révélation particulière à commencer par la sienne propre. En d'autres termes, aucune réalisation historique des divers christianismes depuis vingt siècles ne peut définir l'essence du christianisme comme religion de la révélation complète et définitive sur Dieu.

3. Enfin, pour exorciser tout venin totalitaire dans l'excellence chrétienne et donc favoriser le dialogue interreligieux, il faut comprendre la singularité du christianisme à la lumière du mystère de la Croix. La théologie des religions est invitée à méditer davantage sur la dimension kénotique du Dieu qui se révèle en Jésus-Christ. La Croix est la condition de la Gloire et c'est le renoncement à une particularité qui est la condition d'une universalité concrète. La Croix est le symbole d'une universalité toujours liée au sacrifice d'une particularité. Jésus meurt à sa particularité pour renaître en figure d'universalité concrète, en figure de Christ. C'est la kénose du Christ dans son égalité avec Dieu qui *permet* la résurrection au sens le plus large du mot. C'est aussi le tombeau vide, l'absence du corps de Jésus enseveli qui est la condition d'avènement du corps de l'Église et du corps des Écritures. Et selon cette logique, on peut ajouter que c'est la conscience d'un *manque* qui est la condition d'un rapport à l'autre, à l'étranger, au différent.<sup>9</sup> Il faut aller jusque là pour montrer comment le dialogue avec les autres expériences religieuses est inscrit dans la vocation originaire du christianisme qui ne se définit pas comme une totalité close. De même qu'il n'y a pas d'expérience chrétienne dans l'ordre de la prière sans conscience d'une Origine absente, il n'y a pas de pratique chrétienne sans la conscience d'un *manque* en référence aux autres croyances et aux autres pratiques humaines.

Cette dialectique de la particularité et de son dépassement par l'ouverture à l'autre nous aide à penser le problème de l'articulation entre l'universalité du message chrétien et la pluralité des traditions religieuses et culturelles. La pratique de l'altérité, l'hospitalité à l'égard de l'étranger ne sont pas des options facultatives. Elles relèvent d'une exigence de nature et elles attestent l'altérité d'un Dieu toujours plus grand. De tout cela, on peut conclure qu'il n'y a pas de définition de la singularité chrétienne en dehors de la Croix du Christ comme figure de l'Amour absolu. Ainsi, l'identité chrétienne appelle son propre dépassement. Nous tenons là le fondement dernier du dialogue interreligieux.

Loin d'exercer une violence despotique à l'égard des autres religions, l'être-soi chrétien n'a de consistance que dans son être pour les autres. A la différence d'une perfection d'être d'ordre statique, l'existence chrétienne se définit par un certain non-être et une ouverture à tout ce qu'elle n'est pas. Reconnaître l'autre dans sa différence et la limite qu'il nous impose, c'est la logique même d'une existence pascalienne. On pourra alors parler non pas d'une unicité d'excellence et d'intégration, mais de l'unicité d'un devenir qui est fait de consentement et de service.

### *L'urgence du dialogue islamo-chrétien*

En terminant ces réflexions et dans la perspective de notre séminaire, je me permets seulement de souligner l'importance du dialogue de ces deux premières religions du monde que sont le christianisme et l'islam. Il est devenu d'une urgence plus grande dans le contexte d'une mondialisation qui comporte de réels dangers pour l'avenir de la communauté mondiale et face à la menace terroriste qui depuis le 11 septembre 2001 risque de réactiver la vieille rivalité entre l'Occident chrétien et le monde arabo-musulman.

Il convient tout d'abord de rappeler la nouveauté de l'enseignement de la Déclaration *Nostra aetate* qui n'hésite pas à affirmer : «L'Eglise regarde avec estime les musulmans qui adorent le Dieu, vivant et subsistant, miséricordieux et tout-puissant, Créateur du ciel et de la terre, qui a parlé aux hommes» (n° 3). Cette parenté d'expérience religieuse entre chrétiens et musulmans a été confirmée en août 1985 par le pape Jean-Paul II lors de son discours au stade de Casablanca et dans des termes qui dépassaient l'expression du concile : «Nous (chrétiens et musulmans), nous croyons au même Dieu, le Dieu unique, le Dieu vivant qui crée les mondes et porte les créatures à leur perfection». Cette croyance commune s'enracine dans la foi d'Abraham quoiqu'il en soit des modalités différentes de cette foi : «Abraham est pour nous un même modèle de foi en Dieu, de soumission à

sa volonté et de confiance en sa bonté».

Certes, les théologiens chrétiens divergent sur la nature de la prophétie du prophète Mohammad. Mais il semble que l'Eglise soit prête à considérer l'islam comme une religion abrahamique à l'instar du judaïsme et du christianisme. Elle est seconde en effet par rapport à l'élection d'Abraham. Et conformément à l'enseignement du Coran, c'est le même Dieu qui s'est révélé aux prophètes de la première Alliance, à Jésus et en dernier au prophète Mohammad : «Nous croyons en Dieu et en ce qu'il a fait descendre sur Abraham, Ismaël, Jacob et les douze tribus, à ce qui a été donné à Moïse, à Jésus et à Mohammad» (Coran 3, 64). A parler proprement, l'islam ne prétend pas innover mais il confirme et réactive la confession initiale d'Israël telle qu'elle s'exprime dans le Deutéronome : «Écoute Israël, Yahvé notre Dieu est le seul Dieu» (Dt 6,4).

En dehors même du conflit séculaire qui a opposé la civilisation occidentale et la civilisation arabo-musulmane, on ne peut nier une rivalité mimétique difficilement surmontable entre le christianisme et l'islam. Les deux religions en effet prétendent être les religions de l'accomplissement dernier. Pour les chrétiens, le Christ est le «oui» définitif de Dieu à l'homme qui accomplit toutes les prophéties antérieures. Pour les fidèles de l'islam, c'est le prophète Mohammad qui est le «sceau de la prophétie», le prophète de l'Ultime, qui confirme en les corrigeant dans le sens du monothéisme absolu les prophéties antérieures d'Abraham, Moïse et Jésus. La foi chrétienne renoncerait à elle-même si elle ne confessait pas Jésus-Christ comme l'événement de la révélation complète et définitive sur le mystère de Dieu. Mais comme j'ai essayé de le montrer dans cet exposé, il ne faut pas comprendre cet accomplissement dans un sens totalitaire.

Conformément aux suggestions de plusieurs textes du concile de Vatican II, la théologie chrétienne est prête à reconnaître dans des Écritures sacrées même postérieures à l'Ancien et au Nouveau Testament des rayons de «vérité» incomplets mais précieux qui peuvent témoigner à leur manière du mystère insondable de Dieu. Dans la mesure où le Coran réaffirme avec force la révélation biblique sur l'unicité absolue de Dieu, il peut adresser un avertissement prophétique à la fois au judaïsme et au christianisme. Et en même temps, il peut manifester certaines richesses quant au sens de la grandeur de Dieu et de l'adoration que l'homme lui doit. D'autre part, tout en proclamant l'unicité de la médiation du Christ dans l'ordre du salut, l'Eglise reconnaît que l'islam peut être une voie de salut pour les hommes et les femmes de bonne volonté qui accomplissent la volonté de Dieu conformément à l'enseignement de Vatican II : «Le dessein de salut enve-



loppe également ceux qui reconnaissent le Créateur, en tout premier lieu les musulmans qui professent avoir la foi d'Abraham, adorent avec nous le Dieu unique, miséricordieux, futur juge des hommes au dernier jour» (*Lumen gentium*, n° 16).

En dépit de divergences doctrinales irrécusables, l'heure est peut-être venue au début du troisième millénaire de transformer notre rivalité ancestrale en émulation réciproque dans la défense des valeurs qui nous sont communes au service d'une civilisation plus conviviale. Parmi ces valeurs, on attachera le plus grand prix au sens d'un Dieu toujours plus grand, au respect de l'humain authentique, au combat pour la justice et à la sauvegarde de la création.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A propos de ce nouveau paradigme théologique, je renvoie à mon article, «Le pluralisme religieux comme nouvel horizon de la théologie» dans *La responsabilité des théologiens. Mélanges offerts à Joseph Doré*, Paris, Desclée, 2002, pp. 211-224.

<sup>2</sup> J. DUPUIS, *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1997. Même si la Déclaration *Dominus Jesus* vise certaines thèses défendues par le père Dupuis, on sait que la mise en examen de son livre par la Congrégation pour la doctrine de la foi qui a duré plus de deux ans n'a pas abouti à une condamnation mais à la Notification du 19 janvier 2001 qui ne relève pas d'erreurs proprement dites mais «des formulations ambiguës et des explications insuffisantes».

<sup>3</sup> Pour l'exposé le plus récent de la position de Karl Rahner, on peut se reporter à son *Traité fondamental de la foi*, trad. franç., Paris, Centurion, 1983, pp. 179-202.

<sup>4</sup> Le titre français de son livre *Mensen als verhaal van God, L'histoire des hommes récit de Dieu*, Paris, Ed. du cerf, 1993, est déjà tout un problème.

<sup>5</sup> «Discours aux cardinaux et aux membres de la curie romaine du 22 décembre 1986» (cf. Documentation catholique, n° 1933, 1987, pp. 133-136).

<sup>6</sup> Parmi les théologiens catholiques, on peut citer des américains comme Paul Knitter et Roger Haight et des indiens comme Raimon Panikkar et Michael Amaladoss.

<sup>7</sup> Je me suis expliqué plus nettement sur le sens de cette expression dans le chapitre 5 de mon livre, *Croire et interpréter. Le tournant herméneutique de la théologie*, Paris, Éd. du Cerf, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Je me réfère ici au premier volume de la *Systematic Theology* de Paul Tillich. On trouvera des références plus précises dans mon article : «Paul Tillich et l'avenir de l'œcuménisme interreligieux», *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 77 (1993) pp. 3-22.

<sup>9</sup> Cette catégorie du *manque* chère à Jacques Lacan a souvent été exploitée par Michel de Certeau dans ses travaux historiques sur la mystique. Elle désigne à la fois la *faiblesse de croire* et le caractère non totalitaire du christianisme comme religion de l'Altérité.

Réf. : Texte de l'auteur pour le Séminaire de SEDOS.

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## *Life Giving Experiences of Interreligious Dialogue*

- *Young Muslims Study Christian Theology in Rome*
- *Focolare Movement and American Society of Muslims Share Faith and Life*
- *Christians and Muslims Learn From One Another's Faith and Inner-Life*

## *Young Muslims Study Christian Theology In Rome*

### *My Experience of Dialogue*

– Lejla Demiri –

I am a Muslim student from Macedonia, currently doing my PhD in Turkey. Since my doctoral thesis directly touches the theme of the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus, I decided to immerse myself deeper into an understanding of Christian theology. As a result I came to Rome, the heart of the Catholic world, to study theology at diverse Pontifical Universities. Last year I attended various courses at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum). And at present I am studying at the Gregorian University, in a one-year programme. My studies at both universities and also my research at different libraries have given me the opportunity to learn the Christian religion from the inside.

I believe that to learn and do research on a certain religion is not truly possible unless we meet and live with the people who belong to it. Accordingly, during my stay in Rome, while I have been working on improving my knowledge of Christianity by taking courses and doing research in different libraries, I have also gained insights into the Christian understanding of life by living within a Christian community.

My valuable experiences in Rome confirmed my conviction that mutual openness to understanding is of great importance for building bridges between different religions and cultures. Therefore interreligious dialogue can attain higher levels only by increasing interpersonal relations between people of different traditions. This way we get a chance to understand the other not just from books and lectures, but also from an insider's perspective.

Life experience at a convent run by Lebanese sisters where I resided last year, the community life and family atmosphere of the Lay Center where I am staying this year, and the many friendships that I have made through the international and multi-cultural university scene of Rome, have helped me to understand the meaning of Christian spirituality and religious life in a more profound way. Though I come from a multi-religious society where both Muslims and Christians live together, this is the first time I live with Christians who actually practise their faith, which is a very different experience for me as a practising Muslim.

I will not stress here the classical notion of the

common characteristics that our two religious traditions share. In interreligious dialogue, we not only become aware of the common principles and ideas, but we also see our differences. I think that dialogue does not aim to gather people in order to make them the same; instead its goal is to unite people within the differences they have. Thus, while stressing the basic concepts that both religions have in common, the differences should also be seen and expressed. This is important since it is those divergences that make us who we are. In sum, dialogue involves admitting the differences, rejecting any kind of syncretism, and still being open to the other. It should not be forgotten that being faithful to one's own faith requires openness, tolerance and sincerity to the other, and *vice versa*. Therefore intolerance, an exclusivist attitude and a polemical spirit are the most destructive obstacles in this process. Especially, being suspicious of the other's motives can be more harmful than beneficial.

In conclusion, I believe that by engaging in interreligious dialogue, participating members of both religions gain meaningful understanding and overcome wrong assumptions about each other. It is an occasion to hear the voice of the other and also to hear our own voice, that voice which is deep inside our hearts. It is an opportunity to look at the other and also at ourselves in a new light and in a more profound way. True dialogue leads not just to a discovery of the other but also to a deeper knowledge of ourselves. It directs us to self-criticism and self-analysis from a wider perspective.

I can say that for me interreligious dialogue is a dialogue of life. Therefore dialogue is not something that we do, but something that we live. Rather than finding common principals in faith, doctrine, or ethics, dialogue aims at growing in solidarity and promoting together social justice, individual freedom, and human rights; it is being united in the struggle against intolerance, poverty, and oppression; this is the main common ground that binds people of diverse religions together. We should not forget that this is the final and ultimate goal of dialogue.

Ref.: Text given by the Author at SEDOS Seminar, May 2003.

# *Find One's Own Identity in a More Profound Way*

– Betül Avcı –

The scope of this presentation is not to put anything scholarly but just to share my simple and enriching experience as a young Muslim student in Rome and to reflect upon the future hopes and prospects for Muslim-Christian Dialogue.

## **Why study Christian Theology in Rome?**

Let me begin with “Why study Christian Theology in Rome?”. In fact, I did not want to fall in the trap of just *heard* knowledge or the mass media as most of the people do today. I wanted a first hand experience, the traditional teaching and, obviously, Rome is the place for that. Second, my stay here is a part of both my intellectual and spiritual quest as a famous Turkish Sufi, Yunus Emre puts it, “Knowledge is to know yourself, if you are not aware of yourself what is the use of study?”. I think, *being exposed to a new culture and faith, one finds his or her own identity in a more profound way.*

I have been in Rome for three and half years studying at the Pontifical Gregorian University and living at the Lay Centre, a lay community of students studying at the Pontifical Universities in Rome. Last year, I finished Licenza and now I am enrolled as a doctoral student in the same university. Before coming here, I was working on an MA thesis titled “Logos in the Early Christianity”.

With my STL dissertation “Idea of Revelation in Christianity: Revelation as Progressive”, I focused on the progressive idea of revelation. Throughout the work, my main question was: “Is there evolution in revelation, or is this just a typological approach looking back to history from where faith stands?”. This work brought me to the idea of historiography, mainly the division of the ages. At the moment I am working on the comparative idea of historiography in Christian and Islamic thought, mainly the division of the ages which has an enormous background. With this work, I hope to answer the question of evolution in revelation, from a wider perspective and search the vertical and horizontal aspects of revelation stressing the continuity from a Sufi perspective.

So far, I have lived with Catholics, joined their rituals, asked many stupid questions, attended a course with twenty seminarians and just myself, hanged around with religious sisters, went to cinema

with priest friends. So far, generally I came across the question “what degree have I reached in inter-religious dialogue, or what it means for me”.

To put it simply, for me inter-religious dialogue is to experience the other, and listen to him or her while praying and using his or her own terminology. I learned to live with others, experiencing their faith while living together and understanding my own. It has not been easy but I think, the key point in order to make dialogue, is to know the other with his/her own terminology, either you agree or not. But before that “to know yourself”. As I have noted *being exposed to a new culture and faith, one finds his or her own identity in a more profound way* but more than that, I had an experience of finding God in the other person's presence.

Ref.: Text given by the Author at SEDOS Seminar, May 2003.

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# Interreligious Mission

– Adnane Mokrani –

The flight from Tunis to Rome takes about one hour, but what really counts is the mental journey, which has a dimension of its own. Mental geography is imaginary, the pigeonholes of our dreams and nightmares decisively influence our way of being and behaviour. To jump over or cross the walls of the imagination, means passing from the imaginary Christian to the real Christian (even so the reality is relative), is, in my view, the principal objective of our pilgrimage into the heart of the Catholic world.

The Mediterranean joins and separates two different worlds. In general (to simplify) I should say the countries of the Maghreb — on account of their geography and history — are very close to Western culture, especially the urban *élite*, but this culture is often viewed in its secular dimension *à la française*, in which the religious aspect is neglected not to say suspect. Instead for the majority of the people of the Maghreb the classic image of ‘the other’ (the Spanish *conquistador* or the French colonial) has remained unchanged. After a long period of Westernisation, usually obligatory and superficial, the relationship with the West is still ambiguous: the West hated and loved, condemned and glorified, anti-religious and Christian at the same time.

The geographic closeness or a long stay in the West does not necessarily mean a deep knowledge and understanding of the other, so that memories are free from prejudice. Therefore cultural pilgrimages are needed to form a new generation of dialogue partners. Today, dialogue is the basic way to be universal. Continual conjecture in the absence of the other is now unacceptable.

At the first Islamic University of Algeria (al-amîr ‘abd al-qâdir University for the Islamic Sciences at Constantia) I studied Islamic Theology and Comparative Religions. Most of the professors were Egyptians from the ‘Ayn Shams and al-azhar Universities. The professors of Christianity also taught biblical Greek. His language teaching was excellent because that was his speciality, but as for religion he did his best!

In Tunis I studied at the al-Zaytûna University which has a prestigious history. In the absence of con-

crete dialogue I decided to do some historical research. The IBLA Library, (Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes) founded by the Missionaries of Africa, was the only place where I had any contact with Christians, and even then it was very limited.

Once in Rome, thanks to a scholarship awarded by the *Nostra Aetate* Foundation, I asked myself which part of Christianity should I begin with? Is there a Christian discipline similar to Islamology? Religious Sciences are vast field, one can devote one’s whole life to the work of one theologian or to an exegete.

Where can one study all of this? There are numerous Pontifical universities or institutes in Rome but from where does one begin to study Christianity? Even those that have time to start from the beginning the academic route, need to make their choice between: History, Theology, Bible Studies, *Patristica*, Spirituality, Missiology, Ecumenical Studies... and in Theology, you have to choose between various subjects. You just need to open an order of any Pontifical University, to see the abundance of the choices, where initially there is a perplexity that could be temporary, but occasionally risks to cause a total refuse or generates a superficial knowledge.

You can compare my Roman experience to a man that comes out of a contrast of light and walks in a room; at the beginning, he does not see anything, he is practically blind, then gradually starts to distinguish things, then sees a chair that he can sit on, then finds a switch to turn on the light, and this way he sees an interesting book near the chair and starts to read it... and perhaps opens the window to discover a beautiful garden hidden and so on...

I began as *initiate* with the Ecumenical Studies at the *Angelicum*, *S. Tommaso d’Aquino University*, that appeared to me nearer to interreligious dialogue and give a panoramic view to the big themes of Christianity.

As a second phase, I started a thesis of Doctorate at PISAI (Pontifical Institute of Arab Studies and of Islamic), on Islamic-Christian relations in Lebanon from the Christian point of view, a research on the field based on interviews, that allowed me to discover another face of Christianity and of my Arab identity.

The discovery of Christianity for me is not a University Order or a nice pontifical library. Of course, books and courses are useful and necessary, but the most important is the human meeting. It is incredible and fascinating: meeting a person from a different continent, a different language, a different culture, a different religion... Everything appears different and impossible to overcome; in spite of all this, we can not discover a transcendent unity that constitutes a nucleus of our humanity and divinity. Taking the Gospel or the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and saying: this is Christianity, is a very reduced and mystic way of knowing the Christian. There is a lot of diversity and plurality in the concrete world, not only between right and left, conservatives and reformed, spirituals and commons, *Eretici* and *Orthodox*... but also from person to person, from one country to another... and this way you find out that behind the traditional classification of the religious, there is another classification of religiosity: ways of living and understanding your own religion. There are Christians that live their faith in a relevant way for me, in fact they give me a deeper dimension and a wider horizon for my religious experience. Instead, there are others that remind me of polemic Muslims and exclusivists. Anyway you dialogue and learn from everybody, with the open you learn about openness, and with the closed you learn the art of patience.

Listening fully to others that are different, even when they talk in an abusive way, is a decisive exam and a very important challenge for a religious man, that concretely shows he is free from the individual and collective egoism, that often takes shaded shapes, to not say religious. The dialogue itself is an ascetic way of interior purification. I am not mystic by education, but I confess that my Roman experience has helped me re-discover the spiritual dimension of my religion. Dialogue is a way to deepen our religiosity, if we understand religion as continuous discovery of God's faces in the Cosmo and in man.

There is another dimension in dialogue, the one of the mental categories. The Christian dogmatic discourse is not easy, especially in its abstract philosophic form. How can you understand a theme that seems difficult even for Christians? For example, what communication does it give me Incarnation, Trinity, Passion, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Redemption...? There is a problem of categories and language, but it is not impossible to get through it. Again, according to my little experience, I can maintain that you can create ways of communication through:

1. The spirituality of Eucharistic Theology, in other words, the symbolic interpretation of the Eucharistic scenery. The themes of sufferance, death, spiritual revival, hope... are human universal themes,

in spite of the symbolic language used to express them, are in fact lives and existent experiences above the diversity in culture. Understanding in this case, the Christian language is possible for Muslim.

2. The liberative dimension of the Christian message, concerning the social justice and the solidarity for the poor. This dimension makes the spiritual aspect more active and significant, especially in Southern places of the world. For this reason, the Theology in Liberation, the Black Theology, Women's Theology, etc... have been for me, very helpful to discern a Christian discourse in an understanding way.

Understanding and appreciating Christianity, doesn't necessary mean being *baptised*. But, in my case, Christianity has become a part of my formation and of my cultural luggage, you can also say of my identity, if we understand identity as being a complexed evolved route, that goes with what we have inherited and what we do and purchase. Once the first *choc* is over and familiarised with the new language and its concept, you can also be creative in this symbolic space.

One of the big challenges in front of dialogue, is the education. In what way can we with objectivity teach someone else's' religion? Certainly the objectivity is relative, perhaps there is need of a more positive subjectivness, a Christian cannot represent Islam at his same religious, and the same for a Muslim that teaches Christianity, without a minimal involvement and compassion, a certain sense of adhesion or partial identification, I dare to say.

In this line, the concept of the mission *da'wa* takes other dimensions, it becomes a co-operation for the realisation or humanisation of the Human Being and the humanity.

What does God want from us, together? And what kind of man do we want to educate? Perhaps I exaggerate a bit when I talk about an *interreligious* mission, this seems far away, but today I can already see the signs, in spite of the disasters that are around us.

