

No 1

RELIGIOUS PLURALITY AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

EUROPEAN MISSION STUDIES, NO. 1

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC MISSIOLOGISTS

Editors:

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Preface to the series

With this book, we want to launch a new series dedicated to missiological reflection: *European Mission Studies*. As the world at the beginning of the 21st century is changing, similarly should follow our understanding of Christian missions. That was always a case in the past. Understanding of evangelization was different in the Antiquity, in the Middle Ages and the Age of Discoveries. Generally by “missions” we understand the crossing of the border between faith in Jesus Christ and its absence. But today the border is more fluid. This classical “black-white” division is not so obvious. The principal “way” of mission is always proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and celebration of the new life in community. Among many new dimensions of this contemporary reality of evangelization we see more and more attention paid to the different cultures, different social realities and different religions which influence Christian witness, service, and worship.

Even though missiology starts with the theological perspective, it needs help of other academic disciplines. Two thousand years of Christian missions offers very rich experience, in the fields of linguistics, anthropology, sociology and religious studies, which could be well used in the contemporary missiological reflection.

We hope that this new series will become a chance for the Catholic reflection on missiological issues from the European perspective. Although it starts as an initiative of three centers of central-western Europe, we want to be open for any serious methodological reflection on missions of the Church without regard for any academic disciplinary, national or denominational boundaries.

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RELIGIOUS PLURALITY AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

ED. BY WOJCIECH KLUJ OMI



Wydawnictwo Naukowe
Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego

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Introduction

If any religion were able to fully grasp the reality of God, God would cease to be himself. Does the in-depth self-determination of one's own religious identity exclude religious pluralism? It seems that the opposite is true. For a deeper definition of my own religious identity, I need to examine my own position in light of strongly held beliefs of those who adhere to other religious systems.

As an introductory image to this book, one can use the symbolic grotto-hill, which is located in the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas, in the United States. A beautiful grotto (as in Lourdes) was built there. Some people like to come there to seek the intercession of this "European" Mary. On the other hand, on the back of the cave, the hill of Tepeyac was built, where Our Lady of Guadalupe is venerated. Some people come to this "Indigenous" Mary. Of course, everyone knows that it is the same Mary. However, it is easier for some people to pray and concentrate on one, and for the others, on the "other" Mary. It depends, therefore, which at these one considers to be "their" Mother of God. The same can be said about various Marian sanctuaries in countries around the world. Every nation or ethnic group has its own sanctuary, but it does not mean that we seek the intercession of a different Mary.

Some politicians see religious pluralism either as a threat to their own religious identity, or on the other hand just as a moral duty to be tolerant. It is important, therefore, to consider also the theological dimension of this question. That was the goal of the conference organized on February 24, 2017 by the European Group of International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM), Missio Aachen, Chair of Missiology of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University and the Association of Polish Missiologists. This conference became an inspiration to publish, in one volume, some of the issues raised in the discussion. Not all of the presentations are published here. Only some texts were selected. Two texts which were not delivered at the conference were also added. Of particular importance is the text of Father Joseph Samarakone, who passed on shortly after he had edited his speech. This might have been one of his last or even the last of his many presentations.

This book is divided into two parts; each containing five texts. The first one is dedicated to the theme of Religious Plurality and Religious Identity seen from the perspective of some countries, especially in Asia. The second segment stays more within the European and more general context.

The first part of the book begins with the presentation of Fr. Austin Cooper OMI from Catholic Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia. He presents the theme *Australian perspective on Religious Plurality and Religious Identity*. The author of the second text is Fr. (Swami) Joseph A. Samarakone OMI from India, who spoke on the subject of the *Indian perspective on Religious Plurality and Religious Identity*. He is known in India as one of the leading figures in the movement of Catholic Ashrams. The next text, written by Fr. Claude J. Pereira OMI, the Catholic Chaplain and National Coordinator of the Catholic University Students' Movement in Sri Lanka is dedicated to the issue of *Sri Lankan Perspectives on Religious Identity and Religious Plurality*. The Asian part ends with the text of Fr. Claudio Bertuccio OMI, although of Italian origins, but with many years of experience of missionary work in Thailand. He presented the topic of *Thai perspective on Religious Plurality and Religious Identity*. At the end of the Asian part, one text concerning Africa was included. It is written by a doctoral student from the Cardinal Stephan Wyszyński University, originally from Nigeria, Fr. Useni James Aboreng. His presentation is on *Nigerian perspective on religious plurality and identity*.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the presentation of more general issues, especially from a European perspective. It begins with two ecumenical voices from a German perspective. Both texts relate to the document called "Christian Witness in a multireligious World. Recommendations for conduct" published jointly in 2011 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance. First, we have the presentation of Dr. Stefan Voges. His concern is *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. The reception of the document in Germany and its interreligious challenges*. This text is followed by the presentation of Prof. Dr. Klaus Vellguth, from Missio Aachen. He focuses on the *Genesis of the document "Christian Witness in a multireligious World"*. After these two texts in the book, we present a reflection on the presence of Islam in Europe. The former President of IACM, Fr. Lazar T. Stanislaus SVD did not present his talk at the conference but wanted to share his reflection. It is called: *Religious Pluralism and Islam in Europe: Missiological Orientations*. After him we have

the presentation of Prof. Frans Wijsen from Radboud University in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies and head of the chair of Practical Religious Studies / Mission Studies. He presented the topic of *Religious Identity in the post-Cold War: Islamic Revivalism and Christian Mission*. The book ends with the text on contemporary European evangelization challenges. There are many varieties of expressions of religious belief, but the faith, and especially the Christian faith, is not about the uniformity of all forms, but about unity in the essence of faith. This final text was presented by Fr. Prof. Gianni Colzani (Pontificia Università Urbaniana from Rome) and was dedicated to: *Mission as crosscultural Evangelization. The mission between universal communication and particular identities*.

At the conference referred to earlier, there was a chance to also hear other voices, which were not included in this publication. From the Romanian Orthodox perspective, Fr. Prof. Cristian Sonea (Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj) delivered the speech on *Confessional Education – a bridge between Churches and Religions. The Transylvanian case*. From the Polish Evangelical perspective, Dr. Zbigniew Paszta from the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw presented an issue of *Inculturation of Christianity. The idea and modern context*. Fr. Dr. Hab. Piotr Piasecki OMI from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, presented the topic of the *Religious Identity of Youth Volunteers in the sanctuary of Lourdes*. Presentations of professors from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW) included that of Fr. Prof. Krzysztof Kietliński on *Economic dimension of religious plurality* and Fr. Prof. Tomasz Stępień on *Pagan and Christian religious identity in Late Antiquity*. A series of strictly missiological reflections of the professors of UKSW included that of Fr. Prof. Wojciech Kluj OMI on the *General Chapter [of Religious Congregations] as a tool to give directions to the multicultural religious Congregation*, and another by Fr. Prof. Jarosław Różański OMI on *Religious Plurality and Religious Identity from the perspective of Northern Cameroon* as well as Fr. Prof. Tomasz Szyszka SVD, who presented the subject *Between Religious Identity of a missionary and his / her work*. The professors presentations were supplemented with two speeches by foreign PhD students at UKSW. The first was mentioned above, Fr. Useni Aboreng from Nigeria. Another was Mr. Sergiej Anoszko from Belarus, whose theme was: *Religious Identity and Religious Plurality. A view from Belarus*.

Wojciech Kluj

An Australian perspective on Religious Plurality and Religious Identity

AUSTIN COOPER OMI

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The Australian scene 1788-1945: European settlement dating from 1788 and was almost entirely comprised of people from the UK. They brought with them their traditional religious affiliations: Anglicans from England and Wales (though Methodism, a movement formed within Anglicanism and later forming a separate Church, was gaining popularity in both England and Wales); Presbyterians (Calvinists) from Scotland and Catholics from Ireland. They also imported the disputes and prejudices stemming from the Reformation of the 16th Century. Regrettably but understandably, Sectarian conflict has been part of our religious history. It has erupted with particular vigour in response to some circumstances, such as attitudes to the Great War 1914-1918.

Some general characteristics of Australian History: However traditional religion was also 'shaped' by local conditions. 1) An interpretation of Australian History entitled *The Tyranny of Distance* by Geoffrey Blainey highlighted the extent to which **distance** from their countries of origin affected various settlements as did their distance from one another.¹ In many isolated communities, a common humanity in the face of challenging circumstances, led to a real sense of welcome to strangers and help for one another. 2) '**Secularism**' also shaped the Australian experience, especially from the mid-nineteenth

¹ G. Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1967) and later editions.

century, giving Australia the dubious distinction of being among the most secular societies in the world. Secular attitudes seem to be constantly challenging older Christian values which seem to be retreating such as questions relating to birth control, abortion and 'marriage equality'. 3) Perhaps because of the nostalgia highlighted by 'distance' and the increasing secularism, Australian Churches long remained **dependent** on their parent Churches in the UK for personnel. For many years the local priest was Irish, the local Anglican Vicar an Englishman and the Presbyterian Minister from Scotland. 4) **Laity** generally tended to leave Church issues to clerical leaders though Anglicans and others included lay representatives in governing bodies from about the 1850s. 5) The Australian approach to life has often been described as '**pragmatic**' and lacking in reflectiveness and a sense of vision. One historian commented 'Australian Christians have been builders rather than seers or scholars'.² Finally 6) **the Land** itself seemed strange and difficult to manage, with its different seasons, uncertain rainfall and poor soil around the original settlement. It has often defeated the settler and it took Europeans a century to realise something of its haunting beauty.

Australian religion tended to be dominated by the four larger Christian Churches until after World War II. However their influence was mitigated by secularization as well as by the arrival of some other groups such as Greek Orthodox who opened their first Church in Melbourne in 1898; a number of Jews settled in Australian colonies; Chinese came (temporarily) in great numbers during the 1850s 'gold rushes'.

