

# CENTRO PRO UNIONE

N. 76 - Fall 2009  
ISSN: 1122-0384



**semi-annual Bulletin**

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# Director's Desk

With this issue of the Bulletin we are happy to present the annual bibliography of interchurch and interconfessional dialogues. For those who have access to the web you do not have to wait for the supplement each year since the bibliography is up dated daily. You can access the web page at [http://www.prounione.urbe.it/home\\_en.html](http://www.prounione.urbe.it/home_en.html) and select: catalogue base DIA. We hope that this continued service helps promote not only the knowledge of the dialogues but also their reception.

The text of the annual Paul Wattson and Lurana White lecture opens this issue. Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, M. Afr., Apostolic Nuncio to the Arab Republic of Egypt, delegate to the Arab League and recognized Islamic scholar, addressed a great number of women and men religious whose Congregations are engaged in interreligious dialogue as well as many students from the Ecumenical section of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas-Angelicum.

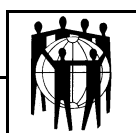
Other activities of the Centro included lectures given by William Henn, OFM Cap, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and dom Patrick Lyons, OSB. Both of these lectures had themes that concluded our anniversary celebration of the Genevan reformer Jean Calvin (10 July 1509 – 27 May 1564). These texts will be published in the Fall issue of the Bulletin. Also in the Spring cycle of lectures the Executive Secretary of the World Mennonite Conference, Dr. Larry Miller dealt with the theme: “Glory to God and on Earth Peace”. Historic Peace Church Perspectives on the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation. In his lecture he explained the attempts of the “peace churches” to be involved in the elimination of violence in society as their contribution to the WCC’s decade to overcome violence. To round out the conference schedule, Dr. Michael Root, a Lutheran member of the International Lutheran Catholic dialogue, addressed a delicate theme in the history of Lutheran Reform in his lecture entitled: “Indulgences as Ecumenical Barometer: Penitence and Unity in the Christian Life”.

The last activity of this Spring included a book presentation of the Dialogue Report Justification in the Life of the Church from the Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue Commission in Sweden. Bishop Eero Huovinen, Lutheran Bishop of Helsinki made a presentation introducing the contents of the dialogue report. This presentation was made in the presence of the dialogue commission composed of Catholics and Lutherans from Sweden and Finland. The evening was concluded with an Ecumenical Prayer and a reception so that the commission could meet some of our students and professors from the Roman Universities.

Check our web site for up to date information on the Centro’s activities and realtime information on the theological dialogues. All of our staff wish you all a very pleasant Summer.

This Bulletin is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Drive, 16th Floor, Chicago, IL 60606 (<http://www.atla.com>).

James F. Puglisi, sa  
Director





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Centro Conferences

## **Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue 1965-2005 An Extraordinary Historical Process with Significant Results and Still Remaining Challenges**

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(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Thursday, 19 March 2009)

### **I. The importance of a historical perspective**

One could argue that the division in the 16<sup>th</sup> century between the Late Medieval Church and the Lutheran reform movement and the Lutheran churches that became its ecclesiastical manifestation constituted the most profound and far-reaching ecclesiastical and also political division in Europe. During the Reformation era and the centuries that followed Europe became a deeply divided continent with several larger confessional churches. Among Europe's confessions the split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches stands out because of the theological sharpness of the conflict and separation. This conflict is symbolized by the excommunication of Martin Luther and the Lutheran denunciation, until recently, of the pope as anti-Christ. Further there was the mutual condemnation of pope and Catholic Church in the Lutheran Confessions and of Lutheran teachings in statements of the Council of Trent. These condemnations, though modified today, are still in force and maintain their church-dividing effect.

This deep, painful, tragic Lutheran-Catholic division with its wide social, political, cultural, and mental implications has marked the European nations and peoples until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was exported through migration and mission to other parts of the world. This radical split has during the last centuries been considered by individual Catholics and Lutherans as a contradiction of God's gift and will of unity. But it was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that many Lutherans and Catholics and their churches have begun to consider overcoming this division as a primary historical commitment and challenge for the two churches. This history-changing reversal of Christian relationships occurred only a few decades ago! We have to keep this dark background in mind of the long and tragic history of Catholic-Lutheran division, in order to come to an adequate evaluation of the exceptional course and results of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue and rapprochement during the last forty years. Only in this horizon can we avoid present superficial negative evaluations of ecumenical progress.

### **II. The Initiation of Catholic-Lutheran Dialogues**

Considered in this historical perspective it was indeed an extraordinary event and process when the official Catholic-Lutheran theological dialogue on a world level and in several countries became possible and was inaugurated in 1965. Only a few decades before that change the Vatican had still responded negatively to invitations to participate in the first World Conference on Faith and Order in 1927 at Lausanne and the first World Conference on Life and Work at Stockholm in 1925. In 1927 Pius XI promulgated the Encyclical "*Mortalium Animos*" that rejected again the participation of the Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement because "There is only one way in which the unity of Christians may be fostered, and that is by promoting the return to the one true church of Christ of those who are separated from it; for from that one true church they have in the past unhappily fallen away."<sup>1</sup>

A new era was opened up when, after unofficial contacts, Pope John XXIII established in 1960 the Secretariat (later Pontifical Council) for Promoting Christian Unity and approved an official delegation of Catholic observers to the 1961 Assembly of the World Council of Churches at New Delhi. And in 1964 the full entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement was ecclesiological and officially legitimized by the 1964 Decree on Ecumenism – *Unitatis Redintegratio* – of Vatican II, dogmatically undergirded by the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, of the same year.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the communion of by now over 68 million Lutherans, was not taken by surprise of these radical changes. It had already in 1963 at its Assembly in Helsinki established the "Lutheran Foundation for Ecumenical

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<sup>1</sup> T. STRANSKY, in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. by N. LOSSKY *et al.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002) 996-997.

Research”<sup>2</sup> with its Institute for Ecumenical Research at Strasbourg/France. The first research professors of the Institute attended together with several other Lutheran observers among the group of non-Catholic observers the Second Vatican Council and closely monitored, studied and interpreted in publications the discussions and decisions of the Council. Already during the fourth session of the Council in 1965 a **Lutheran/Roman Catholic Working Group** met at Strasbourg/France in 1965 and then in 1966 and proposed that the two churches “engage in serious discussions on theological issues”. They should not look primarily for quick solutions to practical problems but rather enter into a comprehensive dialogue about the basic problems which both separate and unite the two churches.<sup>3</sup>

These preparatory conversations are important in three respects. First, they were the first ones that initiated an international dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church that also has become, so far, the longest and most intensive one. Second, they emphasized clearly the nature and purpose of the planned dialogue. According to a basic and characteristic methodological and theological orientation of both Lutheran and Catholic identity, the focus of future discussions would be on central theological issues, some of them that divide the two churches and others that unite them. Here it was implied that the old methodology of “controversial theology” that aimed at an identification, comparison and discussion of doctrinal positions should be overcome. Third, it was decided, that this should be a bilateral dialogue without a third or more partners.

Thus a new method within the broader ecumenical movement - also used by other Christian World Communions -, was introduced. Bilateral dialogues have the advantage that they can focus much better than multilateral dialogues with several partners on the specificities of church dividing differences and existing or potential agreements as well as on their accompanying historical and hermeneutical contexts. The official church sponsorship of these dialogues, furthermore, implies the necessity of acts of official reception by the two dialogue-partners. The limitations of bilateral dialogues consist in the danger of ignoring the broader, more comprehensive spectrum of Christian and ecumenical reality. The Catholic-Lutheran dialogue has sought to avoid this danger.

### III. Overview of Lutheran-Catholic Dialogues

Thus with the 1965/1966 Working Group the ground was prepared for the continuous process of so far four phases of the official international Catholic-Lutheran dialogue. Each phase is authorized by the LWF and the Vatican through its Secretariat/Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian unity. It is

<sup>2</sup> *Offizieller Bericht der Vierten Vollversammlung des Lutherischen Weltbundes, Helsinki, 30. Juli – 11. August 1963*, (Berlin & Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1965) 433-439.

<sup>3</sup> “Joint Report of the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Working Group”, *Lutheran World* 13, 4 (1966) 436f.

significant that some form of visible unity of the church and not simply better mutual knowledge and understanding was from the beginning the implied goal of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue. The four phases so far of the dialogue are:

Phase I: 1967-1971 with the final report of the Study Commission *The Gospel and the Church* (Malta-Report) 1972.<sup>4</sup>

Together with the Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue that began in 1967 and the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue that began in 1970, this Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue was part of a first experiment in bilateral methodology of non-Catholic communions with the Roman Catholic Church. The presentation of a wide range of topics in its report suggested that such a dialogue could be fruitful, and the report provided a basis and encouragement for further conversations.

Phase II: 1973-1984 was very productive with final reports on *The Eucharist* 1978; *Ways to Community* 1980; *All Under One Christ* 1980 (on the Augsburg Confession); *The Ministry in the Church* 1981; *Martin Luther – Witness to Jesus Christ* 1983; *Facing Unity – Models, Forms, and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship* 1984.

Phase III: 1986-1993 with its final report on *Church and Justification* 1993.

Phase IV: 1995-2006 with the Study Document on *The Apostolicity of the Church* 2006. Phase V: 2009 - ... begins with a first meeting in September 2009.

A special Catholic-Lutheran Commission worked from 1997-1999 on the preparation of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* of 1999.

The international Catholic-Lutheran dialogue is accompanied by and frequently related to a number of **national dialogues**. Only three of them can be indicated here: the dialogues in the USA, Germany and Australia.

The **Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue in the USA** began in 1965 and is generally perhaps the most intensive dialogue in view of the number of meetings and publications. Up to 1993 there were nine rounds: I. on the Nicene Creed,<sup>5</sup> II. on Baptism,<sup>6</sup> III. on the Eucharist,<sup>7</sup> IV. on the Eucharist and

<sup>4</sup> “Report of the Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic Study Commission on ‘The Gospel and the Church’. Offprint, *Lutheran World* 19, 3 (1972), also in H. MEYER and L. VISCHER (eds.), *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (New York/Geneva: Paulist Press/World Council of Churches, 1984) 168-189. [Hereafter cited: *Growth in Agreement I*].

<sup>5</sup> “The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma in the Church,” in P.C. EMPIE and T.A. MURPHY (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue I – III* (Minneapolis; Augsburg Publishing House, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> “One Baptism for the Remission of Sins,” in *Lutheran and Catholics in Dialogue I – III*, 1966.

<sup>7</sup> “The Eucharist as Sacrifice,” in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue I – III*, 1967. Vols. I – III are also published separately.

Ministry,<sup>8</sup> V. on Papal Primacy,<sup>9</sup> VI. on Teaching Authority and Infallibility,<sup>10</sup> VII. on Justification,<sup>11</sup> VIII. on the One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary,<sup>12</sup> IX. on Scripture and Tradition,<sup>13</sup> followed by round X. on ecclesiology and the different ministries 1998-2004.<sup>14</sup> The intensity of this dialogue is exemplified by its so far tenth round with its 5 meetings and 7 drafting meetings that led to the final agreed statement that comprehends 140 pages and that should receive a gold medal for the record number of altogether 472 footnotes! Round XI on *The Hope for Eternal Life* began in 2005.