In order to save our common Home, the celestial Boat, it is necessary to have the courage to make a decisive step, expressive and understanding towards others, as the others receive us and invite us in their home.

Ref.: Text given by the Author at SEDOS Seminar, May 2003.

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## *Focolare Movement and American Society of Muslims Share Faith and Life*

– *Mr. Paul Lemarié, Imam David Shaheed,*  
*Mrs. Jo-Ellen Karstens* –

**Mr. PAUL LEMARIE'**

### **The Focolare Movement<sup>1</sup>**

As many of you know, Chiara Lubich began the Focolare Movement in Trent, Italy, in 1943. Its goal is to cooperate towards the realization of unity among Christians and to work for universal brotherhood in the whole human family.<sup>2</sup> It is present in more than 180 countries and is made up of people of all ages, races and vocations. The majority of its members are Catholic, but it also includes Christians of more than 350 churches and ecclesial communities, as well as faithful of the great world religions and also persons who have no particular religious belief.

The rapid spread of the movement is due to its spirituality of unity<sup>3</sup> which emerged from its very beginning, also known as a "spirituality of communion", as Pope John Paul II recently called it in a Letter addressed to Bishops who are friends of the Focolare.<sup>4</sup>

In 1977, when Chiara Lubich received the Templeton Prize for Religion in London, she had the intuition that the spirit and the life of the movement were also made for the faithful of other religions. This marked a turning point for the whole movement. At present about 30,000 people of other religions participate in the life of the movement, of whom about 6,000 are Muslim. As much as they can, they share our spirituality and the goals of the movement. Over the years we have been privileged to share our spirit and collaborate with several large movements of other religions. They are the Rissho Kosei kai, a Japanese Buddhist movement with more than 6 million members, the American Society of Muslims, about which Imam David Shaheed will speak later, and more recently the Swadhyaya Movement, a Hindu movement based in India with more than 8 million members.

From the very beginning, and now, too, after years of experience, we can say that the decisive element at the basis of this growth is love, the love that is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is a love that

finds a spontaneous, immediate echo in other religions and cultures. This is because the Golden Rule is present in them. For Christians it is written: "*Do unto others as you would have others do unto you*" (Lk 6:31). In the Muslim tradition, the Golden Rule is formulated as: "*None of you is a believer until you desire for your brother what you desire for yourself*".<sup>5</sup>

And so we say to one another: "We have to love and we want to love, you have to love and you want to love, and so we have to love one another, we have to treat each other as brothers and sisters, and together we can work for universal brotherhood". They are fascinated by this lifestyle and want to live it with us.

At one of our meetings, an Iranian dentist, mother of a family, said: "*I often ask myself how I can live an Ideal based on the Christian faith if I am a Muslim. The answer is evident. Chiara [Lubich] proposes to us a simple, concrete way of loving, which can be lived by any human being, no matter what their religion is, whether they are believers or not*". And then she added: "*The fact that my family has remained together is thanks to this movement that urges us to forgive always, to love always, to be the first to love without expecting anything in return. Believing in the infinite love of God for me, even when his plans are different from mine, I have discovered that I can live the present moment and start over again every day*".

Therefore, as Christians we realize that God wants us to be perfect in love, living every day what Chiara Lubich calls "the art of loving", which comes from the Gospel. Sometimes it costs us effort and fatigue, but it is always vital and fruitful. In fact, we are convinced, after these decades of dialogue, that what people of other religions expect of us is, above all, a concrete witness of love, which is drawn directly from the Gospel, and which everyone welcomes as the answer to the vocation of love inherent in every human being.<sup>6</sup>

What is this art of loving? Chiara Lubich explained it to a group of young people who wanted to know her experience in interreligious dialogue.

*"Above all, we have to love everyone without*

*discrimination: Buddhists, Muslims, even atheists. Love everyone without distinction, whether they are black or white, men or women, young or old, Germans, Italians, Americans, South Americans. This is the first essential point.*

*"Second: be the first to love without waiting to be loved. Try to do this during the day with everyone you meet — at home, in the family, with your husband or wife, with the children, in the office, at school, in Parliament; try to take the initiative in loving and see what happens. It brings about a Christian revolution!*

*"Next, love is not a matter of words, just saying 'I love you' or ...[other words], but it's a matter of actions, of serving others, which can be summed up in three words: 'make yourself one' with the other person, understand the other person. If that person is suffering, suffer with him or her; if they are rejoicing, rejoice with them; [...] make yourself one with the other person. This is what St Paul<sup>7</sup> indicated when he said he made himself 'all things to all men'. It takes an effort on our part, but it brings immense fruits. 'Make yourself one', just three simple words which are the secret for a dialogue capable of generating unity. Making yourself one is not just a technique or an external attitude, and not even just a feeling of good will or openness or respect, nor just the absence of judgement. It is not limited to bringing a package to a poor person, etc. It includes all of this, of course, but it is something more than this.*

*"This practice of making ourselves one requires a complete emptying of ourselves — to set aside our thoughts, our affections, our intentions, all our plans in order to understand the other person. Those who are experts in dialogue say that we have to enter into the other person, and see the world as a Jew sees it, or as a Buddhist sees it, or as a Muslim sees it. To make yourself one requires that we be poor in spirit, that we be poor in spirit in order to be rich in love.*

*"It's a real exercise, a spiritual gymnastic! Try it! It brings great happiness!"<sup>8</sup>*

This simple formula, called the "art of loving," which we give witness to with our lives, has been taken up by many people, including Muslims.

We exchange experiences on how we have lived this in daily life, with a continual conversion to love, and this is the basis for our dialogue and is what gives it value. On this basis, then, we share the points of our spirituality, those that can be lived in some way by Muslims: the discovery of God who is Love, our response to God which is to do his will, love of neighbour, mutual love, unity and Mary.

With our closer Muslim friends we can communicate, with our experiences, the basis for our dialogue, which is rooted in the moment when Jesus was nailed to the cross and cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"<sup>9</sup> In that moment Jesus had made himself completely empty, he had lost everything: his life, his mother, his disciples. He had lost everything, even the feeling of being united to

God. And he did this in order to make himself one with us, to understand us, to save us.

It is by loving him and following him in this supreme trial of his that we can become instruments of peace in the world, instruments of brotherhood and even of the unity he prayed for and for which he gave his life.

When people live this way, accepting one another and taking the commitment to love one another without prejudice or barriers, we can experience a special presence of the divine that Pope John Paul II underlined when he was in India and met the leaders of various religions: *"The fruit of dialogue is the union people and union of people with God.... By dialogue we let God be present in our midst; because as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God"*.<sup>10</sup>

Our Muslim friends who are in contact with our spirituality deepen their own faith and discover the truths in their tradition that we have in common. This creates a very deep understanding among us.

We have realized that this style of dialogue is also a way of proclaiming our faith, because with love we offer our experience of Christian life and in so doing we communicate the truths of our faith. At the same time it is a sincere way of respecting the "seeds of the Word", the seeds of the Truth, which are abundantly present in all religions. It is "respectful proclamation", as the Pope recently defined it.

Every month we Christians in the movement live one sentence of the Gospel, which we call the "Word of Life". For the last few years, an Iranian Muslim theologian has been writing a commentary on this "Word of Life" based on the Qur'an. Her commentary is then translated and distributed to Muslims who are in contact with the Focolare Movement and who then try to put it into practice.

There would be many experiences to share. In living this way of life with us, many Muslims say that they have re-discovered their religion and practice it in a new way. Here are two testimonies:

1. *"It is thanks to this movement that I am going ahead day after day in the journey of my faith as a Muslim. And thanks to this way of seeing and understanding how to love in a concrete way, I began to read the Qur'an with my heart and vision filled with love. I believe that if I had read the Qur'an before meeting the way of life of Chiara, I would have understood or interpreted it differently. [...] And now my religion has become 'life' and the commitment to live it in my daily activities helps me to be a better Muslim. In fact, it is not a mixture of religions that we experience, but rather these meetings reinforce in each one of us our own religion".*

2. *[I discovered] something that I was missing, which is that God is love. This means that God is close to me, perhaps that God is in me, in my heart [...]. Before this I would say my prayer because of a religious obligation*

*and this really bothered me. I would tell myself that for a free man, this is a contradiction [...] And I also saw God as an implacable judge. All of this has profoundly changed since I began to live this spirit. Now I feel real pleasure in saying the prayer without thinking of the judgement of God, because prayer has become for me a natural expression of this relationship of love”.*

You may ask: how do you come into contact with Muslims and where did this dialogue develop? Generally our contacts are with people at work, for example, or in the neighbourhood, or wherever daily life puts us into contact with others.

As a movement we also have the opportunity to meet people of other religions at large meetings such as the one in Assisi, or through the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, or at the World Conference of Religions for Peace, where we have worked for the past twenty years, and of which Chiara Lubich is one of the honorary Presidents. This is how we met Imam W.D. Mohammed, leader of the American Society of Muslims.

The first place that the dialogue with Muslims developed was in Algeria where we have had Focolare centers since 1966. Since 1985 we have an annual meeting of five days, called the “Mariapolis”, which is especially for Muslims. Of the 120 participants, there are only about 15 Christians, most of whom are the Focolare members living there.

Our dialogue has now developed in various other Muslim countries, and also in Europe and in the United States.

The most recent development is in Pakistan where we are building a “mini-city”<sup>11</sup> around a school for the children of a totally Muslim village. In collaboration with all our Muslim friends in Pakistan, we want to make it a place of peaceful co-existence and a witness of unity between Muslims and Christians.

In the United States we have started “The Encounters in the Spirit of Universal Brotherhood” which the other two speakers will explain.

Another point that I wanted to emphasize is that our entire movement is involved in interreligious dialogue, in all its branches, including youth, adults and families. For example, last year a large international manifestation was held by teenagers in Rome, including young people representing various world religions.<sup>12</sup>

We also consider together the problems facing family life today, in the New Families Movement<sup>13</sup>, which is a branch within the Focolare. For the past three years, Muslims in Algeria have participated in a “school” for families with a couple from our centre in Rome who are experts in family life.

For the past two years there have been contacts between the New Families Movement and other organizations that work with the families in Iran

through the National Department of Education. Recently we were called to share our vision and our work in the field of family and education with groups of 800 and 300 people who are experts in this field: University Professors, Heads of educational agencies, experts in family counselling and directors of various associations. Future joint efforts are being planned.

What we have in common and what we are trying to reach with them are family formation and child education founded on the [Gospel] values.

Meetings that have been particularly beneficial are the international meetings for Muslim friends of the Focolare at our centre in Castel Gandolfo outside of Rome. Last November we held the 5<sup>th</sup> such meeting with more than 220 Muslims from 24 countries, spanning the globe from America to Asia, from Europe to Africa. The theme was a fundamental point of our spirituality: love of neighbour.<sup>14</sup>

In these meetings we share our experiences of how we have lived the art of loving in our families, at work or at school, since love is the central point of our spirituality. What characterizes these meetings is especially the presence of the divine as one student from Morocco said: “If someone were to ask me what I did in Rome, I would say that I met God”.

The theme of this latest congress, “love of neighbor,” was developed by Chiara Lubich in her talk on our spirituality, and also by an Imam from Algeria, a Muslim professor from Jordan and a Muslim leader from Pakistan. It was an extraordinary encounter that made many people say: “Here we are no longer only friends, we are brothers and sisters”.

On the last day, many people spontaneously shared their impressions of the meeting.

A Muslim from the United States: “*It was as if I had done the pilgrimage to Mecca*”.

An Imam from Algeria: “*I see that Chiara is renewing the life of people today, she is renewing the spirit of the people. She leads people to truly love God and to love one another... The effort of the Focolare to reach as many places and people as possible, all over the earth, is not aimed at spreading the movement as such, but at bringing all of humanity to God. Now I direct a word to the Muslims here and say: we shouldn't be afraid of this movement. The Focolare needs our support and our prayers*”.

A professor from Jordan: “*For me it has been a very powerful change in the way of relating between Christians and Muslims. The Second Vatican Council in the 60's recognized Islam as one of the great Abrahamic religions — and that was a big transformation — and I think that today we are taking a big leap forward, in the sense that what was written then is being put into practice now. Finally, I would like to say that I feel the love of Mary who makes herself present and embraces all of us in this very difficult moment in the history of the world*”.

### *Imam DAVID SHAHEED*

The vision for our unity with the Focolare was presented in 1975 when Imam W. Deen Mohammed became the leader of the largest community of Muslims in America. He inherited the leadership of this black-consciousness movement called the "Nation of Islam" (NOI), which was started by his father, Elijah Muhammad. For those who are not familiar with the ugly history of America and its experiment with the slave trade, race relations between blacks and whites have always tainted all aspects of American life — politics, education, industry, business and even religion. The NOI was born as a response to oppressive white supremacy and to a church that was viewed as a silent partner.

When Imam W. Deen Mohammed became the leader in 1975, members of the NOI knew little about the religion of Islam, but they were vocally anti-Government, anti-White and anti-Christian. With only the universal truths found in the Holy Qur'an, the book of guidance for over one billion Muslims, Imam Mohammed guided this community of counter-culture Black militants into the world community of Muslims. Now there are nearly 1.5 million American Muslims who consider themselves members of the American Society of Muslims (ASM), which is led by Imam Mohammed. The ASM has mosques and schools in nearly every major city of the United States, including Bermuda; it publishes an international weekly newspaper, *The Muslim Journal*; its members include professional sports celebrities, business leaders, educators and elected and appointed officials in national, State and local government. Most of all, Imam Mohammed and his community, ASM, has earned the respect of U.S. presidents, governors, numerous city executives, business leaders and religious leaders around the world.

### *Mrs. JO-ELLEN KARSTENS*

Ours is an experience of life. Everything developed according to what we feel is a plan of God and even now we are amazed at how God has led us in this relationship.

In 1995 we had the honour and privilege of meeting Imam W.D. Mohammed. He came to our Focolare Center in Chicago to learn something about our way of life. We told him the simple story of how it began during World War II when Chiara Lubich and her companions realized that all things pass away in this life. We told him of their decision to put God in the first place of their lives, doing his will moment by moment, living out the sentences of the Gospel,

particularly those that speak of love — love your neighbor as yourself, love one another, love your enemy.

At this point Imam Mohammed who had been listening intently, told us: "I want my people to know about this!" When we offered him a book about the life of Chiara Lubich, he told us: "I will read this whole book before going to sleep tonight".

Imam Mohammed is an exceptional person; we realized that from that first meeting. He has an acute understanding of the need for spirituality, and he is willing to go anywhere, and cross over any barrier, to find authentic ways to live for God and to draw closer to God. And it was because of his leadership that hundreds of African American Muslims came into contact with members of the Focolare Movement over the past seven years.

Imam Mohammed has travelled to Rome three times to meet Chiara Lubich and each time he brought with him a delegation of his leadership, Imams and educators, because as he said: "We need to learn from the Focolare how to love one another".

Imam Mohammed also invited Chiara to come to New York, where in May 1997, she was the first white Catholic woman to speak in the famous Malcolm Shabazz Mosque in Harlem, to an audience of 3000 African American Muslims. Chiara spoke of her Christian experience and of the goal of the Focolare. Several times she was interrupted with cheers and shouts of "God is great!" in Arabic. The enthusiasm was explosive.

That day Imam Mohammed and Chiara Lubich promised one another to work for universal brotherhood together. They each proposed to their followers to continue this relationship and spread it to others, by trying to live together the spirituality of unity, which is based on love of neighbour and mutual love. This daily effort to love others is the basis of the very strong bond between us.

The unity that was generated that day in Harlem reverberated all over the United States, so that Muslims in many cities invited Focolare people into their mosques, into their homes and, indeed, into their hearts. We spoke in more than forty mosques about the art of loving, suggesting that we live it together, and this message was welcomed with joy and commitment.

All kinds of ways were invented to get together and to share with one another. We had dinners together, attended each other's banquets, and met together in mosques or church halls. One community runs a Muslim School, entitled Clara Mohammed School after the mother of Imam Mohammed who was a tireless teacher of Islam for years. At their first annual award dinner, they presented the "Clara Mohammed Award" to Chiara Lubich for her way of teaching them how to "love one another".

In another city, which is about a ten-hour drive



from Chicago, the Imam reserves one of the bedrooms in his house for myself and other Focolare members who travel there several times a year. His six young children treat us as part of their family and we really do feel like one family.

On a recent trip there, I was extremely edified to come down early Sunday morning to find the four oldest children studying the Qur'an in the living-room. And at the early morning prayer all the children, even the four-year old, responded to the call to prayer, as they did during the day at the appointed times. Their example increased my desire to live my prayer life well – in fact, we realize how much this relationship tends to make the Christians better Christians and the Muslims better Muslims.

We feel that the reason the bond between us is so strong is that it is based on God. Each one of us is trying to love our neighbour as ourselves, as we are taught both in Christianity and Islam, and when we love one another, we truly feel the presence of God among us.

### *Imam DAVID SHAHEED*

As I talk about the special unity we have with the members of the Focolare Movement, I am often asked, "Why did Muslims respond to the Focolare as they did?". Most of us in the Nation of Islam (NOI) and the American Society of Muslims (ASM) came out of the Christian church. We were familiar with the Bible, the teachings of Jesus and we knew about the Golden Rule. But we did not see it put into practice. Instead we were greeted with lynchings when we tried to vote, fire hoses and police dogs when we demonstrated for integration. So, many of us left the rhetoric of religion for the promise of freedom, justice and equality in Islam.

Imam Mohammed removed the antagonism toward the church and showed the way to interfaith dialogue. But that concept changed when we met Chiara Lubich and her community. In Chiara and the Focolare we saw a demonstration of how Jesus would have treated people when he walked the earth and how he could reach the hearts and souls of the human person with his understanding of religion and people of faith.

Chiara Lubich has so touched the hearts of the ASM members, that she has become a leader for us as well. Imam Mohammed's son-in-law, Imam Earl Abdul Malik Mohammed and his wife, Bakerah, have named their recent daughter after Chiara. Imam Omar Shaheed, one of the leaders of the ASM who met her in Rome said, "It is an encouragement of what we can achieve in the world if we truly put into practice what we claim as people of faith". Another sister said, "I feel eternally committed to work

shoulder to shoulder with my Focolare brothers and sisters to unite our world with the thread of God's love".

### *Mrs. JO-ELLEN KARSTENS*

In November 2000, Imam Mohammed once again invited Chiara Lubich to speak to 6,000 members of his association together with Focolare members in the Washington, D.C. Conference Center. This event was televised worldwide via satellite and was given wide coverage in the press. It was a powerful witness of universal brotherhood, where the barriers of race and religion were overcome.

Whole families participated. Talks were given not only by Muslims and Catholics, but also by a Buddhist, a Rabbi and a Protestant minister, with the goal of showing how all sincere people want to do God's will in their own life, according to their own understanding and faith tradition. The audience included professors and well-educated people, but also very ordinary people who perhaps were meeting a Muslim for the first time in their life, or someone who was not of their race, and this gave great joy to the event. All 6,000 people had lunch together and it was a unique sight to see blacks and whites and Asians at the same table, sharing their life, enjoying each other's company, getting to know one another's background.

After this event, Chiara Lubich and Imam Mohammed met to discuss how to continue and deepen this friendship that was developing so quickly. This gave rise to the "Encounters in the Spirit of Universal Brotherhood", which are meetings between members of the American Society of Muslims and the Focolare Movement who come together to share one point of the spirituality of unity. The themes have included the choice of God who is love, the will of God, love of neighbour, mutual love, the "Golden Rule," peace and brotherhood.

A whole day is dedicated to this event and the programme includes talks given by a Muslim and by a Catholic on how one common point is understood in Islam and Christianity, with quotes from the Bible and the Qur'an to underline the similarities. More importantly, Muslims and Catholics share how they have actually put this point into practice in everyday situations. It has been an immense mutual enrichment for all of us to learn how much we have in common. The day also includes eating lunch together, and interludes of music, singing, poetry or other artistic expressions from each community.

In the past two years, meetings of this kind have been held in New York, Dallas, San Antonio, Los Angeles, San Diego, Indianapolis, Columbus, Baltimore and Chicago. Sometimes it is in a Catholic venue and sometimes at a Muslim location. Several

hundred people attend each time and it is hard to describe the feeling of being a family we experience at these events. One young Muslim, after about an hour, said to his mother: "Mom, have we died and gone to heaven? Because this is just like being in heaven". In fact, a comment that is often heard is: "This is what the world could be like if everyone would love one another. We would have heaven on earth".

In fact, we experience being children of one Father in heaven. The participants speak of this experience to their families and friends, who are also invited to future events, and so the circle continues to grow. The understanding between the two religions grows as well. Prejudices collapse. Stereotype images of Muslims and also of Catholics are wiped out when people actually get to know one another and see how deep and sincere is the faith in God of the other person. On all levels, this has been an extremely important experience.

What Pope John Paul II wrote in *Ecclesia in Asia* certainly has become a reality among us: "Interreligious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen, and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences. For all this, love of others is indispensable. This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment".

### *Imam DAVID SHAHEED*

The work I do is a special kind of challenge. I get a chance to show this love for many people on a daily basis by being a judge in a court. And I presently preside over a drug court. A typical day for me, just in the morning alone, may involve 35, 40 maybe 50 different defendants who have their cases come before the court: i.e. pretrial conferences, bond reviews, trials, sentencing and other kinds of court business. And in each one of those situations, I find myself seeing each one of these defendants as children of God, who can be redeemed. And the challenge is, not to see them as a case number, 115681, or just a defendant, but to try and relate to each of them as a human being, a child of God. What I've learned from Chiara and the Focolare is that it's not just enough for us to have that kind of special feeling when we get together for lunch and other opportunities for dialogue with our friends. I have to take that back to other areas. I have to take that back to the work that I do.

The benefits of this approach came to me several months ago, when I was at a church campaigning. One aspect of campaigning can take place in churches, trying to get the message out of, who I am and why I deserve their vote. And on occasion, there are ministers that allow us to say a few words. We

can say, "I'm running for judge". I was given that opportunity, but since it was Sunday, it just didn't feel right to go up to a pulpit and say something like that. Instead I asked the congregation to pray for those who are caught up in the cycle of dependency ... those that I see in the drug court. I asked them to pray for a day when they may have the will and the presence of mind and the grace of God, so that rather than being in jail because of drug abuse, they would be in a church, among a congregation.

After concluding my comments, I was going to my seat in the second row. Before I could reach my seat, a young man who was in the front row grabbed hold of me before I could sit down. He said, "I was in front of you not too long ago, and I'm doing 'OK' now". And before I left the church, there were at least three other people who said they had been in front of me in court, and thanked me for what I had done in their case. The truth is, I didn't remember the people, and I have no recollection of any special thing that I had done. The only conduct that I can point to is the idea of loving each person in the present moment.

