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Charity, *Karunà/Jihi*
Together on the path of dialogue

First of all a sincere ‘thank you’ to SEDOS, and to the organizers of this Seminar, in particular to Fr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM, and to all those present for having given me the opportunity to be here today to share some reflections on a theme that, as missionaries, concerns us ever more closely. It is true — as Qoheleth wrote over two thousand years ago that — “there is nothing new under the sun” (1:9). The world has always been “plural” or, better still, “multiform”, due to the variety of its cultures, religious Traditions, political organization, as historical, cultural, archeological, anthropological testimony, etc. shows. Nevertheless we cannot deny today, that — in the face of an ever more aggressive globalisation — the “plural” or better “multiform” dimension of our world requires urgent new solutions.

The “path of dialogue” taken by the Catholic Church, especially following the Second Vatican Council onwards, seeks to be a response to the “dissonant, changeable, complex concert of the contemporary world”,¹ to quote that great Pope of dialogue, St. Paul VI. As the “way of making spiritual contact” (*Ecclesiam Suam*, n. 81), true “dialogue” — is not a generic exchange but “The Dialogue of Salvation” that has its foundation in the “mind (*mens*) of God himself” (*ibid.*, n. 70) — demanding “charity”, “meekness”, “the prudence of a teacher” (*ibid.*, n. 81:2, 81:4); “choose appropriate means” (n. 85), “completely faithful to Christ’s teaching” (*ibid.*, n. 88). Paul VI continued, “In this way alone it unites them in mutual adherence to the Good, and thus excludes all self-seeking (81:3). “In a dialogue conducted with this kind of foresight, truth is wedded to charity and understanding love” (*ibid.*, n. 82).

The “Union of Truth and Charity” that directs our reflection today, which — after the Treatment of “Justice and Judaism” and “Freedom and Islam”, has its own specific theme: “Charity in relation to Buddhism”. This theme is not easy to deal with because it demands great caution as the French Tibetologist, Jacques Bacot, (1877 — 1965), wrote: “nothing is more misleading than the transposition of terminology from one religion to another”.²

More than a question of terms

In Buddhism there is no equivalent term for “charity” understood in the Christian sense, just as in the Christian Lexicon there is no equivalent for Buddhist terms such as: “*karuna, maitri, jihi*”, generally translated in European languages as “compassion”, “benevolence”, “mercy”, “charity”. The different meaning of these terms, in fact, refers not only to the irreducible particularity of each language but especially to a veritable nucleus/ *veritativo* that the two Traditions safeguard, and that these terms intend to reveal. Therefore sacred territory is that of “truth”, to approach which one must “take off one’s shoes” (*cf. ES*, nn. 3, 5) and concentrate in a sincere, receptive attitude of reciprocal listening. CHECK

When Christianity first came face to face with the Greek Roman world it had to measure up to — and not without difficulty — the linguistic challenge. Analogously, when Buddhism, at the beginning of the 1st cent. A.D., reached China, one of the great challenges that the Chinese Masters

¹ PAUL VI, *Cf., General Audience*, Castel Gandolfo, 5 August 1964, in w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/audiences/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_aud_19640805.html. *Cf. also Insegnamenti*, II, p. 473.

² *Milarépa. Ses méfaits. Sés épreuves. Son illumination* (translated from the Tebetan by J. BACOT), Fayard, Paris, 1971, p. 19.

had to confront was precisely the translation of the terms and concepts that had no equivalent in the Chinese language and represented the misunderstanding that risked altering the authenticity of Buddhism itself. In the fourth century, the monk and Master Tao-an (312-385), who was particularly conscious of such difficulties and of the risks arising from them, drew up the so-called theory of the “five losses and the three difficulties” that condition every process of translation and cultural mediation, proposing some norms to avoid such an inconvenience. Among these norms, Tao-an proposed that some of the terms should not be translated but simply transliterated, otherwise some key terms would inevitably be impoverished or betrayed by any translation whatsoever. The wisdom of this insight is necessary, especially concerning terms that, in the respective Traditions, have specific meanings and connotations, as for example is the case of “charity” and “*karuna/maitri/jihi*”.

In order to explain the specific value of these terms, their evocative power within Buddhism and Christianity, their background and their fertility in order engage in the genuine “dialogue of salvation”, allow me to start from my experience in Japan.