Australian Aborigines: Australian Aborigines were often neglected and misunderstood. Most of the efforts to serve them were initiated by the various Churches. An early friend of these peoples was the Spanish Benedictine missionary, Rosendo Salvado (1814-1900), Abbot of New Norcia and later Bishop. He sought to understand Aboriginal beliefs and customs to see how they could provide fertile soil for the Gospel.³ But he was one of the relatively few exceptions. Aborigines were only granted the status of being Australian citizens as late as 1967! A major landmark in providing a positive understanding

² J.D. Bollen, *Religion in Australian Society* (Sydney: Leigh College, 1973) p. 28.

³ E.J. Storman SJ (ed. and trans.), *The Salvado Memoirs* (Perth: University of WA Press, 1978).

of their culture and beliefs was articulated in the 1988 speech by St. John Paul II at Alice Springs.⁴

My personal experience: How did this broad picture impact on me? I was born into a family who lived in a sea-side resort (Sorrento, Victoria) where the percentage of Catholics was well below the national average of 20%. But we always had a strong and clear Catholic identity. In the family business we had numerous clients who were non-Catholic and also many who were Jews. I was never conscious of living among people who took these diversities as unusual: most of these were admirable people and many became close friends of the family. Only much later I realised that when I was mixing so easily with Jewish folk, they were being cruelled persecuted under the Nazi regime and ostracised in many other places. But not everyone saw religious differences so easily. I distinctly remember as a youngster going on a walk with a young friend and his mother decided to accompany us. Their family were committed Anglicans. When passing the local Anglican Church I happily went in with them and found it quite fascinating: a mixture of the familiar and some obvious differences. When we passed the local Catholic Church on the way home, I suggested they might like to see around our Church. In no way would the Mother be enticed into the building! But such an attitude was fortunately not common, though one grew increasingly sensitive that prejudices against us lingered long in Australian society. At the local Catholic school which had some 28 pupils taught by two young Sisters of Mercy, we had two children from one Aboriginal family and a few non-Catholics. I do not remember any signs of racial prejudice or animosity being shown towards and of them.

One can only surmise that while at one level Australian Christians were deeply prejudiced against one another, especially against Catholics, and polemic pamphlets and speeches proliferated, at another level, ordinary folk got on with the job of working and doing business with one another. Australian pragmatism perhaps triumphed over the legacies of history.

I now pass on many years to the stage where I was first Rector of the Oblate House of Formation in Melbourne in 1963. Our students attended the local diocesan house of theology which was close by. But we had to provide Philosophy at home. From the beginning I sought to integrate traditional

⁴ https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861129_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia.html (2018.12.12).

philosophy studies in-house, with that taught in a secular university. There was a fine University, Monash, close by our house of formation. Integrating the two was something of a challenge and required a system of tutorial assistance at home to help young minds cope with the inevitable issues that arose. But I still believe it was all worthwhile in learning to meet the challenges of working in a very diverse culture such as ours.

For my part, to enhance our relations with the university, I undertook a part-time teaching post in the History School at Monash University. I found it relatively easy to mix with people of a wide variety of beliefs and none, including that of one of Australia's leading Communists, the historian Ian Turner. He always greeted me, a young colleague, with great friendliness and ease, and was always personally helpful.

Postwar developments: At the end of the war in 1945, the Australian population numbered no more than 8 million. But a vigorous immigration policy resulted in great numerical development including a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Between 1945 and 1970 the Australian Government mainly sought migrants from the UK and Europe, especially among 'displaced persons' from the Continent. In the 1970s, this policy changed, the scope being broadened to include people from Asia, the Middle East and South America. Many of these came as refugees from homelands marred by warfare, persecution and poor social conditions. In 1978, the first refugee boats reached Australia at Darwin. Suddenly Australians were made aware of the problems of refugees. By the end of 1979, 2011 Vietnamese 'boat people' as they had been termed by the media, survived the dangerous journey from Vietnam, many more dying *en route*. By 1982 some 60,000 Vietnamese had arrived in Australia. These refugees included a large percentage of Catholics who have greatly enriched the Australian Catholic community and been remarkably well assimilated into local society. This influx of Asians and folk from the Middle East has resulted in a growing religious and cultural diversification. Australia had become a multi-cultural society. Many small groups are promoting better relations between Christian, Moslems and Jews. On the specifically Christian scene, settlers from the various Eastern Christian Churches have presented additional challenges and opportunities to the ecumenical scene. Those in people belonging to the ancient Eastern Churches communion with Rome have greatly enriched local Catholicism.

The Theological Scene: All this largely coincides with two important movements on the local religious scene. First was the entry of the Catholic

Church into the ecumenical scene as a result of Vatican II. It is probably true to say that for many Christians, this was warmly welcomed. After all, Australian Christians had been working together and mixing socially, while theologians and polemic writers had been hurling polemics at one another with reckless enthusiasm. Secondly, here in Melbourne, a new Archbishop James (later Cardinal) Knox was appointed to Melbourne, then the second largest diocese in the country. On the theological scene he took two initiatives: he sought to bring together in a single theological faculty the several religious houses of formation along with the local regional seminary. It was to be open to seminarians, religious and also laity. Several religious houses of formation decided not to join, and formed their own 'Yarra Theological Union' but his initiative resulted in the establishment of Catholic Theological College. This faculty of philosophy and theology serving the five dioceses of the Province of Melbourne and also four religious formation houses came into being in 1972. And theological studies were to be available to religious sisters and brothers and also to interested laity.

Of paramount importance was Archbishop James Knox's far-sighted second initiative: the decision to seek Catholic membership of the Melbourne College of Divinity (MCD). This was probably a unique institution. The MCD was a government approved degree-granting body established in 1910 by the Parliament of Victoria. It was a response to the local University's repeated refusal to establish a theological faculty for fear of 'sectarianism'. The MCD was an examining, not a teaching body, and comprised Anglicans and several Protestant groups. By the time the Catholic Church joined, it had established a fine reputation among theological scholars throughout the English speaking world, especially in UK to which most students resorted for post-graduate studies. In 1972 it became a teaching body and the Catholic Church became a member.

My own involvement in religious diversity and identity has mainly been through my research and writing on Anglican issues and also my involvement in theological education. I was fortunate in 1967 to be invited to chair the committee formed by the Archbishop to plan for the future Catholic Theological College. When the College eventually began (1972) I was elected first Master of the College.

Membership of the MCD really marked a great 'cultural' change for all concerned. Theology was no longer confined to a (usually) remote seminary and limited to future clerics, but was open to all. That affected all the

Churches. The four 'Affiliated Colleges' of the revised MCD represented the four larger churches: Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian (the two latter soon to be part of the 'Uniting Church of Australia'). Each Affiliated College was encouraged to remain faithful to imparting its own tradition, while a representative Board of Studies approved curriculum and monitored examining to maintain appropriate standards. This ensured great advantages making us 'answerable' to an outside body for academic standards. It also led to an enrichment through close personal contacts with scholars from other traditions. From 2012 the MCD obtained government recognition as the 'University of Divinity' and this new University is now a member of the national university system: theological studies had 'come in from the cold'! The University now numbers ten theological colleges from eight denominations, including the Coptic Church (at St. Athanasius College, Donvale, a Melbourne suburb) the only representative of the Christian East.⁵

This ecumenical body has real achievements to its credit. Often there is an exchange of lecturers for specific topics and on occasion for a whole subject. Early in our history, CTC had no qualified lecturer in Liturgy. We managed to employ Dr. Harold Leatherland, a member of the Congregationalist Union. I attended his lectures (in the early 1970s) on the revised Catholic liturgy. They were a wonderful example of mature scholarship and deep devotion. I myself had the pleasure of lecturing at Trinity College Theological School (Anglican) on Anglican Spirituality for two years. There are numerous examples of such sensitive assistance to Colleges of another denomination. Likewise our student body is very varied. In a class of some 45 which I teach (Christian Spirituality) about one third are seminarians, a few priests and religious and the remainder lay folk, including several non-Catholics.

Bitter sectarianism overshadows much of Australian Church History. As a Catholic member of the MCD from 1972, I clearly remember we faced a mammoth task of widening horizons to include teachings in several different traditions while maintaining a unity of standards and cohesion throughout several degrees. From the beginning it was remarkable how all involved worked as responsible colleagues and numerous long standing friendships ensued. Sectarianism had given way to a more ecumenical atmosphere and perhaps

⁵ P. Sherlock, *The Foundation of the Melbourne College of Divinity*, "Journal of Religious History" 40 (2016) p. 204-224.

Australian pragmatism helped. I personally was privileged to have an established Church historian Professor George Yule (later of the University of Aberdeen) as a colleague. I once asked him his aim in teaching Church History. Without a moment's hesitation he simply said 'I just teach my students the faith!' Church History: how we have expressed our developing faith, sought to teach it and so live it in changing contexts. I have since been faithful to this word of advice from a Calvinist friend and colleague. The MCD had speedily and effectively laid the sectarian ghost to rest.

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Religious Pluralism and Religious Identity from an Indian perspective

JOSEPH A. SAMARAKONE, OMI (1941-2017)

DE MAZENOD INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY, GNANALAYAM, PLACE GARDEN, PERAMBAKKAM,
THIRUVALLUR DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU, INDIA. SWAMI AT AANMODAYA ASHRAM,
KANCHEEPURAM, SOUTH INDIA.

The opening prayer of interreligious meeting could start in such a way:

(1) **Christian**

“Our Father” sung in Polish

(2) **Hindu**

ASATO MA SADGAMAYA (from Delusion lead me to Truth)

TAMASO MA JYOTIRGAMAYA (from Darkness lead me to Light)

MRITYOR MA AMIRITAMGAMAYA (from Death lead me to Im-
mortality) (Bu: 1,3,28)

OM Shanti, Shanti, Shanti (OM Peace, Peace, Peace)

May the river of my life flow into the sea of love that is the Lord. ...

May the thread of my song be not cut before my life merges in the sea
of love (Rig Veda II, 28, 5)

(3) **Muslim**

BISMILLAH-IR-RAHMAN-IR-RAHIM (In the name of Allah, the
Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful)

In this Presentation I am going to highlight the essential aspects of Religious Pluralism as acknowledged by scholars both in India and the world over, as well as our own Religious Identity which emerges by belonging to a particular Religion, and in our case it is Christianity, since the people whom I am addressing are by and large Christians, and the interaction or more deeply the

CONFLUENCE of these two features gradually forming us Interreligious persons, after the example of our “Sat Guru” or “True Teacher” Jesus, who is presented in all the four Gospels, as I will show you in the course of my presentation, *as an Interreligious Person par excellence*.