And the final thing that I would say is, after losing an election for judge in 2000, I was successful in 2002. I now preside over a criminal court and a drug treatment diversion court. I would have never chosen this responsibility if I had won in 2000 but I can see clearly an opportunity to help improve peoples' lives with this special challenge. Almost every week I come into contact with someone who thanks me for giving them or a family member a second chance or showing some special compassion in their case. I have no recollection of the second chance that I supposedly gave them. But I'm convinced that this whole relationship with the Focolare has really helped me to live and love in the present moment.

I have also been seeking out ministers and clergy that I have been involved with over the years to help connect some defendants in court with a church or spiritual home. If they complete their obligations to the courts and also become connected with God in the process, society is better served and their lives may be changed forever. Some of these ministers are amazed that I would direct a defendant to a Christian church, but then I tell them what I have learned from Chiara Lubich and the Focolare, that it is important that each one finds his/her spiritual home according to his/her own faith background.

The love of neighbour that I have seen demonstrated by the Focolare Movement is a part of all the scriptures. But once you see it demonstrated, once you are involved in it, and are the recipient of it, it makes it very easy to take it and apply it to other aspects of your life, and we thank God for that experience.



**Mrs. JO-ELLEN KARSTENS**

My own personal experience of this relationship has been to marvel at the work of God, to see a miracle happening before my eyes. I am continually amazed at the immediate understanding we find with one another. It seems that we have known one another forever, and as soon as we meet, we are able to share on a spiritual level that is hard to find in other places. We have the same desire to live our lives totally for God, to do his will in our daily lives. We have the same longing for peace in our cities and in the world, and the same urgency to work for unity among all.

We owe this to the insight of Imam W. D. Mohammed and Chiara Lubich who set us off on this path. These two very special people have encouraged all of their followers to simply meet one another in a spirit of brotherly love, to live together all those truths of our religions that we can share together, and then to allow God to act. And this is what happens.

Living the “art of loving” has had another important consequence, which is very powerful for us in the United States. As a person who grew up in Chicago and experienced the racial strife of the 1950’s and 60’s, I have seen a barrier collapse that many of us thought could never be overcome. And here it has not only been overcome, but we are like a family.

This is because when we begin to love others, we cannot stop at the fact that the person is of another race. We have to see each person as our brother or sister, and not look at them as Arab or African, as Caucasian or Asian, as black or white. And so the racial barrier is overcome.

In my life, I have had a number of African American friends, especially at work. We would share a lot with each other, including joys and sufferings and difficulties. However, I always felt that there was a fine line that separated us, a subtle barrier that I could not go beyond. There was always something that kept us apart, and this made me suffer. However, with the followers of Imam Mohammed, I have never felt that barrier. We truly meet as brothers and sisters, as friends, with whom I can share everything, and this gives me great joy. We no longer notice the colour of our skin, we are truly one.

Recently I visited the offices of The Muslim Journal in Chicago in order to purchase some extra copies of their newspaper. There was a young woman, an African American, at the front desk who had never been there before. As I walked in I could see the startled look on her face, and when she was introduced to me, she said: “For a minute I thought you were my teacher — you look just like her! Her name is Miss Moore”. Since Moore is an Irish name, I said: “It must be my Irish blood”. But she replied, “Oh no, she is black, but

you look just like her!”. This gave me great joy because I realized that this young woman no longer saw the colour of my skin, she saw me as a human person.

This is our great hope for all of our young people, for all the youth of our country and of the world — that they will no longer see the differences, but the similarities, that they will build on all of those things that unite us, and in this way we will be working together for a more united world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The official website of the Focolare Movement in five languages is: [www.focolare.org](http://www.focolare.org)

<sup>2</sup> According to the Last Prayer of Jesus: “Father, may they all be one” (John 17, 21).

<sup>3</sup> For more on the spirituality see *La Dottrina Spirituale* by Chiara Lubich, Mondadori and [www.cittanuova.it](http://www.cittanuova.it)

<sup>4</sup> Letter of John Paul II to the participants in the 25<sup>th</sup> Spiritual Conference of Bishops Friends of the Focolare Movement, 14 February, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> An-Nawawi, *Quaranta Hadith*, CESI, Translation Mohammed Ali Sabri, *Hadith 13*, referred by al-Bukhari e Muslim, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Familiari Consortio* II, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 9, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Chiara Lubich, *My experience in interreligious dialogue*, Aachen, Germany, 11/13/1998, spoken text.

<sup>9</sup> Mark 15, 34.

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, address to 2,000 non-Christian Leaders and the representatives of various religions of India, 5 February, 1986, in “*Il dialogo interreligioso del Magistero Pontificio*”, Libreria Vaticana, 1994, p. 385.

<sup>11</sup> One of the concrete initiatives of the Focolare Movement are small cities of witness that want to show what the world would be like if everyone lived a life of unity and universal brotherhood.

<sup>12</sup> The Supercongress 2002, organized by the branch of the Focolare Movement for children, called “The Young for Unity”. <http://www.focolare.org/rpu/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.focolare.org/en/> New Families.

<sup>14</sup> One of the twelve points of the spirituality of the Focolare.

Ref.: Text given for the SEDOS Open Seminar of May 2003.

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## *Christians and Muslims Learn From One Another's Faith and Inner-Life*

### *Turkish Experience of Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Past and Present*

– Mr. Cemal Usak –

First of all I would like to say that I am very happy to be invited to this meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to state that, as everybody here knows, today the world is faced with many problems such as international terror, human rights violations, hunger, prostitution, pornography and similar problems. We must accept that these threats are aimed at everyone without discrimination, whether Christian, Jew, Muslim or Buddhist.

Of course none of this has been brought about or produced by religious people or religious ministers (priests, rabbis or imams). However, we must agree that it will take great concerted effort by all religious people to deal with these people. I believe that everyone here would concur that inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation are needed for this purpose.

A verse in the Holy Quran reads as follows: "If God had wished it, He would have made you all one nation". This means that God chose pluralism and multi-culturalism at least until we, who must establish His Will on earth, establish cooperation and harmony through our own desire and will.

In 1985 during his Visit to Morocco, the leading figure of the Christian world, and of Catholics in particular, Pope John Paul II, said:

"Generally speaking, we Christians and Muslims have misunderstood each other, and in the past weakened each other with polemics and wars, which sapped all our strength. Today God Almighty calls on us to give up those old attitudes. With mutual respect, we should therefore advise each other to perform good acts on God's way".

During his Visit to Bangladesh in 1986, he repeated his words in stronger form: "An end should now be put to mutual distrust and fear arising from misunderstandings and differences".

The point I want to draw your attention to is the fact that the Pope's call to dialogue and reconciliation of others did not receive a sufficient response, and were not developed to the degree necessary, to prevent the savagery.

With your permission, I want to pass from here to past dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Fifty years ago, a similar barbarity was experienced in Europe and close on twenty million people lost their lives. The destruction was terrible throughout the continent; distress, suffering, disappointment, and despair were rife. Most importantly, anarchy was born in people's spirits. Around that time, a voice was heard in Turkey, which was affected by the War despite not actually entering it. This was the voice of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, one of the most eminent contemporary Islamic scholars. He said:

"It is recorded in authentic traditions of the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) that at the end of time the truly pious among the Christians will unite with the People of the Qur'an to fight their common enemy, irreligion. And at this time, too, the people of religion and truth need to unite sincerely not only with their own brothers and fellow believers, but also with the truly pious and spiritual ones among the Christians, temporarily refraining from the discussion and debate of points of difference in order to combat their joint enemy — aggressive atheism".<sup>1</sup>

In a letter he wrote some time later to his students, he appeared to accept this unity as existent, for he described his anxiety that "the current from the North" (communism) might attempt to destroy it.<sup>2</sup>

Now I would like to quote from Professor Thomas Michel's book, (who is at present employed in the Vatican), which corroborates this:

"Christian history itself even is full of wars, the settling of accounts, and examples of greed, intolerance, and exploitation. It was Christians who created the Inquisition and organized the massacres of the

Crusades. The genocide which claimed the lives of millions of Jews, gypsies, and others was the product of Christian Europe. These are facts and a serious indictment of Christian society. The only way they can be explained is as the result of denial by Christians of Jesus' teachings or refusal to comply with them".<sup>3</sup>

Doubtless, Islam is 'the religion of the sword', but this has been reflected by its wars being fought more in accordance with principles of defence. Be this as it may, Bediuzzaman stated that now "freedom of conscience, which is opposed to force and compulsion in religion, and to religious struggle and armed jihad for religion, [has been accepted as] a fundamental rule and political principle by governments" and "secular republics" have begun to be set up.<sup>4</sup>

In his final years, Said Nursi exerted himself personally to bring about reconciliation and friendship with Christians. In 1950, he sent a collection of his works to Pope Pius XII in Rome and received in reply, on 22 February 1951, a personal letter of thanks. One observer notes that it was only a little over ten years later that, at the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church proclaimed its respect and esteem for Muslims and asserted that Islam was a genuine path of salvation. In the same way, a few years later in 1953, Said Nursi visited the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Istanbul to seek cooperation between Muslims and Christians in the face of aggressive atheism.

The reply of the Christian world to the Muslim thinker Bediuzzaman's call to "dialogue and co-operation with Christians" came around twenty years later. Moves to draw closer to Muslims began under Pope John XXIII; however, they were realized only in the decisions of the Second Vatican Council, which was convened in 1962 and continued till 1965. The paragraph concerning Muslims is this:

"The Church has respect for Muslims, who worship the One God, the Creator of the Heavens and Earth, Who is Powerful over all things, sent signs to men, and is and ever shall be. The Council advises that Christians and Muslims forget the centuries long misunderstandings and enmities between them, and sincerely endeavour to understand one another, together establish social justice, peace, and liberty, and preserve them and moral and spiritual values for all mankind".<sup>5</sup>

This decision was accepted on 28 October 1965 with 1763 votes in favour and 242 votes against. Such a decision was truly revolutionary in the history of Christianity. Both Muslims and Jews are on the way leading to God. For Christianity, this then forms

the basis of dialogue.

It will be apt to quote here a passage from a speech of General de Gaulle, one of the most famous statesmen Europe has produced:

"See, there are countries developing on the other side of the Mediterranean. They too have a civilization, a culture, a humanism, and human relations such as have started to be lost in our industrialized society. One day it may please us to borrow these human relations.... If we want to found an industrial society which considers man to be not its means but its end, we shall have to open up our cultures to one another to a large extent".<sup>6</sup>

Twenty-five years after General de Gaulle made these points, Prince Charles made some noteworthy comments. He said both at the opening of the Oxford Islamic Centre in 1995, and in his speech at Wilton Park in Sussex last December that there should be greater contact with Islamic civilization, and stated even that through such relations Western civilization could be saved from complete decline.

It is my opinion that with their many contributions to Muslim-Christian dialogue through their analyses of the decisions of the Second Vatican Council, such as Michel Lelong, who for many years directed the Secretariat for Muslim Relations in the Vatican.

Michel Lelong states that according to a verse of the Qur'an (5:48), "If God had so willed", He would have made us all a single people or community. But He created us as different communities in order to test us. There is therefore great wisdom in this.

In his very useful books, Lelong bases his discussion of dialogue on Abraham (UWP) and invites members of the two religions to meet at that point. He frequently stresses that the majority of Christians are unaware that Muslims accept Jesus and Moses (upon whom be peace) and that they believe in the Gospels and Torah.

According to the Tunisian professor, Muhammad Yalawi, if one takes note of the international situation, "three Jonah's are needed today", for the development of dialogue and co-operation. These will be for the Jews, Christians, and Muslims respectively.

The Tunisian professor says that the Muslim Jonah would address his co-religionists like this: "You fought for independence in the age of imperialism, and you were right. You are right too to reject the materialism which threatens the West and the economic pressures of the big powers. But while exercising your lawful rights like remaining true to the reli-

gion of your forefathers and preserving your identity, beliefs, and spirit, you should study the principles and commands of the Qur'an; you must not fall into the situation of only looking inwards and should give up outdated feelings of aggression. Do not forget that throughout history Islam has remained open to other cultures and other religions. It cannot be doubted that today Western civilization has many sides that are disquieting and unacceptable, but at the same time you should not forget that that same civilization has a vast spiritual legacy and has made scientific conquests that may be thought of as wondrous. It might offer the way of freedom. The Qur'an tells us that we came from God and it is only to Him that we shall return. It rejects every kind of idol and idol-worship and in consequence, fanatic sectarianism. It calls on humanity to be honourable, just, philanthropic and compassionate".

A Jonah is needed for the Jews of today, too. He addresses them in this way: "For centuries you suffered. You were abased and persecuted and repressed. Today everyone knows what you underwent in medieval Christendom and the Nazi camps. But today do you hear and understand the groans of the Palestinians? The prophets of the Old and New Testaments frequently told you that it was not enough for you to want to be united, to pray in the temple and to say that you were "God's chosen people"; they continually reminded to you that the main thing to be done was to be just, respectful of rights, and not to cause distress to strangers. But what have Israel's rulers done this last few years? Those who claim to be faithful to the tenets of the Jewish religion should recognize the rights of the Palestinians".

As for the Christian Jonah, he addressed the churches like this: "You have spent great efforts these last years to solve the new questions raised by your contemporaries. With reinterpretations, and breathing new life into religious rites, theology, and unification of the churches, and increased interest in social matters and the Third World, the Christian churches have managed to maintain their power and vitality. But have the Catholics and Protestants of Europe given adequate thought to the questions raised by international relations of the present? Subsequent to the decolonization they were compelled to bring about politically, have they in truth found a new perspective and new world order which will ensure the establishment of a more just balance between North and South? Have they been able to take up an objective position in matters connected with East and West? And finally, are they able to consider seriously other religions and cultures, and particularly Islam, which is still inadequately known in the West?"<sup>7</sup>

The visits Pope John Paul II made to Turkey in 1979, Kenya in 1980, Pakistan in 1981, the Philippines in 1981, Indonesia in 1981, Morocco in 1985, and Bangladesh in 1986, and the contacts he made and speeches covering many subjects he gave during these visits, further broadened the basis of dialogue. Many meetings were held in Great Britain, France, and particularly in Germany, to further dialogue. Nevertheless, the results and fruits of this work were very limited and did not go beyond being local. Doubtless, it is not easy to remove the remnants of the centuries in one sweep. Only, if we are going to take the decisions of the Second Vatican Council as the basis, the last thirty years is also not a short time.

With your permission, I want now to speak to you of another leading proponent of dialogue. The esteemed person I shall mention appeared with the slogan "Love and Dialogue". And he did not restrict his efforts to merely saying this, he applied it practically. This person is M. Fethullah Gülen. He is a very important follower of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and his ideas, who was the first person in Turkey and the Islamic world to mention dialogue and co-operation with Christians, and he has put those ideas into practice.

In the nearly three hundred schools that M. Fethullah Gülen has opened in an area so broad it stretches from Siberia to Kenya and from the United States to Thailand, Muslims, Christians and Jews study together in peace and happiness. In fact, in countries like Maldives, Tajikistan, and Mongolia, the great majority of the pupils are not Muslim, Christian, or Jewish. It is my guess that you will find these endeavours of a Muslim leader to be very noteworthy.

When in 1996 M. Fethullah Gülen met with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Bartholomew, there were reactions from radicals and fanatics, but the majority of people, who support moderation, congratulated him. He later met also with David Aseo, the leader of the Jewish community, and the Vatican's Ankara Envoy, Pier Luigi, demonstrating his determination to further dialogue.

History has been a stage for very bloody religious wars. We must admit that these were mostly the exploitation of religious people and places of worship for political and economic interests. However, it is time to realize what Jesus said at the Last Supper. As you know, after he washed the feet of all the disciples with him, he said, "I washed your feet even though I am your Master. So from now on, wash each others' feet".<sup>8</sup>

Of course these words command humility, tolerance and helping one another. So come and, as Muslims,

Christians, Buddhists or Jews, let's wash each others' feet and take some serious steps towards world peace.

I congratulate and give my respects to organisers of this meeting on behalf of the honorary chairman of our Foundation, Fethullah Gulen which is proud to take an active role in inter-faith dialogue efforts, and on behalf of myself and foundation workers.

## Notes

[Cemal Usak is writer/ Secretary General for Intercultural Dialogue Platform and Vice Chairman of The Journalists and Writers Foundation].

1. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Risale-i Nur Külliyyati (two vol. ed.), i, 663.
2. *Ibid.*, ii, 1744.
3. Thomas Michel, Hristiyan Tanrı Bilimine Giriş, İstanbul 1992, 6.
4. Bediuzzaman, *ibid.*, i, 985.
5. 'Recognize the Spiritual Bonds', 3 (*Nostra Aetate*, 3); Michel Lelong, Eđer Allah «steseydi, İstanbul 1992, Yeni Asya Yayınları, 18.
6. *Le Monde*, 20 July 1972 (Paul Palta); Eđer Allah «steseydi, 15.
7. *Ibid.*, 44.
8. Gospel According to St. John, 13:14-15 (King James Version).

Ref.: Text from the Author. Given for the SEDOS Seminar (May 2003) .

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# *Presenting One's Faith to Another: A Witness*

– Fr. Thomas Michel, SJ –

In this brief paper, I would like to offer a personal experiences to illustrate ways that Christians and Muslims might present their faith to each other. My point of departure will be my experience in teaching an introduction to Christian theology to Muslim students in Turkish theological faculties.

## ANKARA, IZMIR, KONYA, URFA

Between 1981 and 1994, I served in the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (formerly known as the Secretariat for non Christians). In 1985, the Rector of Ankara University contacted the Vatican with a proposal to invite a Catholic theologian to present lectures in the context of the History of Religions requirement in the curriculum of the İlahiyat Faculty. As my own academic background is in Islamic thought, it was felt that my understanding of Islam would help me to present Christian theology to Muslim university students. Hence I was asked to respond to the invitation of Ankara University.

### Ankara University

In the autumn of 1986 I took a small apartment near the university and attended the formal opening of the academic year. My salary was jointly covered by Ankara University and a teaching grant from the Fulbright Foundation. Ankara has the largest and oldest theology faculty in Turkey; in my course there were perhaps 200 students.

The course had four parts: 1) An introduction to the Bible and its basic teachings. This included a study of the Christian concept of revelation and Biblical inspiration. 2) The basic doctrines of Christian faith. 3) A history of the Christian community from the time of the Apostles until today. 4) Brief panoramas of the sweep of Christian theology, philosophy, and spirituality. The last point, though by its nature superficial, had two aims: to introduce the students to important thinkers in Christian history and to provide input for the theological students who were simultaneously taking courses in *kalam* and *tawhid*, *falsafa*, and *tasawwuf* or Sufism.

Since I did not speak Turkish, I was assigned a

teaching assistant with a good knowledge of English. I wrote out each lecture and the assistant prepared translations. He was quite conscientious in that whenever there were phrases or concepts he did not understand, we discussed the point thoroughly until he was satisfied he could put my thoughts accurately into Turkish.

The discussions in preparation for the classes were an important element in their success. The planning sessions gradually came to include a core of 5-6 graduate students and through their questions, objections, and often simple incomprehension, I met the problem of "theological language"; terms and concepts that seem obvious and unequivocal to a Christian trained in Christian theology can, to a Muslim well versed in Islamic faith, appear contradictory, pointless, and on occasion even blasphemous.

### Problems of translation

Having lived for two years in an Arabic-speaking Coptic seminary in Egypt, I found my knowledge of Arabic and of Christian Arab terminology to be a mixed blessing. Presenting Christian faith in Turkish presents different problems from the same activity in Arabic. Whereas Christian theology in Arabic was already highly developed by the Ninth Century, on a par with theological thought in Byzantium and Western Europe, Turkish-speaking Christians had not produced parallel theological efforts in Turkish. Although some Turcophone Christians, like the Gagauz of Moldavia, have Biblical and liturgical texts in Turkish, Christians in Turkish-speaking regions generally write and pray in the languages in which the Christian tradition had been handed down for centuries, e.g., Syriac, Greek, Armenian, Georgian. As a result, the Turkish language today does not possess a ready-made Christian vocabulary or a Christian theological tradition.

Translating my lectures into Turkish was thus a challenging endeavour. I approached the task by thoroughly talking through each subject with my teaching aide and the other graduate students, until they could rephrase it to our mutual satisfaction as an adequate expression of what I as a Christian believe. I studied Turkish and, living as I did in an



entirely Turkish-speaking environment, before long could follow enough to be sure that my idea was getting accurately conveyed. The whole process depended upon the quality of the graduate students. I found them to be highly conscientious, careful to “translate”, not only my words but my exact ideas, into good Turkish. They had no hesitation about saying that a certain phrase or concept was nonsense to them. They well understood the importance of faithfully reproducing my ideas without adding any changes of their own.

### Reactions of the students

At the beginning of the lectures, I explained to the students that I was not interested either in proselytism or in polemics. I was not trying to convince them of anything; I had no hidden agenda. I was simply attempting to explain what Christians believe and how we practise our faith in worship and daily life. The lectures would not treat Christian faith from a comparative intent of establishing which is better — Christianity or Islam, or who is right or wrong. I simply wanted to present Christianity as it is understood by those who believe and follow it.

How did the students react to the lectures? As one might expect, their reactions were various. Few of the students had any previous knowledge of Christianity whatsoever. They had some information, unsystematic and often inaccurate, the source of which was usually popular films like *The Name of the Rose*, *The Thornbirds*, *Shoes of the Fisherman*. The students came from towns and villages in Anatolia where most had probably had never met and certainly had never discussed religious matters with a Christian.

Thus, the most common reaction was curiosity. I was someone from a very different world with ideas on God, human life and society that were new and unfamiliar. Many students would remain for hours after lectures to ask more questions and debate points that I had raised in the lecture. Often over tea or at lunch, they would invite me to talk about aspects of Christian faith. This curiosity extended not only to me, but many wanted to visit the chapel at the Vatican Embassy or one of the churches in Izmir to attend the Eucharistic service.

A second reaction was polemics. Some students, usually not very numerous but quite vocal, wanted to debate my presentation with the intent of proving that Christianity was in error and Islam was correct. This often did not indicate a very deep opposition to my lectures, but was more in the line of the time-

honored practice of *mujadala*, academic disputation, in Muslim lands. I made it a practice not to enter into debate, stating that my task was simply to give a complete and sound exposition of Christianity, from which they were free to draw their own conclusions.

On the positive side, I noticed a progression which took place. Polemical attitudes were most to the fore so long as the students did not know me well: my first weeks at the Theology Faculty or on those occasions when I delivered guest lectures elsewhere. After the novelty of my presence wore off and I became an accepted part of the life of the Faculty, students were more ready to listen openly without following a *penchant* for polemical argument. After several months, with some students I could sense further movement. Their questions were less of the type: “What do you Christians believe on this issue? Here is what we Muslims hold”, and more along the lines of: “How do we Muslims and Christians, believers in God who want to do His will, living in today’s world, approach this specific question of faith?”.