The **Catholic-Lutheran dialogue in Germany** began unofficially already soon after World War II in 1945 with the (later so called) Ecumenical Working Group of Evangelical (mostly Lutheran) and Catholic Theologians (ÖAK), a truly pioneering enterprise that still continues today. The Group has published the contributions of its members and the results of its discussions and reflections in so far 14 volumes. The last three ones contain in over 1200 pages the papers of its members and a larger concluding report on their study project *Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge*<sup>15</sup> (*The Ministry of the Church in Apostolic Succession*). These volumes represent an enor-

<sup>8</sup> "Eucharist and Ministry," in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV* (New York/Washington, DC: U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation/The Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> P.C. EMPIE and T.A. MURPHY (eds.), *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> P.C. EMPIE, T.A. MURPHY, and J.A. BURGESS (eds.), *Teaching Authority & Infallibility in the Church, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> H.G. ANDERSON, T. A. MURPHY, and J.A. BURGESS (eds.), *Justification by Faith, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> H.G. ANDERSON, J.F. STAFFORD, and J.A. BURGESS (eds.), *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> H.C. SKILLRUD, J.F. STAFFORD, and D.F. MARTENSEN (eds.), *Scripture and Tradition, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> R. HILL and J. GROS (eds.), *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation – Its Structures and Ministries, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue X* (Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Th. SCHNEIDER & G. WENZ, (eds.), Teil I: *Grundlagen und Grundfragen* (Freiburg/Göttingen: Herder/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); D. SATTLER & G. WENZ, (eds.), Teil II: *Ursprünge und Wandlungen*, hg. (Freiburg/Göttingen: Herder/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); D. SATTLER & G. WENZ, (eds.), Teil III: *Verständigungen und Differenzen*, hg. (Freiburg/Göttingen: Herder/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

mously rich source of material and perspectives for the ongoing Catholic-Lutheran dialogue. In addition to this group the official dialogue in the form of the Bilateral Working Group of the German (Catholic) Bishops' Conference and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) began in 1978 and led to a first document on *Communion in Word and Sacrament* in 1984. Responses of the Catholic Bishops Conference (1987) and the VELKD (1985) declared, among others, that the Reformation's condemnation of the Mass as an "abomination" and of the pope as "Antichrist" do not apply to the present teaching of the Catholic Church.<sup>16</sup> This new interpretation was already taken up in a new edition (by the VELKD) of the Lutheran Confessions<sup>17</sup> where the condemnations were explained and qualified in footnotes with references to the dialogue. This again represents a remarkable reception of the dialogue with consequences for official teaching. And this way of dealing with statements and decisions of past history that are judged no longer applicable today seems to me an appropriate method of re-representing historical events and statements that cannot be erased from history.

A second Catholic-Lutheran Bilateral Working Group in Germany began its work in 1987. It used a new ecumenical methodology that was first applied in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* of 1999. The Preface to the final report of 2000 with the title *Sanctorum Communio*<sup>18</sup> says: "The goal of the dialogue is not a consensus in the sense of a complete identity of opinions/understandings but a 'differentiated consensus' which contains two different statements:

the agreement reached in the fundamental and essential content of a hitherto controversial doctrine;

an explanation how and why the remaining differences can be accepted without undercutting the basis and essence of the agreement." The Working Group presented its (German) concluding report in 2000. It is praised for its method and courage to take up topics of considerable difficulty such as teaching authority in the church, the papacy, a petrine ministry within the communion of the church.

Finally one should mention among national Catholic-Lutheran dialogues the dialogue that is faithfully conducted in **Australia**. The Australian Lutheran-Roman-Catholic Dialogue began in 1975. It has so far published the following statements: *Agreed Statement on Baptism* (1977), *Sacrament and Sacrifice*

<sup>16</sup> More fully developed in the report of the ÖAK: K. LEHMANN and W. PANNENBERG, (eds.), *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), (German: *Lehrverurteilungen . kirchentrennend?* [Freiburg/Göttingen: Herder/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986]).

<sup>17</sup> *Unser Glaube. Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1991) 451f; 466; 515f; 520.

<sup>18</sup> *Communio Sanctorum. The Church as the Communion of Saints* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004) ix.

(1985), *Pastor and Priest* (1989),<sup>19</sup> *Communion and Mission. A Report from the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue on the Theology of the Church* (1995)<sup>20</sup> (a topic seldom considered in dialogues) and *Justification – A Common Statement of the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue*.<sup>21</sup>

Other national dialogues were or are conducted in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Finland, India, Japan, Norway and Sweden.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV. Main Characteristics and Results of Catholic-Lutheran Dialogues

The great number of international and national Catholic-Lutheran dialogues has up to this day produced a flood of papers and reports. In this short survey I can refer only to international dialogues and mention some national ones.

Even though the initial phase of the international Catholic-Lutheran dialogue from 1967 to 1972 was necessarily provisional and testing out new ground in inter-church relations, the topic assigned to the dialogue that was carried out by a Study Commission was already significant – *The Gospel and the Church* (cf. note 4). It articulated a kind of thesis, stating two particular theological emphases of the two traditions while at the same time connecting and interrelating them. It also is remarkable and even surprising that the 1972 report of the Study Commission after this short initial period of the dialogue and after a limited number of meetings is already affirming that the members “have achieved a noteworthy and far-reaching consensus” within the framework of their theme.<sup>23</sup> A positive statement in such words was only possible on the basis of preceding theological developments in both churches since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, perhaps even more importantly, in the light of the new recognition and awareness of continuing theological commonalities between both churches that formerly had been ignored and pushed aside in the heat of past controversies.

The report did break new ground methodologically and hermeneutically. It argued against starting all over again with the old controversial theological positions as was the method of “Kontroversialtheologie” far into the 20<sup>th</sup> century – and some old-

fashioned theological warriors still employ it today. Rather, changes in the historical situation as well as changes in theological methods and ways of thinking that have been brought about by modern biblical and historical research should be taken into consideration (p.4). Then a number of basic convergences on former controversial issues are listed, thereby already anticipating later more developed results of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue. The methodological and theological groundwork for the ensuing phases of the dialogue had been laid and encouragement and hope for this new era of Catholic-Lutheran relations had been inspired. Looking forty years later at the excitement of these beginnings it is obvious that this spirit could not be maintained in the ongoing dialogue when the more detailed and patient work of struggling with complex doctrinal differences had to be undertaken. But this retrospective on the first report also may explain why the present dialogue with its much more broadly spread out and often unnecessarily repetitive work does no longer look so exciting.

This harder work of struggling with individual topics of past dividing differences began in the second phase of the international Catholic-Lutheran dialogue 1973 to 1984 with the theme and final report on *The Eucharist* (1978).<sup>24</sup> As Lutherans had considered the main difference with the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition to consist in the area of Eucharistic doctrine, they tended also with regard to the Roman Catholic Church to consider the Eucharist as a main point of difference and division. Therefore this first choice was made. A remarkable broad methodological approach was taken in this dialogue by deciding also to include results of Anglican-Catholic, Anglican-Lutheran, Catholic-Reformed-Lutheran (France, Groupe de Dombes), WCC/Faith and Order, Catholic-Lutheran/USA and other dialogues. Thus, the danger of a too narrow approach was avoided.

Second, references to liturgical orders as expressions of Eucharistic doctrine were included. This approach is very much in line with the proposal of my teacher Edmund Schlink in his important article “The Structure of Dogmatic Statements as an Ecumenical Problem,”<sup>25</sup> according to which basic doctrinal affirmations of the different churches are often expressed in a variety of forms of faith affirmations. Third, the consideration of the traditional divisive issues such as Eucharistic presence, Eucharistic sacrifice, Eucharistic communion and fellowship, was prepared and prefaced by a first section of the report called “Joint Witness” that opened up the whole report with common doctrinal positions. Also in the following section on “Common Tasks” that dealt with controversial issues, each of the issues mentioned above was introduced by a common statement. Only then the differences were discussed and challenges addressed to each side and possible solutions outlined. This method and style

<sup>24</sup> (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1978), also in *Growth in Agreement I*, 190-214.

<sup>25</sup> Printed in E. SCHLINK, *The Coming Christ and the Coming Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968) 16-84.

<sup>19</sup> The three statements have been published in R.K. WILLIAMSON (ed.), *Stages on the Way. Documents from the Bilateral Conversations between Churches in Australia* (Melbourne: The Joint Board of Christian Education, 1994) 56-129.

<sup>20</sup> (Adelaide, Openbook Publishers, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> (Adelaide, Openbook Publishers, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Information on these dialogues can be found in the regular *A Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Theological Dialogues* as part of the Semi-Annual Bulletin of the Centro pro Unione.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. note 4, 3.

provided the report with an enormously broad and positive spirit. It did not hide difficulties, but put them into a new light in which they lost their divisive sharp edges.

The degree of remarkable agreement and convergence in this report on the Eucharist is complemented by the reports of national Catholic-Lutheran dialogues on that topic. Thus, when we take these reports all together and read them in the light of reactions to them as well as in view of the 1982 World Council of Churches/Faith and Order document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* we may speak of a far-reaching Lutheran-Roman Catholic agreement on the doctrine and practice of the Eucharist. The remaining differences in theological interpretation and liturgical expression are generally regarded as no longer being divisive. It is obvious that there are no fixed criteria for discerning that which is church dividing and what is not. Such criteria exist neither within the churches nor as mutually agreed ones between them. In this slightly floating matter we have to rely on the sum of reactions to dialogue reports and to forms of official reception by the churches. But within this framework of moving towards discernment of consensus, convergence, and acceptable differences we can speak of a far-reaching agreement on the doctrine and practice of the Eucharist.

**This represents a significant result. And in these ecumenically not so exciting times it would be a remarkable step and a sign of hope and encouragement if the Roman Catholic Church and the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation would affirm this far-reaching agreement on the understanding and practice of the Eucharist.**

However, the agreement on the Eucharist does not comprehend the ministry of the Eucharist, and here we encounter its limitations. This brings us to the next topic of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue. In the same way as the report on the Eucharist the report on *The Ministry in the Church*<sup>26</sup> of 1981 refers extensively to other ecumenical dialogues and takes over many of their insights. This expresses the insight that the various ecumenical dialogues can complement and enrich each other. A new methodological element in the report on the ministry is the frequent concluding clause at the end of a section “if both churches acknowledge that . . .” or “wherever there exists this understanding . . . and where one-sidedness and distortions have been overcome, it is possible to speak of a *consensus* on the reality” (par. 39). Accordingly, the conclusions of the different sections do not “hang in the air” but require acceptance/reception in order to become an agreed or convergent position. The different sections formulate agreements and convergences on the origin and nature of the ordained ministry, its different forms, on ordination, apostolic succession, episcopal ministry, and the Petrine ministry of the bishop of Rome. This Petrine ministry, the report says, “need not be excluded by Lutherans as a visible sign of the unity of the church as a whole”

<sup>26</sup> (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1982), also in *Growth in Agreement I*, 248-275.

(par.73), however with the added qualification already stated in the 1972 report on *The Gospel and the Church* (no. 66) and referring to the Lutheran Confessions: “insofar as this office is subordinated to the primacy of the gospel by theological reinterpretation and practical restructuring”.