“I wish to believe what that man believes”

The year was 1986. I had been in Japan a little over a year and I was still studying Japanese at Kobe, a lovely, lively city in the Kansai Region. In order to practise the language and become familiar with the Japanese world, I attended some meetings that were held in a nearby parish. One day, during a very informal exchange, an elderly Christian, from Hiroshima, told me that he had become a Christian because he had “seen” Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ. “When I saw him” — he recounted — “I said to myself: ‘I do not know what that man believes, but I wish to believe what he believes’”.

His testimony struck me particularly and it became a constant reference point for me in my missionary service: “I do not know what that man believes, but I wish to believe what he believes”! An admirably strong witness, I said to myself!

Fr. Arrupe had been a missionary in Japan for many a long year prior to being appointed General Superior of the Society of Jesus. He was in Hiroshima at the time of the atomic bomb and, with his medical knowledge he expended himself tirelessly in helping the stricken population. However, this was not what impressed that youth in Hiroshima.

The Japanese are, in fact, very solidary among themselves and also in that tragic and dramatic crisis did not fail to perform heroic actions of solidarity and reciprocal help. When I asked that venerable man what had impressed him to the point of wanting to believe what that man, Fr. Arrupe, believed he replied: “I did not know Fr. Arrupe. I only saw him act, lovingly expending himself for others with a different loving attention, a love I cannot explain. He acted as though moved by a living Presence, benevolent, luminous, that transpired from his every gesture. It was that that fascinated me and impelled me to become Christian. I wanted to know the secret of that “Presence”.

I was silent, thoughtful, while Jesus’ words re-echoed within me: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Gv 13:35), and those of St Paul: “For the love of Christ controls us” (II Cor 5:14).

“I shall not let rain, wind, snow nor the heat of summer overcome me” (Miyazawa Kenji)

Once I had finished my course of Japanese, in August 1987, I went to the Spirituality and Inter-religious Dialogue Centre at Shinmeizan which was then starting. It had been founded by the Saverian Fr. Franco Sottocornola with the assistance of Venerable Tairyu Furukawa, Head of the Buddhist Temple of Seimeizan Schweitzer. The Shinmeizan Centre is in the neighbouring hills of Nagomi, a little town in the Province of Kumamoto, in west Japan.

As a Centre of Spirituality and Inter-religious Dialogue, in these thirty years, Shinmeizan has been able to establish many relations of friendship and co-operation with the various components of the Japanese religious world and, in particular with the real Buddhist world thanks to the mediation of the late Ven. Furukawa, who died in 2000.

In the very early years of my stay at Shinmeizan, during a regular study day that the Ven. Furukawa held for his disciples and which our small community of Shinmeizan attended, I was particularly impressed by an anecdote (probably a *koan* from Zen) he told us: “a Buddhist Master was walking with a group of disciples when the group came across an elderly man who with great difficulty was pushing a heavy cart along the up-hill road. One of his disciples, instinctively, left the group to help the elderly man who was struggling along the road. However, once they had reached their destination, the Master called the disciple and scolded him severely. His task, at that moment, was not to attend to the old man on the road with the pretext of helping him, but to follow the Master and, indifferent to everything reach illumination as soon as possible, namely a 'clear vision of things'. Only then would he have been in a state to truly help others”.

I shall not hide the fact that at that moment, I was perplexed and thoughtful. Why — I asked myself — had the only disciple who had shown attention to a person in difficulty and his readiness to help him been reproved? My perplexity grew as I thought of the life choice Ven. Furukawa had made. He was always ready to help whoever was in need, even to his own cost. Therefore, I asked myself, what was the meaning of that precept, certainly narrated for a purpose?

Ven. Furukawa, born in 1920 in the Province of Saga, in the north-west of the island of Kyushu, had lived through the drama of the Second World War that over-turned Japan too. He had been recruited into the army, at twenty he had been sent to Manchuria from where he was repatriated after he had been wounded. Once he regained health his father, a Bonzo of the Shingon School, sent him to Monte Koya, the main centre of Shingon Buddhism, where he continued his formation and the curriculum to become a monk.