### Izmir, Konya

When the other Faculties of Theology in Turkey (there were eight at the time) learned that there was a professor of Christian theology at Ankara, several extended invitations to give guest lectures or to present short courses of 1-4 weeks. In this way, I came to deliver lectures at Theology Faculties in Bursa (Uludag University), Istanbul (Marmara), Izmir (Dokuz Eylül), Kayseri, (Erciyes), Samsun (Ondokuz Mayıs), and Urfa (Harran).

After delivering lectures in Izmir, the Rector invited me to give a course the following year similar to that which I had been offering at Ankara. I returned the following year and taught a semester course at Dokuz Eylül University. While basically the same, the course was enriched by the questions, reactions, and objections of the students in Ankara. For example, I came to the conclusion that my treatment of the question of the Christian understanding of the Redemption was inadequate, and so in Izmir I presented the dogma with greater care and attention to Muslim sensitivities. I added surveys of developments in Christian theology, philosophy and spirituality to coordinate with similar courses the students were simultaneously taking on parallel Islamic themes.

The third year I was invited by Selcuk University in Konya, where I gave a semester course of Introduction to Christian theology. The following year I was unable to offer a full-semester course, but

I returned to Turkey to give a series of lectures in Ankara, at Erciyes University in Kayseri, and at Marmara University in Istanbul.

### Urfa

Most recently, in 2000 and 2003, I lectured at Harran University in Urfa in Eastern Anatolia. Modern Urfa is a fascinating city in that it is the crossroads of three great Middle Eastern civilizations: the city is one-third Turkish, one-third Arab, and one-third Kurdish. Ancient Urfa is also interesting. It is one of the traditional locations of the birthplace of Abraham and the nearby ruins of Harran are associated in the Bible with Abraham and his family. The cave in which, according to ancient Jewish and Islamic traditions, the child Abraham was hidden from the tyrant Nimrod, is a much-revered pilgrimage site.

I found the atmosphere very different from what I had known many years before in Ankara. There were virtually no students who sought to engage in harsh polemics. A great shift in atmosphere seems to have occurred since 1986, in that it is no longer a novelty to have a Christian professor teaching Christian theology. Moreover, in Urfa I discovered that many of the students' questions concerned issues of contemporary Europe, rather than the text-based questions raised in the first years of my teaching. The widespread availability of internet with its access to broad realms of information is clearly a factor in the changing mentality of the students.

### Spiritual exchange

The students at the Theology Faculties were not interested simply in an intellectual presentation of Christian faith but, as their questions indicated, they wanted to know about Christians' interior life of faith before God. How do Christians pray? Who is Jesus Christ for you personally? How can you know someone who died almost 2000 years ago? What does it mean that Christians claim to encounter Christ in the sacramental life of the Church? Is it true that Christians only pray once a week? As an unmarried priest, don't you find your life unnatural? You belong to a religious order (*tarekat*); why did you choose this life? How does one become a member? What do you do during your time of probation (novitiate)? What are the vows or promises you make? Through the students' questions, I felt it important to introduce them through the course to the great figures of the history of Christian spirituality.

In Ankara and Konya, some Muslims who were interested in the interior life of believers had regular

meetings to share their religious experiences. Some were connected with Sufi orders, others were not. I received several invitations to meet with them, and we discussed many issues connected with prayer and devotion, and the love of God as it is experienced by religious believers. With these people, we all found it enriching to compare the methods and types of prayer in Christianity and Islam.

### The teacher is taught

I should not give the impression that the imparting of knowledge and the intellectual and spiritual growth were a one-way street, that I was giving and the students receiving. I learned much from my colleagues on the faculty and the students. The willingness to spend time and energy on making me, a foreigner, feel at home in Turkey were beyond anything I had known in Europe or North America. The openness of the teaching staff in arranging a faculty seminar on Christian-Muslim themes showed an intellectual commitment and curiosity that continually surprised me.

More importantly, I learned much from being integrated into the rhythms of the Islamic life cycle. During my stay, several of the graduate students went through the complex and subtle process of betrothal and marriage, an activity that engaged both families as well as the staff of the Theological Faculty. I came to see that this lengthy and involved procedure laid a strong basis for a sound marriage. Once I was invited when a family accompanied, with prayers and readings from the Qur'an, a grandparent at the moment of death. Living among committed Muslims during the fasting month of Ramadan, breaking the fast with them after sunset, rising in the early hours before dawn, taught me the sense of communal solidarity that is reinforced in the time of Ramadan.

Ref.: Text from the Author. Given at the SEDOS Seminar, May 2003.

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# *Muslim and Christian Women in Dialogue*

- *Challenges of Faith in the Post-Modern World and Hopeful Strategies*
- *Growing Towards a Dialogue of Life and Prayer: An Algerian Experience*

## *Challenges of Faith in the Post-Modern World and Hopeful Strategies*

### *A Muslim Woman's Perspective*

– Mrs. Anita Mir –

In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt argues that man both creates things and is then conditioned by the things he creates.<sup>1</sup> For our present argument, we will understand these 'things' as ideas which exist within a private and public space. Man is therefore conditioned by his own thinking, and the thoughts of others.

There are two challenges to faith I would like to attempt to address in this paper. The first is the challenge of continuing to abide in hope; the other is the challenge from the radical politicization of religion. The first appears to be solely concerned with the individual — for hope is a state of being and as such is perceived as internal to man; the second appears to exist exclusively in relation to the *polis*. While demarcations between the private and public domains may be applicable in theory, they rarely have strong grounds in reality, for man lives concurrently in his own world and in *the* world. He relates to and is affected by changes in both. The preacher, Paul Tillich, in *On the boundary: an autobiographical sketch*, posits that truth lies in living on the borderlines.<sup>2</sup> It is to these borderlines, the interrelationship between the internal and the external, man's beliefs and the worlds. These beliefs cause our discussion to turn.

While hope may be internally and individually registered, it is not immune to external and collective factors. So that a man may feel despair at his own life, and despair of the world in which he is living. Such feelings may be temporary or long-lasting. In both, the loss of hope is an acknowledgment of a sense of fragmentation, of separation from the larger community and its concerns. Aberrations, strangely enough, are the norm in the human condition and it is through our slippages, that we learn how to value and what it is that we value. However, the acquiring of such knowledge is premised on the fact that we contain within us the ability to see and crave the eternal. It is the eternal which is fixed in our constellation and towards this that, through word and deed, through effort, that we aspire. There are those who would consider such a 'fixidity' of gaze as an inability to accept reality as it is; as an inability to live in the now. Augustine tells us though that consciousness of 'divine time' is to give witness to 'today as eternity' for the future is not desired, it is lived. When despair/loss of hope then becomes a constant state, there is a real danger to be faced — for in this there is a consciousness loss of God.

#### From the abstract to the concrete

Not only do we speak of external factors igniting or culling individual hope, we also speak of the hope of people, a nation, in creating an externally optimistic situation. During the recent Coalition war on Iraq, it was hope that took many of us to the streets, that compelled us to write letters and sign petitions to our local and national political representatives and to declare that this war would not be fought 'in our name'. At the two million strong rally that took place in Hyde Park (with similar numbers gathering in other countries across the world — including the impressive turnout in Rome) my friends and I listened to the stories of other marchers. From these stories we realized that the anti-war demonstrators, could not be categorized into one type. There were some who believed that this, and the other marches they had attended, would make a difference to the Coalition position vis a vis an attack on Iraq. Others were less optimistic, but still clearly felt the need to be counted and to show their solidarity with like-minded people. We see therefore that hope — which is an abstract idea — produces something which is tangible.

In this modern period where the radicalization of religion is both a threat to faith and to life itself, it becomes incumbent upon us to try and comprehend this phenomena. Its relation to hope is twofold. The abrogation of our faiths may lead to a diminishing of our hope. Secondly, research on the formation of such radical groups indicates that many of those who join, do so because these organizations fulfill, or portend to fulfill, an absence in people's lives. With their sense of association and community these groups give those who join them hope. While the state of man in this world is a finite one, such groups posit the idea of what Simone Weil calls 'false infinities'. Of these she says we should beware.

While it is now common to hold that there is no objective reality and no objective values. I would like to argue that the hope which such groups foster is something we need to pay close attention to — for their final goal is destruction — of life and belief in a God who is tolerant and wants to be loved by Man as He loves man. In their framework of thinking man is not created in God's image with the ability to imagine an

earth and a heaven. He sinks under the brutality of their representation. God is, as Nietzsche rightly says, killed by the ugly man who knows He exists but cannot contemplate his own disfigurement and God's majesty and His beauty (In Islam these twin terms are called *jamal* and *jadal*. They recall us constantly to God's multiplicity in unity). Without the wings of grace man then aspires to nothing. What faces him is the void; the eternal void of allegiance to false gods. As the Prophet Mohammed said, to the idol worshippers of Arabia, who refused to believe his message of the One God, 'Ask your gods to speak and save you'. Their gods remained silent. Our God speaks in the heart of man. It is this voice that we need to learn and continue to learn to hear. The voice is a gentle one, for our God desires that we love rightly. 'I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known', says God in one of the most famous *hadith*, or traditions, affirming to the special relationship between man and God.

The radical politicization of religion fulfils, I would argue, not a religious end, but a political one. This idea of politics is, moreover, a debased one, for it speaks not to service of the whole community, but to the needs of one group (it is immaterial here whether that group is the majority or minority. The principle foundation of such extremist politics is exclusivity and fear of the 'other'). Politics thereby becomes a domain not where ideas are worked out, but where emotions are expressed: these emotions are predominately ones of fear and hatred. If we look at the faces of the Taliban, the Serbs and the Croats, we see writ large their history and the closed futures they would make for us all. It is not an ideology they offer us — built on a vision of utopia, but rather a moralism — based on the lowest of emotions.

The sense of community that such people seek, is not however so distinct from the sense of community, that brought the millions of peace demonstrators worldwide to the streets. As the war proceeded however, the number of marchers attending such rallies dwindled. The present reality of politics had enmeshed their hope and in the process transformed it back into an abstract idea. How is the hope of one group and the subsequent activity it generates maintained, while the hope of the other peters out? Does the one group believe, in a way that the second group does not, that the future is of their making? Are there perhaps lessons to be learnt from the radical right? Are there perhaps adjustments we have to make — not in our thinking, but in our individual and collective belief in our thinking? I hope that during this Seminar, we, as people of faith, can begin to address strategies for sustaining hope, for hope is integral to man, it signifies his desire to live, love and create. To a man of faith it signifies also something else. It is by hope that a man climbs the ladder of love to God.

As hope is influenced by states which may be interior to and exterior to man, can we understand the mani-

festation of such an idea as the politicization of religion only in its public and collective sense? In circumstances where such politicization is the dominant ideology, what space and what language is left to the individual believer? Will she concur with this view of her religion both publicly and privately? Will she turn from her faith? Are there other options open to her?

Beginning then with the premise that a man has to interact with the world in order to understand both it and himself we see that there are important intersections between hope and the politicization of religion. These concern the theological and political, private and public aspects of faith. It is with these intersections that this paper will be concerned.

## Beginnings

The Ahmadiya considers itself a sect of Islam. In order to obtain a passport, a Pakistani citizen has to declare, in writing, that he affirms that the Ahmadiya are non-Muslims. In so doing, he validates and hence participates in the state's radical politicization of religion. He is not allowed an opinion that counters the state's; if he wishes to employ the right to self-determination of his views, he has to forgo the right to travel beyond the confines of his country.

In Pakistan, the first country in the modern period to be created on a religious precept, such radicalization is increasingly witnessed at the state, organizational and individual levels. I will be arguing that this extremist politicization of religion is one of the greatest challenges to faith. The examples I will be drawing upon are the country of my birth, Pakistan and the region which I have recently begun to teach, and in the process, learn about the Middle East.

Power allows escape routes from standardisation, even in the most rigid of regimes. Any such political radicalization, therefore more markedly affects those in society who have less power to barter with — such as the poor and minorities. Here I will be focusing on one such minority group — women. It is hoped that by close attention to this one aspect, we may understand an important dimension of the way in which the radical politicization of religion is established and functions. As a feminist I am interested in seeing not only how the state relates to women, but also how women relate to the state, how they accept or transcend and transform the realities that are imposed upon them.

## Public and private spaces

Richard Sennett, in his book, *The fall of public man*, contends that in the Antique world inwardness (the private) was based on the principle of religious transcendence of the world. It was in the public domain that the world's action took place and where man acquired his sense of continuity. Sennett says



that following the upsurge of capitalism and secularism the public domain was dis-valued. Privatness was then seen to lead not to transcendence, but to self-absorption. Without the public or political domain — the arena of continuity, the reposit of our shared memories, we become rootless. Those who espouse one or another form of religious fundamentalism,<sup>3</sup> understand and feed off this rootlessness. Hannah Arendt describes this as the human paradox: just as we have control over nature, the ability to go to space and literally transcend earth we have come to believe that we are only one of many animal species that just live and die. The Pakistani poet/philosopher, Mohammad Iqbal in *Is religion possible?*<sup>4</sup> makes a similar point when he says, ‘... an unprecedented control over the forces of Nature, has robbed man of his faith in his own future’.

In my time as both a journalist and human activist in Pakistan, I have interviewed a number of fundamentalists. What remains with me is the implacability of their faces — in which all uncertainty has been wiped clear — and their lack of imagination in envisaging a future. The world they would build is one that belongs to the past, but to a past however that never existed. Their call to ‘tradition’, to ‘cultural authenticity’ is not only misguided, it is wrong. For tradition and culture are vital; they remain so by their openness to change. As regards uncertainty, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum makes an important point: it is through our uncertainty, our pain and fragility that we learn to be truly human. Our acceptance of such fragility is, therefore, seen to be a good. Fundamentalists, with the rigidity of their thinking, would rid us of chance, the wind of fortune that brings with it both good and ill. The scale of our lives would be rendered in a minor key. And beauty would be forbidden to us, for it is, as Plato says, the only thing we know instinctively. Instincts which inspire us to the transcendent would not be allowed; for they would lead to a return to the sanctity of the private. In the fundamentalists reckoning, private and public space are one and each man becomes the keeper of his neighbours’ morality.

Can we argue that it is from his very rootedness to time and space — to the temporal — that man begins to comprehend the eternal and also his rootedness to that?<sup>5</sup> Do we need public space in order to envisage a private space?

### The position of women

Before we can begin to analyse the present day situation of women in the Islamic world, we need to look further back into their history. The year 1924 is an important one, for it is in this year that the Muslim Caliphate is firmly suppressed by the new Turkish state. As countries in the Middle East and the Islamic world break free from the tutelage of their former Imperial powers, they begin to define their new nation

states.<sup>6</sup> The move, foreshadowed by Turkey, is one towards modernity. Women, surprisingly, figure largely in these new definitions.

The position of women in society, their representation, increasingly becomes to be seen as a marker, firstly for a state’s modernity and following the later rise of Islamist groups in the 70s, as a marker for ‘cultural authenticity’. In the first paradigm, a nation’s progress is measured by women’s public activity (education/employment etc). In the second, a nation’s sanctity is measured by women’s perceived ‘purity’. The ‘return’ to an older, indigenous cultural identity (which is, of course, not a return but a new construction that merely borrows from the old identity) pushes women back into the private domain and imposes upon them stricter rules of behaviour. In both movements (the nationalist and Islamist) the new states in the Middle East, were affected by and were responding to an Orientalist gaze.

Key Orientalist assumptions made regarding women in the Islamic world are:<sup>7</sup>

- Muslim women are a homogenous group
- Islam is a religion which is repressive to women;
- The private and public domains are largely segregated along gender lines, with women fixed in the private domain and men in the public domain;
- The women’s sphere is domestic and small; the sphere of men is political and large.

In the West, such assumptions may have been challenged on the intellectual front. To a large degree however they remain enmeshed in the public imagination. Hence, one of the significant Western portrayals of Afghanistan’s ‘liberation’ from a repressive Taliban regime was the symbolic act of women’s unveiling. They were no longer closed from the world; they had been ‘freed’. When Middle East women themselves examined the manifestation of gender related power in their societies they began to challenge — and significantly so — these assumptions.<sup>8</sup> Women, however, are not merely tools of the state; they also are actors.

The women who joined the nationalist movements of the 50s were not primarily concerned with women’s rights but with nationalist ideas of sovereignty and citizenship. The argument which was presented to them — and which they accepted — was that the state should receive precedence in their concerns; their rights would consequently be tabled. In most of the new nation states that emerged in this period in the Middle East, these rights did not follow. In the 70s there was a significant encounter between Middle East women and Western feminism. In the 80s we see the rise of Islamist groups. Feminists in the Middle East hereby become distinguished into two visible factions: secular feminists and Islamist feminists. The secular feminists argue that religion has no place in politics; the Islamist feminists argue that either Islam is not oppressive to women or that what is oppressive in their societies, is not truly Islamic. An important distinction we need to make between the

two groups, is that the first is largely composed of middle to upper class women and the second has mass appeal.

During the Islamist period in Pakistan, ordinances are promulgated which clearly target women and religious minorities. According to the Hudood Ordinance of 1979, in order to substantiate cases of rape, women have to provide the evidence of four 'up-standing' Muslim men; in legal and business transactions the testimony of two women is regarded as equivalent to that of one man. In Iran, important changes are brought into the Family and Personal Law, which weaken women's position regarding divorce and subsequently, access to their children. As we all know, a strict 'Islamic' dress code is enforced.

Islamist feminists, often do not condemn such activities as education and employment and with the requisite dress code, enter both eagerly. In numerous Middle East countries colleges and universities, become a ripe ground for attracting new adherents.

And with this we see a further transformation in the radical politicization of religion. What began largely as a movement appealing to the disenfranchised in society, is garnering support across class and national divides. I will cite here just two examples: There are a growing number of middle class and upper class women in the Islamic World, whose religiosity is becoming more publicly manifest. That such public religious ardour is to be found in those, who, because of their class, are traditionally less accepting of extremist positions is striking and worth analysing. The second incident I will draw upon is more horrific. The act of annihilation by the British Asian suicide bombers who recently attacked a Tel Aviv bar sent shock-waves through the Asian and British Asian communities. Some of my friends who are Pakistanis, others who have worked in Palestine, asked the same rhetorical question: 'why did they do it? It wasn't their war'. Someone, somewhere had told them that it was. The 20.05.03 issue of 'The Guardian' reports that Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed, leader of the British Islamist organization, Al-Muhajiroun, is holding up Sharif (the 'successful' bomber) as an exemplar for British suicide bombers. To accept fundamentalism is to accept the idea of a closed world, a world in monotone. How best can we stem this challenge? And why am I suggesting that it is a challenge which not only politicians, but we have to address? As people of faith, we have a duty to evaluate and to counter how our religious credos, are being employed to incite hatred. We can begin a dialogue with fundamentalists, or we can cultivate a culture of true pluralism.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to examine the relationship of hope to the radical politicization of religion. We have looked at how such fundamentalist groups make their appeal and how their worldview and

politics may impinge upon our hope.

I would like to contend that as people of faith our sense of hope is different. It accepts that we belong, as Tillich says, to 'two spheres, the *changeable* and the *unchangeable*'.<sup>9</sup> Implicit therefore in its very nature is the idea and acceptance of fluidity and hence, difference.

It sees that manifest strength is nothing if not vivified by inward strength which ultimately emanates from and is dependent upon God. The anxiety of our age is endemic of many fragmentations. Ours is then a powerful message. Augustine, as always, says it better: love is derived from hope. The fundamentalists hate the world and all that is in it which is not in their image. We love the world and those in it because we see in both a reflection of His face. I hope that this Seminar will generate ideas for us to work both within our religious communities and in unison. There is an urgency for us to understand this phenomena and to act to counter its destructive force.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Arendt Hannah, *The human condition*, The University of Chicago Press, 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Tillich Paul, *On the boundary: an autobiographical sketch*, Collins, 1967.

<sup>3</sup> I acknowledge my difficulty in conjoining these two terms, which, to my mind, are disparate. Henceforth, I will employ the term 'fundamentalism' with the implicit understanding that this refers to the credo of those who use religion for political extremist ends.

<sup>4</sup> See Mohammed Iqbal in: *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*.

<sup>5</sup> In Annemarie Schimmel's, *I am the Wind, You are the Fire*, Rumi's interpretation of the oft cited phrase "he who knows himself knows his Lord" is given as : he who knows the finite knows the infinite.

<sup>6</sup> While we hope to steer clear of the Orientalist position of homogenizing the varied expanse of the Middle East, there are certain trends of political development which are common to a large number of countries in this region. This paper therefore addresses this majority trend, while acknowledging that variances do exist, country to country.

<sup>7</sup> See Kandiyoti, Schick, Sherabi and Tucker.

<sup>8</sup> Says Cynthia Nelson, 'I would like to challenge the notion that the social worlds of men and women, despite the element of segregation, are reducible to spheres of private and public with power limited to males in a so-called public arena. By using data from ethnographic studies by both men and women concerning women in the Middle East, I shall suggest that women can and do exercise a greater degree of power in spheres of social life than has heretofore been appreciated.' *Public and private politics: women in the Middle Eastern world*, 'American ethnologist'.

<sup>9</sup> Tillich Paul, *The shaking of the foundations*, Penguin, 1949.

# *A Christian Woman's Response in Dialogue*

– Prof. Donna Orsuto –

## Introduction

Anita Mir and I have been invited here today *not* to talk about interreligious dialogue, but *to dialogue with each other and with you* about the theme *Challenges of Faith in the Modern (Post-Modern) World: A Woman's Perspective*. Together we face a twofold difficulty: first, we are from diverse religious (Muslim/Christian) and cultural (Pakistan/USA) backgrounds and we have not had an extensive opportunity to become acquainted with one another. Second, the topic is quite broad, impossible to cover it in depth in a short period of time.

To remedy the first problem, Anita and I have corresponded by e-mail over the last few months. This has been helpful because I find it is difficult to dialogue without in some way entering into the other's world. Aristotle suggests that friendships take time and this is why he recommends that friends eat the proverbial peck of salt together. Dialogue also takes time and, though Anita and I did not take Aristotle's proverb literally, we did manage to share a few meals together and have some significant conversations over the last few days. I am grateful to her for coming to Rome a day early so that we could do this and I hope that these encounters will be the beginning of a more prolonged dialogue and friendship.

To respond to the second challenge, I have limited myself by responding specifically to the paper presented by Anita Mir. She has placed two challenges before us: the challenge of continuing to abide in hope and the politicizing of religion. I will focus my response on the first challenge by asking two questions: (1) Why do people often lack hope in today's post-modern world? And (2) how can we, Muslims and Christians, work together to develop strategies for sustaining hope?