More recent dialogue reports such as *Communio Sanctorum* (Germany 2000), *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation* (USA, 2005), *The Apostolicity of the Church* (world level dialogue, 2006), have continued to struggle with the issue of the Petrine ministry in its service to Christian unity on the universal level. They suggest steps towards a “middle solution” on the way to a convergence. In this context it could be helpful to consider the agreement expressed in the last sentence of the *Annex to the Official Common Statement* that is attached to the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (page 47 or *Growth in Agreement II*, page 582): “Notwithstanding different conceptions of authority in the church, each partner respects the other partner’s ordered process of reaching doctrinal decisions.” This is a way forward that could lead to an understanding that would include some form of respect of non-catholic churches for and relation of with the petrine ministry without accepting its present canonical forms and its prerogatives of primacy and infallibility.

Yet apart from this issue the 1981 report on the ministry ends rather positively by referring to “the desirability of the mutual recognition by the two churches of their ministries in the not too distant future” (par.81). Steps towards this goal would lead from (1) mutual respect of ministries and (2) practical cooperation of ministries – both already widely taking place – to (3) “a mutual recognition that the ministry in the other church exercises essential functions of the ministry that Jesus Christ himself instituted in his church” (par.85). This recognition would also include the affirmation that the Holy Spirit uses the ministries of the other church as means of salvation in the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments and the leadership of congregations (par.85). Again, these carefully formulated proposals should be complemented and supported – as in the case of the Eucharist – by the results of later and more detailed bilateral dialogue reports on the ministry. Then we may say:

**This represents a significant result. And in these not so exciting ecumenical times it would be a considerable step and a sign of hope and encouragement if the Roman Catholic Church and the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation would affirm, that the ministry in the other church exercises essential functions of the ministry that Jesus Christ instituted in his church, and that the Holy Spirit uses the ministries of the other church as means of salvation in the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments and the leadership of congregations.**

After having covered some basic ground and expressing considerable commonalities and agreements, the Catholic-Lutheran international dialogue introduced two rather unique

methodological considerations: 1. It presented in its 1980 report on *Ways to Community*<sup>27</sup> a kind of reflective pause in order to consider the goal of unity and the ecclesiological as well as practical implications and steps on the way to that goal. This exercise ends with the broader perspective of this Catholic-Lutheran historical project by pointing to the “fellowship of all Christians” and the “unity of humankind” (paras. 91-96). 2. Four years later followed in 1984 the report on *Facing Unity*,<sup>28</sup> a kind of intermediate taking stock (Bilanz) of the results of the dialogues so far on the understanding of the faith, the sacraments and the ministry. The report connected and complemented its survey with first evaluations and the results of other bilateral and multilateral dialogues, Catholic-Lutheran and others. This preliminary form of reception comes as a magnificent intermediate evaluation, a “stop-over” on the way to further work. In addition the report presents in Part I a most helpful survey of different concepts and models of partial and full church union and communion, without expressing preference for one of them.

Another special element of this dialogue is the fact that it has dealt with two historical events and personalities in addition to the usual list of disputed doctrines. The first example is the joint statement *All Under One Christ*<sup>29</sup> on the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980, the most widely officially accepted Lutheran confessional writing, together with Martin Luther’s Small Catechism. Returning to the original aim of the Augsburg Confession to offer a basis for preserving church unity, an aim that was not successful, now, 450 years later the report could say in reference to the first part of the Augsburg Confession: “Reflecting on the Augsburg Confession, therefore, Catholics and Lutherans have discovered that they have a common mind on basic doctrinal truths...” This conclusion is based on the “joint statement on the relation between gospel and church; the broad common understanding of the Eucharist; the agreement that a special ministerial office conferred by ordination is constitutive for the church” (paras. 17 and 18). After pointing out further agreements and convergences, the report concludes that “the common faith which we have discovered in the Augsburg Confession can also help us to confess this faith anew in our times” (par. 27).

The second example is the short 1983 text on *Martin Luther – Witness to Jesus Christ. A Statement by the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission on the Occasion of Martin*

*Luther’s 500<sup>th</sup> Birthday*.<sup>30</sup> Such a text was only possible on the basis of the profound Catholic Luther-research since the late 1930s. The text summarizes and further develops a common Lutheran-Catholic understanding of the work and legacy of Martin Luther. Luther, a major symbol and personification during 400 years of the past Catholic-Lutheran conflict and division is now seen as a Christian who “has had, and still has a crucial influence on the history of the church, of society and of thought” (par. 1). His “call for church reform, a call for repentance, is still relevant for us.” (par.6). And: “Luther points beyond his own person in order to confront us all the more inescapably with the promise and the claim of the gospel he confessed” (par.12). The text is not silent about Luther’s “polemical excesses” in his writings about the papacy, the Jews, the Anabaptists, and the peasants (par.20). It also mentions the distortions that were inflicted on his theological and spiritual heritage in the course of history (par.19). Yet the overarching evaluation is positive and ends with a list of points from Luther’s legacy, the first one must suffice here: “As a theologian, preacher, pastor, hymn-writer, and man of prayer, Luther has with extraordinary spiritual force witnessed anew to the biblical message of God’s gift of liberating righteousness and made it to shine forth” (par.26).

**This represents a significant result. And in these ecumenically not so exciting times it would be a remarkable step and a sign of hope and encouragement if the Roman Catholic Church would also officially affirm the changed evaluation of Martin Luther and declare that the excommunication of Martin Luther no longer applies today.**

After the reports on *Martin Luther – Witness to Jesus Christ* (1983) and *Facing Unity* (1984), phase III of the international Catholic-Lutheran dialogue between 1986 and 1993 discussed two crucial issues and formulated its findings in the report on *Church and Justification*.<sup>31</sup> It presents a comprehensive Catholic-Lutheran agreement and convergence on the church, its origin, its Trinitarian and communitarian nature, and its saving and social mission. Remaining differences between both sides are considered to be non-divisive and would thus be elements of a “unity in reconciled diversity”. The ecclesiological considerations again draw extensively on reports of other ecumenical dialogues and thereby achieve a form of ecumenical cross-reception that adds to the weight and width of the text. As an introductory perspective and as part of the conclusion the report relates the common understanding of the doctrine of justification to the reflection on the church. Thereby it both corrects an often rather narrow individualistic Lutheran under-

<sup>27</sup> *Ways to Community* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1981), also in *Growth in Agreement I*, 215-240.

<sup>28</sup> (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1985), also in J. GROS, H. MEYER, and W.G. RUSCH, (eds.), *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998* (Geneva/Grand Rapids: WCC Publications/William B. Eerdmans, 2000) 443-484.

<sup>29</sup> Printed together with *Ways to Community* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1981) 29-35, also in *Growth in Agreement I*, 241-247.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 72-80 and in *Growth in Agreement II*, 438-442.

<sup>31</sup> *Church and Justification. Understanding the Church in the Light of the Doctrine of Justification* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1994), also in *Growth in Agreement II*, 485-565.

standing of justification and helps to prepare the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* of 1999.<sup>32</sup>

The significance of this Joint Declaration is – at least – threefold: First, it represents an agreement concerning the most fundamental theological difference and division between Catholics and Lutherans at the time of the Reformation and ever since. Its acceptance, indeed, “represents an ecumenical event of historical significance” (Preface, 6). Second, the Joint Declaration is the result of a conscious “confluence” of the insights of international and national Catholic-Lutheran dialogues. Thus it rests on a broader basis of theological discussion and consensus. Third, the Joint Declaration has been officially received and thereby affirmed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation with its member churches. **This is, so far, the first time that the Roman Catholic Church and one of its dialogue partners have not only responded to a dialogue result but have officially affirmed it. This was an act of reception that is up to now unique.** The Joint Declaration has found a broad theological echo<sup>33</sup> and continues to act as an impulse and encouragement of both initiating and intensifying Catholic-Lutheran relationships in many places in the world. Furthermore, the acceptance of the Joint Declaration by the World Methodist Conference in July 2006 is a highly important sign of a wider ecumenical convergence that binds the three communions closer together.

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<sup>32</sup> THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids; William B. Eerdmans, 2007) also in *Growth in Agreement II*, 566-582.

<sup>33</sup> Only a few examples: B.J. HILBERATH und W. PANNENBERG, (eds.), *Die Zukunft der Ökumene. Die „Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1999); A. MAFFEIS, (ed.), *Dossier sulla giustificazione: La dichiarazione congiunta cattolico-luterana, commento e dibattito teologico*, (Brescia: Queriniana, 2000); A. BIRMELÉ, *La communion ecclésiale. Progrès œcuméniques et enjeux méthodologiques* (Paris/Genève: Cerf/Labor et Fides, 2000) 101-190; M. HONNECKER & K. KERTELGE, *Zur ökumenischen Debatte um die „Rechtfertigung“* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001); K.L. BLOOMQUIST and W. GREIVE *The Doctrine of Justification. Its Reception and Meaning Today* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2003); E. GENRE e A. GRILLO, (eds.), *Giustificazione, chiese, sacramenti. Prospettive dopo la Dichiarazione cattolico-luterana* (Roma: Centro studi S. Anselmo, 2003); W.G. RUSCH, (ed.), *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003); N.A.C. OGOKO, *Dialogue on Justification. A Model for Ecumenical Dialogue Among the Churches in Nigeria?* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007); C. ACHENBRUCK, *Einig und verschieden in der Rechtfertigungslehre. Das Sündersein der Gerechten nach der „Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“ im Spiegel der Reaktionen* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009).

## V. Conclusion

This survey provides just a glimpse at the extraordinary historical process of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue and its truly significant results. In a full overview of the main results of all international and national Catholic-Lutheran dialogues the enormous wealth of their theological insights and perspectives would become even more clearly apparent. This rich material has been studied in ecumenical institutes, doctoral dissertations, many publications, examination papers, etc. but it has not yet been widely taken note of by the churches on both sides. Nevertheless, together with the official reception of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* the international and national Catholic-Lutheran dialogues already are having an – often indirect and implicit – impact on theological thinking, changes of spiritual life and mentality of Christians, and on furthering contacts and relations between our churches. The still remaining challenges and tasks are the frequently mentioned but not so numerous theological and structural issues that require further convergence of positions.

The main task, however, will be the official reception by both churches of those agreements and convergences and the recommendations attached to them that have been highlighted in this paper. Forms of this reception were suggested in the reports themselves. In order to prepare such acts of reception the LWF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity could follow a similar procedure to the one used when the Joint Declaration was prepared. A special Catholic-Lutheran drafting group could evaluate all dialogue statements on particular issues, beginning with, for example, the Eucharist and draft an agreed statement on the Eucharist that would also mention the remaining but not divisive differences. A step on these lines has been mentioned above at the end of the Eucharist section. This draft could be considered again by a larger group and then, if acceptance by the churches seems possible, be submitted to the respective authorities for an act of official reception and affirmation. If such an official reaction to and reception of the achievements of the dialogues on the Eucharist and then on other issues as indicated in my text would be possible, this would brighten the ecumenical scene and have an encouraging impact on our churches.

**Furthermore, this would inspire ecumenical hope and confidence in our time and in the wider ecumenical community because the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue certainly is not the exclusive property of the two communions but a contribution to the broader ecumenical movement as this dialogue is also profiting from the theological and spiritual insights of this movement.**



# CC

Centro Conferences

## Hebrew Bible, Human Rights and Interreligious Dialogue

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(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Thursday, 26 March 2009)

### Introduction

What I would like to do in this paper is to describe some aspects of the Hebrew Bible's ethical and religious teachings together with some of their Rabbinic elaborations and how they have contributed to our understanding of human rights in general and universal human rights in particular. Furthermore I would like to show how inter religious dialogue can help to provide both a foundation and support for these values.