On his return to Kyushu, he began his service as a bonzo in a small country temple in the Province of Saga where he sought to realise the ideal that Miyazawa Kenji's (1896-1933) poem had aroused in him. The “poet-peasant” was a fervent follower of Nichiren Buddhism, who died from exhaustion in solidarity with his people:

*Be not defeated by the rain,
Nor let the wind prove your better
Succumb not to the snow of winter
Nor be overcome by the heat of summer...
If, to the East, a child lies sick:
Go forth and nurse him to health.
If, to the West, a mother stands exhausted:
Go forth and relieve her of her burden of rice.
If, to the South, a man lies dying:
Go forth with words of courage to dispel his fear.
If, to the North, an argument or fight ensues:
Go forth and beg them to stop such a waste of effort and of spirit...*

Venerable Furukawa liked to recite this poem by heart, like a mantra, and it was of great inspiration to him. Having settled in Tamana, in the Province of Kumamoto, in 1952, he became chaplain to the prison in Fukuoka, in which there was a section reserved to those condemned to death. Having approached the prisoners and heard their accounts, Furukawa soon felt convinced of the innocence of two of them. They were Takeo Nishi and Kenjiro Ishii, who were sentenced for

man slaughter and robbery following an incident that had happened in Fukuoka, on 20th May 1947, during which a Chinese merchant was also killed.

It was in the aftermath of the World War. Japan, as a defeated and occupied country, in order to avoid further tension with China, had sought to archive the case as quickly as possible. Thus, Takeo Nishi and Kenjiro Ishii were sentenced without the proper investigation.

Morally convinced that he was before two innocent men, unjustly condemned to death, left Furukawa no peace, after having requested the co-operation of Lawyers and the Jesuits in this instance. In 1961 he started a national campaign to obtain the revision of their case and the liberation of Nishi and Ishii. Furthermore he started a movement against the Death Penalty, employing every means at his disposal and thereby reducing himself to penury despite the fact that he still had young children. Following this campaign, Tadashi Mukai, President of the Lutheran Association Albert Schweitzer of Kobe, who possessed a precious relic of Dr Schweitzer, consigned it to Ven. Furukawa as a sign of supportive involvement in the difficult campaign underway.

Profoundly touched by this gesture, Furukawa accepted the relic, still jealously preserved in the Temple of Seimeizan, that then, — in honour of the Christian Missionary — took the name of Seimeizan Schweitzer Temple.

However, in June 1974, the meek and taciturn Takeo Nishi, who passed his time transcribing sutras and painting images of the Buddha, was put to death. It was a great trial for Furukawa who, then intensified his efforts to obtain the release of Kenjiro Ishii, whose death sentence was at first commuted into life imprisonment, and later, thanks to the amnesty conceded on the occasion of the death of Emperor Showa (7 January 1989) he was released. On quitting the prison he was received at the Temple of Seimeizan Schweitzer where he lived for some years. I had the opportunity to meet Kenjiro Ishii personally and to hear his testimony several times.

“I cannot but weep”

The solidary and “compassionate” commitment of Ven. Furukawa in favour of the least did not end with the difficult and fraught campaign in favour of the revision of the case against Takeo Nishi and Kenjiro Ishii. In 1985, a witness of the horrors of the Second World War went to him and begged him to help have a memorial built to the hundreds of Chinese victims in the neighbourhood of Tamana. To commemorate those who died from forced labour in the local coal mines. Profoundly struck by this request, Furukawa not only cooperated with the nascent Association, but actually became its president. The following year on Mount Shotai, overlooking the site of the ex-concentration camp, a funerary stele was erected in memory of the Chinese victims.

On that occasion, as President of the Association, Furukawa contacted the Chinese Red Cross thanks to whose mediation an annual pilgrimage of reconciliation and peace was started in China, especially to particularly evocative places like Ponte Marco Polo Bridge, in Peking — where the “incident/crime” took place that led to the Sino-Japanese conflict — and to Nanchino, sadly noted for the massacre perpetrated by Japanese troops in 1937. The purpose of the pilgrimages Ven. Furukawa organized was to pray for the victims of both countries and to promote relations of reconciliation and peace between the Japanese and Chinese peoples. From 1989, some members of the Shinmeizan Community: Fr. Sottocornola, myself, with some Japanese Christians, joined a group of Japanese Buddhists, under the leadership of Master Furukawa, on an annual pilgrimage of peace to Peking and Nanchino. However, a few years later a need was felt to express reconciliation, friendship and peace between the two countries with a concrete and visible gesture. This was how the idea came about to build together, Christians and Buddhists, a Rehabilitation Centre for disabled children at Fangshan, near Peking.

Despite the many difficulties, — but especially thanks to the active involvement of Fr. Sottocornola, who did his utmost to raise funds and arrange for cooperation in the management, and Ven. Furukawa, — the Rehabilitation Centre was finally inaugurated in Fangshan, in October 1997, as a concrete sign of Buddhist-Christian cooperation.

The true “great compassion” (*daihi*)

This demanding initiative was an important and fruitful step on our journey of dialogue, both on the practical level of cooperation and, above all, on the spiritual level of sharing the reasons that inspired, moved and supported it.