## Why do many people lack hope today?

Abiding in hope is difficult today because we live in a culture where fear often pervades our lives. War and terrorism bring instability and uncertainty to many parts of the world. Consider the terrorists' attacks that strike at any time or place, the unresolved problems in the Middle East, and the precarious situation in Iraq and in so many other places. A climate of fear pervades the lives of many people also because they cannot provide basic needs for their families. Fear grips us in many

diverse ways. It can be personal, like receiving news of a suspect x-ray in a medical report, or, more global, as in the shattering statistics about hunger in today's world.

Recently I received a letter from a Lebanese Muslim friend, Luna Farhat, an attorney who is also writing a doctoral dissertation. Her words express one of the big challenges for all of us, for Muslims and Christians alike, namely, to live our faith in the context of external conflict. It is hard to maintain inner peace and hope when everything around us is unstable. Luna expressed these sentiments well when she wrote:

Last year was not pleasant for me, nothing serious happened. My job was going well. I had some problems with my thesis, but later it was okay. In general, I was not happy from within. The outside world can so easily affect me. I hope the fear that I feel can be removed. I pray a lot, and I have never felt as close to God as I do now.

What happens around us can cause anxiety and fear, and thus can become a challenge of faith. Through prayer we can be drawn closer to God, even in the midst of these trials. At the same time, we must ask ourselves, "what can we do to remedy this climate of fear in our troubled world?". *Dealing with fear is a major challenge to faith today*. I admit that it is not a particular issue for women, because it grips all of us, women and men alike.

One manifestation of fear is fundamentalism, a theme discussed by Anita Mir. This is not only a Muslim problem, but also a Christian one. Anita described some Pakistani fundamentalists she interviewed in this way: "What remains with me is the implacable expression on their faces — in which all uncertainty has been wiped clean — their lack of imagination envisioning a future". Fundamentalism is a complex issue, but I am convinced that one of the reasons why we have a problem with fundamentalism is precisely because the challenges of the post-modern world frighten people and so they want to cling to the security of the past. This nostalgic longing for the past, though, is ultimately an illusion. As Jonathan Sacks says, "The best cure for nostalgia is going to the dentist in any previous historical age".<sup>1</sup>

*In order to deal with fear, the first step is to recognize honestly our reaction to it. We can only develop*

*strategies of hope if we first deal with fear.* If you think about it, we often respond to fear either by aggression or by becoming paralyzed. The unknown often provokes fear, whether the unknown is a person or a new cultural situation. This fear can stop us from having an authentic encounter with others. Sometimes even before we meet the other, we have created our own fantasy conversation that warps any attempt at an authentic encounter because we approach the other person aggressively. The psychologist, Paul Watzlawick, tells the following story that may make us laugh, but may also encourage us to reflect on our own attitude towards others.

A man wants to hang up a picture. He has the nail, but no hammer. His neighbour has one. And so our man decides to go next door and borrow it. But he hesitates: "What if my neighbour won't lend me the hammer? Yesterday he greeted me so hastily. Perhaps he was in a hurry. But perhaps the hurry was only an excuse: maybe he has something against me? Well, what? I haven't done anything to him: it's just his imagination. If someone wanted to borrow a tool from me, I would give it to him right away. Then why won't he? People like this jerk are the ruination of others. And he also imagines I'm dependent on him for his hammer, just because he has a hammer. I've had it up to here". And so he storms to his neighbour's house and rings the bell. The neighbour opens the door, but before he can say his friendly "Good morning" our man shouts at him "You can just keep your hammer, you idiot!"<sup>2</sup>

Aggression is not the only response to fear, sometimes paralysis strikes. Fear can lead to fatalistic withdrawal and flight from activity. Times of crisis and anxiety, of religious and political unrest, and of instability lead not only to fear, but also to depression. Psychologists tell us that in these situations, people often feel paralyzed and apathetic, incapable of doing anything.<sup>3</sup> Fear certainly challenges our faith. It can raise questions in our minds about the existence of God. It can affect how we relate to God and to another.

How can we overcome this climate of fear? In an *Address to the Diplomatic Corps* given in January 2003, Pope John Paul II offered three points that are important in counteracting the fear that pervades society: respect for life, respect for law and solidarity. Respect for life means honouring every human life — from the womb to the tomb. Respect for law implies that political leaders and each of us do what we can to work within the structures set up by the international community to promote justice for all. Finally, solidarity encourages each of us to give to the other not only out of what is superfluous, but out of our need. We are all brothers and sisters, and we are responsible for one another. These are not optional activities, because:

"Our future is at stake. An unemployed young person, a handicapped person who is marginalized, elderly people who are uncared for, countries which are captives of hunger and poverty — these situations all too often make people despair and fall prey to the temptation either of closing in on themselves or of resorting to violence".<sup>4</sup>

When I look for inspiration on how to react to the fear around us, I turn to Sacred Scripture. One theme that emerges in the Bible is that "God is not afraid". In a recently published book entitled *Dio non ha paura. La forza del Vangelo in un mondo che cambia*, Andrea Riccardi writes that above all what emerges in the Bible is that "God is not afraid... [God] is not afraid of the storms of human history... on the other hand, women and men are afraid. Fear manifests itself in the fragility and weakness of the human condition".<sup>5</sup>

In one way or another, Sacred Scripture encourages us 181 times not to be afraid. Though time does not allow me to read all of these passages to you, I do want to mention one: The Letter to the Hebrews says of the great people of faith in Israel: "they found strength in their weakness" (Heb 11, 34). We may feel uncertain, fragile and worried, but in our weakness, we can receive from God a "humble strength" that will fill us with hope.<sup>6</sup> The experience of weakness leads us to turn to God who becomes our strength. As we discover this strength in weakness, we discover peace within ourselves. The circle of peace can then widen to those around us until it finally reaches out to embrace the whole world.

### **How can we as Muslims and Christians work together to begin to develop some strategies for sustaining hope?**

Anita Mir suggested that we are challenged to discover some strategies for sustaining hope among people. I would like to offer two strategies that might serve as a point of departure. Without a doubt, the great religions of the world encourage us to live in hope despite the challenges that face us. In the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, we, the people of the World Religions are to devote "... [our] lives not to the noise of the now but to the music of eternity, not to the shifting sands of the international arena but to the inner landscapes of the human spirit".<sup>7</sup> If we really do this, we will be able to make a significant contribution to society. *So the first strategy for sustaining hope is for each of us to become instruments of hope in our world through an ever deeper openness to God. This will allow us to be contemplatives in action.*

Both Anita Mir and I are interested in mysticism,



and one notices both in Christianity and Islam some extraordinary women who dedicate their lives to the “music of eternity”. I think of Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) as one who was totally involved in the ecclesial and political activities of her time, and yet managed to listen to the “music of eternity” and integrate this music into her busy life. She was a woman of hope, and she encouraged others to join her in promoting hope in the troubled fourteenth century. Her life was moulded by her relationship with Jesus Christ, who was the source of her hope. Ultimately, Catherine understood in a profound way that God exists. She also understood that she is not God! For all of us, this is the beginning of hope: to know that God exists and that we are not God. A journey towards hope is a path that leads to a loving surrender to the God who is.

Speaking from a Christian perspective, we would say that hope is a gift from God. As we begin to accept this gift in our lives, we recognize that God exists and that we are instruments in God’s merciful and loving hands. This allows us to live in hope in even the most difficult and “hopeless” situations. I think, for example, of the witness of St Edith Stein. Ten years after her death in Auschwitz, a Dutch official wrote: “During one conversation she told me, ‘For now, the world consists of opposites.... But in the end, none of those contrasts will remain. There will only be the fullness of love. How could it be otherwise?’”.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, she recognized the evil around her, saying to this official, “I never knew people could actually be like this . . . and I honestly had no idea of how my sisters and brothers were being made to suffer...”.<sup>9</sup> In the midst of the indescribable misery at the camp, Edith Stein was a witness of hope who comforted those around her.

I do not know much about the Sufi tradition, but there is one text that I found striking, a text that also demonstrates the single-minded devotion of a woman to her Sustainer. The Eighth Century woman, Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya, witnesses to the “inner landscape” and the “music of eternity” that I mentioned earlier. She writes:

My Joy –  
My Hunger –  
My Shelter –  
My Friend –  
My Food for the journey  
My journey’s End –  
You are my breath,  
My hope,  
My companion,  
My craving,  
My abundant wealth.  
Without You – my Life, my Love –

I would never have wandered across these end-

less countries.

You have poured out so much grace for me,  
Done me so many favours, given me so  
many gifts –  
I look everywhere for Your love –  
Then suddenly I am filled with it.  
O Captain of my Heart,  
Radiant Eye of Yearning in my breast,  
I will never be free from You  
As long as I live.  
Be satisfied with me, Love,  
And I am satisfied.<sup>10</sup>

The mystical tradition of both Christianity and Islam offer insights into what it means to hope in God. They can be sources of inspiration as we face the challenges of faith in the post-modern world.

*It is not enough simply to be individual persons of hope, we also need to witness to the hope that is within us through actions of hope.* This is the second strategy I would like to suggest. In a world where people say so often that situations are hopeless, we need to be open to the idea that things can change. God’s grace can and does break into these situations — sometimes in ways beyond our expectations. Imagination and creativity will unleash new energy in a world so in need of hope.

What actions of hope can Muslims and Christians do for, and with, one another? First, I think of an initiative, supported by all faith groups in the United Kingdom. The initiative is called RESPECT, and the idea is that each religious or ethnic community should encourage its members to do an act of service or kindness to someone or some group across faith groups. This grass-roots initiative encourages people to move across boundaries and rebuild trust where it has broken down. This may seem a simple thing, but it is a small way of witnessing to hope. It is a way of changing a seemingly hopeless situation.

Another way of sustaining hope consists in the opportunities we give one another to learn about the other’s religion. For example, the *Nostra Aetate* Foundation offers scholarships to students of other religions who come to Rome to study Christianity. Similarly, there are exchange programmes between Muslim and Christian professors at some universities. The simple experience of sharing daily life with two Muslim students, Betül Avci and Lejla Demiri, who have come to Rome to study at the Gregorian University and to live with a group of Roman Catholic lay students at the Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas has become for me a sign of hope for the future. I am convinced that both education and a dialogue of life form a major strategy for sustaining



hope in future relations between Muslims and Christians. These various modest efforts lead to mutual respect and understanding. They will help to break down some of the boundaries that hinder dialogue. I am sure that many people involved in SEDOS can share experiences of similar initiatives.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, our response to the fear that threatens our post-modern world, is for *each of us to take responsibility in developing strategies of hope*. A strategy for sustaining hope invites us, above all, to look beyond ourselves, to have the courage to broaden our horizons. God works in surprising ways far beyond our expectations. It is only if we live in hope that we will be able to stretch beyond where we are now to that future God has prepared for us. The often quoted prayerful reflection of Archbishop Oscar Romero is a reminder of how to face the challenges presented by our post-modern world by placing our hope in the One who will not disappoint us.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us....

This is what we are about:

We plant seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders,

ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.  
Amen.

My invitation to you today is to think of your own experiences and ask yourself where you are invited to plant seeds or lay foundations for a future full of hope. This is one way of facing the challenges of faith in the post-modern world.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Sacks, *Celebrating Life. Finding Happiness in Unexpected Places* London: Fount (Harper, Collins, Religious, 2000), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Watzlawick, *Anleitung zum Unglücklichsein* (Munich, 1983) as quoted in Willi Lambert, *Directions for Communication, Discoveries with Ignatius Loyola* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>Karen Scott, *Not Only with Words, but With Deeds: The Role of Speech in Catherine of Siena's Understanding of Her Mission* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Service, 1989), p. 575. In a doctoral dissertation written about the fourteenth century mystic Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), Karen Scott speaks about the pervasive pessimism that characterized the Fourteenth century as an age of "crisis and anxiety; of debilitating famines, wars, and plagues; of political and religious ferment and unrest; and of instability in all areas of life". Does it sound familiar? Some have called the fourteenth century a distant mirror of our own times. "Historians have often described the religious reactions to such disasters as one of fatalistic withdrawal and flight, of ... depression" (p. 575).

<sup>4</sup>John Paul II, *Address to Diplomats*, (13 January 2003). Cf. the Vatican Web site [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20030113\\_diplomatic-corps\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20030113_diplomatic-corps_en.html).

<sup>5</sup>Andrea Riccardi, *Dio non ha paura, La forza del vangelo in un mondo che cambia*, Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>Riccardi, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>Jonathan Sacks, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>As quoted in Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein. A Biography*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row), pp. 107-108.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup>*Women of Sufism A Hidden Treasure*, Selected and Introduced by Camille Adam Helminski, Boston and London: Shambala, 2003), pp. 33-34.

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## *Growing Towards a Dialogue of Life and Prayer: An Algerian Experience*

### *Du dialogue de la vie au dialogue de la prière*

— *Sr. Lucie Pruvost, MSOLA*

Sans vouloir remonter trop loin dans le temps, j'aimerais néanmoins dire que ma vocation au dialogue interreligieux doit beaucoup à l'environnement familial et social dans lequel j'ai grandi. Nous vivions dans une ferme de la campagne algérienne, en proximité réelle avec la famille algérienne de l'un des employés. C'est ainsi que j'ai appris par osmose et par éducation qu'existaient des manières différentes de «croire», la chrétienne et la musulmane, aussi respectable l'une que l'autre, comme existaient deux langues, la française parlée en famille et l'arabe parlée avec les petites camarades de jeu. Apprentissage informel au droit à la différence qui serait plus tard intégré comme un aspect indispensable de ma vie en contexte interculturel. La vie quotidienne permettait d'entrer de plein pied dans cette différence, à travers fêtes et rites, la prière et le jeûne notamment, dont j'ai par la suite découvert les fondements et sources que sont le Coran et la Tradition du Prophète Muhammad.

Plus tard, entre 1954 et 1958, c'était en Algérie les débuts de la guerre d'Indépendance, j'ai participé avec assiduité aux activités d'un groupe de «Jeunes Algériennes», organisé et animé par une SMNDA et un Père Blanc, où se retrouvaient des jeunes filles musulmanes et chrétiennes. C'était déjà, avant le Concile et Nostra Aetate, un authentique groupe de dialogue islamo-chrétien avec ce qu'il comportait de réflexion, de partage et parfois même de prière.

Telles ont été les fondations sur lesquelles s'est construite ma vie de SMNDA, avec cette grâce de l'avoir passée presque tout entière en pays musulman, Tunisie d'abord, Algérie ensuite et toujours avec au fond du cœur le désir de la rencontre avec des musulmans. Mais il faut aussi remarquer que, en dépit de ces fondations, rien n'était gagné d'avance car, au fond de mon être demeure toujours bien vivante une forme de refus de l'autre comme le montrent bien mes réactions premières et parfois secondes vis-à-vis de tout ce qui, même de loin, me paraît fleurir l'intégrisme.

#### **Du dialogue de la vie à celui de la prière**

En y réfléchissant, je constate que mon expérience

du dialogue correspond assez bien aux formes que la réflexion de l'Eglise a mises en lumière dans le Document Dialogue et annonce.<sup>1</sup> Mais comme je viens de le dire, en la matière rien n'est donné d'avance. La vie en contexte pluraliste demande des ajustements constants. Il s'agit non seulement de reconnaître la richesse qui en découle, mais encore de se laisser transformer par cette reconnaissance, c'est-à-dire pour moi dans mon cheminement spirituel lui-même. Reconnaître dans la rencontre de l'autre différent la présence même de Dieu qui s'exprime à l'intérieur même de la différence. Mais reconnaître aussi ce qui est intolérable parce que conduisant directement à la violence terroriste.

Une première forme de dialogue s'inscrit bien dans la continuité des prémices de l'enfance. C'est ce que l'on appelle «dialogue de la vie». Il s'agit des rencontres quotidiennes vécues grâce à une certaine proximité d'habitat et dans l'amitié. Il est clair que le fait de parler l'arabe et de porter un réel intérêt à la foi et à la culture musulmane est un soutien important pour ce dialogue. Cette connaissance, approfondie au fil des ans et aussi des études, provoque souvent l'étonnement des personnes musulmanes rencontrées. Il faut parfois se faire pardonner en quelque sorte de fouler une terre sacrée, se faire accepter dans un espace où, quoi que je dise et quoi que je fasse, je suis étrangère. Je constate que c'est aussi un appel pour chacun, l'autre et moi, à partager davantage et en vérité, c'est-à-dire sans nier les différences mais en s'efforçant d'en saisir le sens chaque fois que c'est possible.

Je peux évoquer mes rencontres avec une femme, formée à l'école réformatrice d'Algérie, portant la stricte tenue dite «musulmane» qui évoque plutôt le fondamentalisme et l'intolérance. Nous nous sommes rencontrées un peu par hasard au cours d'un colloque organisé par l'Institut de sciences théologiques d'Alger. C'est elle qui a fait le premier pas pour m'accueillir, moi, unique femme non voilée, étrangère de surcroît, arrivant dans un amphithéâtre rempli de femmes en hijâb et où je ne connaissais personne. Notre relation s'est poursuivie et le

«dialogue de vie» s'est ouvert sur un dialogue au niveau de nos fois respectives. Appel à une découverte mutuelle qui s'approfondit au fil des rencontres. J'ai ainsi découvert que, sous des dehors de type fondamentaliste, pouvait s'épanouir une spiritualité profonde avec le goût de méditer la parole de Dieu qu'est le Coran pour les Musulmans et le souci bien concret que cette femme prenait de ses coreligionnaires femmes avides elles aussi d'approfondir leur foi. Et c'est en toute amitié et grande confiance que l'on me faisait partager cela, comme à une amie qui sait de quoi il est question et qui peut comprendre.

Mes engagements professionnels m'entraînent aussi, et directement, dans ce que l'on appelle «dialogue au niveau des œuvres». Cela a commencé au début des années 70 alors que j'avais été admise à la Faculté de Droit de Tunis, comme étudiante d'abord puis comme membre du corps enseignant, mon identité de religieuse étant connue de tous. C'est ainsi que j'ai participé à la recherche qui commençait à se lancer, pour retrouver les fondements historiques du droit tunisien dont l'islam constitue une partie significative.

Ce point de départ m'a conduite à m'investir dans l'étude des sciences religieuses musulmanes, Coran et ses prolongements que sont le commentaire et le hadîth ainsi que le droit musulman, matières où je suis autodidacte, pour, d'abord, enseigner le droit de la famille, puis publier en Algérie un ouvrage sur le statut juridique des femmes dans la famille, qui touche directement au religieux. Par-delà la dimension scientifique, il s'agissait de m'engager effectivement en solidarité avec les Algériennes qui militent pour la modernisation de leur statut, sans pour autant y perdre leur âme. Ce travail que je considère comme l'aboutissement de toute ma vie d'enseignante et de chercheur a été continuellement soutenu par le désir intérieur d'un dialogue interreligieux et interculturel. Je dois préciser que, par souci de respect de l'autre, je me suis toujours efforcée de parler ou d'écrire comme de l'intérieur, ce qui suppose une certaine conversion de l'intelligence et peut-être du cœur et la conviction que l'on a toujours à recevoir de l'autre.

Mon activité actuelle au Centre d'Etudes diocésain d'Alger s'inscrit dans cette forme de dialogue à travers des œuvres menées ensemble. Notre équipe de travail est mixte. Elle est composée de musulmans et de chrétiens qui se veulent animés d'un esprit commun, celui de cette institution de l'Eglise d'Algérie créée, il faut le préciser, pour servir le dialogue interreligieux et interculturel.

J'ai eu également la joie profonde de vivre une troisième forme de dialogue, celui d'un partage d'expérience religieuse qui peut se poursuivre en prière partagée où l'on apprend à goûter la prière de

l'autre dans les formes où il l'exprime, tout en lui offrant la sienne propre en toute humilité. Il s'agit d'un petit groupe de sept personnes, trois chrétiens et quatre musulmans se retrouvant régulièrement pour partager sur des thèmes concernant nos fois et nos pratiques respectives. Quelques thèmes de nos partages : pauvreté et abandon à Dieu ; comment dans chacune de nos traditions nous vivons nos fêtes essentielles, leur signification, leur contenu liturgique, etc... (Liturgie pascalle, Noël, Ramadhan, Fête des Sacrifices....) ; mystique chrétienne, mystique musulmane, etc... J'ai reçu de ces partages une connaissance plus savoureuse et sans doute plus vraie de la foi musulmane. Nos partenaires musulmans, deux soufis et deux musulmans «orthodoxes», pénétrés des textes sacrés de l'islam, savent illustrer leurs propos de citations du Coran ou de la Tradition du Prophète musulmane, à travers quoi on peut saisir quelque chose de la profondeur de leur foi et de ce qui les fait vivre.

### Conclusion

Nous vivons depuis quelques années des affrontements d'une extrême violence. On parle de «choc des cultures». Et voilà que, chrétiens, nous ne cessons d'être appelés à un dialogue entre les cultures pour une civilisation de l'amour et de la paix, comme le répète si souvent le Pape Jean-Paul II.<sup>2</sup> Comme je l'ai déjà dit, les choses ne vont pas de soi. Car nous avons à maintenir le cap du dialogue dans un contexte où la diabolisation de l'autre différent tente de s'imposer, par les armes s'il le faut. On diabolise l'autre, tout simplement parce qu'on ne le connaît pas et, plus grave pour des croyants, faute de convictions de base. Il me paraît important, au terme de ce témoignage d'énumérer quelques-unes de ces convictions.

La première est que Dieu ne réserve pas son salut aux seuls baptisés ou aux seuls disciples de Jésus. Il veut en effet que tous soient sauvés. C'est bien ce dont témoignent les rencontres de Jésus rapportées par l'Evangile. C'est ainsi que la qualité de vie spirituelle de personnes non-baptisées et spécialement de nombreux musulmans et la qualité de leurs relations humaines, sont un appel permanent à la conversion du cœur et à l'approfondissement de sa propre foi. Dieu est tellement au-delà des limites que nous serions tentés de lui imposer dans nos orthodoxies respectives !

Une seconde conviction est que le respect de la différence se cultive non seulement dans la rencontre mais aussi dans un effort permanent pour mieux connaître et peut-être comprendre cette différence et parvenir ainsi, quand c'est nécessaire, à en rendre compte comme de l'intérieur.

Une dernière conviction enfin est que le pluralisme religieux fait partie du dessein même de Dieu. Comme l'explique un théologien du dialogue interreligieux, une expérience concrète et réfléchie du dialogue, non pas de système à système, mais de personne à personne, permet de découvrir dans ce pluralisme le témoignage de «la surabondante générosité avec laquelle Dieu s'est manifesté au genre humain d'une multitude de manières, et de la réponse plurielle que, dans les diverses cultures, les êtres humains ont donné à la révélation que Dieu fait de lui-même».<sup>3</sup> Cette approche est d'une richesse extraordinaire dans sa fécondité. Et c'est pourquoi le pluralisme doit être accueilli avec joie.