In order to understand Biblical teaching we must explore the fundamental significance of Monotheism for the foundation of human rights. It is generally understood that the affirmation of a Spiritual creator God who transcends and creates the world as an organized whole functioning with order and purpose and who creates human beings both male and female as spiritual beings created in and for the divine image is the foundation for the dignity and sanctity of all human beings.

Not merely does the first chapter of Genesis speak of the creation of men and women as equal, (Gen 1:26) but more particularly a special act of creation was necessary to demonstrate that women were on the same level as men. Furthermore the viewing of Adam and Eve as the parents of humanity testifies to the equality of all human beings.

The uniqueness and individuality of human beings was elaborated in rabbinic texts with the focusing on the concept of the individual.

The ancient rabbinic text, the Mishnah, in Sanhedrin 4:5, states:

“A single man was created in the world, to teach that if any man has caused a single soul to perish, scripture imputes it to him as if he had caused a whole world to perish, and if any man saves alive a single soul, scripture imputes it to him as if he had saved alive a whole world... Therefore everyone must say, for my sake the world was created.”<sup>1</sup>

Another Mishnah in *Eduyoth* recounts a significant debate between the schools of Hillel and Shammai about whether or not

<sup>1</sup> *The Mishnah*, translated from the Hebrew with introduction and brief explanatory notes by Herbert DANBY (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) 388.

it was better for man to have been created. After considerable discussion, a vote was taken and the School of Shammai, that claimed it was better for man *not* to have been created, got the most votes. Thereupon the Hillelites taught that since man was already created, people should examine their past deeds and future deeds, so that one's past would not necessarily become one's future. However since everyone does not know whether in his/her particular case it would have been better or not if s/he were created, everyone should live one's life as if s/he were worthy of having been created.

The point of this passage is that being worthy of having been created is to live according to the virtues of justice, compassion, and peace.

The uniqueness of human beings is illustrated by a Rabbinic Homily which states that when a king of flesh and blood mints coins they are all the same, but when God created man in his own image each individual is created unique and different.

Just as God transcends nature, human beings also transcend nature in social relations rendering history possible.

History is brought about by individual's having the capacity to organize society in terms of the ideal values of justice and peace. This historic goal is represented by Messianism and its corresponding idea of humanity as an ideal to be achieved. One God implies the possibility of a world of peace and justice. As long as there exists the battle between the gods and the plurality of gods as embodying separate forces of nature then there is no sense of a world at peace. One God implies one world and one universal goal of justice and peace embodying the greatest possible realization for each individual.

It is necessary to understand that the meaning and significance of Equality in its Biblical formulation is not solely the spiritual equality of every human being but has a special meaning in the Biblical teaching and legislation.

*First*, for the Bible equality does not refer primarily to those of equal rank, or those of the same class, or who have equal possessions. Also, equality is more than justice in the sense of rectification of wrong. It is something positive and it refers to *those who are weaker than oneself* i.e. the poor, the stranger the widow, orphan

and the slave.

Equality means the bringing up or raising those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged, to the status of those who are secure. Thus the Biblical legislation mandates that there be one law for the home born and the stranger; (Exodus 12:49)

Biblical laws and teachings spell out the rights of the poor, the orphan, the widow and the stranger. There is a common bond between all these groups. All of them lack a protector that can stand up for them. The widow, the orphan and the stranger do not have a next of kin to intercede for them and therefore the law intervenes as the next of kin. And the guarantee is God.

*Second*, this social concern for the vulnerable can be traced to the experience of Egyptian slavery.

The paradigm of the Exodus appears throughout the Bible with the concomitant self understanding of the Jewish People as originating as slaves who were freed and the memory of slavery was constitutive of their national self consciousness. The philosopher Nietzsche brands the Biblical ethics a slave ethic. In my opinion that is why it is so good. By viewing themselves as having been slaves the Israelites determined that since they never began with property they could not own property in perpetuity and the land is not theirs but God's. Leviticus 25:23 claims that the land is mine (i.e. God's) and you are sojourners and resident settlers with me. The purpose of these laws was to restore and protect the private possessions of both the individual and families. This is seen in the institution of the Jubilee year.

The Hebrew Prophets denounce the encroachment of the powerful upon the just deserts of the poor. This is most clearly seen in the literary Prophets.

Amos can serve as a typical example. Amos is the first prophet to claim that social injustice will bring about national ruination. While earlier prophets condemn individual social sins as the prophet Nathan condemned David and Elijah condemned Ahab, they nevertheless believe that the punishment will be meted out only in the lives of these individuals. National exile and destruction can only result from the nations resorting to idolatry.

Amos is the first of a line of "classical" prophets who view the exploitation of the poor and destitute as a crime equivalent to idolatry. Amos maintained that the transgressions of Israel were ethical and God will cause ruin for such sins.

The Prophets condemn the belief that as long as one engages in sacrifices and the cult then they are right with God in spite of their exploitative behavior toward the poor and destitute. This is a revolutionary idea: that the value and destiny of the nation is dependent on how it treats its most vulnerable members.

Amos condemns the northern kingdom for having "sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes" (2:6) or again "I hate and I despise your feasts and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of our songs, to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever

flowing stream." (Chapter 5:521-24)

Amos states: "Seek good and not evil, that you may live . . . hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate, it may be that the Lord the God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph". (Chapter 5: 14-15)

It is Justice and righteousness that God wants and it is only through the exercise of these virtues that God is properly served.

Jeremiah says: "let not the wise man glory in his wisdom or the strong man in his might or the rich man in his riches but let he who glories glory in this that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth for in these things I delight." (Jeremiah 9:23)

Isaiah affirms that God is "sanctified through righteousness". (Isaiah 5:16)

Leviticus 19 clearly states that the Holy and the Ethical are inseparable.

*Third*, the Biblical concern for the stranger and sojourner is also an essential part of its legislation. The status of the stranger is a concept that is central in the Bible.

Many passages underline the importance of the proper treatment of the stranger. Repeatedly, the appeal is to one's own inwardness. For example the refrain; "you know the heart of the stranger because you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Inwardness is at the heart of Jewish tradition and is expressed in one of the most famous Biblical passages in Leviticus. The injunction is one in a series of ethical commandments that include not standing idly by your neighbor's blood; not cursing the deaf; not putting a stumbling block before the blind, and that one should love one's fellow human being, not as oneself as most translations state. A more accurate translation of *ahavah*, "love" would be valuing, caring or tender concern for your fellow human being. A more accurate translation of *kamocho*, normally translated as yourself, should be translated "for he is like you". The neighbor is like you. There is a common ground of humanity between you and your fellow human being that must be respected.

There is more to this text. One can interpret it to mean: Be conscious of your fellow human being like you are conscious of yourself. The other also has inwardness, an inner self and you must strive to be aware of that as much as you are aware of your own inner self. Your relationship with another human being cannot be a subject to object relationship. It must be a subject to subject relationship —for another human being is not simply a means to your end.

Before one can love one's neighbor one must recognize his or her as a "like you".

Deut 23:8: uses that term your brother of the Edomite and the Egyptian. Numbers 15:15 addressed to the whole congregation: "one law for you and for the stranger" or Leviticus 19:33-34: "Now when there sojourns a stranger in your land you are not to maltreat him, like the native born among you shall he be to you the stranger that sojourns with you. Love him as yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

Deut 10:18 states that God loves the stranger and enjoys the

Israelite to do likewise for you were strangers in the land of Egypt

The stranger had significant rights. Ezekiel claims he had the right to the parceling out of the land. (47:22) . He had a right to a city of refuge. (Numbers 35:15). He had a right to the tithe. (Deut 14:27-29)

Just as there is no word for beggar in Biblical Hebrew or for alms, so the Hebrew word for slave is simply servant and can apply to anyone even a king.

Herman Cohen has pointed out the line of development from man to neighbor to fellow man and thus to the thought of humanity in its totality.

This is based on Monotheism

A fellow man is not an object but a subject.

The coexistence of I and thou is the equality that must be constantly achieved and renewed. Its guarantee is God. Wherever we find these injunctions like Love your neighbor, or one statute or one manner of law between the native and the stranger it is followed by I am the lord or the equivalent.

What makes them all have a claim is that they are equal in the sight of God.

Herman Cohen's interpretation of Isaiah chapter 58 gets to the heart of the teaching. He states:

“When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh” (Isa. 58:7). This is the new insight that true monotheism brings about: the poor man is your own flesh. You do not consist of your own body, nor is your wife, the object of your sexual love, the only flesh that is your flesh, but the poor man is also your flesh.”

Leviticus 25 states: “but you shall fear your God so that your brother may live with thee.”(Verse 36)

Ahika thy brother is to be seen as thy fellow human being.

*Fourth* - the Sabbath as an institution.

The Sabbath as an institution was also revolutionary since it saw the need for all human beings to rest one day a week and to be in control of one's own time, including the slave and the stranger, even the animal.

A person in this commandment is defined as one who is in control of his or her time, so that at least one day a week he is not simply an object but a subject.

In Deuteronomy the slaves and the sojourners are to rest for you (the Israelites) were slaves in the land of Egypt. Most significantly the run away slave could not be returned he could find refuge. (Deuteronomy 23:15-16)

The institution of the Sabbath was extended to the sabbatical year and finally to the Jubilee year. What is embodied here is the concept of returning, of restoration, of renewal.

The evening of every day was a termination with its corresponding duties.

The pledge had to be returned not later than the evening. (Ex. 22:25; Deut 24:15)

Wages of the day laborer had to be paid no later than the evening. (Lev. 19:14; Deut 24:15)

Here again it is stated that if this is not done the aggrieved will

call upon the Lord and will be heard.

The Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year are entirely based on a returning.

What is of special interest here is that the land must also rest. Human beings are responsible for the doings of nature. The Jubilee year harmonizes land and freedom, and achieves the great returning and the rectification of social ills.

Property and debt and servitude cannot become permanent.

The Jubilee stands for the transitoriness of poverty.

The law takes the place of the kinsman as the redeemer or restorer. Lev 25:10 you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a homecoming to you. You are to return each man to his holding.

This puts a limit on avarice and destitution.

But this return is to a new and higher level. It is an inner and social transformation through teshuvah – return, reconciliation.

That the Jubilee is to be proclaimed on the Day of Atonement indicates that the return is joined in its religious dimensions with the *teshuvah* of the great day of atonement where the Mishnah clearly states that the day of atonement atones for sins between human beings and God but not sins between human beings until each person changes his ways.

The greatest achievement for human beings is to embody the virtues. These are God's attributes of compassion graciousness, patience, steadfast love and truth. (Exodus 34:6)

Thus a higher level is open for us to be reached and the basis is laid for its extension to all human beings. This is the sense in which the figure Abraham stands and is to be understood in its biblical and rabbinic context.

Abraham is to be the father of all peoples. The Talmud expands it to - father to all of the world. (Ber. 13a)

*Fifth* - kingship

In Deuteronomy 17:14 ff the King is subject to the torah. The king is not above but subservient to the law, and in first Samuel 8 it makes it very clear why since kings are not interested in the welfare of their subjects but rather their own glory and hence a righteous king the Messianic king who embodied the virtues of the true king is introduced in the Prophetic teaching. Such a king was to usher in the end of war and a society of Justice and Peace. (Isaiah 2 and 9 and 11 cf Isaiah 19)

The Bible does not legislate reality but strives to make the best within the limits of the social reality.