Religious Experience of Humankind

During the last four or five decades extensive scientific study and research have been undertaken into the religious experience of humankind and study of comparative religions to discover the basic experience from which all religions spring, by serious scholars such as Mircea Eliade, Ninian Smart, etc. Ninian Smart has written a very comprehensive book, *The Religious Experience of Humankind*. It is a very pervasive work, beginning from the human experience of God from prehistoric times and primitive religions down to contemporary religious experience, including Ideologies like Marxism and so on. In the very opening lines, he says: “Throughout history and beyond in the dark recesses of people’s earliest culture, religion has been a vital and pervasive feature of human life. To understand human history and human life it is necessary to understand religion... Each of the great religions is like a *growing organism*.”¹ People who have read and reflected on this great work say, “The author holds that the study of religion can be a scientific discipline... Whether guided by God or spirits or the hope for ‘*Nirvana*’, men/women have always tried to see beyond their senses.” It is opined that “in this study of great world religions, the author shows that religions grow and change and affect each other just as living organisms do... One cannot understand human history without knowing something about people’s religions.”² Religion is considered as the liberative core of every culture.

This study and research have brought out notably two conclusions:

(1) All human groups without any exception have had an *Isvara Anubava*, an experience of the Sacred, or the Divine Mystery.

¹ N. Smart, *Religious Experience of Humankind* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 1970) p. 11.13.

² N. Smart, *Religious Experience of Humankind*, back cover.

(2) This experience of the Divine Mystery is veering inexorably towards the fact that this Divine Mystery is ONE.

The oldest Hindu Scripture, the Rig Veda says: “Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti” (I.164.46), meaning “Being is one but the wise speak of it in manifold ways.” It was this *One Being* which stirred the minds of the Vedic Sages and Seers of all time, so that all “gods” were seen as but names and forms (*nama rupa*) of this *One Reality*.

When I was in the Novitiate in 1958-1960, I happened to read a book on the Eskimos, now called the Inuit. An Oblate missionary was narrating his experience with the Eskimo or Inuit. He asked an Inuit, “How do you call ‘God’? The Inuit stood still, took a deep breath and uttered a very long loud cry, his face radiant! The Missionary continues: “I did not understand the meaning of the sound that was uttered; but the way he uttered the sound, and from the radiance in his face, I understood that God for this Inuit is someone immense, transcendent, and unfathomable. I knelt down to worship the “God” I saw in him!” The Oblate Missionary was baffled that the “God” he came to preach to these “uncivilized” and “uneducated” Inuit, has already visited this people!

Swami Bede Griffiths, OSB (1906-1993) with his deep experience as an Indian Sannyasi (Hermit) affirms this: “God has graced every tradition with INSIGHT into the DIVINE MYSTERY, from the most primitive to the most sophisticated – each has a gift to bring to the world”.

Rudolf Otto, in his *Idea of the Holy*, has attempted to uncover the hidden source of religion. Human beings faced with the vastness of the mysterious universe, awaken to what he calls, “*mysterium tremendum et facinans*”, i.e., *a tremendous and fascinating mystery*.³ It awakens one to try to explore it, and to fathom its immensity. It awakens a yearning in her/him for something inexplicable.

Spirituality is an experience of the “BEYOND” as they say in the Hindu Tradition, “PARATH PARAM”, i.e., Beyond the Beyond. God in Hinduism is addressed as BRAHMAN from the root *brh* or *bri*, which means to “expand” or to “grow”. Brahman – God, therefore, is an ever growing, expanding reality. The Spirit reaches the depth of the Divine, the Spirit/

³ R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

God is beyond all *namarupa*, i.e., names and forms. Spirituality calls for SELF-TRANSCENDENCE.⁴

A new paradigm shift

This totally NEW VIEW of the Universal presence of God and his relationship to all humanity and to the Universe, calls for a NEW VISION. God is not the monopoly of a particular people. SHE/HE is the ABBA -- FATHER-MOTHER of all as Jesus himself taught. This brings to the fore a great TRUTH: REALITY IS PLURALISTIC, IT MUST BE RESPECTED AND ACCEPTED.

Before the Vatican II, Christians by and large were of the view that the Holy Bible is the only Revelation of God or the Word of God, and when it comes to religion, God is dealing only with the Jewish “Chosen People” and later through Jesus Christ, dealing with the Christian people who are now the “New People of God”. During the Second Vatican Council Christians were jolted out of their dogmatic slumber to realize that Israel and the Old Testament are but SIGNS or SACRAMENTS pointing to the God dealing with all the nations.

Edward Schillebeeckx, OP (1914-2009), the famous Belgian-born Dutch Catholic Theologian, in his great work “Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God” makes this Dramatic Statement: “Non-Christian Religions are Sacraments of God”.

When the Old Testament is read in Christianity, it became the New Testament, pointing to God dealing with the nations through JESUS CHRIST the SACRAMENT OF GOD. JESUS CHRIST is again a SIGN pointing to GOD present and acting among all people and all nations. As we read in the book of Revelation: “I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne”(Rev 7:9).

⁴ J.A. Samarakone, *Searching for the Sacred*. A paper presented at the Indo-German Seminar, “Searching for the Sacred,” Chennai, January 2007. Printed in: *A New Vision of Inter-Religious Spirituality. A Memorial Volume on Swami Joseph Samarakone, OMI*, ed. by A. Rayappan, OMI & H. Immanuel, OMI (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018), p. 33-56.

At the end of the Second Vatican Council (1960-1965) the Church through the Council Document *Nostra Aetate* exhorts her sons and daughters, “to REGOGNIZE, PRESERVE and PROMOTE all that is good in the Ancient Religions”, and speaks very highly of them (§2). Jesus the Christ is a particular, historical expression of the WORD to a particular people in time and space; but one should not make this CHRIST-EVENT absolute for all people.

God by the action of his Spirit and Word has brought into existence, innumerable religions from time immemorial. As I mentioned in the introductory historical survey, God has not left out a single human group from his embrace, every single human group has had an Experience of the DIVINE giving rise to a plethora of Sacred Books and Religious literature, feasts and festivals, many forms of meditation, leading to the exploration of the INNER WORLD OF THE SPIRIT.

Swami Bede Griffiths, OSB, says that the present modern discovery of the outer space is a mere child’s play when compared with the exploration of the inner world of the Spirit!

A Theologian named Romanus says that God has not yet finished with his creation; we can expect greater things to come!

The Religious Panorama – the fabric of the Holy Spirit, is indeed very grand! There is a beautiful German VISION of GOD: GOTT IST DIE ALLE UND ALLESUM FASSENGE LIEBE

God is the ALL-ENCOMPASSING LOVE, HOLDING EVERYONE and EVERYTHING.

There is a beautiful sacred text in the oldest Upanishad namely, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (BU)*, which runs as follows:

Om purnam adah, purnam idam
purnat purnam udayachate
purnashiya purnam adaya
purnam eva avasishyate
Om Shanti... Shanti... Shanti... (BU V.2.1).⁵

⁵ The meaning of this verse is as follows: “Om! That is Fullness, this is Fullness, / From Fullness comes Fullness. / When Fullness is taken from Fullness / Fullness remains. / OM! Peace, Peace, Peace!” Though this mantra is found in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, this

This Upanishadic *sloka* in a way sums up the *Vision of God for the Humankind and the Universe*, going beyond all sectarian boundaries through which, religions in particular, have divided people from people. Happily Mother Nature has been unaffected by this narrow fragmentation. This *sloka* – the Scared Verse, holds up Mother Nature in her pristine beauty, in the form of ‘unity in diversity’.

In India we often have Interreligious live-ins lasting for about a week, where people belonging to 10 or more World Religions and Ideologies come together. They come together, pray together, read and reflect on the Sacred Scriptures of all these various Religions, meditate together and Celebrate life and God’s manifold gifts he has showered on these Religions. I have presided over many of these Prayer and worship sessions. In one of these, one of the most touching experience of the largeness of heart was a prayer said by a Sikh gentleman Kulwant Singh : “When I have found Thee, there is no “mine” and “not mine”, everybody is MINE!” Later he shared with me that he enjoyed a very lucrative post in the Indian Diplomatic Service. He heard an INNER VOICE calling him to resign this post and come. The “WORD” was so strong it would not let him go! God took him to a LEPER COLONY in the state of Maharashtra where he looks after a group of lepers. He told that it is the 3-hour prayer and meditation which he has every day in the morning that gives him the power and strength to work among these lepers; to take their hands and bind their wounds with love and care as though they were his own hands. Kolkata St Mother Theresa narrates a similar experience working with the lepers.

I read another touching story about one ETTY HILLESUM, who lived in the NAZI CONCENTRATION camp for Jews. She wrote, “We can be at home ANYWHERE, if we carry the HOME within us”. In that camp she reached out to many to comfort them before she herself was consigned to the AUSCHWITZ – the HOLOCAUST! While alive she decided to be the ‘thinking heart of the Barracks’. The truth is this: I can feel at home anywhere, with any person or group provided my HEART and MIND are OPEN, and life is much happier and richer this way.”⁶

is placed at the head of the *Isa Upanishad as a Blessing* and recited during the *Pratha Sandhya* (Morning Prayer) in many an *Ashram* in India, both Hindu and Christian.

⁶ J. Manath, *Insider-Outsider*, “New Leader” (2015) no. 15, p. 7.

Inauguration of the Mission of Jesus

Scripture scholars consider Luke the Evangelist as the best New Testament writer who is “incorrigibly systematic”! In Luke’s Gospel Jesus is presented as having been anointed by the Father through the Holy Spirit (3:21-22), now full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan, and was led (or driven) by the Spirit in the wilderness where he fasted for forty days (4:1). Then Jesus filled with the power of the spirit, returned to Galilee (4:14) and began his ministry.