Voilà qui donne une singulière portée au début de la Lettre aux Hébreux : «Dieu a parlé aux hommes à bien des reprises et de bien des manières avant de parler par l'intermédiaire du Fils». Le Coran a un verset assez clair sur cette manière de voir, qui peut aussi nous interpeller : «Si Dieu avait voulu, Il aurait fait de vous tous une seule communauté. Mais Il veut vous éprouver en ce qu'Il vous donne. Cherchez à vous surpasser les uns les autres par vos bonnes actions. C'est vers Dieu que tous vous retournerez» (Cor 5,48).

En envisageant ainsi les choses, on sort de l'ère de la «coexistence» entre les religions pour entrer dans la «révolution du dialogue» qui modifiera au moins deux images : celle que chaque partenaire a de la religion de l'autre, et celle aussi qu'il a de sa propre religion.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dialogue et annonce, Document commun du Conseil Pontifical pour le dialogue interreligieux et de la Congrégation pour l'évangélisation des peuples (19 mai 1991), in Conseil Pontifical pour le dialogue interreligieux, *Le Dialogue interreligieux dans l'enseignement officiel de l'Eglise catholique* (1963-1997), Documents rassemblés par F. GIOIA, Ed. de Solesmes, 1998, pp. 797 et s., voir n. 42, p. 814.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jean-Paul II, Message pour la Journée mondiale de la Paix, 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 2001, *Documentation catholique*, 7 janvier 2001, n. 2239, p. 1 et s.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques DUPUIS, *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*, Paris, Cerf, 1997, 655 p. (*Cogitatio Fidei*), cf. p. 585.

Réf. : Texte de l'auteur. Pour le Séminaire de SEDOS (Mai 2003).

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# *Dialogue interreligieux et partage de souffrance*

– *Maître Yamina Kebir* –

Je voudrais tout d'abord remercier les organisateurs de cette rencontre de m'avoir fait l'honneur de m'inviter à livrer un point de vue sur le dialogue interreligieux. Il s'agit plus exactement d'un témoignage : parmi les intervenants, je suis en effet la seule personne qui ne soit pas impliquée dans des recherches théologiques ou académiques sur le sujet et c'est donc tout simplement de mon expérience personnelle que je voudrais vous faire part.

Lorsque Sœur Lucie m'a demandé de l'accompagner dans un témoignage commun sur nos expériences respectives de partage et de dialogue, j'ai immédiatement accepté sa proposition, d'abord par amitié pour Sr Lucie, bien sûr, mais aussi parce qu'il me paraît tout à fait important d'apporter ma modeste contribution à la construction du difficile dialogue entre les hommes et les femmes qui appartiennent aux deux plus grandes religions dans cette région du monde, dialogue dont l'urgence se manifeste chaque jour davantage.

Cette contribution revêt pour moi, en tant que musulmane algérienne, une signification particulière à un double titre.

D'abord, pour les personnes de ma génération, il apparaissait que les guerres se réclamant de la religion, le colonialisme avec sa «mission civilisatrice» étaient définitivement révolus et qu'avec l'avènement du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle s'ouvrirait une ère de paix et de progrès pour l'humanité qui, tirant les leçons des tragédies et des massacres qui ont ponctué les siècles passés, s'avancait résolument vers le dialogue, l'entraide et la solidarité, transcendant les clivages ethniques, religieux et culturels.

Or toutes les perspectives d'un avenir prometteur se sont obscurcies et c'est tout à l'inverse — et la guerre qui vient de se dérouler contre l'Irak le confirme cruellement — que nous assistons, avec l'invocation de concepts repris des affrontements passés entre l'Islam et la Chrétienté et la résurgence d'un manichéisme primitif et mystificateur ainsi que de l'obscurantisme.

Par ailleurs, nous avons traversé, dans mon pays, une terrible tourmente où la religion était invoquée

pour justifier des actes d'une barbarie inouïe aux effets dévastateurs sur la société tout entière. En tant que musulmans, nous étions interpellés au plus profond de nous-mêmes : au nom de la religion que nous avions de tout temps vécue de manière paisible, ouverte aux autres croyances et principalement aux religions du Livre, voilà que des enfants, des nourrissons, des vieillards, étaient massacrés, des femmes violées.

Les principes religieux invoqués dont on se servait pour sacrifier des innocents, pour faire régner la terreur, ne pouvaient être rattachés à l'Islam qui prône la tolérance et le pluralisme religieux. En fait, ils sont la négation même du message coranique. C'est donc par un approfondissement du message coranique que nous tentions de trouver les réponses aux questions existentielles auxquelles nous étions confrontés. Et ces questions, nous nous les sommes posées personnellement et entre musulmans, mais aussi avec nos amis chrétiens.

Pour ce qui me concerne, puisque c'est de mon expérience que je vais vous parler, le chemin vers le dialogue avec mes amis chrétiens allait naturellement de soi. Comment, en effet, en serait-il autrement quand on a été élevé dans les enseignements d'amour et de respect du prochain, sans distinction de race, d'ethnie et de couleur, enseignements de pardon et de tolérance.

Cette ouverture au partage et au dialogue interreligieux, je la dois en effet à diverses influences.

Je suis née et ai grandi à Mascara, berceau de l'Emir Abdelkader, figure emblématique de la résistance à l'occupation française certes, mais également grand mystique, précurseur de la reconnaissance des droits des prisonniers dans les conflits armés et défenseur des minorités religieuses opprimées. La figure de ce grand homme et les valeurs qu'il incarnait ont nourri mon enfance ; ces valeurs trouvaient leur concrétisation dans la société pluriconfessionnelle d'alors, et au-delà des ambiguïtés de la société coloniale. En effet, l'autre, qu'il soit chrétien, juif ou musulman était reconnu — avec distance certes — dans sa différence de pratique



religieuse, mais comme faisant partie de la même famille monothéiste.

Toutes les personnes qui ont marqué mon enfance, grands-parents, grands-oncles et grand-tantes étaient des personnes profondément pieuses et, avec le recul ce qui me frappe, c'est que la religion imprégnait profondément leur vie quotidienne, tous leurs comportements, tous leurs faits et gestes. Leur relation aux "gens du Livre" que sont pour les musulmans les chrétiens et les juifs était empreinte de bienveillance et d'ouverture. Cette attitude de tolérance ne procédait pas d'une réflexion ou d'une démarche volontariste mais résultait tout naturellement de la force de leurs convictions religieuses.

La troisième influence et non la moindre fut celle de mon père, médecin, dont la vie toute entière a été consacrée à soulager avec un égal dévouement la souffrance de ses semblables, qu'ils soient chrétiens, juifs ou musulmans.

La première expérience marquante du dialogue a eu lieu il y a une vingtaine d'années quand, avec des étudiants musulmans à Paris nous avons amorcé un groupe de rencontres périodiques avec Soeur Lucie. Nous éprouvions alors la nécessité de réfléchir ensemble sur les liens qui nous unissaient et qui nous permettraient d'apporter des réponses aux défis auxquels nous étions confrontés dans nos sociétés respectives en conciliant la modernité et l'authenticité.

Mais plus simplement, c'est le partage avec nos amis chrétiens des moments de vie : des moments de joies et de peines, des fêtes religieuses des uns et des autres, des événements familiaux, de ceux qui touchent la vie de la cité, du pays ou même du monde.

Ce sont ces collaborations professionnelles fructueuses, ces échanges d'expériences, chacun apportant sa sensibilité propre riche de son histoire, de ses croyances, de son vécu.

Ce sont les débats de société qui nous sont posés et auxquels nous essayons de réfléchir en commun.

Ce sont les actions de solidarité envers les personnes en détresse, les enfants abandonnés, les sinistrés.

Mais c'est assurément pendant la descente aux enfers et les années de terrorisme que notre relation avec nos amis chrétiens a pris tout son sens et sa profondeur en évoluant vers un véritable dialogue.

Toutes les forces vives de la société algérienne ont été les cibles d'attentats; aucune catégorie sociale n'a été épargnée par la violence terroriste, pas même les religieux, qu'ils soient chrétiens ou musulmans.

Dans cette épreuve nous avons partagé la même douleur lorsque la violence aveugle frappait des milliers d'innocents et souvent des amis,

musulmans ou chrétiens.

Nous étions interpellés au plus profond de nous-mêmes par le déchaînement de la violence qui de surcroît était légitimée par des motifs religieux. Il nous fallait chercher les réponses aux questions existentielles auxquelles nous étions confrontés par un approfondissement de notre foi, et cette réflexion était menée avec nos amis musulmans mais aussi avec nos amis chrétiens.

Le dialogue interreligieux était devenu vital : ensemble, nous devons aborder les questions sur la violence, le pardon, la réconciliation.

Le rapprochement entre musulmans et chrétiens qui s'est opéré dans le partage de la souffrance s'est encore renforcé grâce à la fidélité témoignée par les religieux chrétiens qui ont, en toute conscience et au péril de leur vie décidé de rester parmi nous et d'être solidaires de nos épreuves. C'est là toute la force du message du moine Christian

de Chergé, moine de Tibhérine assassiné avec les six autres membres de la communauté des Trappistes.

Cette présence, nous la souhaitions, nous la revendiquions même au nom du pluralisme religieux voulu par Dieu :

"Si Allah l'avait voulu, Il aurait fait de vous une communauté unique. Il ne l'a toutefois pas fait, afin de vous éprouver en ce qu'Il vous a donné" (Cor. 5/48).

Le Coran et les hadiths ne prescrivent-ils pas l'ouverture aux autres, la concertation, l'hospitalité. Aussi, la confrontation des différences assumées ne peut-elle être que stimulante. L'histoire de ma Méditerranée est d'ailleurs riche de ces échanges entre Islam et Chrétienté qui ont alterné avec les conflits ouverts.

C'est pourquoi le choc des civilisations, et singulièrement entre l'Islam et l'Occident, qui nous est présenté comme la marque du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle n'est pas acceptable ; il n'est en tout état de cause pas une fatalité.

Les défis que nous impose la mondialisation rendent ce dialogue inéluctable.

L'engagement commun des musulmans et des chrétiens trouve son enracinement dans des actions concrètes à la mesure des défis auxquels est confrontée toute société ; ces défis sont immenses : il s'agit de reconstruire le tissu social déchiré par les haines, les souffrances, les rancunes, de promouvoir la justice, la dignité de l'homme, les valeurs morales, spirituelles et culturelles.

Nous devons, musulmans et chrétiens, nous retrouver d'abord sur les valeurs communes que nous partageons et féconder l'héritage d'Abraham, dont nous sommes les fils, par l'émulation à laquelle nous invite Dieu : "devancez vous donc dans les bonnes actions" (Cor. 5:48).

Cette émulation doit nous conduire à promouvoir la justice et la paix et ne saurait bien entendu s'accommoder de prosélytisme ou de militantisme religieux. «Pas de contrainte en religion» dit le Coran Cor. 2/225.

Ce n'est que dans le respect de l'autre et de sa liberté que le dialogue peut exister et s'épanouir ; il ne s'agit pas seulement de tolérance mais de respect, c'est à dire de l'acceptation de l'autre tel qu'il est, dans sa foi et ses convictions, et de la reconnaissance de l'autre.

Cependant il ne saurait y avoir de reconnaissance sans connaissance, connaissance de sa propre identité et de celle de l'autre.

Pour les musulmans, il s'agit d'approfondir les valeurs de l'Islam par l'*ijtihad*. L'enseignement doit être pensé et revu de manière à intégrer l'histoire des religions et des prophètes que le Coran vénère et, pour ce qui concerne l'Algérie, l'histoire de tous les saints du pays, qu'ils soient musulmans ou chrétiens dont Saint Augustin.

Pour les chrétiens il s'agit de reconnaître les sources musulmanes de la pensée que l'on qualifie de judéo-chrétienne et les apports si riches de la civilisation arabo-musulmane à la civilisation occidentale.

Alors les préjugés pourront être balayés de part et d'autre et la peur de l'Autre exorcisée ; nous serons ainsi préparés à mettre ensemble notre foi au service de la paix et de la justice.

Avec Christian de Chergé nous pouvons nous demander :

“Aurons nous l'audace et la simplicité d'emprunter ensemble une même échelle si nous refusons dès l'abord de croire qu'un même Esprit de Dieu nous y invite”.

Réf. : Texte de l'auteur. Pour le Séminaire de SEDOS (Mai 2003).

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***SEDOS Secretariat would like to inform the readers  
that our offices will be closed for Summer Holidays  
from Monday 28 July 2003 to Monday 1 September 2003  
Happy Summer Season to all of you!!!!***

***SEDOS Secretariat***

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*Interreligious Dialogue  
and Human Rights*

# *Le dialogue islamo-chrétien et les Droits de l'Homme*

– Dr. Harald Suermann –

Le dialogue islamo-chrétien et les droits de l'homme sont un sujet délicat. Les relations entre droits de l'homme et christianisme ne sont historiquement pas faciles. Et même aujourd'hui où l'Église Catholique intègre les droits de l'homme dans sa doctrine sociale, la revendication universelle des droits de l'homme et la revendication universelle de l'Église ne sont pas sans conflit. Les relations entre l'islam et les droits de l'homme sont également tendues. La *sharia* — la loi islamique — donnée par Dieu et valable en tout temps et en tout lieu est en concurrence avec les droits de l'homme se manifestant dans le temps moderne. Ni l'islam ni le christianisme ne sont à l'origine des droits de l'homme, même si les droits de l'homme sont nés dans la culture de tradition chrétienne.

Je présenterai brièvement l'histoire et le contenu des droits de l'homme. Puis je présenterai la réception des droits de l'homme dans l'Église Catholique. Je souligne que je me concentre sur l'Église Catholique et que je ne traiterai pas des positions des autres Eglises. Par contre, je me concentrerai sur l'islam sunnite sans en distinguer les différentes tendances, quand je présenterai les relations entre l'islam et les droits de l'homme. Nous savons qu'il y a une multitude d'opinions et donc différents partenaires du dialogue. Mais il ne faut pas oublier non plus que les musulmans se trouvent face à une multitude d'opinions chrétiennes car l'Église Catholique n'est pas le seul partenaire. La dernière partie concernera les droits de l'homme comme sujet du dialogue islamo-chrétien.

Les droits de l'homme de l'époque moderne ont une préhistoire. Pour certains auteurs, les racines des droits de l'homme se trouvent dans l'antiquité gréco-romaine. Mais la légitimité de l'esclavage p.e. était fondamentalement opposée à l'idée de l'égalité universelle de tous les hommes. L'Habeas-Corpus-Act de 1679 et la Déclaration des droits (Bill of rights) 1689 sont des pas importants vers la déclaration américaine des droits de l'homme. Dans les années 1770s, plusieurs Etats américains ont promulgué des déclarations de droits. En 1789 une déclaration des droits (bill of rights) fut présentée au Congrès pour être approuvée et insérée dans la constitution des États-Unis. La même année, la Déclaration des droits

de l'Homme et du Citoyen fut approuvée en France. Par la suite, d'autres pays ont également déclaré les droits de l'homme. Le 26 juin 1945, l'Organisation des Nations Unies naissait à la suite de la deuxième guerre mondiale. Le but de la fondation est selon la Charte de l'ONU de «préserver les générations futures du fléau de la guerre et proclamer à nouveau leur foi dans les droits fondamentaux de l'homme, dans la dignité et la valeur de la personne humaine et dans l'égalité de droits des hommes et des femmes». Avec la Charte de l'ONU, les droits de l'homme sont proclamés sur une nouvelle base. Ils sont intégrés dans le droit international. L'expérience de la terreur du régime nazi a été fondamental pour cette intégration. L'expérience de l'injustice était déjà à la base des proclamations des droits de l'homme dans les différents Etats.

Les droits de l'homme sont ouverts aux développements. Les droits classiques ou de la première génération se référaient à la relation entre l'individu et l'État. Ils voulaient affirmer que la personne humaine a des droits qui sont attachés à sa nature et qui doivent être respectés partout dans le monde quel que soit le gouvernement. Ils sont le contre-poids à la doctrine de la souveraineté qui tend à un pouvoir sans limite. L'individu ne peut donc pas être privé de sa vie, de sa liberté ni de sa propriété. Ces droits sont comme une défense des individus contre l'État. Ces droits comprennent également la liberté religieuse, la liberté d'opinion, etc. Les droits de participation appartiennent aussi à la première génération. Ce sont les droits de participer aux processus de formation de l'opinion et de pouvoir ainsi participer aux processus de décision.

La deuxième génération ou groupe de droits de l'homme vit le jour en 1948 avec la Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme de l'ONU. Cette déclaration énumère les droits que la société doit garantir à l'individu. Ce sont les droits de participation sociale, économique et culturelle. Ces droits doivent assurer le cadre des conditions qui rendent possibles la poursuite des droits politiques et la liberté. Ce sont le droit au travail, à l'éducation, à la santé etc.

La troisième génération des droits de l'homme ne concerne pas l'individu mais les peuples, malgré son nom. La discussion des droits de l'homme de la

troisième génération fut initiée par les pays du soi-disant tiers monde. On évoquera notamment le droit au développement, le droit au commerce équitable, le droit à l'environnement, le droit à l'autonomie culturelle etc. Ces nouveaux droits représentent des obligations que les gouvernements s'engagent à respecter vis-à-vis d'autres. C'est une affaire d'État à État.

Le catalogue des droits de l'homme n'est pas un corpus fermé. Il est ouvert au développement. La raison est le fondement même des droits de l'homme: la dignité humaine. Celle-ci n'est pas définie. Elle représente la base d'un système ouvert qui aboutit à un catalogue de droits ouvert au développement. Mais la dignité humaine est essentielle pour l'établissement universel des droits de l'homme. Ce n'est que dans le cas où les droits de l'homme ne sont pas fondés sur la promulgation de l'État ni sur les conventions morales existantes ni sur la volonté majoritaire qu'ils ont un caractère universel et peuvent représenter une fonction d'orientation et de critique pour la loi et la politique.

La dignité humaine étant formellement à la base de la déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme, celle-ci est, dans son contenu, ouverte aux différentes cultures et religions. Elle doit l'être pour ne pas être relativiste. Justifier les droits de l'homme et expliciter la dignité humaine uniquement à partir d'une seule culture ou religion détruit leur caractère universel. D'un autre côté, la déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme se fondant sur la dignité humaine sans précision de son contenu offre la possibilité à toutes les cultures et religions de s'approprier les droits de l'homme.

Église Catholique et droits de l'homme. L'attitude de l'Église Catholique envers les droits de l'homme fut dans le passé plutôt négative. Les droits de liberté ont surtout été rejetés, il y eut des polémiques au sujet de la liberté de conscience et de religion. Avec le Pape Jean XXIII (1958-1963) il y eut un tournant radical dans l'attitude de l'Église envers les droits de l'homme.<sup>1</sup> Alors qu'il était nonce à Paris, Roncalli, le futur Pape, a participé aux discussions de la délégation française pour la préparation de la déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme.<sup>2</sup> Le 11 Avril 1963 le Pape Jean XXIII publia l'encyclique «Pacem in terris» qui porte le sous-titre Sur la paix entre toutes les nations, fondée sur la vérité, la justice, la charité, la liberté. La publication venait directement après la crise de Cuba en 1962 et le pape adressait cette encyclique aussi «à tous les hommes de bonne volonté». Dans le chapitre «Signe des temps» il reconnaît l'Organisation des Nations Unis ainsi que les Droits de l'Homme (PT 142-143). L'encyclique considère «cette Déclaration [universelle des droits de l'homme] comme un pas vers

l'établissement d'une organisation juridico-politique de la communauté mondiale». Cette Déclaration reconnaît solennellement à tous les hommes, sans exception, leur dignité de personne ; elle affirme pour chaque individu ses droits de rechercher librement la vérité, de suivre les normes de la moralité, de pratiquer les devoirs de justice, d'exiger des conditions de vie conformes à la dignité humaine, ainsi que d'autres droits liés à ceux-ci» (PT 144).

L'appropriation des droits de l'homme par l'Église se fait d'une manière exemplaire. Elle est une relecture de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme de 1948 à la lumière des doctrines sociales de l'Église ainsi que de la nouvelle orientation ecclésiale du Concile. L'encyclique dépasse l'aspect individualiste de la Déclaration en partant du principe de la personne. La notion de personne comprend la dimension de l'«être avec». L'homme est compris comme l'agent, le créateur et le but de toutes les institutions de société. Cette conception conduit à une autre relation entre les droits de liberté et les droits de participation. Il faut remarquer que «Pacem in terris» formule aussi des devoirs de la personne (PT28-45).

Lors du Concile, la déclaration *Dignitatis humanae* fut l'un des documents les plus discutés, surtout en ce qui concerne le sujet de la liberté religieuse.<sup>3</sup> Finalement, la déclaration reconnaît que la liberté religieuse est conforme à la dignité de l'homme et à la révélation divine. Et les pères du Concile reconnaissent également que l'Église n'a pas toujours respecté la liberté religieuse quand ils disent: « Cette doctrine, reçue du Christ et des apôtres, elle l'a, au cours des temps, gardée et transmise. Bien qu'il y ait eut parfois dans la vie du peuple de Dieu, cheminant à travers les vicissitudes de l'histoire humaine, des manières d'agir moins conformes, bien plus même contraires à l'esprit évangélique, l'Eglise a cependant toujours enseigné que personne ne peut être amené par contrainte à la foi » (DH12). La déclaration est en deux parties: la première présente la liberté religieuse selon le droit naturel, la deuxième l'interprète à la lumière de la révélation.

En ce qui concerne le développement des droits de l'homme de la troisième génération, l'Église a plutôt un rôle de précurseur. Le droit au développement était formulé d'une façon juridique (*rechtsverbindlich*) dans la Charte Africaine de Banjul sur les droits de l'homme et du peuple en 1981. Ces droits ont été reconnus en 1986 par les Nations Unies dans une déclaration et confirmés par la Conférence Mondiale de droits de l'homme à Vienne en 1993.<sup>4</sup> Tandis que l'Église Catholique publia «De iustitia in mundo» en 1971 à la suite du Synode des Évêques. Se basant sur «Populorum progressio» (1967), la constitution pastorale du Concile et sur le document



de CELAM (1968), «De iustitia in mundo» elle reconnaît explicitement le droit au développement. Dans l'introduction, l'Église proclame que l'engagement pour la justice et la participation à la transformation du monde est partie intégrante de la proclamation de la Bonne Nouvelle, de la mission de l'Église pour la rédemption des hommes et pour la libération de tous états d'oppression. (IM 6). L'Église lie même sa crédibilité à son engagement pour la justice dans le monde (IM 36).