*Sixth* - other religions

With respect to the way religions view one another what has to be overcome is the invidious contrast between viewing one's own religion as embodying the children of light and the other religions as being children of darkness.

There are two specific teachings that separated Judaism from such a view. *First* there is the establishment of the Noachide as a status that taught that one did not have to be an Israelite to be saved. Indeed, as long as one acted according to the seven commandments of the sons of Noah, commandments which embodied a universal

ethic then that sufficed.

*Secondly*, the Tosephta enunciated what has become universally accepted in Judaism, that “the righteous of all nations have a place in world to come.” (T. Sanhedrin XIII, 2)

### **Interreligious dialogue**

All religions have elements in their teaching which parallel those I have presented as coming from the Jewish Biblical tradition. The question I would like to pose is how inter religious dialogue can help us give meaning and substance to the universal human rights we all feel are foundational for furthering a respect for all human beings and the necessary requirements for peace.

Religions have great power. They influence millions perhaps billions of people. How can this influence be directed to better understanding and mobilizing these resources for good? In the over thirty years that I have been engaged in interfaith dialogue I have determined that there are three issues that must be dealt with.

First we must ask and answer the question: “How can I be true to my faith without being false to yours?”

Dialogue and communication is needed in order not to distort or misrepresent the other. Common words mean very different things in different traditions. Only dialogue can bring about clarification by devising a more abstract terminology so that our own and the other’s religion can be described.

Most of all one must recognize oneself as properly characterized by the other in the dialogue process.

The great Sage Hillel enjoined us not to judge our fellow human being until you stand in his or her place. What I believe he meant is that it is not enough to just put your self in another person’s place, in that person’s shoes, or experience the world through that person’s categories, through their hopes and fears, their feelings. One must do something more, to look at yourself with the eyes of the other. How do you look to him? With what eyes do you see me?”

Now in the past, I have to acknowledge most religions viewed one another not in terms of their best elements but unfortunately the worst. Not only misunderstanding but suspicion and the tragic distinction that we are the children of light and everyone else the child of darkness. All too often Christians, Jews, and Muslims viewed each other with contempt.

The major difference is that Jews predominantly have been a persecuted minority defined by the Christian or Moslem majority and had to adapt to the place such religious societies provided for them.

In January 2003, I was privileged to be one of 38 religious leaders from around the world to participate in a Vatican symposium on Peace. The following is the communiqué I helped write:

Our Scriptures and traditions are the most important spiritual resources which each of us possesses. We believe that the Scriptures of each religion teach the path to peace, but we acknowledge that our various sacred writings have often been and continue to be used to justify violence, war, and exclusion of others. Our various communities cannot ignore such passages which have often been misinterpreted or

manipulated for unworthy goals such as power, wealth, or revenge, but we must all recognize the need for new, contextual studies and a deeper understanding of our various Scriptures that clearly enunciate the message and value of peace for all humanity.

Believers need to examine those Scriptural passages that depict people of other religions in ways that conflict with their own self-understanding. This requires a renewed effort to educate properly our own adherents to the values and beliefs of others. Such interreligious education, that takes seriously the self-understanding of other religious traditions, is essential for communicating the message of peace to new generations. This challenge is to remain true to our own faith without disparaging or distorting that of others.

Spiritual resources for peace include not only our Scriptural foundations, but also the example of our fellow believers who, down through history, have taught peace and acted as peacemakers. These include saints, poets and martyrs who have suffered and often given their lives in non-violent commitment to truth, justice and fellowship, which have been the foundations of human progress. They include countless persons of every religion whose names are not recorded by history, but who have valiantly acted to prevent conflict and war, who have assisted victims of violence without regard to religion or nation, and who have and who have worked for justice and reconciliation as the basis for establishing peace. By their actions, they have borne concrete witness to the mission of each religious community to be agents of peace amidst the harsh realities of injustice, aggression, terrorism and war.

The spiritual resources for peace also include interreligious encounters which have helped many to come together to learn about each other’s faith and shared values, and to discover the possibility of living and working together to build societies of justice and peace. Such encounters seek to instill a spirit of mutual respect and genuine understanding of one another and have helped us to see our religions as a force for good. Mutual respect and honoring differences are not simply lofty goals, but achievable reality.

In the last 42 years revolutionary changes have taken place that have witnessed considerable efforts on the parts of Christians to view Jews as they view themselves. Concerned with anti-Semitism and the part that Christians teaching may have contributed to it, has been amply investigated and epoch making changes have taken place beginning with *Nostra Aetate*, the Guidelines, the Notes, Pope John Paul’s visit to the synagogue in Rome, the Vatican Israel Accord, the We Remember document, and most recently the Papal visit to Jerusalem; all have shown the great efforts on the part of the Catholic Church in trying to provide a totally different atmosphere for dialogue and Christian Jewish relationships on all levels. This is now gradually being extended in what hopefully will be a positive transformation in Jewish, Christian, Muslim dialogue. It is clear that such change can be a model for dialogue among all

religions.

The Vatican itself has been a very positive source of progress. This change has led to the posing of two further related questions

The first question is: "How can I be true to my faith without being false to your faith?"

The second question that we must deal with is: "What is the place of the other religions in our own self understanding?" That is, what place do we provide for the other religions in our religious theologies? As we review our past teachings about the other we must find a proper place for the other.

Pope John Paul II wanted to dramatize these teachings by going to the Synagogue in Rome and to Jerusalem and also visiting a Mosque.

Thirdly we must dialogue to discover the common moral and ethical elements that are constitutive of our religions and try to unite on a common ethic independent of our theological perspectives.

This third necessity is of the utmost importance since we cannot expect the major religions to agree on theological issues but for the sake of our future and the future of our children they must agree on moral issues.

I hope that I have provided as sense in which the Hebrew Bible and Jewish teachings can contribute to the issue of human rights and why inter religious dialogue can be a significant resource for strengthening, establishing, and extending them so that all human beings can begin to find fulfillment.



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Centro Conferences

## *Dialogue and Proclamation* **Reflection and Orientation of Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ**

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(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Thursday, 2 April 2009)

The above-named document was published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on 19 May, 1991. It was intended to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council's document regarding the Church's relations with non-Christian religions.

One of the weighty matters that the Second Vatican Council sought to elucidate and determine was the proper attitude of the Church toward non-Christian religions. It devoted considerable thought, study, and reflection to the matter, and the result was the "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions", by its Latin title *Nostra Aetate*, which was solemnly promulgated by the reigning Pontiff, Paul VI, on 28 October, 1965.

In what follows we shall briefly recall the essential points of *nostra aetate* and examine the commentary and the suggestions made in its regard by the document presented by the Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1991.

### *Nostra Aetate*

1) As part of the mission given it by its Divine Founder, the Church has the task of fostering unity and love among men. All men, wherever they may be and whatever may be their culture and beliefs, form one human community. Likewise, all men have only one source – God – and only one end – eternal life in God.

Although this is the case, not all know and understand their nature and their destiny. But all, in one way or another, somehow sense that there must be more to human life than meets the eye, and so they seek answers, they try to discover the meaning of the mystery of life. In this search, many turn to religion for these answers, instinctively knowing that whatever may be the benefits of modern science, there is an area of human existence where science stumbles and falls short, unable to find its way in a mystery that is beyond its limits.

2) From the beginning, humankind darkly sensed a hidden power in the world, regulating nature and human existence. This power was conceived at first as belonging to spirit divinities, and as time progressed, these concepts developed and there appeared in some civilizations the idea of one supreme Divinity.

*Hinduism* is characterised by its use of myths as well as philosophical enquiry to explain the existence of the world, and by ascetical practices as well as loving trust in God it seeks salvation, defined as *mokša*, that is, release from the illusion of the contingent world and union with the Divine in the attainment of enlightenment.

*Buddhism* proclaims the insufficiency of this world, considering it to be fundamentally illusory, and teaches a concrete path to enlightenment, which brings freedom from the illusion of the world as we perceive it. Its various schools teach that this goal can be attained by meditation and ascetical practices or by assistance from a higher power.

*Other Religions*, whether traditional such as Taoism or newcomers such as Baha'i, all teach that the meaning and fulfilment of human life is to be found somewhere outside and beyond the material world as we know it in this present life, and they all offer teachings, rules of life, and sacred ceremonies to attain the desired goal.

The Catholic Church readily accepts all that is good, true, and holy in other religious traditions. Though these traditions have doctrines and ways that are different from her own, they contain a ray of the Truth that enlightens all men. Nevertheless, at the same time, the Church must proclaim Jesus Christ, who is the ray, the Truth, and the Life in whom is the fullness of Life and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. Therefore the Church encourages dialogue to acknowledge, preserve, and promote all that is good and true in other religious traditions, while at the same time she pushes onward in bearing witness to her divine Founder, Jesus Christ.

3) *Islam* has many good traits, such as the belief in one God, Creator of all, revelation, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, etc. Christians and Muslims need to forget their past quarrels and strive for mutual understanding, uniting to make common cause for the attainment of social justice, peace, and freedom, and the observance of the moral values that are the corollary of human dignity.

4) *Judaism*. The Church readily recognizes her debt to Jewish tradition. The Eternal Word became incarnate as a Jew, lived as a

Jew, and in his Passion and Death reconciled in himself both Jew and Gentile. Jerusalem did not recognize the time of its visitation and did not receive the Gospel, but God does not repent of his election, so we patiently await the day when all peoples will adore God with one voice. For the present, however, our common patrimony requires of us mutual understanding and respect.

All Jews cannot be held responsible for the act of a few two thousand years ago. We must not, therefore, present Jews as repudiated or cursed, and we must make this quite clear in our catechesis. The Church repudiates all hatred, persecution and other manifestations of anti-Semitism. We must all remember and understand that Christ freely accepted death on the Cross for the Salvation of all, so the Church must proclaim the Cross as the sign of God's love for all men.

5) Love of God and love of neighbor are intimately linked, and thus there can be no excuse for any distinction between men or peoples as regards human dignity. Therefore the Church firmly rejects all discrimination because of race, color, ethnicity, condition, or religion. Christians must conduct themselves properly with dignity and keep peace with all, since we are all children of our heavenly Father.

Let us note here simply that the document seemingly indicates a progression from religions that are deemed farthest from Christianity to those deemed closest to it, but one may question this classification. Hinduism, Buddhism, and all other religions are gathered together into one category, then follow Islam and Judaism, all being implicitly compared to the content of the Christian Faith. This seems to imply that somehow Islam and Judaism are more like Christianity than is, for instance, Hinduism. But in Hinduism, for example, we find the concept of a trinity, which is totally absent in Islam and Judaism. Again, Hinduism has the concept of the incarnation of a divine being (*avatar*), but there is nothing of the kind in Judaism and Islam, for which such a concept is blasphemous. The classification implied in the document seems to be based on the idea that the so-called "wisdom religions" of the Orient belong in one group while the so-called "abrahamic religions" are similar to each other because of their common reference to Abraham. They may indeed all claim Abraham for their ancestor, but in fact the "abrahamic" religions are essentially dissimilar among themselves whereas there are important elements common to Christianity and religions of the "wisdom" group, such as noted above.