Now comes a poignant moment when Jesus comes to “Nazareth where he had been brought up” (4:16) and enters the Synagogue on a Sabbath day, stands and reads from the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah (4:18-19) to witness to his mission: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21). All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth (4:22). JESUS’ MISSION is INAUGURATED. Now Luke intentionally places a very important teaching of Jesus as his very FIRST TEACHING: Jesus places before his Jewish audience two Old Testament events.

(1) “...there were many widows in Israel in the time of Prophet Elijah, when... there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon (4:25,26)”, a non-Jewish person.

(2) “...there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the Prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian (4:27)”, again a non-Jewish person.

I was pleasantly surprised to see the way Jesus perceives the incident about the healing of Naaman, the leper, by Prophet Elisha. In the Old Testament narrative (cf 2Kgs. 5:1-19), the punch-line is that “there is no God in all the earth except in Israel!” (5:15). In the Gospels, however, Jesus handles this same event in a very different way:

“...there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the Prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian” (4:27)!

When the Jewish people heard this “all in the Synagogue were filled with rage, they got up and drove him out of the town ...” (4:29).

Jesus was shaking their very foundational belief: “Israel is the only chosen people of God”. They were so rooted in this Ideology, they went to the extent of making a monster out of Yahweh, a “tribal God”, who destroys other nations, their religions and cultures in order to settle this nation in a “land flowing with milk and honey”! With the passage of time they added a little grace to this Ideology: Israel was chosen “so that all nations may be blessed

through them"! Has this ever happened? In fact history witnesses to the contrary even to this day!

The beautiful experience of God as Yahweh – I AM WHO I AM, the source of all LIFE, is completely distorted! Jesus right through his mission was labouring hard to liberate this "tribal god" of the Jewish people and reveal him as ABBA – the FATHER/MOTHER of ALL.

Some, especially the Mystics, do not want to call God as ONE, since "ONE" is a human category. They prefer to call GOD a MYSTERY. A similar idea is expressed in a Shaivite Scripture:

THENNAR UDAYA SIVANE POOTRI

ENNADAVARKUM IRAIVA POOTRI (Thiruvagam IV/164, 165)

Hail to THEE, O SIVA – the GOD OF LOVE, who holds this Southern Nation as your special possession; you are the same ONE who is worshipped as GOD by ALL THE NATIONS, Hail to THEE.

The later day Church though claiming to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, rooted for a more triumphalistic model of the Jewish people, called itself the "People of God", equating the CHURCH to the KINGDOM in an exclusivistic world-view. Incidentally in the early days of the Church, it was of the understanding that Jesus and his Good News should be confined only to the Jewish People. It was by the action of the Holy Spirit the early Church broke out of the "Jewish shell" to become the Universal Church as it is beautifully described in the Cornelius-event (Acts 10:1-48) which culminates in God's Revelation to Simon Peter: "God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34).

In the Book of Wisdom we read: "You are merciful to all, O Lord, and despise nothing that you have made (11:24). In the Book of Deuteronomy we read how God has given HIS WORD to all people. Surely, this commandment ("THORAH") that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross the other side of the sea for us and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" No, the WORD is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe (Deut 30:11-14). In the Old Testament the word "THORAH" meaning LAW is the compendium of God's Word. Here again we have restricted the presence of the WORD of GOD only to the Bible. But Jesus our SAT GURU shows the way.

Jesus the Interreligious Person par excellence

At the very outset of his MISSION Jesus having awakened his Jewish People out of their dogmatic slumber continues this MISSION as his MINISTRY unfolds:

When asked by the Samaritan woman which is the true God one should worship, Jesus says: “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship Him” (Jn 4:21, 23). Further, the beautiful prayer that Jesus has taught his disciples, the “Our Father,” has arisen beyond all sectarian boundaries and has become a veritable Universal Prayer that every believer in God can pray. In every Interreligious meeting we use this prayer “Our Father”.

Sufi Rumi (1207-1273), the Islamic mystic says: “lovers of God have no religion but God alone.”⁷ As I read the Gospel in the context of an *Ashram*, with its interreligious thrust, I am pleasantly surprised that they are completely devoid of the superiority claims of the Old Testament. In the Gospels, we do not see Jesus denigrating any one religion. On the contrary, we see him recognizing and praising the faith of people belonging to other religions, e.g., one is able to appreciate the moment of ‘conversion’ for Jesus when he came face to face with the Syrophoenician woman whose humble demeanour so struck him that he was able to recognize a “great faith” in the woman (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30). Again, amazed at the faith of the Roman Centurion, Jesus exclaims: “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith!” (Mt 8:10; Lk 7:1-10); in the same breath, he adds: “... many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham ... in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 8:11). He was able to form and shape the minds of his disciples who were all Jews, that many years after the departure of Jesus Christ they were able to present faithfully in the Gospels the interreligious person, Jesus.

This is the great Legacy that Jesus has bequeathed to his disciples and to all people of goodwill, which every disciple should strive to follow with every fibre of his being. But Christianity, which claims to continue his work

⁷ B. Griffiths, *Universal Wisdom* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994). *Poems of Rumi*, on p. 106; *The Shepherd's Prayer*, on p. 362.

among the people, got embroiled in Roman imperialism, and equated one particular historical institution, namely, the Church with the Kingdom of God, as someone cryptically remarked: “Jesus preached the Kingdom and out came Churchianity!”

The Official Church identified itself with the Kingdom and set on a mission of bringing everyone into the Church. A wrong understanding of the Theology of Religions informed the Missionary Ecclesiology of that time. Those who were outside the Church were considered to be anti-Kingdom: “*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*” (meaning, “Outside the Church there is no salvation”). This doctrine was followed for more than a thousand years until 1949 when it was declared *heretical* by Pope Pius XII and, eventually, a Jesuit priest, Leonardo Feeny of Boston was excommunicated since he adamantly held on to this doctrinal proposition.

With the above doctrine as the basis, missionaries were sent out into the world on a mission of “conversion”. With a missionary zeal they wielded the long handle and were trying to bring in everyone into the fold of the Church by means fair or foul. Conversion was the order of the day. When the missionary proclaimed that Jesus Christ is the *Life of the World*, the world witnessed death and destruction of continents and cultures, mostly initiated by the associates of the missionaries! Thus, the Church with its imperialistic spirit, and not the spirit of Jesus, distorted the Vision of God for Humankind and the Universe in terms of Unity and Communion, and brought about Division and Separation. Some other religions too followed suit.

Today, especially after the Second Vatican Council, and the new paradigm shift, the Church has begun, at least conceptually, to realize her life and work in reference to the Kingdom. The Council proclaimed that “the Church in Christ is in the nature of a sacrament, a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all people...” (LG 1). As a “sacrament” or a “sign” of Jesus “who revealed that God is with us to deliver us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life” (DV 4), the Church should live this legacy of Jesus and proclaim God’s saving love for all people, irrespective of their religious affiliation.⁸

⁸ J.A. Samarakone, *My Adventure with Interreligious Dialogue*, “Religion and the Arts” 12 (2008) p. 131-132.

When we look into the basic teachings of the Founders of almost all the World Religions there is a beautiful symphony harmoniously resonating through. No wonder they come from the same Source, nourished by the same Spirit (cf. Ezek 47:1-12)! A couple of years ago I came across a scholarly book by Dr Rayappa A. Kasi (Ecowarrior) entitled: “In search of the Lost Kingdoms. Asoka’s Dhamma and Jesus Christ’s Kingdom of God”. Dr Rayappa Kasi is trying to show that the Beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount resonate very well with the Rock Inscriptions.⁹

But invariably when it comes to “MY RELIGION”, the *AHAMKAR* the “I-Maker”, the Ego raises its ugly head giving rise to Religious Fundamentalism. In the Tamil language we have a word for Religion – *MADAM*. But this same word also refers to a “Rogue Elephant”, “to be drunk with Religious Bigotry”. The word *MADA* refers to one of the six Capital Sins as enumerated in Hinduism. Some Hindus have told me that they get very humiliated when Christians ask them to be converted to their Religion, without realizing that they are what they are because of the Religion to which they belong! This Religious Bigotry has given rise to so much of Religious conflicts, violence and wars right down the centuries. Paradoxically, it has been said that more blood has been shed in religious wars than all the World Wars put together!

Kingdom of God: The Legacy of Jesus

The Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus is an all-inclusive reality. It is not so much a new religion but a new vision of society. This new vision springs out of his foundational experience of God as the *ABBA*, the Father of all. Jesus called this, the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven. This new society, which has its roots in God or Heaven, has to become a reality on this Earth, here and now in our own lives. We find a similar vision in the *Katha Upanishad*: “The Tree of Eternity has its roots above and its branches on earth below. Its pure root is Brahman, the immortal from whom all the

⁹ R.A. Kasi, *In Search of the Lost Kingdoms. Asoka’s Dhamma & Jesus Christ’s Kingdom of God* (Chennai: LTD Media Publications, 2014). See especially Chapter 4: *Historical Jesus – A Practioner of Dhamma, Kandhabar, Greek/Aramic Bilingual Rock Inscriptions*, p. 207-217.

worlds draw their lives, and whom none can transcend. For this Self is the Supreme” (II.3)!¹⁰

If we could sum up in one word the teaching of Jesus, it is *Kingdom*. This word ‘Kingdom’ is found 122 times in the Gospels whereas in all the four gospels we find the word ‘church’ only in two places and that too in the Gospel of Mathew (16:18; 18:17). Scientific Biblical hermeneutics tells us that the word ‘church’ probably was not a concept in the vision of Jesus.

Who are the people worthy of the Kingdom? Jesus answers this clearly by narrating the parable of the Wedding Banquet (Mt 22:15-20; Lk 14:15-20). All People are welcome to the Kingdom provided they prove themselves worthy by practising the ‘Kingdom values’ which we find enumerated in the teachings of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1 ff.). Incidentally, these teachings form the basis of every religion and Ideology. Hence, a person who wants to be a follower of the Kingdom need not necessarily break away from her/his ancestral Religion. Here in India Mahatma Gandhi is recognized as a great follower of Jesus who practiced the Gospel more than any other average Christian. But he remained a Hindu till his death.