La réception des droits de l'homme dans la doctrine sociale de l'Église est liée étroitement à la sollicitude pour la paix dans le monde. Chaque engagement pour les droits de l'homme est considéré comme un service pour la paix.<sup>5</sup>

La crédibilité de l'Église dans le domaine des droits de l'homme ne dépend pas uniquement de son engagement envers les droits de l'homme dans le monde mais aussi de leur observation à l'intérieur de l'Église. De iustitia in mundo le reconnaît **expressément** (IM 40-49). La réalisation des droits de l'homme dans l'Église concerne son organisation visible. Nous savons qu'il y avait des manquements, sinon De iustitia in mundo ne l'aurait pas mentionné **expressément**. On peut toujours améliorer le respect de droits de l'homme dans l'organisation visible de l'Église. Et on peut mentionner ici la participation des laïcs, la position des femmes et la liberté d'opinion et de pensée. Mais pour la réception de l'idée de droits de l'homme, il est important de noter qu'ils sont devenus un critère pour la conscience (*Gewissenserforschung*) de l'Église.

Islam et droits de l'homme Considérons maintenant les relations entre l'islam et les droits de l'homme différentes de celles entre le christianisme et les droits de l'homme. Bien que les droits de l'homme ne soient pas nés dans la culture islamique, il existe depuis à peu près 40 ans une tradition de discussion sur ces droits en Islam. Cette discussion est en partie apologétique, affirmant que les droits de l'homme ont été déjà proclamés par le Prophète Muhammad et qu'ils ont été respectés depuis. Les lois islamiques, qui sont au premier abord contradictoire aux droits de l'homme moderne, sont en vérité en accord avec la dignité humaine. Mais il y a aussi des Musulmans que l'on qualifie volontiers de libéraux, favorables au dialogue islamo-chrétien, qui avouent que les droits de l'homme sont nés dans la culture européenne et nord-américaine et qu'il n'est possible de vérifier si le coran et la sunna approuvent les droits de l'homme pour tous les hommes ou au moins n'y sont pas contradictoires.<sup>6</sup>

Il existe dans le Monde musulman plusieurs déclarations des droits de l'homme. En 1980, le Conseil Islamique de l'Europe a publié une

Déclaration Islamique Universelle des droits de l'homme. La traduction française et anglaise diffère du texte arabe.

La déclaration des droits de l'homme en Islam, votée par les ministres des relations extérieures de l'Organisation de la Conférence Islamique au Caire en 1990, est le document politiquement le plus important. — Il y avait des documents antérieurs en date de 1979 et 1981. — Tous les articles sont mis sous réserve d'être en accord avec la sharia islamique et ils doivent être interprétés dans son esprit. Cette déclaration des droits de l'homme n'est plus dans la ligne de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme.<sup>7</sup> La déclaration islamique n'est pas la médiatrice entre les droits de l'homme selon la déclaration universelle et la religion islamique, comme c'est le cas dans l'adaptation de l'Église Catholique depuis *Pacem in terris*.

Les différentes déclarations islamiques des droits de l'homme ne sont pas obligatoires et leur non-respect ne peut pas être poursuivi. Dans la région arabe et en Asie, il n'existe pas encore de pacte régional des droits de l'homme. Ce fait n'est pas négligeable étant donné le fait que l'islam se comprend toujours comme englobant religion et État. Mais cette unité entre religion et État est réalisée très différemment dans des différents États à majorité musulmane.

Les conflits entre l'interprétation classique de la sharia et les droits de l'homme sont multiples. Il faut mentionner en premier lieu l'institution de l'esclavage, la situation de la femme considérée comme inférieure par rapport à l'homme et le principe de la liberté religieuse.

L'herméneutique du Coran, du hadith et de la sharia me semble être au centre de la discussion islamique sur les droits de l'homme. Il existe des interprétations récentes du Coran donnant une fondation coranique à la dignité humaine. C'est le concept de l'homme comme lieutenant ou vicaire de Dieu sur terre (Sure 2/30). Cette conception est mise en relation avec des exigences modernes de liberté et d'égalité. Le vicariat est la base de la dignité de l'homme et peut être comparé à la déclaration biblique que l'homme est fait à l'image de Dieu. La grande majorité des penseurs islamiques donne aujourd'hui cette interprétation, seuls quelques penseurs islamistes pensent que le vicariat ne consiste que dans l'obéissance à la loi révélée et que seuls les musulmans qui se soumettent à la sharia ont cette dignité.

D'autres versets du Coran donnent des indications sur la dignité humaine de tous les hommes. D'après les versets 14/33 ou 22/65, toute la création était mise au service de l'homme. Aujourd'hui, beaucoup de musulmans interprètent l'«amana» qui est donnée par Dieu aux hommes après

qu'elle fut refusée par les autres créatures (verset 33/72) comme la liberté dans le sens de la responsabilité morale.

La dignité humaine, qui est le fondement des droits de l'homme, peut être comprise à partir du Coran. Cela est un point acquis important pour le dialogue. Mais une grande partie des articles particuliers des droits de l'homme ne sont pas compatibles avec la sharia.

Un premier point est l'esclavage. Le Coran connaît l'institution de l'esclavage et contient des règles pour le traitement des esclaves. Mais il ne prescrit pas l'existence de l'esclavage. Au contraire la libération d'un esclave est un mérite. L'interprétation que le Coran a l'intention d'abolir l'esclavage l'emporte aujourd'hui.

Les peines corporelle drastiques (*hudud*) sont prescrites dans le Coran. Il n'est pas possible de les ignorer, bien qu'elles ne correspondent plus à l'opinion ou à l'imagination morale de la plupart des musulmans. Il existe une interprétation du Coran qui dit que les prescriptions pour les preuves de crime demandant une telle punition sont rédigées de telle façon qu'il est pratiquement impossible de les remplir. La conclusion est que ces peines corporelles ne sont pas à appliquer mais qu'elles sont plutôt une dissuasion symbolique.

La discrimination de la femme et des non-musulmans dans la sharia n'est pas compatible avec les droits de l'homme. Même si certains aspects de la discrimination de la femme ne sont plus acceptés dans certaine interprétation moderne du Coran, il reste dans l'ensemble l'incompatibilité des prescriptions de la sharia et les droits de l'homme en ce domaine. Aujourd'hui, la permission de polygamie n'est plus acceptée par beaucoup de musulmans, car le Coran dit que toutes les épouses doivent être traitées de manière juste et aussi que personne ne peut jamais agir de manière parfaitement juste. Les deux versets vus ensemble interdisent pratiquement la polygamie.

La discrimination des non-musulmans ayant «un livre révélé» — les Chrétiens et les Juifs — menait dans le passé au statut de dhimmi et pour les «païens» à la conversion forcée à l'Islam. Le verset qui dit qu'il n'y a pas de contrainte dans la religion est cité par des Musulmans cherchant une interprétation du Coran qui ne contredit pas l'égalité de tous les hommes. Mais ce verset ne peut pas faire oublier les prescriptions coraniques discriminantes, p.e. celles concernant l'apostasie.

Les difficultés d'accepter et d'adapter les droits de l'homme dans l'Islam concernent en premier lieu les droits politiques et la liberté. Dans l'ensemble, il semble que l'approche islamique des droits de l'homme économiques, sociaux et culturels soit plus facile.

L'importance des droits de l'homme dans le

dialogue islamo-chrétien. Il faut distinguer entre le dialogue entre les pays occidentaux et les pays islamiques et le dialogue entre le christianisme et l'islam. Le premier peut être le dialogue entre les États ou entre les cultures. Dans un tel dialogue, l'application des droits de l'homme doit prendre une part importante. Le dialogue inter-religieux n'a pas comme sujet l'application des droits de l'homme, mais il traite de l'appropriation des droits de l'homme. Ni l'islam ni le christianisme n'ont inventé les droits de l'homme modernes. Mais nous avons vu que dans les deux religions on trouve des traditions qui fondent la dignité humaine sans conditions, liée simplement au fait d'être un homme. C'est une bonne base pour la continuation du dialogue, même si nous trouvons encore des groupes surtout islamistes qui nient la dignité humaine universelle. En ce qui concerne les droits de l'homme particuliers, l'islam a beaucoup plus de mal à les réconcilier avec sa propre tradition religieuse, notamment la sharia, que le christianisme l'a aujourd'hui. Mais il suffit de regarder l'histoire du christianisme et des droits de l'homme pour voir que leur relation n'a pas toujours été harmonieuse. Je suis convaincu qu'il faut raconter cette histoire difficile et compliquée pour montrer deux choses:

1. Les droits de l'homme n'ont pas été inventés par le christianisme et ne lui sont donc pas liés. Cette histoire de dispute et d'appropriation est importante pour ne pas récupérer (*vereeinnahmen*) la tradition des droits de l'homme. Cette histoire souligne plutôt le caractère universel des droits de l'homme, qui ne sont pas liés à une culture ou une religion particulière. Ce caractère offre aussi à l'islam la possibilité de s'approprier les droits de l'homme. 2. En racontant sa propre histoire d'appropriation, l'Église est un exemple pour l'islam. Bien sûr, les points de départ religieux et historiques ne sont pas les mêmes et l'islam ne peut pas imiter l'appropriation chrétienne. Mais les musulmans peuvent être encouragés par le chemin chrétien à entreprendre un chemin similaire, car les problèmes sont également similaires: ré-interpréter sa propre histoire ainsi que re-nouveler l'herméneutique du Coran. Ce dernier point me semble essentiel. Nous Chrétiens ne pouvons pas proposer une nouvelle herméneutique mais nous pouvons encourager les musulmans qui en proposent une en les écoutant et en discutant avec eux.

Le dialogue islamo-chrétien sur les droits de l'homme a aussi un aspect très pratique. Ce dialogue peut clarifier les bases communes pour un engagement commun dans le monde pour la paix et la justice. Les bases communes ne peuvent pas être uniquement la tradition religieuse monothéiste ou abrahamique, mais elles doivent comprendre aussi

les droits de l'homme. Si les musulmans acceptent plus facilement les droits de l'homme de la deuxième et troisième génération, commençons par là sans oublier que les droits de l'homme sont indivisibles. Il faut rappeler à nos partenaires du dialogue que la liberté de religion et d'opinion ainsi que la non-discrimination des femmes et des non-musulmans font aussi partie des droits de l'homme et doivent être à la base d'un engagement commun.

Le dialogue inter-religieux en vérité suppose le respect des droits de l'homme. Sans la liberté religieuse et sans le respect du partenaire d'une foi différente, le dialogue n'est pas possible, car le dialogue n'est pas simple comparaison des religions ou des positions religieuses ou débat ou discussion, mais c'est plutôt prendre part ou partager pour communier dans la vérité. Communier dans la vérité suppose que l'autre soit de bonne intelligence et de bonne volonté de telle manière qu'il a une certaine connaissance de la vérité suprême. La liberté religieuse n'est pas seulement la condition d'un vrai dialogue, mais elle est aussi la mesure du dialogue. Le dialogue n'est possible que dans la mesure où la liberté religieuse va ensemble avec le respect de la personne. C'est aussi la raison pour laquelle la liberté religieuse doit être le point central du dialogue.

Enfin, l'Église a lié la crédibilité de la proclamation de la bonne nouvelle à son engagement pour les droits de l'homme. Cette proclamation interdit tout compromis sur l'universalité et la validité inconditionnée des droits de l'homme. Tout marchandage est interdit. Nous ne pouvons pas concéder des droits de l'homme dans la mesure où l'autre nous les concède. Nous ne pouvons pas accorder la liberté religieuse en Europe pour les musulmans comme réponse à la tolérance limitée pour les chrétiens dans certain pays musulman. Cela limiterait également la crédibilité de l'Église. De plus, il faut accepter que nos partenaires du dialogue nous critiquent au nom des droits de l'homme, car les droits de l'homme ne sont pas un bien uniquement chrétien, mais universel.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Marianne Heimbach-Steins, *Menschenrechte in Gesellschaft und Kirche. Lernprozesse – Konfliktfelder – Zukunftschancen*, Mainz 2001, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Heimbach-Steins, *Menschenrechte* 15 ; René Cassin, *Vatican II et la protection de la personne*, in : *Rencontre des cultures à l'UNESCO. Sous le signe du concile oecuménique Vatican II*, Paris 1966, 31-37, ici 33.

<sup>3</sup> Heimbach-Steins, *Menschenrechte* 26.

<sup>4</sup> Heimbach-Steins, *Menschenrechte* 37.

<sup>5</sup> Heimbach-Steins, *Menschenrechte* 44-45.

<sup>6</sup> Alexandra Petersohn, *Islamisches Menschenrechtsverständnis unter Berücksichtigung der Vorbehalte muslimischer Staaten zu den UN-Menschenrechtsverträge* (Diss. Bonn 1999) 58 ; compare également : Abdoldjavad Falaturi, *Westliche Menschenrechtsvorstellungen und Koran*, Köln 1992, 7 ; Fouad Zakariya, *Human Rights in the Arab World : the Islamic Context*, en : *UNESCO Publications* 1991, 227.

<sup>7</sup> Heiner Bielefeldt, *Menschenrechte III. Außereuropäische Kulturen*, en : *LTHK* ??? 128.

Réf. : Texte de l'auteur. Pour le Séminaire de SEDOS (Mai 2003).

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# *Interreligious Dialogue and Human Rights: A Response*

– Imam David Shaheed –

With the Name of God, the Merciful Benefactor, the Merciful Redeemer. It is not practical to respond to all of the points raised in Professor Suermann's paper, but what I will attempt to do is make two points related to his paper. First, I would like to present the Islamic approach to the subject of human rights. Secondly, we want to discuss the concept of state action or government action as it is seen today when people think of or speak of "Islamic governments or countries".

Before approaching a discussion of any topic, it is important to recognize the accepted authorities for Muslims. The primary authority for Muslims is the Qur'an (Koran), which is the sacred text or scripture for Muslims. We believe that the Qur'an is the Word of Almighty God and that it was revealed to Prophet Muhammed (peace and blessings upon him) approximately fourteen hundred years ago. Also, as a primary authority for Muslims is the life example of Prophet Muhammed (*pbuh*), which has been recorded and compiled in hadith or reports of what the Prophet Muhammed said and did. The best hadith is the Qur'an but there are many other reports on the life of Prophet Muhammed (*pbuh*).

Secondary authorities for Muslims include Al-Ijma or the consensus of opinions from the learned scholars in Islam; Al-Qiyas or analogical deduction and Al-Ijtihad, which involves personal reasoning to find the right answer to an Islamic issue. There are also four major schools of thought recognized by the vast majority of Muslims. The founders of these major schools of thought are: Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Malik Bin Anas, Imam Muhammed Idris al-Shafi'i and Imam Ahmed bin Muhammed bin Hanbal (or Hambal). These religious thinkers had students who established their schools of thought in the Muslim world during their lives and most of all after their deaths. For this discussion of human rights it is important to understand that all of these religious leaders were dead before 1100 AD. So their writings and impact upon Islamic thinking predates the modern discussion of human rights.

Shari'ah (generally translated as Islamic law or jurisprudence) is derived from the primary and sec-

ondary sources just mentioned. There is no single Shari'ah that is universally accepted by all Muslims. The approach to *Shari'ah* would be influenced by the School of Thought adopted by the religious leaders of that country or area. Therefore, the concept and application of Shari'ah is subject to interpretation and may vary from one country to another.

Aside from the concept of *Shari'ah* and how certain Muslims may apply Islamic law in adopting a position of human rights, it is presented in the Qur'an that God has made honorable every child of Adam. Muslims regard every human being as a descendent of Adam and we view Adam as the first father of all people. So, every human being is afforded the respect that God gives to each human soul in the Qur'an.

Also, the Qur'an says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion". This means that each person is free to choose his/her religious path. The Qur'an states "tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter". Prophet Muhammed came to mankind and the Arabs of his time as a liberator of the individual. He promoted freedom for the individual and established rights and freedom that did not exist in Arabia prior to his prophethood or the Qur'an. For example, in Chapter (*Sura*) 4, we are instructed to protect the rights and property of orphans. The rights of slaves were also protected. The masters of slaves were instructed to help them marry and gain their independence if that is their desire... to feed them with the same food and from the same table that you eat. The Prophet Muhammed (*pbuh*) said that the master who educates his female slave would have a double reward in Paradise.

Most important, the rights of women were established. Prior to Prophet Muhammed and the Qur'an, infanticide or the killing of female babies was a common practice. Women were treated as property and had no recognized rights to property and had no voice in marriage or divorce. The Qur'an gave women the right to choose their mate, a right to divorce their husbands, rights to inherit property, to be maintained during a divorce and to receive property from a divorce. Also, there was a limit set on the number of

wives a man could have and the admonition that one wife is the better choice.

Education of women was encouraged as it was said by Prophet Muhammed, “The man who educates two of his daughters is guaranteed the Paradise”.

So these few references are presented to show that the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) established rights and protected individual freedoms in a way that did not exist previously. This is the best background for approaching the subject of human rights.

Finally, when discussing human rights in the modern world, we would agree with Professor Suermann that this is a sensitive subject. There is a tendency for non-Muslims to label countries with sizeable Muslim populations as “Muslim states”. This is a mistake for a number of reasons. First of all the government of those countries may not be an ample representative of the aspirations and beliefs of the people in that country. The governments are not democratically elected based upon Western standards of free, open elections. Secondly, if there is some effort to establish a government to reflect Islamic principles, one must inquire as to the process of those principles being established and whether or not a participatory legislative process was employed to reach that position. As a final point, it should be noted that some of the countries that are generally regarded as “Muslim states” because of the number of Muslims in the country — i.e. Turkey, Nigeria, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Malaysia — have had less than sixty years of independence. In other words, sixty years ago they were colonies of the western powers. So there is a legitimate question as to the influence of colonialism upon the government scheme that exists in some of these countries and the influence of colonialism on their approach to human rights.

Ref.: Text from the Author. Given at the SEDOS Seminar, May 2003.

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***Where is Your Sister?***  
***“The New Slaves Trade Challenges Religious Life***  
***in the Third Millennium”***

***How Should We React?***

by Eugenia Bonetti, MC

**Thursday, 16 October 2003**

**16:00 hrs**

Brothers of the Christian Schools

Via Aurelia, 476

ROME



*Convictions, Observations and Hopes  
for Muslim-Christian Dialogue*

# Engaging in a Dialogue of Life

– Lejla Demiri –

On Monday I presented my experience of dialogue in Rome from a Muslim student's perspective. I also stressed my approach to dialogue, which I like to call a "dialogue of life". Today, I would like to talk about the future hopes and prospects of the Muslim-Christian dialogue.

When I ask myself this question, I find the answer in my own experience, which consists of: studying the other's religious culture and living with the other. I think, my friend Betul and I are both an example of this approach. From the very beginning of my stay in Rome I have been getting encouragement from Muslims and Christians alike. People from both religions have shown a very sincere appreciation for the work that I am doing here. From this I can see that both sides are eager to know each other, and they are also aware of the importance of a better understanding of one another.

As is well known, better understanding of, and dialogue between, people of different religious traditions, requires a profound knowledge of each other. Whenever I talk about the close connection between understanding and knowledge I always remember an ancient Arab proverb which states, "*man is enemy of those that he does not have knowledge about*". Therefore for mutual appreciation, we need to know and learn about each other's religion and tradition.

Yes, this is the main idea of dialogue, and I do not want to talk about abstract notions concerning dialogue. Instead I am presenting my friend and I as concrete examples. What can be done in the future? I suggest that we could encourage youth to study and to engage in a dialogue of life. I am convinced that this would be a turning point for future generations. Giving opportunity to encounter the other's religion not only by academic study, but by living a community life with the other would bring many changes to their approach to the other and would contribute to their spiritual growth of each one's faith as well.

On Tuesday it was stressed that fear is one of the challenges to faith and dialogue in contemporary life. As a witness of dialogue I can say that we should put aside the fear of becoming less Christian or less Muslim by engaging in dialogue. On the contrary, through dialogue we become better Christians and better Muslims.

As I said on Monday, though I come from a multi-religious society where both Muslims and Christians live together, this is the first time I am living with Christians who actually practise their faith. A great majority of my friends are either priests and seminarians or sisters. We go to class together, study in the library together, and drink tea together. In other words,

we share the daily experience of student life together.

For example before I came to Rome even though I did not have any prejudice against Christians, to tell the truth, I had no idea of the richness of their spiritual life. During this time in Rome I have come realize this fact which has made me understand my own Scriptures/Qur'ân in a more profound way as well. If I had not had this Roman experience I would not have had a chance to grasp the Qur'ân's praise of Christian monks for their humbleness and humility. And especially describing their attitude as they listen to the word of God: "thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of their recognition of the Truth. They say: Our Lord, we believe. Inscribe us as among the witnesses" (al-Mâida 4/82-83).

To speak more concretely and more thoroughly, I can present two examples of promoting dialogue among young people, which can be taken as a model for further endeavours in this field. The first one is a scholarship for Muslim (and other) researchers provided by *Nostra Aetate*, a foundation of the Vatican, which allowed me to begin my studies here. I think this kind of opportunity should be widened and increased not only by Christians, but also by Muslims.

And the second example is The Lay Center at Foyer Unitas, the place where I am staying. It is an international community where at the moment 15 students from 10 different countries live together. In this centre, students of diverse religions such as Jews and Muslims can share daily life not only with Roman Catholics, but also with other Christians. It is a form of community life, which also welcomes members of different religions; it is a family, consisting of people from different religious traditions.

I consider The Lay Center as a model for our enthusiastically and eagerly desired future full of peace and mutual understanding. I wish I had a chance to invite all of you one day to come and see for yourselves that the dialogue we talk and write so much about is not a utopia but something attainable if we really work at it.

I think these two concrete examples give us some real ideas about future prospects in the growing field of Muslim-Christian dialogue. And most importantly they provide a union between theoretical knowledge and personal relations, which offers much more than just a glimpse into the Christian faith.

Ref.: Text from the Author. Given at the SEDOS Seminar, May 2003.

# *Open to the Mystery of God Beyond Ourselves*

– *Betül Avcı* –

This question and answer is based simply on the short span of time: these five days of the SEDOS Seminar. I would like to briefly mention a few insights that I gained during the sessions in which I was present. These are the points that I will continue to meditate upon in the near future. They are just modest insights because, I realize that we are not able to save the world in a few days!

During the SEDOS Seminar, sometimes I felt like we were taking part in the *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer. We are from all over the world, from different backgrounds, doing many different things and with diverse experiences. As a native American proverb says, “we are neither totally what we were, or what we are going to be or we want to be”. In other words, we want to do something, but it is beyond ourselves. This is not a reason to do nothing, rather we are invited *to seize the moment*.

I would like to make three points:

1) The first point is that *we are all different* and we need to try, at least I will try, to define ourselves, rather than trying to define the other. I think we need to be careful about categorizing the other. And “to know thyself” might be a good starting point. As one of the speaker’s said: “Go deeper into yourself, and you will find whatever there is”. For me, there is something deep down, it is not voidless. There is a seed. There is something in each layer of the onion and it is still fresh and growing. I think we need to define ourselves before we try to define the other and we need to let the voice of the other speak for himself or herself.