### ***Dialogue and Proclamation***

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Proclamation may be defined as the announcement of the person and message of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, who lived among us some 2000 years ago, preached a message of love and the forgiveness of sins, suffered an excruciating Passion, died on the Cross, was buried but rose from the dead and gave his chosen Apostles specific instructions to carry his message to all mankind, and, before ascending to his Father, promised to send them an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who would take his place among them in his absence and who would guide the Church, the

collective body of those who believe in Him, receive his message and are baptized into his Mystical Body, the very Church that He founded, which continues to be governed by the legitimate successors of his Apostles, until the end of the world.

Dialogue, on the other hand, specifically interreligious dialogue, is communication with followers of other religious traditions regarding the teachings and the practices of their traditions and sharing with them objective information regarding the teachings and the practices of the Church.

Dialogue then, essentially different in character and function, does not replace, indeed, cannot replace, proclamation and does not compete with it. Instead, it accompanies it. It may precede it, in which case it is meant to function as an introduction to proclamation, which may or may not eventually take place given the interest or lack of interest on the part of the partner in dialogue. On the other hand, it may follow it. This happens when hearers of the proclamation are attracted by what they hear and are moved to delve deeper into what has been proclaimed, either by asking for further information or by expressing doubt or disagreement concerning what they have heard, perhaps offering a rebuttal taken from their own religious tradition, whatever it may be.

The process or activity of Evangelization includes both proclamation and dialogue, and we must understand that neither of the two is necessarily bound to or limited to verbal communication. A simple smile is an act of dialogue. It reaches out to another and expresses openness, benevolence, and willingness to advance to a deeper level of contact with the other should that be appropriate and desirable. At this level, of course, the boundaries of proclamation and dialogue tend to become blurred and to fuse into one process. For the expression of benevolence and interest in another, while a dialogic gesture, is at the same a proclamation of acceptance of the other and benevolence in his regard, that is, of love in the Christian sense of the word.

And that is precisely the basis for proceeding further in dialogue: interest in the other, respect for his dignity, due attention to his cares and needs, and the willingness and the desire to understand him as he is, without attempting to change him or to somehow make him better. Indeed, dialogue is only possible on the basis of the equality of the partners, for without the mutual respect and equality of those engaged in dialogue, dialogue becomes either an attempt to "teach" the other and thus somehow improve him, or a defense against what he is perceived to represent.

The most important element of dialogue is each partner's sincere desire to listen to the other and to learn from him who he is and how he is, and thus avoid whatever preconceived misconceptions we might have in his regard given only our *perception* of who and what he is. Experience has shown that by listening to the partner in interreligious dialogue carefully and objectively, the Christian himself has much to learn and can indeed gain greater insight into and understanding of his own religious tradition.

Dialogue, as a means of proclamation, of sharing with others the unique treasure that we have as Christians, is both rich with possibilities and at the same time exposed to unexpected turns of events. If the Holy Spirit opens the other to the Gospel and to the

knowledge of the Divine Son, this may result in the conversion of the other to the Church. On the other hand, if the Christian partner is not well grounded in his Faith and sustained constant prayer, he might be led to abandon his Faith and to leave the Church. The world is full of ex-Catholics who, for one reason or another, have left the Church and found fulfilment of their religious needs in other religious traditions.

This document was conceived by Catholics for Catholics, and it makes clear that interreligious dialogue is, among other things, intended as a means of proclamation. The document states that it is intended for Catholics first of all, but that it is also offered to other Christians and to those of other religious traditions, but there is no evidence in the document itself that any thought was given at any time to how those outside the Catholic Church might perceive it, what they might think of it, and, in consequence, what they might think of the Church. The message, however, is clear: we (the Church) have the Truth; other traditions have partial truths; but those adherents of other traditions who recognize Christ and come into the Church will receive the full Truth. Such is, indeed, the position expressed by the document, which faithfully mirrors the teaching of the Church. That is well and good as a statement of position, but it is certainly not designed to create any good will among non-Catholics, who might justly feel offended by being classified as underprivileged with regard to truth and religion.

In this connection, two things must be made clear. First of all, all of these other religious traditions, whether Christian or non-Christian, perceive *themselves* to be true and valid. Other Christian denominations believe that the Catholic Church has, in one way or another, over the centuries strayed from what it originally was and, indeed, was intended to be, by her Divine Founder. They all conceive of themselves as either not having strayed from the original purity of the Church (the Orthodox) or as having corrected the abuses and errors that over the centuries had crept into the Church and as having returned to the original condition intended by Christ (the Protestants). As for the non-Christian traditions, whether of the Abrahamic-monotheistic strain (Judaism and Islam) or of the so-called “wisdom” religions of Asia, (Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc.), they all understand themselves to be the “truth”, valid and efficacious ways or paths leading their adherents to salvation, that is, to the fulfilment of the deepest of human longings and the very purpose of human existence. None of them feel that they have anything to learn or to receive from Christianity that might make them better or more perfect. Often, in fact, the reverse is true: they believe that Christians as well as others outside their own tradition can only attain the final goal of human existence by abandoning their false convictions and accepting instead those that they propose as truth. In a word, they consider themselves to be the true path to enlightenment and to salvation. That is the way they sincerely understand themselves. They have every right to their opinion, and it is incumbent on us to respect and to honor their position. Some of us may have had, and one time or the other, the unpleasant experience of being accosted by Jehovah’s Witnesses and being told point blank that we were in error and that we needed to convert to their persuasion. Thus we know from experience that it is neither

wise nor helpful to proceed in such a manner.

Secondly, we must understand that to know and to accept Christ one needs a special grace, a special gift from God. Those who are baptized in infancy often do not sufficiently realize the great gift they have received. Those of us, however, who are converts, such as the present writer, know well that we would never have been able to understand and to accept Christ’s message if God had not opened our minds and hearts and enabled us to see and to understand. As converts, we know well that we have received a pure gift that we in no way merited, one of which we were, and still are, unworthy. The reality is that all men seem not to be called to know Christ in this life. Christ Himself speaks of this in the Gospel when He refers to those who are “not of my sheep” (John 10:26) and, again, says “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him,” (John 6:44), and “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am...” (John 17: 24) thereby clearly indicating that there are also those whom the Father has *not* given Him.

If this is so, how then are we to reconcile this with the divine command recorded in Mt. 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”? The answer to this is a mystery that lies hidden in the heart of God, outside our field of vision. It is one of the many mysteries to which we cannot know the answer. One possibility, however, would be to understand “of all nations” as a partitive genitive: make disciples from all nations, precisely those whom the Father chooses to draw to His divine Son. In any case, we as disciples are called to proclaim the Son of God to all men, but it behooves us to do this in an appropriate manner, one that does not offend from the start. And the best way to do this is to offer to those around us the example of an authentically Christian life, holy and totally dedicated to God. One could hardly think of a better example of this than Mother Theresa of Calcutta, whose whole life was an eloquent proclamation of God and his love for mankind revealed in his Divine Son, Jesus Christ.

### ***Interreligious Dialogue***

A truly Christian approach to other religious traditions is open and welcoming rather than closed and negative. Christ indeed died for all, including all those outside the visible Church, whether they are members of other Christian denominations, follow some non-Christian religious tradition, or have no religious convictions at all. As the Second Vatican Council made clear in its pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, Christ not only died for all but is in some mysterious way at work in all calling them to a life united with God. As the Church also affirms, although the Holy Spirit was sent to the Church to guide her through the ages until the end of time, He is active as well outside the Church, sending down divine graces on humanity to awaken in men a desire for God and His Truth, a desire to know the reason for their existence and the goal of human life.

Non-Christian religious traditions have considerable good in them. They also call their adherents to a life lived for God, in the hope of an eternal reward. While they lack the fullness of Truth, they have rays of that Truth, as some of the Fathers of the Early

Church, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyon, and Clement of Alexandria put it, seeds sown by the Incarnate Word among the nations, indeed, “seeds of the Gospel.”

Here, however, we must register a note of caution. While the Incarnate word is, as He said of Himself, “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” (John 14:6) and founded the Church so that His disciples might have Life and “have it to the full”, (John 10:10), that Truth and that Life, although objectively present in the Church for the taking, is in fact possessed by its members only imperfectly, according to the measure of their union with God, which, however deep and intimate it might be, can only be limited and imperfect in our present condition, and therefore our grasp of the Truth, our understanding of it, is likewise imperfect. This means that if we know the Truth, we do not know it fully, and our knowledge is capable of growing in scope and in depth. And this, in turn, means that we ourselves can learn and benefit from those rays of the Truth that are found in other religious traditions in the measure that they are different from our own understanding. They can possibly complement, increase, and deepen our own knowledge of God, not least in providing new and different points of view from which to contemplate the unfathomable mystery of God. And here we have one of the most important reasons for interreligious dialogue. If we approach other religions with Faith and deference to the action of the Holy Spirit, seeking and praying for His enlightenment, we can learn more about our infinitely loving God and Creator, which can lead to an increase of our Faith in Him and love for Him.

We must understand that there are three Churches: the Church Triumphant in heaven, where all its members have been brought to perfection, the Church Militant on earth, where its members are united to God but only imperfectly, and by Faith and good works are striving to be ever more united to God by doing His Will, and the Church Suffering composed of those souls who have already finished their early course but who still have not yet attained that degree of perfect union with God that He wishes to give them. It is only in the Church Triumphant that there is perfect knowledge of God, in so far as this is possible to mere creatures. As for the rest of us, our knowledge of God is always capable of being perfected, broadened, and deepened, of becoming more full and authentic. Unfortunately, in our approach to other religious traditions, we act as if our knowledge of God was already fully adequate and correct, and we do not usually realize that some of those “rays” of Truth present in other religions could be of great benefit to us by providing other points of view from which to consider God, until, that is, all of a sudden, by contact with other traditions, we see something that we hadn’t seen before, or we see something of which we were previously aware but we see it from an entirely different angle, and this broadens our understanding of God.

What is true for the individual is also valid for Christian theology. The Church has developed and perfected its doctrine and teaching over two thousand years, but the Church itself is still a small plant, barely emerging from the soil, and has a very long way to travel yet until it reaches the fullness of that perfection that is possible to it on earth. Twentieth century theology has been immeasurably enriched by its encounters, deliberate or chance, as

the case may be, with eastern religious traditions, which have opened up for it new horizons to be contemplated, tested, verified, and confirmed as rich and beautiful approaches to the Divine Majesty.

Old Testament revelation teaches us that God made a covenant with all peoples, and through the ages he guided mankind by the prophets, who proclaimed the coming of a Savior for mankind. We recognize that Savior in Jesus, the Messiah, the Incarnate Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and we know that He has come for all men, without distinction, for He sent His Apostles to all nations. This is our Faith, resting on the rock of Peter, whom Christ chose to be the first of His stewards on earth. But we must not forget that He has always been active, and shall continue to be so, outside the Church as well, and it is precisely interreligious dialogue that permits us to catch glimpses of His action, to see His footprints as it were, as He works to bring all humanity to Himself. By His coming, Christ established the Kingdom of God on earth, and He wills that all enter it and find there a home, rest for their troubled souls, where their instinctive though at times unconscious longing for their Divine Source be satisfied.