When asked who is the greatest in the Kingdom, Jesus says: “the least one who is worthy to be in the Kingdom is even greater than John the Baptist” (Mt 11:11). Jesus’ teaching is very revolutionary. He didn’t give much importance to belonging to a particular religion.

Jesus Christ – the Mystic

For all aspiring to be disciples of Jesus, Jesus of the Gospel is the ultimate norm of Discipleship. One of the outstanding features in the life of Jesus that strikes us on the face is the long hours he spent in mountains and deserted place in PRAYER to his ABBA – FATHER.

All the three synoptic gospels tell us that he fasted for forty days in the desert”. The Gospel tells us that “the Spirit drove him in the wilderness” (Mk 1:12). Mk 1:35: In the morning while it was still very dark (before dawn) Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place and there he prayed. Lk 6:12:

¹⁰ *Katha Upanishad*, II.3 (trans. Eknath Easwaran), *The Upanishad* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 95.

Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.

Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray as we read in Mt 6:5-15. Here Jesus tells his disciples, “Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and street corners, so that they may be seen by others... But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret... When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases” (6:5-7).

When we read this text of the Gospel in our context we allow this text to flow into our Indian spiritual tradition, we read this text as follows: “Whenever you pray go into your INNER ROOM, meaning ‘cave of the Heart’, and pray to your Father in secret (meaning, ‘silence’).” This refers to the process of “Meditation”. Here “Meditation is understood as the process of leaving the level of the mind, the “world of the senses”, where one’s EGO dominates, and going down deep into the “cave of the heart” in silence and enter into communion with the FATHER.

St. Augustine (354-430) in his *Confessions* describes the process of Meditation leading to the experience of *theosis*: “Seek for yourself, O Man; search for your true self. He who Seeks shall find himself in God”.

Swami Gnanananda of Tirukoviloor, the Guru of Swami Abhishikatananda, speaking of meditation says: “Return within to the place where there is nothing and take care that nothing comes in. Penetrate to the depths of yourself, to the place where thought no longer exists and take care that no thought raises its head. There where nothing exists is fullness; there where nothing is seen is the vision of being; there where nothing appears any longer is the sudden appearing of the Atman – the Self! Dhyana is this”.¹¹

Swami Abhishikatananda (Fr. Henri le Saux, OSB) (1910-1973) one of the pioneers in the Christian Ashram movement who along with Fr. Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) (who later took the name of Swami Parama Arubi Ananda) founded one of the earliest Catholic Ashrams, the Saccidananda Ashram (Shantivanam) on the banks of the river Kaveri in Thanneerpali near Kulithalai in Tamil Nadu, speaking about meditation says, “Meditation is the fundamental dimension of every human person without which he cannot be

¹¹ H. Le Saux, [Swami Abhishikatananda], *Guru and Disciple: An Encounter with Sri Gnanananda Giri. A Contemporary Spiritual Master* (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1990) p. 75.

a human person!” He makes this statement in a small book entitled, *Prayer*, the only book he wrote in English in 1967. In the same book he muses on our Christian Priests and Religious who say that they are “part-time contemplatives”! He asks amusingly, “Can there be a ‘part-time man?’” In the same way as there cannot be a ‘part-time man’, so there cannot be a ‘part-time contemplative’!” When people asked him, “Then what about the people who do not meditate?” He calmly responds, “They are as good as dead!” As the Dhammapada says, “Watchfulness is the path of immortality: unwatchfulness is the path of death. Those who are watchful never die: those who do not watch are already as dead” (Verse 21, Translation by Juan Mascaro). The *Patanjali Yoga Sutra* defines Meditation as “CITTA VIRUTI NIRODA” the stopping of all thought-waves of the mind.

The Gayatri Mantra

The people of India have been passionately longing for Spiritual Vision. There is a prayer in the *Vedas* which for over 4000 years has been in lips of millions of Indians. It is the *Gayatri Mantra*:

TAT SAVITUR VARENIAM
BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHİ
DHIYO YO NAH PRACHODAYAT¹²
(Rig Veda III,62,10)

After adding a first line and a last line the *Gayatri Mantra* is chanted as follows:

OM BHUR BHUVAH SVAH
TAT SAVITUR VARENIAM
BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHİ
DHIYO YO NAH PRACHODAYAT
OM SHANTI SHANTI SHANTI

¹² *The Bhagavad Gita*, ed. and translated by Juan Mascaro (Bhargava: Penguin Books India, 1994) p. 10.

This could be translated as follows: O Divine Breath, you are in the earth, in the sky above and in the havens beyond. We have come to Mediate on the glorious Splendour of SAVITRI – the VIVIFIER DIVINE / LIFE–GIVER. May SHE/HE illumine our *DHI* – the penetrating or intuitive faculty / May this LIGHT illumine our minds and our hearts. (provisional translation).

Early in the morning as the SUN rises with all its Splendour, (sometimes also at Sunset), people after performing their ablutions stand before the *Rising Sun* and chant this *Sacred Gayatri Mantra*. The people see in the SUN the presence of the Divine as *Mother* and *Father*, source of *Light* and *Life*, Heat and Energy – *TAPAS*.

It is customary to chant the *Gayatri Mantra before Meditation* or Dhyana. Here Meditation is seen as the process of becoming the “Contemplata” – that which one is contemplating, namely, the DIVINE. Meditation, therefore, transforms one into the Divine.

The Dynamics of Dhyana – Meditation

In the Gospel of Matthew the Evangelist uses two Aramaic words which are irreconcilable opposites – *ABBA* and *MAMMON*. Jesus says, You cannot serve *God* and mammon (Mt 6,24). The whole life of Jesus was a life-long struggle, moving away from Mammon and turning towards *ABBA*, as shown in his Temptations in the desert. Mammon represents the *false centre* – the *Ego and ABBA* represents the *True Centre*.

When a person is at the level of her/his mind the “egoistic-eye” dominates; at this level God is merely the *Object* of her/his worship. Most of our prayers, especially vocal prayers and rituals which are mechanically gone through, are at this level! Here a person looks at everyone and everything in reference to her/his “selfish-self” – the *Ahamkar* = the *I-maker*.

When the moment of grace comes to a person she/he realizes that she/he is in her/his false ego centre. Then she/he turns towards the – *Abba* and away from the false centre *Mammon*. This is the moment of Conversion.

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore says: “When a man gets rid of his “*ahamkar*” or Ego, he enters into his true inheritance and his true inheritance is God”. The person relentlessly moves towards the true Centre – God or *Abba* and realizes the *Divine* or in our Indian terms, attains *Atmabodha*. So the Holy Pilgrimage of one’s life – *Tirtha Yatra*, is a life-long journey of Conversion,

from Ahamkar (ego) to Atmabodha. Once a person reaches this stage she/he doesn't stay there; her/his "third-eye" (*Divyam Cakshuh* or *Divine Eye*) is opened and she/he now sees everything and everyone through God's eye, – at this level God becomes the subject of her/his being, – as our OMI Constitutions and Rules says, "we see the world through the eyes of the crucified Saviour", (cf CCR 4) and begins to serve everyone without the least trace of self-seeking, with total self-abnegation. She/he is thus gifted with the "Broader Vision of Reality" – *Vishva Rupa Darshana Yoga*. This is Integral Spirituality. In Srimad Bhagavad Gita the *Bhagavan* – the *Lord*, speaking about the spiritual state of such a person says: "She/he sees the *Atman* (the *Divine Self*) in the heart of all beings and sees all beings in the *Atman*. . . . then I never leave her/him and she/he never leaves me. She/he who in this oneness of love, loves me in whatever she/he sees, wherever this person may live, whatever work this person may do, in truth this person lives in me. And she/he is the greatest *Yogi*. . . . when the pleasure and pain of others is her/his own pleasure and pain" (6 / 29 – 32).

Vishva Rupa Darshanam – A Broad Vision of Reality

As St. Paul says, "It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Summing up we could say: All are broken people living with various compulsions arising from our false ego. It is in the "desert" that we are healed of our brokenness – our compulsions, and we are transformed. Hence the need for all to enter the *desert*. It is from this transformed self real ministry flows.¹³

Some 20 years ago I was animating the Annual Retreats of the SVDs (Society of the Divine Word) of the Odisha Province at Jharsuguda when I chanced browsing through a magazine in their reading room. I was pleasantly surprised to read a Prayer by Bishop George Appleton (1902-93), evidently from the Western Christian Tradition, entitled *Candle of the Spirit* which resonated very much the process of Meditation from the Indian Spiritual Tradition as I have shown above:

¹³ J.A. Samarakone, *Conversion as seen through the Prism of the Indian Spiritual Tradition*, in: *A New Vision of Inter-Religious Spirituality. A Memorial Volume on Swami Joseph Samarakone, OMI*, ed. by A. Rayppan, OMI & H. Immanuel, OMI (Bengaluru; Dharmaram Publications, 2018) p. 198. Originally it was a preparatory paper for the 35th General Chapter 2010 of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Give me a candle of your Spirit (*dhi*), O God,
as I go down into the deep of my own being.
Show me the hidden things.
Take me down to the spring of my life,
and tell me my nature and my name.
Give me the freedom to grow
so that I may become my true Self (*Atman*) -
the fulfillment of the seed which you planted in me at my
making.
Out of the deep I cry unto You, O God. Amen.

When we look into the context of the Gospel, the words “pray” or “prayer” can surely be presumed to refer mainly to this form of meditation where the WORD is nourished by contemplative silence. So we can affirm that Jesus is surely a Mystic.

The early Christians too would have followed in the footsteps of Jesus. It is this Mystical dimension of Jesus that made him affirm at one point in his life, his *theosis experience* “THE FATHER AND I ARE ONE” (Jn 10:30). Christian Spirituality, therefore, is the contemplative participation in the unique *Atmabodha* or *ABBA Experience* of Jesus. The Gospel of John presents a Mystical Jesus. There is a Separate Gospel which is not part of New Testament, which is called the Mystical Gospel of John. The proclamation of Jesus: “THE FATHER AND I ARE ONE!” very closely reflects the experience of the Indian Sannyasis (Hermit): “AHAM BRAHMAN ASMI”, meaning “I AM BRAHMAN”.