Ven. Furukawa, a convinced Buddhist, believed in dialogue especially with the Catholic Church. In his conferences he often repeated that *Nostra Aetate* was a mile stone, not only for the Church but for all the Religions and he hoped that an analogous Document would soon be published within Buddhism. He nourished profound admiration for Mother Teresa of Calcutta, whom he had had the joy of meeting twice, and whom he considered a *bodhisattva* of modern times. He did not hesitate to say that Mother Teresa’s unconditional choice to serve the least was for him an example and a continual source of inspiration.

Analogously, in view of Master Furukawa’s indefatigable commitment I, in turn, felt challenged by his choices and his example. This aroused in me the wish to know more in-depth the inspiring font of his action.

One day a propitious occasion arose and, recalling an anecdote he had narrated more than once of the young disciple the Master had reproved for having helped an elderly man in difficulty, I dared to ask him the meaning of that teaching.

Then Ven. Furukawa patiently explained to me that in Buddhism the supreme virtue is *jīhi*, *meaning* compassion and benevolence to all living beings, indiscriminately, and that the Japanese term *jīhi*, thanks to the evocative power of the ideograms, condenses in a unique character the Sanskrit terms *karuna* and *maitri* (Pali, *metta*): This term is generally translated in Western languages as: “compassion”, “pity”, “empathy”; “love”, “benevolence”, “charity”.

The ideogram *ji* — Ven. Furukawa continued, who among other things was an excellent master of Japanese calligraphy — expresses affection, tenderness, benevolence; instead the ideogram, *hi*, expresses sharing in the pain and suffering of others. These two ideograms combined express the benevolent, compassionate heart of the Buddha, the true ideal every Buddhist aspires to reach.

However to reach this goal is a long journey. Only those who have reached illumination, or the “clear vision of reality”, can experience the true “great compassion”. Only those — guided by the Buddha — who understand that everything is “empty”, impermanent, that all beings are nothing but “a combination of mental and physical forms of energy in constant mutation”,³ therefore deprived of their own substance and perennially exposed to the transitory state of becoming, can feel arising in themselves the true “great compassion”.

Master Furukawa explained to me that to reach this goal is a long, slow journey. Not by chance, Buddhism speaks of a “small compassion”, a “medium compassion” and a “great compassion”.

The “small compassion” (*sho hi*) is that sentiment/impulse that springs up instinctively in the human heart on perceiving the suffering of others. Whoever reacts under this impulse does not yet realize the true nature of things, namely their impermanence and acts, so to speak, as yet “in a worldly manner”. The disciple who had left the Master and the others to help the old man in difficulty, was moved by this “small compassion”.

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

Instead, “medium compassion” (*chuihi*) enlivens the action of the *Arhat*, the monk of early Buddhism, namely the one who having perceived the impermanence of all things, undertakes the journey to illumination during which he learns to look at every reality with detachment, with interior freedom, precisely with “compassion”.

Finally, the “great compassion” (*daihi*) is that of the Buddha and of the *bodhisattvas* who — having contemplated the vacuity of everything and having understood that everything is relative and inter-dependent, that nothing has in itself the reason of its own existence and that what is born inevitably dies — experience for all living beings, indiscriminately, a feeling of compassion and of benevolence, and work so that all may reach illumination, i.e. a “clear vision” of reality.

This explanation was a small “illumination” that helped me to understand better that in Buddhism “vacuity” and “compassion” are indissolubly linked and that one cannot correctly comprehend the one without the other. It is not by chance that Buddhist scholars define “the heart of Buddhism” as the intuition of *pratitya samutpada*, or the “supreme truth” (*paramartha*) of the inter-dependent becoming of all things, that struck Sakyamuni on the night of illumination.

Actually, at that moment, the words of the old Christian from Hiroshima referring to Fr. Arrupe came to mind: “He acted as though moved by a living Presence, benevolent, luminous, that transpired in all his gestures. It was that that fascinated me and impelled me to become Christian. I wanted to know the secret of that “Presence”.

“Vacuity” and “Presence”, “compassion” and “charity”: terms, concepts that were different but not divergent, convergent but not equal, which I felt the need to rearrange in a new synthesis. It was at that moment that Ven. Furukawa asked me to speak to him about Christian charity in more detail.

“For God is Love” (I Jn 4:8)

It is not easy to summarize in this context the colloquium of that time. Urged by the Master, I tried to explain how love/charity is at the heart of the Christian message because God himself is “love/charity”. As, in fact, John the Evangelist wrote in his First Letter: “God is love” (*Deus caritas est*). And furthermore: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also, ought to love one another” (I Jn 4:10, 11).