But in seeking to find His Presence in men and in other religious traditions, so we can build on them to promote the knowledge of Christ, we need careful discernment and wisdom, for in religious traditions, including our own, as history testifies, all does not come from the good Spirit. So we must proceed cautiously, constantly seeking divine guidance in prayer. As we find that all is not perfect in other traditions, however, so must we be prepared to recognize the faults and imperfections in our own tradition. Before we seek to point out the imperfections in the traditions of others, we must be careful and attentive to recognize and to remove the beam from our own eye, and this means that we must listen carefully when our partners in dialogue point out to us the defects that they perceive in the Church, for it is possible that we are so used to them that we have not recognized them for what they are, hindrances to the fulfilment of the Divine Will. So conceived and practiced, interreligious dialogue is beneficial to all concerned, an aid to all in our effort to be pleasing to God and to live as He expects of us.

Thus, we see that interreligious dialogue is a necessary and integral part of the Church mission. It must be undertaken with all seriousness and carried forward with respect for our partners and their traditions, and with patience and kindness when confronted with the inevitable difficulties that are therein inherent. We know, and we must never forget, that this is not a purely human undertaking. We enter into dialogue with others in order to be faithful to the Divine Will, and we know that we become thus collaborators with the Holy Spirit who inspires us to undertake this task and who supports and guides us on the way forward. We must never forget the word of the Psalmist: unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it, (Ps. 126:1).

The necessary dispositions, then, for interreligious dialogue are absolute faith in God and His divine guidance, a sincere desire to build His Kingdom, the humility to recognize and to accept the mistakes and the deficiencies of the Church not only in the past but

also in the present, and a desire to grow in the knowledge of God and in union with Him, conscious of the fact that He is active outside the visible Church and desirous of discovering Him and His action in other religious traditions. Dialogue is by definition a two-way street, and only if we approach it in that spirit can it bring forth fruit.

There are, of course, many obstacles to interreligious dialogue. These may be objective in nature, that is, independent of the persons wishing to engage in dialogue, such as historical confrontations and difficulties with a particular tradition, political and/or social situations that militate against dialogue, where one of the partners has been, and perhaps still is, either disadvantaged or unduly favored with respect to the prospective partner, etc. On the other hand, there may be serious subjective difficulties, such as insufficient knowledge of one's own tradition, ignorance and/or prejudice with regard to the tradition of the other, doubt regarding the dispositions of the other, suspicion of his motives, underlying intolerance or indifference to the tradition and the opinions of the other, a polemical attitude rather than a desire to learn and to understand, etc. But experience has shown that where dialogue has been conducted in a fitting spirit and in suitable conditions, it can and does produce real fruit: it promotes mutual understanding and acceptance. We must understand that the Church's commitment to interreligious dialogue stems from and is inspired by God's dialogue with all of humanity from the beginning of Creation, for the Church is sent by her Divine Founder precisely to all men in the name of God.

### ***Proclaiming Jesus Christ***

The four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles all testify to the solemn mandate from the Lord Jesus to proclaim His Gospel to the world. Jesus Himself proclaimed the Kingdom not only by His words, but by His whole life, in particular by His Passion and Death on the Cross that testified to His total obedience to the Father, and above all by His Resurrection from the dead, thereby confirming the truth of His Message. The works that He accomplished, the miracles that He performed, all testified to His Divinity, confirmed by the Father who gave Him those works to perform and who, speaking from Heaven at Jesus' Baptism by John in the Jordan, testified that Christ was His own Beloved Son.

The Church receives that mandate from her divine Founder with joy, and guided by the Holy Spirit continues the mission of the Apostles, intending, by faithful compliance with the divine command, to bring the Good News of Salvation to all men. We, His disciples and members of His Mystical body, are not ordinarily called upon to perform miracles, but we are indeed called upon to proclaim the Kingdom not merely in words but, as Jesus Himself, by our whole life. First of all, because a holy life, totally dedicated to the service of God and of men for the love of God is, in itself, an eloquent proclamation of Christ's message, and secondly, because if the oral proclamation that we may have occasion to make is not authenticated by the witness of our lives, our words are empty and devoid of meaning, turning in derision the very message that we announce.

Thus, by our lives and, as the occasion presents itself, by our words, we announce Jesus the Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who, having conquered death by His glorious Resurrection, as Savior of mankind calls all men to repentance and conversion for the forgiveness of their sins and the reward of eternal life in the bosom of the Father.

The Acts of the Apostles relate how the Holy Spirit Himself confirmed the universality of the gift of Salvation on the occasion of Peter's visit to the Roman Centurion Cornelius, when He descended on Cornelius and his whole household just as He had done on the Apostles at Pentecost (Acts 10:44ff.). St. Paul tells us that the hidden mystery of God's love for mankind is revealed in Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man (1 Tm. 2:4-6.). St. John witnesses to the Incarnation of the Eternal Word (Jn. 1:14) who reveals God to man (Jn. 1:18) and through whom the Father can be seen (Jn. 14:8ff.).

The urgency of this proclamation is well expressed by the words of St. Paul, as he cries out: woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel (Rm. 10:4ff.). And two thousand years later, his namesake, Pope Paul VI again stresses this urgency in his Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, reminding all that the proclamation of the Message of the Gospel is a solemn duty imposed on the Church by the command of the Lord Himself.

The Church, then, continuing the witness of the Apostles and Holy Scripture, announces, to all who would hear, the Word Incarnate, who brings Redemption and life eternal to all who would receive Him, becoming in them, together with the Father, a living Presence to sustain and to guide them. Eternal Truth, He brings truth and freedom to all who keep His commandments.

In her proclamation of Salvation for all mankind, the witness of the Church is not merely a human work, for the Church is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who, in answer to mankind's unspoken and, indeed, often unconscious, aspiration for Salvation, makes powerful the words of weak and imperfect disciples, and who sends down divine grace on hearers that they may understand and receive the Church's message.

But for her message to be received, those who announce the Gospel to the world must learn to present their Message in such a way that it may be understood and accepted by those who hear it. As the Council teaches, God is at work outside the visible Church, and the Holy Spirit is active in the hearts of those who in good faith sincerely practice another tradition. Therefore the Church must adapt the presentation of her Message to the mentality and the cultural suppositions of her audience, proceeding slowly and prudently. It is not enough to proclaim the Gospel in the language of the hearers, it must also be presented in a manner and a context that is comprehensible to them.

Thus, it is necessary that the bearers of the Good News know well the religious tradition and the culture of those whom they wish to evangelize. They must proclaim their Message in a manner that both faithfully conveys its content and at the same time is respectful of their audience. Above all, they must be attentive to the signs of the Holy Spirit at work in their hearers that they may act in a manner consonant with His action, for it is He who is the principal

agent of Evangelization. And for their Message to be perceived as authentic, those who proclaim must themselves be intimately united to Christ, that they may be guided and inspired by Him, and that their lives mirror their words. Indeed, the quality of their lives may be even more eloquent than their words. A shining contemporary example, of course, is Mother Theresa of Calcutta.

As we saw that there are obstacles to interreligious dialogue, there are also obstacles to proclamation of the Gospel, which, it must be said, is a difficult and complicated task. The document lists various difficulties, dividing them into two groups, internal and external, but it seems that a better classification would be subjective and objective.

The first category concerns problems such as the life of those who proclaim the Gospel not being in conformity with the message. This is, admittedly, always a problem, because those who proclaim are simply human beings, with all the defects, faults and insufficiencies that that entails. Not all of us are St. Francis or St. Theresa. Again, one may neglect proclamation out of shyness, human respect, or even reluctance to commit oneself to a position that is not popular or politically correct. One may also lack sufficient knowledge and/or respect for the tradition of the hearer, one may betray an attitude of superiority with regard to the hearer, or one may unconsciously identify the message with a particular culture, different from that of the hearer, perhaps one that has historically been imposed from without. A case in point is the attitude of the Church in China, where from the XVII c. till the latter half of the XX c. missionaries built gothic style churches, repudiated indigenous customs regarding respect for the dead, and in general imposed a mentality and a style on converts that were completely foreign to the Chinese genius.

The second category of difficulty concerns difficulties relating to the concrete situation of those to whom the Gospel is directed. For example, to mirror the last difficulty described in the first category, the experience of colonialism may produce a fear on the part of the hearer that the Gospel is inimical to and incompatible with indigenous culture, and would inevitably result in its deformation or even destruction were one to accept it. Different conceptions of human rights and lack of respect for them on the part of the culture of the hearer may limit his freedom to accept the Message. A political situation that entails persecution of religion in general, such as was the case in China until more liberal policies were quite recently adopted by the government, or persecution specifically of the religion of the messenger, such as is still the case in Islamic countries, may seriously hinder or even completely prevent proclamation. Conversion may be against the law, and even punishable by death, as it is where Islamic religious law determines the justice system. And even in Islamic countries where *shari'a* is not officially the law of the land, a Muslim who converts to Christianity can be killed with relative impunity, because to kill an apostate is considered to be an act of virtue by the faithful Muslim, obedient to Allah's law even without juridical sanction by the government. Again, the widespread contemporary mentality of indifference and relativism found everywhere in secular society is a serious obstacle to proclamation. One the other hand, religion

may be, rather than a faith, simply a badge of social and/or ethnic identity, where any change automatically puts one outside one's traditional social or ethnic group. This is typically the case in some of the more open societies in the Near East, where religion is a way of belonging to a particular social or ethnic group. Such a mentality owes much to the government of the Ottoman Empire, which dealt with its citizens on the basis of their religious identity. Or again, one finds a similar phenomenon in strict Judaism, where one who marries outside the community, that is, marries a non-Jew, is considered dead. All of these things and others like them create very serious difficulties, if not for proclamation itself, then certainly for the acceptance of the message proclaimed.

Nevertheless, proclamation is essential, vital, to the mission of the Church. Proclamation is part of the very nature of the Church, which is called to proclaim Christ to all peoples, certainly in words, but even more in deeds, as the Church is called to bring the Gospel to the world by the quality of life, the moral rectitude, of its children, in order to gain the world for Christ and to transform it into the Kingdom of God on earth. We recall rather shamefacedly the reaction of the pagans to the primitive Christian community: "See how they love one another!" Would to God that that were still the reality today! At the same time, however, we must always be aware that the Gospel will always be a stumbling block to some, perhaps even to many. As St. Paul puts it so well, the Cross of Christ is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews (1Cor.1:23.). In spite of all, however, proclamation of the Gospel of Christ is, and shall always be, a sacred duty of the Church as such as well as of her individual members, by whatever means possible.

### ***Interreligious Dialogue and Proclamation***

Both dialogue and proclamation are necessary elements of the Church mission. As we have seen, the Church is truly interested in interreligious dialogue, to the point of creating a special Pontifical Council to promote and guide it, and it is this same Council that issued a special document in 1991, the document that is under discussion here, to explain her interest in it and to encourage more and more people to become engaged in it.

In reading the document, however, it is somewhat difficult to avoid getting the impression that the Church is not interested in other religious traditions *per se*, that is for themselves, but only to discover in them seeds of the Gospel in order to orient her proclamation of the Gospel toward them and to base it on them, so that, hopefully, her proclamation may the better resonate with those who hear it and thus have a better chance of success. In other words, dialogue is conceived exclusively as a *means* of proclamation. There is, of course, nothing wrong in this. The Church is simply seeking thereby to augment her chances of success in bringing the Gospel to all peoples. After all, one always attempts to use the best bait to attract the fish, and the Lord Himself said clearly when He began calling His Apostles: come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. (Mt. 4:19; Mk. 1:17).