Indian Christians and even others consider the words of Jesus: “Kingdom of God is within you” or “Kingdom of God is in your midst” as a fitting equivalent of the *Mahavakyas* “AHAM BRAHMAN ASMI” (I am Brahman) or “TAT TVAM ASI” (Thou art that).

The Sufi Mystic Saadi (1210 -1291) with his final breath spoke to God; “Now in death may the illusion of my separateness be shattered for ever; may I know you as me, and me as you”.¹⁴ St. John of the Cross in one of his famous *theosis experience* says: “What God is by nature we become by participation”.

¹⁴ R. Van de Weyer, *366 Readings from World Religions* (Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 2006) p. 438.

Spirituality of the Desert

When the early Church got embroiled in the Roman Imperialism, and “Thrones and Dominations” marched into the Church, the Beatitudes of the Gospels and the Kingdom values receded from the mainline life of the Church. At this juncture God raised up men and women filled with the spirit of Jesus. Now comes on the scene St. Anthony of the Desert (c.251-356) – the Father of the Desert Monks. The words of Jesus to the rich young man “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all your possessions... then come and follow me” (Mt 19:21), this WORD of God held Anthony in its grip, and Anthony taking permission from his Egyptian mother, worked as an ordinary labourer on the periphery of Egypt and then slipped into the Egyptian Desert. There he spent 20 years in silence and solitude undergoing a great purification. Then he returned to his people. People saw him as a beautiful person, healthy in body, mind and spirit, and experienced in him the “Sacrament of God”. People flocked to him and Anthony who carried the desert in his heart invited the people to enter into this “Sacred Space” – “desert of the heart”, and healed them all. He ministered to his people for a few years and returned to a deeper part of the desert where he died at the ripe old age of 105. St. Athanasius, his biographer gives this information. Now many men and women followed Anthony into the desert, and history records a great movement – Desert Mystics.

Centuries later the Islamic Sufis who emerged as the great contemplative branch of Islam, trace their origins to these Desert Fathers.

This was followed by great Religious Orders like the Benedictines and the Carmelites, who devoted much time to contemplation. Great Mystics like St. Theresa of Avila (1515-1582), St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), a German Mystic Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) emerge.

The Official Church always looked upon the Mystics with suspicion and never encouraged Mysticism. Many of them were condemned as heretics and burnt at the stakes or sent to the dungeon, like the Spanish Mystic Michael Molinos (1628-1696). Christians were forbidden to read their books. Spain certainly is a great fertile land of the Mystics!

But God is all the while raising Mystics all over the world, notably in the Eastern Religions, like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism, etc. When Christianity failed to quench the thirst of Christians for mysticism, notably in Europe and America, they turned to these Religions. Today we can see a large number of people in Europe and America where their thirst for Mystical

union with God, or as they say “a deeper walk with the Lord”, is quenched by Religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism etc. The great Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) made this prophetic statement: “The future Christian will be a Mystic or he will not exist at all!”¹⁵

Incidentally the great Spiritual Master, the late Benedictine Monk John Main, OSB, before joining the Benedictine Order, while he was still a young man, met a Hindu Monk in Malaysia who taught him Meditation. John Main found this a very useful spiritual tool and a rewarding experience, Later when he became a Benedictine monk taught this to many, especially to Christian groups in the West, adapting this Meditation technique to suit the Christian context. Today this has evolved into a great movement – World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), and has influenced many Christians and even others to take to Meditation. WCCM has now taken roots in your great country Poland. Mr. Andrzej Ziółkowski is now the Polish National Coordinator.

An Indian Renaissance

In the late 18th century there lived a great political leader named Raja Ram Mohanroy (1772-1833), a Bengali Hindu. He loved his land, Religion and Culture. But he did not like some of the anachronistic, uncivilized behaviour of his people, viz., “*Sati*” – a widow being burnt on the husband’s funeral pyre, child-marriage, etc... Raja Ram Mohanroy was a great Anglophile himself who loved English culture. He along with some like-minded young men founded a movement called *Brahmo Samaj*. He said, “Let English people, particularly the Christian Missionaries, come to our land and open Schools, and teach our people English. Let our people imbibe the English Culture.” This he hoped will bring about a great ‘renaissance’ in India.

There was a flurry of activities: almost all the Christian Denominations the world over sent their missionaries to India. Some even said, “Oh! at last the opportune moment has come for India to be converted to Christianity”. Swami Bede Griffiths (1906 -1993), an English Benedictine Monk who came

¹⁵ K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981) vol. 20, p. 149.

to India in the middle of the 20th Century and inculturated himself into an Indian Sannyasi (Hermit) speaking of the above event says, “But God willed it otherwise!”: God raised up an illiterate Mystic Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa who stopped this tide and saved Mother India, her people and their great ancient Religious and Cultural Tradition!¹⁶

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

Sri Ramakrishna was born on 17th February, 1836. Young Ramakrishna was an unusual boy given to long hours of Meditation; a lover of solitude. His parents gave him in marriage to one Sarada Devi, hoping that this will make him live a “normal life”. But Ramakrishna taught Sarada Devi the Mystical path to communion with the Divine and allowed her free to choose between a marital life and the Bliss of communion with the Divine. She readily chose the latter and remained with him as a life-long consort in the pursuit of the Divine; after Rama Krishna’s unexpected death at the age of 50 on 16th August 1886, she remained a great inspiration to his disciples.

The life of Sri Ramakrishna was a source of great inspiration to all, and quite a few young men were attracted towards him, one of the well-known being Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). Ramakrishna formed them into good Disciples of the Master steeped in contemplation. Many people flocked to him and looked upon him as their great Spiritual Master. They called him PAR-AMAHAMSA, meaning, the great Enlightened One.

When Ramakrishna passed away quite unexpectedly at a young age of 50, his disciples who were all young men, found themselves leaderless. So they were thinking of going back to their homes and live the life their teacher had imparted to them. It was then a friend of Ramakrishna advised them not to take such a drastic decision when they were in distress. He invited them to come to his estate and spend a few months to get over their traumatic experience.

It was during this period, on the auspicious day of December 24/25, 1886, that Swami Vivekananda had a *Dharshan* or “Vision” of Jesus Christ the whole night. The next day Swami Vivekananda shared his vision with his companions: “You have been formed by Sri Ramakrishna as good spiritual men;” Jesus said,

¹⁶ B. Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu way to God* (London: Collins, 1983).

“Now this spirituality has to be translated into action; Mother India needs you. Go around India and look for yourself what the people of India, especially the poor need, and make this your Mission.” This pleased them all. Checking the calendar they found this was CHRISTMAS DAY, a day the Christians celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ, and then and there they took the momentous decision to *Found the Ramakrishna Mission*. Thus Christmas Day became their Foundation Day. To this day the Foundation Day is celebrated in all the Ramakrishna Missions the world over on Christmas Day, and they make it a point to invite a Christian priest to preside over this function. So we find that Jesus Christ is giving his Dharshan or Vision to many a follower outside the Official Church!

Jesus Christ is no stranger to the followers of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna himself had expressed his deep admiration for Jesus: for three days continuously he meditated on JESUS ALONE and had a deep experience of the DIVINE. The Ramakrishna monks had been greatly influenced by the Jesuits of Kolkata and this is reflected in the rules and regulations they have formed for themselves. The Ramakrishna Math is the Contemplative wing of the Order and the Ramakrishna Mission is the Active wing serving the people, especially the poor.

God is the Source of all Religions

I am narrating all this is to show that the DIVINE MYSTERY cannot be compartmentalized into Religions. God is beyond all Religions. The Spirit blows where She wills and we all marvel at this. The Holy Spirit is not the monopoly of any one Religion. It is the Spirit who brings into existence all Religions, including Jesus Christ and his disciples, and orientates them towards the Universal Kingdom of Communion which the same spirit is effecting at the heart of Humanity.¹⁷

In this Broad Vision of the Spirit, Christians, and for that matter all Religionists, are called upon to play a participatory role, joining hands with all the people of goodwill and *make the Kingdom Come*.

Of course all Religions have their share of Fundamentalists who deviate from the founding spirit. Our Master Jesus Christ himself has given us an acid

¹⁷ F. Wilfred, *Once again ... Church and the Kingdom*, “Vidyajoti” 57 (1993) p. 6-24.

test by which the true Master can be recognized. We find this in the beautiful Prayer of Jesus to the Father after the Last Supper in the Gospel of St. John: “I in them and you in me, that they may become completely ONE, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (17:23). Having prayed for Union with the Father and Communion with all, Jesus says this ONENESS shall be the credibility for his Mission – by this the “world may know that you have sent Me”! So too the credential of any person manifesting the face of the DIVINE is that her/his followers are united in ONE COMMUNION and her/his teaching brings about COMMUNION among ALL.

Conclusion

Let me conclude this presentation with the heart’s longing of the Nobel Laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore for a humane existence: “The human world is made one; all the countries are losing their distance every day, their boundaries rot, offering the same resistance as they did in the past age. Politicians struggle to exploit this great facet and wrangle about establishing trade relationships. But *my mission is to urge for a world-wide commerce of heart and mind, sympathy and understanding*, and never to allow this sublime opportunity to be sold in the slave markets for the cheap price of individual profits or to be shattered away by the unholy competition in mutual destructiveness.”¹⁸

Let me end this Presentation with the chanting of the *Shanti Mantra* – Prayer for Peace:

LOKHA SAMASTA SUKHINO BHAVANTU
MAY ALL BEINGS IN ALL THE WORLD BE HAPPY
AND CONTENTED
OM SHANTI SHANTI SHANTI
OM PEACE PEACE PEACE

¹⁸ Tagore wrote this in 1930, in Paris. His video recording of this passage in his own voice can be listened (2017-02-02) to at the link: <http://www.storypick.com/rabindranath-tagore-rare-video/> (not available in Poland).