2) Second, from a theological perspective, I think there were two approaches used at SEDOS in these days. The first was an attempt to make complex abstractions out of simple realities. My comment may seem critical, but I mention it because I think it is important that we deal with it for the sake of dialogue. Let me explain. Sometimes, I hear both Christians and Muslims trying to reconcile the terminology of their faiths with the other through abstract thought and metaphorical language. The fact is, there *are* simple realities. Yes, the words point beyond themselves, but we need to be careful not to suggest forms

other than what they point to. I think we need to be very careful not to force our forms. To put it differently, the metaphors point further than the words, but it is important to respect the integrity of the form. Here, I feel that the problem of metaphoric language is sometimes being used in order to reconcile ones own with the others’ terminology.

Another approach, that I feel is more helpful, was also used in these days. This second voice tried to be open to the mystery of God beyond ourselves. Our vision is only partial. We only catch a glimpse, now and then, of reality as it really is. Often, I find myself lost trying to see the whole big picture. I get exhausted and have to be content with what I can see out of my own small window. I simply try to listen to the music of eternity. Sometimes though, I can only repeat it simply by whistling.

3) The third point I want to mention emerged in our buzz group the other day. In the group, there were two sisters from India, one from the Philippines, two ladies from Vietnam and another lady from the United States. We brought up the issue of self-definition and concluded: There is no one way of classification. Sociological assertions are not ultimate realities. They might be helpful up to a certain point but, in fact, they are fluctuating. To be honest, sometimes it is easier to talk to the so-called “other”. This is because, if I could borrow the words of the late Jesuit Pedro Arrupe, “*What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything*”. I would add, it will decide what you are and what you are going to be.

I want to conclude with something that happened to me at the Gregorian University last year. At the beginning of the year, one of my classmates asked me where I was from: And I said “from Turkey”. He was surprised and was very excited and said, “Oh, we are neighbours”.

I asked, “Where are you from?”. And he wanted me to guess. I began with Syria.

He said:

- No.

- Iraq?

- No.

- Iran?

- No.

At a certain point he was trying to give me a hint. He said:

- We are enemies. At this point he was excited and smiling.

And I said:

- Oh yes Greece!

“There you go!” I was right.

We shook hands.

I do not mean to simplify the world situation as if Greece and Turkey are great friends and that they do not have any problems, as if nothing happened in Cyprus. But because we have this dialogue of life, we really can be friends. So you see, we do not have to define “who is what” or “what is who” before letting the other pronounce his or her name.

My strategy of hope is this: I want to catch a glimpse of God’s vision by trying to listen to the “music of eternity” in my daily life. This is what I would like to meditate on after these days together, nothing more. I think this is already quite a big task for my limited human understanding.

Ref.: Text from the Author. Given at the SEDOS Seminar, May 2003.

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# Confiance dans un avenir de convivialité

– Fr. Claude Geffré, OP –

Le Comité organisateur a pris le risque de me demander de proposer quelques réflexions conclusives à l'issue des cinq journées de notre Séminaire. Je sais par expérience combien il est difficile de tirer les conclusions d'un colloque ou d'une rencontre. Cela ressemble trop à un numéro acrobatique où les participants se sentent frustrés par rapport à toutes les richesses dont ils ont été les heureux bénéficiaires. A défaut de véritables conclusions, je voudrais seulement partager avec vous en quelques minutes certaines *convictions*, certains *constats* et certains *espoirs*.

## 1. Les convictions

D'un point de vue très personnel, je voudrais seulement faire état de deux convictions très fortes.

1) Notre Séminaire a été sous le signe du *mystère* du pluralisme religieux. C'est l'expression qui est revenue le plus souvent et très heureusement, elle a spontanément remplacé celle encore toute théorique d'un pluralisme *de principe*. On m'avait demandé de fournir le premier jour une justification théologique du pluralisme religieux. C'est un grand réconfort pour un théologien de constater qu'une hypothèse théologique, celle d'un *mystère* du pluralisme religieux correspondant à un dessein caché de Dieu, trouve sa vérification sur le terrain. Comme beaucoup de témoignages l'ont attesté, chrétiens et musulmans nous faisons l'expérience que l'Esprit de Dieu est au travail dans chacune de nos traditions religieuses et qu'aucune religion n'a le monopole des dons de Dieu.

2) Dans le dialogue interreligieux comme dans le dialogue œcuménique entre chrétiens séparés, le dialogue le plus important, c'est le *dialogue de la vie*, c'est-à-dire le partage des souffrances et des joies, des peurs et des espoirs, dans le combat quotidien pour être des hommes et des femmes debout. Le mot "dialogue" évoque trop souvent d'abord un débat d'idées ou même un échange purement verbal. Le bon mot que je voudrais privilégier et qui n'a pas été prononcé au cours du Séminaire, c'est celui de *convivialité* entre chrétiens et musulmans. Il a d'ailleurs des affinités avec la notion chère au Coran d'hospitalité. Comment comme chrétiens pratiquer l'hospitalité vis-à-vis des musulmans et inversement ces derniers vis-à-vis des chrétiens, et cela, après des siècles de conflits, de rivalité et de préjugés ? Le

dialogue de la vie ne rend pas inutile le travail des experts et donc le dialogue proprement doctrinal. Mais j'ai la conviction qu'il prépare les voies d'une meilleure intelligence de nos divergences fondamentales.

## 2. Les constats

Quand j'essaie de résumer mes impressions au terme de ces cinq demi-journées, je crois pouvoir discerner cinq constats.

1) Par rapport à la situation géo-politique du monde d'aujourd'hui et par rapport à la tentation d'instrumentalisation de la religion par les pouvoirs politiques (en Occident comme dans le monde musulman), je constate avec joie que notre séminaire nous a donné une formidable leçon d'espoir et de confiance dans l'avenir. Je dois avouer qu'après une trentaine d'années d'expérience du dialogue islamo-chrétien dans le cadre du GRIC (Groupe de Recherches Islamo-chrétien) fondé en 1977 et dans le cadre de la Conférence Mondiale des Religions pour la Paix (WCRP), j'ai été plusieurs fois tenté de trouver que nos débats témoignaient parfois d'un trop grand optimisme ou irénisme. Nous avons entendu des témoignages éloquentes de convivialité. Mais la fraternité universelle et la règle d'or de l'amour réciproque ne surmontent pas magiquement nos contentieux historiques et les obstacles non négociables de nos divergences doctrinales. En même temps, le Séminaire m'a appris qu'il ne faut pas confondre trop vite la majorité silencieuse des croyants à la base avec les institutions religieuses officielles et que l'Esprit de Dieu déborde toujours nos orthodoxies trop rigides.

2) On dit volontiers que c'est toujours l'Église catholique qui a l'initiative du dialogue et certaines voix musulmanes s'élèvent pour le déplorer. Or notre Séminaire nous a plutôt apporté la preuve du contraire. J'ai été personnellement impressionné et même bouleversé par l'initiative des étudiantes et étudiants musulmans de Macédoine, de Turquie et de Tunisie venus à Rome pour faire des études universitaires en théologie catholique et respirer au jour le jour l'atmosphère du centre de la catholicité. Il faudrait aussi évoquer les initiatives de Monsieur Cemal Usak pour l'organisation de symposiums abrahamiques en Turquie. Et comment ne pas saluer



la portée symbolique décisive de l'invitation adressée par les autorités religieuses turques au Père Thomas Michel pour venir enseigner le christianisme aux élites des facultés d'Ankara ?

3) Les femmes jouent un rôle croissant à l'intérieur de l'Église catholique et à l'intérieur de l'islam pour la promotion d'une nouvelle convivialité entre chrétiens et musulmans. C'est vrai au Pakistan dans la lutte commune pour la reconnaissance des droits des femmes. C'est vrai aux États-Unis où c'est grâce aux Focolarini de Chiara Lubich que nous avons connu l'importance de l'*American Society of Muslims*. Et l'imam David Shaheed a témoigné des valeurs communes que chrétiens et musulmans pouvaient partager dans la prière et le dialogue. C'est vrai de l'Algérie et nous avons été les témoins du dialogue exemplaire qui s'est instauré entre la sœur Lucie Pruvost et Madame Amina Kebir dans la lutte commune contre la violence aveugle et cela justement pour ne pas blasphémer le nom de Dieu.

4) Un autre trait que je voudrais souligner, c'est le lien au sein même du dialogue de la vie entre les engagements les plus concrets et l'expérience intérieure de Dieu. Nous avons discerné une convergence remarquable entre le goût commun pour la mystique chez la chrétienne Donna Orsuto et la musulmane Anita Mir. On peut être une journaliste très engagée politiquement et travailler en même temps à une thèse sur une mystique hollandaise du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Et toutes les deux dans une vie très active ressentent la nostalgie de «la musique de l'éternité» à l'école de Catherine de Sienne.

5) Tous les témoignages nous ont confirmé les deux règles d'or du dialogue interreligieux : 1. être totalement ouvert à l'autre dans son altérité et respecter son droit à la différence ; 2. être fidèle à soi-même, c'est-à-dire ne pas mettre sa foi entre parenthèses sous prétexte de mieux dialoguer.

Le dialogue vaut par lui-même, sans calcul. Il n'est pas une stratégie pour «convertir» l'autre. Comme le disait le premier jour Mgr Khaled Akasheh, il n'y a pas d'«agenda caché». Mais le dialogue interreligieux peut être un *dialogue de salut* car les deux interlocuteurs redécouvrent leur propre foi avec des yeux neufs et ils comprennent qu'ils peuvent être les membres du même Royaume de Dieu alors même qu'ils sont solidaires de deux traditions religieuses différentes. La grâce du dialogue interreligieux, c'est une certaine conversion intérieure qui nous conduit à dépasser une mentalité de propriétaire. Je suis tenté de citer ici cette remarque si juste de Pierre Claverie, évêque d'Oran, qui a poursuivi, au prix de sa vie, un dialogue sans concession avec tous les musulmans : «Je suis croyant, je crois qu'il y a un Dieu, mais je n'ai pas la prétention de posséder ce

Dieu-là, ni par Jésus qui me le révèle, ni par les dogmes de ma foi. On ne possède pas Dieu».

### 3. Les espoirs

Plusieurs ont exprimé la nécessité d'exorciser la peur qui peut exister entre nous, cette peur qui conduit soit au fondamentalisme, soit à la paralysie. Ils ont alors souhaité des initiatives communes qui favorisent ce que certains appellent volontiers des «stratégies de l'espoir».

Je pense en effet qu'au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, la convivialité entre chrétiens et musulmans est une chance historique pour l'avenir de la communauté mondiale. Et cela, dans le contexte qui est le nôtre, c'est-à-dire face aux dangers de la mondialisation et, depuis le 11 septembre 2001, face à la tentation de réactiver la peur ancestrale entre l'Occident chrétien et le monde musulman. Il n'y a pas de fatalité historique et avec la grâce de Dieu, je crois que les libertés humaines peuvent réaliser ce que j'aimerais appeler «les possibles de l'histoire».

En terminant, je voudrais suggérer quatre directions pour des actions communes entre chrétiens et musulmans.

#### 1) La recherche d'un Dieu toujours plus grand

Le christianisme et l'islam sont les deux premières religions du monde (près de 3 milliards de croyants). Face au nihilisme occidental et face à l'attrait grandissant des sagesse de l'Orient qui répugnent à invoquer un Dieu personnel, c'est la responsabilité commune des chrétiens et musulmans de continuer à bénir le nom personnel d'un Dieu créateur. Les chrétiens doivent être prêts à entendre la leçon de l'islam quant au rappel de la grandeur de Dieu ; *Allahhu Akbar, Dieu est grand, Dieu seul est grand*. Mais surtout face à l'excès du mal dans le monde, les docteurs de l'islam doivent réfléchir au Dieu de Jésus comme figure de l'Amour absolu.

#### 2) Le respect de l'humain authentique

Dans l'islam comme dans le christianisme, on ne peut dissocier le sens de la grandeur du Dieu créateur et le sens de la grandeur de l'homme. C'est le lieu d'une véritable convivialité entre les membres des deux religions. Il faut dépasser une opposition historique superficielle entre l'Occident et le monde arabo-musulman. À côté de l'héritage judéo-chrétien et de l'héritage de la Grèce, la tradition prophétique de l'islam est une composante essentielle de l'Europe. À la suite de l'historien tunisien Mohammed Talbi et de l'islamologue français Roger Arnaldez, il est permis de parler d'un *humanisme islamo-judéo-chrétien* qui est d'un grand prix pour l'ensemble de la

communauté mondiale. Il est au point de rencontre entre les traditions bibliques et la raison critique héritée de la grâce.

C'est la vocation historique du christianisme et de l'islam d'être des ferments de contre-culture contre les effets déshumanisants d'une culture médiatique mondiale que certains n'hésitent pas à décrire comme un *macdonaldisme culturel*. Défendre une certaine qualité de l'humain, c'est défendre un être humain — masculin et féminin — qui ne se définit pas seulement en termes de besoin et de rentabilité, mais en termes de désir et de dépassement de son désir. Il se définit surtout par son ouverture à une Altérité transcendante.

### 3) *Le combat pour la justice*

Le christianisme et l'islam témoignent d'une espérance au-delà de notre histoire et ils ne s'épuisent donc pas dans le service du monde. Mais sur la base de la révélation biblique et du Coran, ces deux religions découvrent de plus en plus leur dimension éthique et messianique pour humaniser la mondialisation et donner un visage plus humain à l'histoire. C'est la vocation du dialogue islamo-chrétien de lancer un *avertissement prophétique* face aux injustices structurelles du monde contemporain qui obéit de plus en plus à la seule loi du profit et creuse toujours davantage le fossé entre les plus pauvres et les plus riches.

Il n'est pas nécessaire de se réclamer d'une religion pour défendre les droits de l'homme. Leur fondement immédiat, c'est la dignité de la personne humaine comme nous l'a rappelé hier le docteur Suermann. Mais la violation permanente des droits humains nous démontre que nous avons besoin d'un fondement plus radical. Ce fondement, nous le trouvons dans la doctrine biblique de l'homme-image de Dieu et la doctrine coranique de l'homme vicair et calife de Dieu sur la terre. On ne peut pas violer les droits de l'homme sans porter atteinte aux droits de Dieu. C'est un véritable blasphème.

### 4) *La sauvegarde de la création*

La chance du dialogue islamo-chrétien au seuil du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, c'est de prendre en charge le destin même de la planète Terre. Face à la menace d'une catastrophe d'ordre planétaire, nous découvrons que nous ne pouvons pas défendre les droits de l'homme si nous ne respectons pas en même temps les *droits de la terre*. On a pu déjà parler d'une *justice écologique*.

En vertu du pouvoir illimité des technologies modernes, nous nous demandons sérieusement comment faire en sorte pour que la terre soit toujours habitable pour les générations qui nous suivent. La question-clé pour l'avenir, c'est celle de

«l'autolimitation du pouvoir humain». Qu'il suffise de rappeler ici le nouvel impératif catégorique de la conscience morale mis en avant par le philosophe Hans Jonas : «Agis de telle sorte que les effets de ton action soient compatibles avec la permanence d'une vie authentiquement humaine sur la terre».

Dans un monde fasciné par les nouvelles prouesses techniques, je pense que nous deux traditions religieuses peuvent être des écoles de *sagesse* et de *démaîtris*. De même que Dieu s'est reposé le septième jour, l'homme du troisième millénaire doit redécouvrir le secret d'une *sagesse sabbatique*, c'est-à-dire le prix de la non-action, du jeu, du silence, de la louange et de l'émerveillement devant la création.

Même si nous ne sommes qu'au cinquième jour de notre Séminaire, nous avons bien travaillé et je crois que toutes et tous nous avons droit à un repos sabbatique. C'est pourquoi, je ne veux pas prolonger davantage ces quelques réflexions qui avaient seulement pour but de nourrir notre confiance dans l'avenir de la convivialité entre chrétiens et musulmans.

Réf. : Texte de l'auteur pour le Séminaire de SEDOS (mai 2003).

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## *Resource Persons SEDOS Seminar 2003*

### **Mgr. KHALED AKASHEH**

Mgr. Khaled Akasheh, Palestinian, is since 1978 a priest of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Pope John Paul II recently appointed him as head of the office for the relations with Islam at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Before coming to Rome in 1994, he worked in a parish and was teacher at the seminary. In 1992, he received a Doctorate in Biblical Theology. Through his presence of many years in a country with a Muslim-majority, he is very well acquainted with the Arabic-Islamic culture.

### **LEJLA DEMIRI**

Lejla Demiri is from Macedonia (former Yugoslav Republic). She lives in Rome at the Lay Center at Foyer Unitas. She is a research student of a one-year program at the Institute for the Study of Religions and Cultures of the Gregorian University and auditing student at the Faculty of Theology Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas. Her research area is Muslim Theology of Christianity in classical times. She has chosen the concept of 'incarnation' as a subject to be focused on. Her current research is on Muslim theologians' views about the divinity of Jesus.

### **BETÜL AVCI**

Betül Avcı is from Turkey. She lives in Rome at the Lay Center at Foyer Unitas. In November 2002 she obtained a STL in Interreligious Studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University. The topic of her dissertation: "Idea of Revelation in Christianity: Revelation as Progressive". Actually she is Doctoral candidate in Interreligious Studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University. Her future project is to further explore and answer the question of evolution in revelation.

### **ADNANE MOKRANI**

Adnane Mokrani is from Tunisia. He lives in Rome at the Giovanni XXIII center. At the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, (PISAI), he works at a

Doctorate on "Christians' Points of View on Muslim-Christian Relations, the Case of Lebanon 1990-2000". His writings and contributions to various conferences, seminars and meetings show that he is very active in the field of interreligious dialogue.

### **Fr. CLAUDE GEFFRÉ, OP**

Fr. Claude Geffré, OP, théologien dominicain et ancien Recteur des Facultés dominicaines du Saulchoir (1965-1968), a été professeur titulaire à la faculté de théologie de Paris où il a enseigné la théologie fondamentale, l'herméneutique théologique et la théologie des religions. Professeur honoraire de l'Institut catholique de Paris depuis 1996, il est devenu Directeur de l'École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem (1996-1999). Maintenant, le père Geffré est Directeur de la collection «Cogitatio fidei» aux Éditions du Cerf à Paris.

### **Mrs. ANITA MIR**

Mrs. Anita Mir began her career as a journalist in Pakistan, working on human rights investigation stories. She focused on issues brought about by the 1986 blasphemy law. Her last job in Pakistan was as program coordinator of Church World Service, where she was involved in development, emergency and inter-faith work. Presently she works at her PhD, a comparative study of two poets, the female Christian Dutch mystic, Hadwyck, and the male Punjabi Sufi poet, Bulleh Shah. She also teaches at the University of Exeter (UK).

### **Prof. DONNA ORSUTO**

Prof. Donna Orsuto is from Ohio (USA). She completed her STD at the Gregorian University in 1990 where she now teaches in the Institute of Spirituality. She is director of the Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and the Vincent Pallotti Institute in Rome. She has written various articles on lay spirituality, lay involvement in interreligious dialogue, and women mystics. She serves as consulter for the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

**Imam and Judge  
DAVID ABDUL SHAHEED**

Imam and Judge David Shaheed has been involved with interreligious dialogue for nearly twenty-five years. For the past six years, David Shaheed, Imam in Indianapolis, has been actively involved in the "dialogue of life" between members of the Focolare Movement and the American Society of Muslims. He is currently the Facilitator for the Islamic Affairs Council of the American Society of Muslims. David Shaheed was appointed judge in the Marion County Superior Court of Indianapolis, Indiana, in September 1999 and was elected to a six-year term in November 2002.

**Mrs. JO - ELLEN KARSTENS**

Mrs. Jo-Ellen Karstens has a Master's degree in Guidance and Counseling from Loyola University, and lives at the Focolare Center of Chicago, IL (USA). She has been a *focolarina* since 1967. Since 1996 the Focolare Movement has developed a very productive relationship with members of the American Society of Muslims. She has helped to organize several "Encounters in the Spirit of Universal Brotherhood" in the United States, allowing hundreds of Muslims and Catholics to experience their commonalities in a spirit of mutual love and respect.

**Mr. PAUL LEMARIE**

As member of the Focolare Movement, Mr. Paul Lemarié, born in France, has developed his activity of study of the Arabic language and culture as well as his profession in the social field and as teacher (14 years in Algeria; 6 years in Israel). Study and assimilation of the Middle East culture allowed him to intensely promoting dialogue with Muslims and Hebrews. He organized conferences of study and socialization with Arabic Muslims in Algeria, with Hebrews in Jerusalem and, in Italy, with Muslims coming from various countries. In 2002, he was nominated for the International Center for Interreligious Dialogue of the Focolare Movement, especially for the dialogue with the Muslims of the Movement.

**Mr. CEMAL USAK**

Mr. Cemal Usak graduated from the Istanbul Advance Institute of Islam in 1977. He entered pro-

fessionally in the world of media and press and worked in different positions: from art correspondent to editor, from article writer to manager. He worked as an adviser for the General Directorate in TRT-TV. He is currently active as Associate President of Jourish speaking people of Turkey and Europe.

**Fr. THOMAS MICHEL, SJ**

Fr. Thomas Michel, SJ (originally from the USA), is a priest of the Society of Jesus. He began his priestly ministry in Indonesia, teaching in various Muslim universities and practicing dialogue with Islam. Now Fr. Michel is head of the Jesuits' International Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue, the Ecumenical Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC), and Consulter for the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

**Sr. LUCIE PRUVOST MSOLA**

Sr. Lucie Pruvost, MSOLA was born in Algeria where she is living and working at present. She is a lawyer and recently published a book on "The situation of the woman according to the code of the Algerian Family." Sr. Lucie Pruvost is responsible for the ongoing formation of Christians studying Islamology, either in Algeria or at the Pontifical Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies (PISAI) at Rome, where she has been teaching since 1982.

**Maître YAMINA KEBIR**

Maître Yamina Kebir is an Algerian Muslim woman. She studied in France (together with Sr. Lucie Pruvost). Actually she lives in Algiers where she runs a Law Office. Her particular attention is focused on the rights of the Algerian family. Maître Yamina Kebir is strongly engaged in the dialogue between men and woman in her country Algeria, belonging to the two largest world religions.

**Dr. HARALD SUERMANN**

As professor, Dr. Harald Suermann teaches at the philosophical faculty of the Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms University Wisdom of the Eastern Christianity. As co-worker at the foreign department of *Mission Aachen*, Dr. Suermann has many contacts with the Church of the Third World.





## *Thank you!!!*

*In the name of all the SEDOS Seminar participants and of the Executive Committee Members, we would like to thank all the resource persons for their presence and for the work they did during the hole week.*

*We would like to also thank the Seminar Planning Committee for all they did in preparation, during the year and Sr. Filo Hirota, MMB, that helped us begin this project.*

*A very special thanks, goes to Fr. Pierre-Paul Walraet, OSC, SEDOS Executive Committee Member, that in the last months has magnificently carried out the role of Executive Director allowing also this Seminar to be successful.*

*SEDOS Secretariat*