This and nothing else is the foundation, the root of Christian love/charity to the point that as St John wrote — “If any one says, ‘I love God’, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (I Jn 4:19-20).

I explained to him how in order to express the irreducible “novelty” of Christian love, that, already the Greek New Testament had had to make a careful choice of terms. Not *eros*, nor *philia* but *agape* which although little used was chosen by the Evangelists. A choice that in the Latin of the Vulgate, in its turn, was rendered not with *amor* but with *caritas*, terms linked to the Greek *karis* (thanks, gift), as more suitable than “*amor*” to express a love freely received and freely given.

Unfortunately, the Japanese term *ai*, used to translate the Christian “novelty” of love/*agape/caritas* of which Jesus spoke in the New Testament, is very ambiguous and creates not a little perplexity in the ordinary Japanese and, in particular, in the Buddhist for whom “*ai*” retains an irreducible connotation of *eros*, an egoistic passion of which one should free oneself. Thus, it is understandable how the affirmation: “God is love” from which derives “but that he/God loved us ... we also ought to love one another”, has a particularly problematical connotation in Buddhism that aside from God maintains strict silence on the great metaphysical questions.

Ven. Furukawa, recognising the inadequacy of the terms and of the language, indirectly confirmed what the above-mentioned Jacques Bacot wrote, namely that “nothing is more deceptive than transposing the terms from one religion to another”, and therefore, the need for an appropriate

cultural mediation as the basis for authentic and fruitful dialogue. It is a slow process that requires "clarity", "gentleness", "express our teaching with great fairness", and "respond to it gradually" as St Paul VI wrote in his Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, (cf. n. 83), and that makes of us humble pilgrims on the way to Truth. A journey that is as yet at the initial stage but that will certainly produce its fruit. Recently, I had a little confirmation too.

For many years I have belonged to a group of Christian/Buddhist dialogue that started in Fukuoka and that meets periodically. In fact, we are a group of "friends" who seek to know each other better, over and above any prior knowledge. The Bonze of Tendai Buddhism, Zen, Jōdo Shinshu, Catholics and Protestants all take part in the group. Every year we chose a common theme that is then addressed from different perspectives. Last year the theme chosen was human dignity and I was asked to present the Christian perspective.

Starting from the biblical conception of man as "*imago Dei*" in the likeness of God, I spoke of the inalienability of the dignity of every human person from the Christian point of view. In the debate that followed, a young Bonzo of the Jōdo Shinshu School said: "I need to study what you have said more in-depth because, as a Buddhist, I realize that I do not have any doctrinal foundation to speak on human rights".

His observation struck me profoundly and made me understand that true dialogue must be able to raise questions too.

In fact, Ven. Inoue's observation touched a neuralgic point of Buddhist/Christian dialogue, namely the concept of the human being: "demands of man every effort of intellect, a sound will, 'an upright heart'", or "person", a combination of irrepressible unity, an alert free subject in continual mutation and transformation "created in God's image" and even as '*capax Dei*'?',⁴ (Cf. II, 31).

Only by keeping these fundamental differences in mind can we understand the ultimate reference to the Buddhist *karuna/jihi* and to Christian "charity". On the one hand, the vision of Void, of impermanence and of the contingency of all things, and on the other, of the Living and vivifying Presence of God/Person, who knows each one by name, who calls every creature into being and holds it in love.

Paradoxically, these apparently irreconcilable perspectives can instead offer unheard of possibilities of dialogue to the extent that they are inexhaustible expressions of human research concerning those "unsolved riddles of human existence" that are at the base of every authentic religious experience. As in fact, the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, (28 October 1965) authoritatively states:

"Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behaviour, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery beyond human explanation which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?" (n. 1).

Conclusive Notes

In the context of this shared research is situated The beauty and challenge of the dialogue between believers of the different Tradizioni religious traditions seeking the Truth:

In fact, "The one who believes is the one who seeks the truth and draws life from it", states the most recent Document issued by the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue: *Dialogue in the Truth and in Charity* (2014), specifying that "in promoting the dialogue in truth, the followers

⁴ CATECHISMO DELLA CHIESA CATTOLICA, CAP. I.

of the different religions are invited to explain clearly the content of their beliefs” with “respect, attention, kindness, trust, humility, patience, forgiveness, reciprocal acceptance of the other as a member of the same human family and be ready to share in the other’s joy and difficulty”.