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Sri Lankan Perspectives on Religious Identity and Religious Plurality

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The constitution of the Democratic Social Republic of Sri Lanka guarantees the basic religious freedom to all religions. The Constitution No. 9 says, “The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e).” These rights include:

- (a) the freedom of speech and expression including publication;
- (b) the freedom of peaceful assembly;
- (c) the freedom of association;
- (d) the freedom to form and join a trade union;
- (e) the freedom, either by himself or in association with others and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching;
- (f) the freedom by himself or in association with others to enjoy and promote his own culture and to use his own language;
- (g) the freedom to engage by himself or in association with others in any lawful occupation, profession, trade, business or enterprise;
- (h) the freedom of movement and of choosing his residence within Sri Lanka; and
- (i) the freedom to return to Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, according to CC 10, “Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.”

No Person shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. (CC 10)

According to CC 10 “All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to

(1) the equal protection of the law. No citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds

(2) of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any one of such grounds:

The above shows that on the basis of the Constitution of Sri Lanka there is freedom of religion to all. Religious identity of all is guaranteed in the Constitution. But the problem is whether this situation is found **ALWAYS** in practice. In general, the answer is affirmative, but there are particular cases of violation.

For this we have to understand the demographic situation and the historical circumstances of Sri Lanka. Statistics on religious affiliation can be tabulated as follows:

| Religion | Number of People | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| Buddhism | 14,272,056 | 70.1 |
| Hinduism | 2,561,299 | 12.58 |
| Islam | 1,967,523 | 9.7 |
| Christianity (all denominations) | 1,552,161 | 7.6 |

Of these, Buddhists and Hindus have coexisted from the ancient times. Muslims came to Sri Lanka in the 7th-8th centuries CE. Catholicism came with the colonization of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) by the Portuguese in 1505 CE and Dutch Reformed Church in 1656 with the advent of the Dutch and Anglicanism with the coming of the British in 1896. On the part of the majority Sinhalese Buddhist extremists, there is a superiority feeling that they were the original inhabitants of the island nation and therefore, they are its owners. The others are infiltrators who came in later and who have little or no right to live in this country. This is particularly so among the Buddhist fundamentalists and those led by them. Similarly, all adherents belonging to various religions feel

that their doctrinal claims are superior. Generally, there is little respect for each other's beliefs. In such a situation, interreligious dialogue is practically impossible. But the post Vatican Catholic attitude of tolerance has been something very positive. Besides, there is no fundamentalism in the Catholic Church. But such sympathy and benevolence are interpreted by fundamentalist and chauvinist elements in non-Christian religions as subtle forms of proselytism. Politicians try to please everyone for their own political advantage and cause of religion suffers because of this.

Christianity is identified with the West. Although Jesus was an Easterner, Christianity is identified with the West since it was brought to Asia by Western colonialists. There is a terrible antipathy towards whatever is associated with colonialism although they did also many good things. On the other hand, although five centuries have passed, traumatic memories of persecution of Buddhists and Hindus by the Colonial Portuguese, Dutch and British is deep seated in the sub-conscious of the populace. They still recall to mind the events related to forced conversions as well as public apologetic debates of the 19th century between Protestants and Buddhists (e.g. Pānadurā Wāda) at which the Buddhist won, and make hate statements so that the bitterness continues while affirming their superiority over Christianity. Apart from fanatic members of the laity, the biggest drawback is the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim clergymen who have become bitter sowers of anti-Christian seeds.

The Catholic Church as well as the Mainline Protestant Churches have since 1960s adopted a tolerant attitude and have been engaged in dialogue with religions, particularly with Buddhists and Hindus. In Sri Lanka clergymen like Fr. Michael Rodrigo, omi (who was martyred in 1987), Archbishop Christopher Bonjean, omi, Bishop Leo Nanayakkara, OSB, Anglican Bishops Lakshman Wickramasinghe and Lakdasa de Mel, Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, omi, Fr. Aloysius Peiris, SJ, Fr. Paul Casperz, SJ, Fr. Paul Sathkunamayagam, SJ, Rev. Lynn de Silva and Rev. Yohan Dewananda (Anglican Church). The dialogue with Buddhism in which they were involved was a sincere one in search of the truth. They approached the question without Catholic superiority or with filthy gains of proselytism. Theirs was a dialogue of life, social commitment as well as intellectual pursuit. This is not the case with Christian fundamentalist sects whose sole intent conversion through proselytism. Such attempts have had violent backlashes from non-Christians.

Problem areas related to interreligious dialogue can be listed as follows:

Christians cannot erect a place of worship, or an object veneration like a statue, cross etc as and when they wish. Strict procedures are adopted in getting permission for such things which are often difficult and fruitless. Even when such permission is obtained there have been related instances of burning and vandalism.

Although there is no constitutional obstacle, a Christian can never be accepted as a President or a Prime Minister of the country. Christians are free to hold any other position in the state sector.

Sometimes, publications and media coverage of offensive, derogatory and provocative nature come out.

There are sporadic instances of violence among various religious groups on various issues, though these are not regular occurrences.

Hate statements are common between Buddhists and Muslims and it is on the increase all the time.

The ethos and moral values propagated are one thing and their practice of them is unrelated to theory.

Empty ritualism devoid of the demands of justice, equality and freedom

This kind of hostile spirit is prevalent even among some of the younger people.

Conclusion

We Catholics are serious and sincere about dialogue with other religions. For me it looks that Catholics are the only ones who want and work towards it. Other religions are not interested in such ventures. But that does not mean that we give up. It is our firm hope that someday the truth will make all humans free and make humanity realize our common brotherhood and sisterhood.

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Thai perspective on Religious Plurality and Religious Identity

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This short presentation focuses on the relationship between religious plurality and religious identity in the Thai context. Since there are other interventions from different contexts and perspectives I will limit myself to briefly present the concrete situation of it in Thailand and then shortly reflect on these data. What I will say is based on my experience as a missionary in this country for about 24 years.

It is a fact that the world in which we live is becoming more and more pluralistic because of many reasons and among others especially mass migrations and faster communications at all level. Also from the religious point of view plurality is becoming more evident sometimes even inside the same household.

Though Thailand is a country with a great majority of Buddhists, also Muslims, Hindus and Christians of various denominations are quite visible in its society. The State officially recognizes five religions, namely Buddhism, Islam, Christian Catholicism, Christian Protestantism and Hinduism. The king is considered the protector of all religions and a guarantor of religious freedom.

The common attitude of the majority of the Thai people is that all religions teach to be good people and therefore all religions are worthy of respect and appreciation. At present here people of different religions usually live and work together harmoniously. There have been some discriminations and persecutions years ago, when the Christian religion was perceived as an instrument in the hands of the colonial powers. However it is something of the past.

Also on the part of the Church, though in the past it was strictly separated from other religions to the point that interfaith marriages were prohibited and even only entering a Buddhist temple was considered a sin, today the attitude has totally changed. The wide opening of the Vatican II Council brought a new positive outlook towards other faiths. For this reason it is now much easier for Christians to live together with the other people without becoming strangers in their own country.

Today in Thailand in some villages where there are both a Buddhist temple and a Catholic church, the Buddhist community helps preparing and participates in the parish feast. At the same time the Christian community does the same on the occasion of the temple feast. In most Catholics schools it is common for Buddhist students to join the Catholics in prayer and even in the liturgy. Often Buddhist monks are invited for performing religious activities for the Buddhist students at the school itself. Neighbors can be in very good terms or even good friends in spite of different religious beliefs. Sometimes they accompany each other when doing some charitable activities, no matter who the organizer or the receiver might be. Working together for the common building of the society is expected from all. Often the government calls for the representatives of the various religions present in the country to lead prayers on some national special occasions. Since the Catholics are a tiny minority in this country (about 0.3 percent of the population) most of them marry in interfaith marriages bringing religious plurality even inside the family.

The acceptance of religious plurality is certainly positive. It leads to harmonious living together and it brings peace to the society. It is born from the certitude that God who is Truth and Love is present and works in different degrees in all religions as it is stated in many recent Church documents (*Nostra Aetate, Redemptoris Missio...*). It is rooted in the certainty that “it is the Spirit who sows the “seeds of the Word” present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ” (RMis 28). “Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things” (RMis 29).

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from

the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men” (NA 2). “The Church’s relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: “Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man.” (RMis 29).

Certainly in religious plurality there are also challenges to be faced. The risk is to become so indifferent to the religious dimension up to the point that all religions can be considered as the same. Sometimes Relativism leads to think that one religion is good for me while another can be good for you. In this way reference to the absolute truth would be lost.

These challenges lead us to reflect on the second part of our topic, that is, religious identity. Religious plurality should not be perceived as a threat to religious identity. On the opposite, experience shows that it is a stimulus and an opportunity for growth in one’s identity.

Very often the first reaction towards someone of a different faith is fear. Whatever is different from me is perceived as a threat, because it challenges me pushing me out of my comfort zone of religious certitudes towards a new synthesis capable of welcoming the other. Challenges are important for growth and depth in the understanding of one’s faith. This is certainly true also in Thailand, where the tiny Christian community daily faces the huge majority of Buddhists. If both can overcome fear, meeting the other becomes a liberating and enriching experience as the experience of many here shows.

Religious identity is certainly not only a set of doctrines learned in a classroom once and for all. On the contrary it requires a constant adaptation and transformation. Perhaps it can help now to reflect on how we form our religious identity.¹

First of all we should be aware that *religious identity is formed in a context of reciprocal trust*. And trust is also shown in *openness to dialogue*, which is precisely to say that trust happens when religious adherents *encounter* and engage one another.

Actually *Religious identity is always formed in relationship*; meeting the other, the different one, helps identifying one self. In reference to the other

¹ The article *Forming Religious Identity in the Context of Religious Pluralism*, written by Michael Reid Trice on 05/01/2011 (<https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/210>) is very helpful in our reflection of the formation of religious identity. I make constant reference to it in these few lines.

I identify myself more clearly, understanding in a deeper way similarities and differences with the other. However no relationship could be possible without an attitude of reciprocal trust.

Religious identity is formed through mutual discovery. Discovery requires us to risk ourselves insofar as our pre-conceived perspectives are *re-formed* in relationship. Listening to the other, understanding who he/she is, and letting him/her challenge my certitudes; explaining who I am in a way that the other can understand; all this leads to a new synthesis about myself and my identity.