Such an attitude is not wrong, but it is definitely short-sighted. The second half of the XX c. has given solid examples of Chris-

tians who have sought to know other religious traditions above all for the spiritual riches that they carry within themselves. To mention only a few, one thinks of Fr. Yves Monchanin, Fr. Bede Griffiths, O.S.B., and Fr. Henri Le Saux, O.S.B., who all set out for India, pulled by an invisible and irresistible attraction it would not be too much to say inspired by the Holy Spirit to discover the immense riches of the Hindu tradition. After many years in the land, Fr. Monchanin finally returned to France, but Frs. Le Saux and Griffiths remained all their lives in India, the first becoming a wandering hermit and the second founding a Christian *ashram* in Tamil Nadu that still flourishes today. Both men entered deeply into the Hindu religious experience, thereby being blessed and gaining much profit and insight into matters of the spirit. And in Japan, Fr. Enomiya Lasalle, S.J., comes immediately to mind as one who entered thoroughly into the spirit and practice of Zen meditation, from which he drew much profit for himself and for hundreds of others whom he guided along the path of Zen.

The point is that these traditions are immensely valuable in themselves and offer many spiritual riches to all who approach them with reverence, humility, and determination. They need not be in competition with the Gospel, but rather complementary to it. Indeed, they can be a powerful means of deepening the experience of the Gospel message, that is, of increasing one's union with God. In a word, these traditions have much to offer in and of themselves, and should not be used simply as a means to get people interested in the Gospel. To do so is not to recognize their intrinsic value and to miss the rich insights they can afford to the spiritual seeker. In other words, these traditions are worthy of being investigated and understood for the riches that they hold, and to use them as simply a means of introducing the Gospel is to forgo the immense benefit that they contain for whoever wishes to approach them seriously.

The Church's mission is universal, but she must proclaim it in very diverse cultural and religious situations, and therefore she must always adapt her proclamation to the concrete situation in which she finds herself. Such adaptation, however, requires serious and careful discernment, which, in turn, can only be achieved by complete openness and objectivity toward other traditions as well as deep reflection on the significance of God's activity in them and on the spiritual experience of those who live according to them. In other words, the Church must approach other religious traditions with an attitude of deep respect for the tradition itself and for God's action in it.

Even while doing her best to adapt her message to her hearers, however, men will inevitably react differently toward the Church and her proclamation of the Gospel. Some will be attracted and want to learn more, others will show some initial interest only to turn away after a moment, and still others will have no interest whatsoever, some even being repulsed from the beginning by the Church's advances. We must realize that some people simply have no interest at all in religion as such, and really want nothing to do with it, whatever its form and message. And this, too, must be respected. In such cases, our proclamation must be reduced to silent example and fervent prayer.

Certainly, the Gospel message will raise questions in some

hearers, but, on the other hand, those who proclaim it may find themselves being challenged as well by the tradition that faces them. It may raise serious questions in them. They may wonder, for instance, on discovering that Jews and Muslims pray more than Catholics, why this is so. Put inversely, why do Catholics pray so little when others pray so much? Or, being confronted by a deep, genuine awareness of the Divine Presence in even simple, little-educated Hindus, they may be forced to ask themselves why they, who have been told by the Lord that if they keep His commandments, He and the Father will take up their abode in them, they who have been assured by St. Paul that they are temples of the Holy Spirit, why, indeed, they, who have the Truth, have so little awareness of the Divine Presence in them? Such experiences should be for them the occasion for learning to be more attentive to God, for deepening their Faith in Him, for reaffirming their dedication to Him, and becoming more conscious of their total reliance on Him, not only for proclamation but for all that they undertake in life, even down to the most minute details of everyday existence, for without Him, as Jesus said, they can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5.).

But the Church not only has the obligation to proclaim the Gospel everywhere and at all times and to enter into dialogue with other religious traditions, she should also encourage dialogue between the diverse religious traditions themselves in order to promote truth, justice, peace, holiness, and love on earth. Indeed, interreligious dialogue, among all religions, mirrors and imitates the divine dialogue of Salvation that God entertains with all humankind. We are all companions on the path leading to God.

Having said this, however, we must be very much aware as well that other religious traditions are, in fact, not particularly interested in dialogue, either with the Catholic Church or with other religions. In fact, each of the great religious traditions of humanity considers itself to be true and complete, sufficient in itself, and the true and totally adequate path to Salvation, however it may be conceived. As such, they neither feel nor recognize any need to enter into dialogue with any other religious tradition, which, for them, is by definition imperfect and inadequate. For many, many centuries, the Catholic Church herself had this same attitude, and only relatively recently, in the second half of the XX c., has she become interested in interreligious dialogue. Thus it should neither surprise nor offend her that other religious traditions have little or no interest in dialogue. And where such interest is indeed present, it is usually only at the invitation and the insistence, not to say the prodding, of the Catholic Church, which, to be candid, from the point of view of other religious traditions, seems to have suddenly become obsessed with dialogue.

Our document tells us repeatedly that the purpose of proclamation is to announce to mankind what God has done for men in Jesus Christ and to invite them to become His disciples. Further, it wishes to make us understand that proclamation must be done in a sensitive manner, in which those who proclaim are duly attentive to God's presence in the hearer and in his religious tradition. It reminds us as well, that it is only when the hearer recognizes that Christ is truly God can he then become His disciple and then

himself take part in the evangelizing mission of the Church. That is, of course, all true and well and good, but what it seems not to stress sufficiently is the fact that, however good, zealous, eloquent, logical, sensitive, attentive, and whatever the proclamation may be, it can and will avail nothing if, in addition to all the admirable efforts of those who proclaim, God does not give the hearer a special grace to be open to, to understand, and to receive what is proclaimed. One cannot stress enough the necessity of this free gift of God, without which all the eloquence of all the proclamations in the world are, and will always be, useless. Only, yes, only if this gift is present in the heart of the hearer, can he respond positively to what he hears. The corollary of this, of course, is that if, for a reason or reasons known only to God, He does not deign to accord this necessary gift to the hearer, the hearer *cannot* respond to and receive the Gospel in his heart. And in such a case, God will have to, and in fact does, lead his child by other paths than the Gospel. We need always to be mindful of Jesus words: you do not believe because you are *not of my sheep*. (Jn. 10:26). The message is clear, even if we fail to understand why it is so: Not all are called to be Jesus disciples, and we shall just have to accept that, while at the same time doing all we possibly can to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world, and then leave the rest up to God.

Here the document insists again, as we have already seen, that all are called to both dialogue and proclamation, since both are part of the effort to bring Christ to the world. All are called to this work according to each one's capacity and situation, which determine how he can take part in the task of bringing God's Salvation to all peoples. Dialogue does not replace proclamation, rather it prepares the way for it, which by word and/or example makes Christ known to others. Dialogue is the means by which we can discover those seeds of the Word in non-Christian traditions upon which we can build in our effort to help all men come to know the Savior. Our effort to make Christ known must be preceded and accompanied by a serious effort to understand the religious tradition of the hearer, so that we may adapt our message to his personal situation. And knowledge of his tradition can open up insights for us that can help us to deepen our own Faith in and commitment to Christ, and thus help up to proclaim Him with more conviction and zeal. But another religious tradition can also be a challenge to our own, and thus a deep and strong Faith is essential, not only the better to proclaim Christ, but also to meet the challenge another faith may represent to us, and to be able to answer it as we present our message.

As we saw, we desire to bring Christ to others not only in obedience to the Lord's command, but also because we wish to share our most precious gift with others that they, too, may enjoy the blessings that our Faith has brought us. But at the same time we must understand that our hearer may have a desire similar to our own, that is, to bring the riches of *his* tradition to us, and out of respect for this and out of respect for the Holy Spirit, who leads each of us as He sees fit, according to each one's capacity to respond to the divine invitation, we must be prepared to listen to his message as he listens to ours. And we must also be alert for any message that God may have for us in the words of the other, for we

learn about God not only in Holy Scripture, also through those whom God places on our path. We all respond to the divine call as we perceive it, and since we all seek God but find ourselves on different paths, we must leave it to God to establish one flock under one Shepherd, in His own good time and in His own good way.

In all of this, of course, we take Jesus as our Guide. The Church pursues her task in the spirit of the Gospel and of Jesus' teaching, taking His patience and His love as our model in all. If we wish to be successful in our efforts, we must look to Jesus and do our best to act as He did. Take the example He gave us in His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:7ff.). Jesus breaks the model of social convention. As a Jew, He is not supposed to speak to this woman, but, in spite of the fact that He declared that He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (cf. Mt. 15:25.), because He so ardently desires to draw all to Himself, He ignores convention and asks her for a drink of water. This breaks the ice, and a conversation ensues in which He captures all her attention and interest. He is not aggressive, nor does He attempt to lecture her and reprove her for her conduct (she has had five husbands). He simply catches her attention and lets the power of His person attract her to Him, to the point that after a minute or two of conversation, she already suspects that He is the Messiah of God. We must do likewise: establish contact and let the divine power of the Holy Spirit open our hearer's heart to our words. But in order to have any chance of success, we must above all be authentic, that is to say, our life must mirror our words, and that will be the case only if we are ourselves intimately united to God. That this may be the case, we need to avail ourselves of the means that God has placed at our disposal: sincere prayer, faithfulness to God's commandments, and above all the Holy Eucharist, from which we may draw the strength and the discernment necessary to proclaim the Gospel in a worthy and fitting manner. And we must never forget that at times the best – and indeed in some difficult situations, the only possible – proclamation is simply the silent but eloquent witness of a life faithful to Christ. As Scripture says, there is "a time to speak and a time to be silent" (Eccl. 3:7.).

### **Conclusion**

For dialogue and proclamation to be successful, they must always take place according to the conditions posed by the concrete situation, both of the proclaimer and of the hearer. Above all, dialogue and proclamation must be adapted to the concrete reality of each different religious tradition. As the saying goes, "What do you need to know in order to teach Johnny math? Johnny!" All the necessary knowledge of the subject and all the preparation possible will serve as nothing and bring forth no result if one does not carefully and wisely adapt them to the hearer. For this to be possible, however, it is absolutely necessary that the proclaimer have adequate knowledge of the tradition of the hearer, and this is only then possible when the proclaimer takes the time and makes the effort necessary to acquaint himself thoroughly both with this particular tradition and with its specificity in the concrete context of the hearer. In addition to this, of course, as has been often emphasized here, the proclaimer must also be well grounded in and

faithfully live his own tradition.

Dialogue and proclamation are not easy, but, as is usually the case, nothing of value ever is. Dialogue and proclamation are both necessary, and all are called to participate, according to their personal capacity and their concrete life situation, in the effort to make Christ known to the Nations. And all must realize that this effort depends for success totally on divine grace, both to inspire the proclaimer and to open the heart and the mind of the hearer, that

he may understand and receive the message presented to him. Thus, all our endeavors to make Christ known and loved need to be prepared and accompanied by fervent and constant prayer, that the Holy Spirit may inspire, empower, sustain, and guide our efforts, so that they may be in accordance with the action of His grace and consequently produce the desired fruit, the opening of a soul to God's Love and to a life lived in and for Him.