To respond adequately to this articulated and complex challenge an appropriate formation and specific competence are necessary. As, in fact, St. John Paul II wrote in his Missionary Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*: “Every member of the faithful and all Christian Communities are called to practise dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way”.⁵

Not by chance, immediately following the above affirmation, *Dialogue in the Truth and in Charity* proposed anew the four forms of dialogue presented both in *Dialogue and Mission*, promulgated by the then Secretariat for Non-Christians, in 1984, and, more recently in *Dialogue and Proclamation*, issued by the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue in 1991. They are forms, which have now become established, but need an appropriate preparation, specific competence and reciprocal inter-action to be put into practise.

It is helpful to give these four forms of inter-religious dialogue briefly in this context too:

- The Dialogue of Life, here people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing in the other’s joy and hardship, problems and worries.
- The Dialogue of Action, in which Christians and others cooperate for the integral development and liberation of peoples.
- The Dialogue of Theological Exchange, here specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their specific religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values....
- The Dialogue of Religious Experience ... where people rooted in their own religious Traditions, share their spiritual riches — prayer — contemplation, faith, ways of searching for God or the Absolute

The response to the “call” to ecclesial dialogue, in the diverse forms cannot be left to chance, or to initiatives of individuals. It must be assumed and coordinated by the community in all its phases in a responsible and steady way.

For example, cooperation and sharing in a social commitment for human advancement, the very exercise of charity/*karunà/jihi*, which may bind Christians and Buddhists in many ways at the level of the dialogue of life, and of action, does not exhaust the area of inter-religious dialogue, but rather leads it to broach an ever wider horizon. In its service to the human being, charity/*karunà* cannot confine itself to material help alone, to psychological sympathy, but must be able to satisfy the deepest yearning of the human being: the thirst and hunger for the Truth. Of little or no purpose would be “compassion” or “love” for human beings that left their supreme yearning dissatisfied and their extreme need to inquire into the “ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence” (NA, n. 1).

Furthermore it should be added that the harmony of behaviour and conduct that we have perceived in *karunà* and charity, refer in fact to a real conception of the human being, and to the Ultimate profoundly diverse Reality. Indeed these “divergences”, rightly, solicit the dialogue of Religious Experience and that of Theological Exchange because the dialogue of charity cannot forgo the dialogue of truth. Rather it is called to open the way and smooth the journey. In fact, as Benedetto XVI wrote in his Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*: “To defend the truth, to articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it in life are therefore exacting and indispensable forms of charity”.⁶

However, analogously, the dialogue of truth too would have no value were it to fail to promote the dialogue of charity.

⁵ GIOVANNI PAOLO II, Lettera Enciclica *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 dicembre 1990, n. 57.

⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate*, 29 June 2009, n. 1.

Precisely the radical differences on the anthropological and metaphysical plane open the Christian/Buddhist Dialogue to an unheard of horizon whose exploration requires, today more than ever, qualified and knowledgeable exponents on both sides.

Interreligious dialogue — simply cannot be left to improvisation and to the good will of individuals — in fact, it demands an appropriate formation of its members especially within religious and missionary life. The 63th six-monthly encounter of the Union of Superiors General, held in Rome from the 26 — 29 November 2003, had as its theme: *Il dialogo interreligioso, compito prioritario della vita consacrata /Inter-religious Dialogue, the Priority Task of Consecrated Life*. On that occasion — starting with the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* by St John Paul II — not only the importance of dialogue was stressed as an integral part of the evangelizing mission of the Church, and consequently of the duty of the Institutes of Consecrated Life to commit themselves in this field according to their specific charism, but also the urgency of an appropriate preparation to be initiated “in initial formation and in continuing formation. They require study and research, since in this very delicate area a profound knowledge of Christianity and of other religions is needed, accompanied by solid faith and by spiritual and personal maturity”.⁷ /⁷

However, after an interval of sixteen years, in order not to remain prisoner to the slogans and thought patterns of that time, I think it is necessary to evaluate the steps taken in this direction up to now and to ask ourselves: to what extent has inter-religious dialogue really been adopted/assumed as the priority task of the evangelizing mission of the Church and to what extent have religious and mission-sending institutes invested in personnel, energy and means in order to promote it? The current Convention with its enthusing themes may serve as a providential opportunity to reconsider and follow up its felicitous intuitions and relevant proposals. This is another reason to express renewed gratitude to the organizers of, and participants at, today’s Convention. Wishing you the most positive results!

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 25 March 1996, n. 102.