Many examples could be brought to clarify what might sound as a theory. I will just refer here to the experience of some parishioners in the parish where I was ministering, when we decided to ask for the collaboration of the local Buddhist temple in order to serve better people affected by AIDS and belonging to both religions in the territory of our parish. At the beginning people were afraid of working for a social service with others of different faith, but once they overcame their fears, they discovered that those people had their same desire to work for the good of the patients. Little by little trust developed. Dialoguing with them while working, they were able to understand the motivations behind the action of the Buddhist counterpart while at the same time they had to clarify their motivations in order to explain them to the others. It became an opportunity to go deeper in their faith understanding in order to be able to clarify it to the other. It was the beginning of a collaboration that lasted many years till a new Abbot out of fear for the close collaboration and friendship that had developed, stopped it. However, for those who lived it, that experience is cherished even after some years have passed. They feel that their faith has been strengthened through the openness and collaboration with people of other faiths and that they are more mature and open people because of what they lived.

It is obvious that, if there is not an initial clear understanding of one's identity, the risk of confusion and syncretism is always present. Only respect for the truth and constant research of it can ensure a deepening in one's identity while entering in relationship with the other.

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The Perspective of Religious Plurality and Identity in Nigeria

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FINISHING DISSERTATION ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Introduction

Nigeria is a purely plural-ethnic, plural-cultural, plural-religious and plural-linguistic nation. Before the historic amalgamation in 1914, the various ethnic and cultural groups that now make up Nigeria existed as autonomous political entities, having their own political systems, social and religious values. Many have today associated the problem of Nigeria to the failure of the Colonial masters to recognize and respect these diversities. The resultant effect of this negligent, they had maintained, is the loose and cosmetic merger of the ethnic and cultural groups in Nigeria, which has turned to be the main source of the Nigerian headache. In Nigeria for example, religion being a persuasive source of identity is not disputable. Thus, it is not difficult to identify a Christian from Muslim or a traditionalist since their dominant beliefs betray them openly in many spheres of life. Studies have shown that in Nigeria, ethnic and religious differences form sentiments which override perception of Nationalism. Leaders are distracted from national thinking and focus on religious interest, hence, religion frames people's identity.

Having viewed the other religious groups as rivals, members of a particular group work to discredit the members of the other group and these results into prejudice and discrimination of other religious groups. The outcome of the impulse is the division of the society into "we" and "them"; "us" and "them";

“Muslim” versus “Christian” mindsets and this draws our minds to the fact that religion is a major source of identity and division in the country. Therefore, how do these religions framed identity in the midst of religious plurality? Put in another way, what is the co-relationship between religious plurality and identity? This presentation is set out to look at the Nigerian perspectives of religious plurality and identity. After the introduction, I will look at the pluralistic nature of religion in Nigeria with the advent Christianity and Islam forming the background, I will also look at religious identity vis-à-vis ethnicity. By highlighting the conflicts and differences shared by these religions will help me proposed the way forward and then conclude.

Plurality of Religions in Nigeria

Religion, despite its concern with the spiritual matters, also affects us socially. Religious rights therefore, remain an important topic in contemporary society such as Nigeria. Simeon Onyewueke Eboh, asserts that religion “has always manifested itself as a social fact, an associative reality with a communitarian character”.¹ He further argues that “although religion concerns the spiritual and other-worldly dimensions of man”, it also “affects deeply the temporal dimension of man”.² Religion therefore, can effectively reinforce societal norms and values only when a single religion within the society has a monopoly on the truth.³ Against this background, it is pertinent to note that, a typical indigenous African society hardly tolerated religious plurality, but the advent of Islam and Christianity brought religious plurality and social upheaval to Nigeria by introducing different cultures and ideas.

There are estimated 250 – 400 ethnic groups in the over 180 million population of Nigeria, with different cultures and modes of political organizations. Despite that, currently, Christianity, Islam and Indigenous religion are the three main religions practiced in Nigeria, with Christianity and Islam

¹ S.O. Eboh, *Church-State Relations: A Juridical Survey of the Church-State Relationship 1960-1983* (Romae: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana: 1984) p. 1.

² Ibid.

³ M. Haralambos & R.M. Heald, *Sociology: Themes and Perspective* (2nd ed.) (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Sheridan House, 1985) p. 476-478.

being the dominant religion in the country, at a level of almost equal percentage.⁴ Based on this, there are few traditionalists in Nigeria, most towns, particularly in the southern Nigeria, still retain their traditional deities and have custodians who worship those deities. Indigenous religions typically involve the worship of idols who serve as intermediaries to the main god. It is therefore not surprising that the followers of the indigenous religions due to their insignificant number, suffer discrimination, mainly from fanatical Christian and Muslim groups. This can be seen in the religious fanaticism displayed by some Muslim groups and Christian sects, together with some politicians' use of religion to further justify their ends.

It is of essence to mention here, the Nigerian Constitution grants freedom of religious worship to all Nigerians. The constitution provides that "the Government of the Federation or of a state (36 States and the Federal Capital Territory) shall not adopt any religion as State Religion".⁵ It does further to say, "every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observances".⁶

Christianity in Nigeria

Owing to the European military conquest of southern Nigeria, European missionaries, from the 17th centuries, began introducing Christianity primarily into southern Nigeria. Please note here, these same European Christian missionaries worked in all parts of Nigeria. Today, as I speak, Christianity has spread into many parts of the northern Nigeria where the Islamic religion is most dominant. However, prior to the advent of Christianity, most communities, in the southern Nigeria maintained their identities through

⁴ CIA, *The World Factbook (Nigeria)*, in <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (2018.12.12).

⁵ *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999)*, in: <http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm> (2018.12.12). Chapt. I, § 10. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution was promulgated on May 5th, 1999 and came into force on May 29th, 1999.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapt. IV, § 35.

their indigenous religion. Even when Christianity's presence was relatively new, it only introduced a new world view that complements the religious identity of these communities. A renowned Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, captured the cultural conflict, social trauma, and destabilization caused by the introduction of Christianity into the Nigerian communities, by his description of the prevailing social situation in Umuofia, a village representing the Igbo region in the south-east at the time of the advent of Christianity.⁷ Today, Christianity has become more integrated into the indigenous Nigerian cultures. An emerging problem now is that of religious identity posed by differences caused by religious pluralism.

Islam in Nigeria

History has it that, Muslim merchants from North Africa introduced Islam into the northern parts of Nigeria during the 10th century. Therefore, Islam existed in Nigeria for six centuries before the introduction of Christianity. The Muslim traders from North Africa who first introduced Islam exposed the indigenous communities to visual manifestation of the faith. As the faith gains ground, two main Islamic denominations were practiced in Nigeria: *Tijaniyya* and *Quadiriyya*, with *Tijaniyya* practiced more widely. Although we have the *Ahmadiyya* movement found in the western Nigeria as a third Islamic sect, but it has not been fully accepted by the more Orthodox Muslims.⁸ Furthermore, a multiplicity of sects and movements has emerged within the Islamic faith. The prominent sects include the *Izalatul – Bid'ah Wa Igamat al' Sunnah*, abbreviated as the *Yan Izala*, founded by Mallam Ismaila Idris. Another prominent sect is *Izala*, a strong reformist group favored by Islamic intellectuals. These

⁷ Ch. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959).

⁸ See: *How Ahmadiyya was introduced into Nigeria*, in: <http://ahmadiyyanigeria.net/about-us/our-existence-in-nigeria/> (2017.02.22); Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Nigeria: Predominant sects, or branches, of Islam present in Nigeria; role of Imam and how an individual becomes one; whether Imam has any power, or role, in the issuing of death sentences under Sharia law and, if so, the manner in which a death sentence would be issued and carried out; whether a death sentence issued under Sharia law would be legal under Nigerian law*, 28 March 2001, NGA36566.E, in: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be7e18.html> (2019.02.02).

two sects have clashed over modes of worship and have other differences as well. Islam, as practiced in northern Nigeria, does not reflect a demarcation between the social, political and religious life of the people.

Religious Identity and Ethnicity

Ethnicity and religion are some of the many forms of identity to which large academic literature attach in Nigeria. The majority ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest and Igbo in the southeast. All the other ethnic groups fit into the minority category, with varying degrees of political status, depending on their numerical size and political influence. The Hausa-Fulani and other communities residing in Northern Nigeria are mainly Muslims while the south-south minority areas and Igbo speaking areas in the southeast are predominantly Christians. The Middle Belt (north-central zone) is a mixture of Christian and Muslim populations, while the Yoruba speaking communities in the southwest are about half Muslims and half Christians.

These differences underlie the North-South and sharpen ethnic cleavages in the country. Firstly, ethnic identification is presumed to be the most outstanding and consistent source of social identity in Nigeria. Second, ethnicity is regarded as a central avenue for collective action. Thirdly, ethnicity is assumed to be a generally destabilizing influence, with particularly suspicious influences on democracy. Among the three religious identities in Nigeria: Christianity, Islam and Indigenous religion, the latter is the least politically active; numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses. It is this unique religious divide that prompted Archbishop Onaiyekan of Abuja to describe the country as “the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world”.⁹ Underlying this deep religious identity is the deep distrust each group feels toward the other.

⁹ J. Onaiyekan, *Panel Discussion on the Role of Bishops in Peace building: A contribution from the Nigerian Perspective. Catholic Peace building Network Conference Notre Dame University, South Bend, USA. April 13 (2008)*. See http://www.nd.edu/~cpn/papers_2008CPN/Homily%204-14%20-%20Onaiyekan.pdf (2017.02.22).

See: *How Ahmadiyya was introduced into Nigeria*, in: <http://ahmadiyyanigeria.net/about-us/our-existence-in-nigeria/> (2017-02-22); Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Nigeria: Predominant sects, or branches, of Islam present in Nigeria; role of Imam and how an individual becomes one; whether Imam has any power, or role, in the issuing of death sentences under Sharia law and, if so, the manner in which a death sentence would be issued and carried out; whether a death sentence issued under Sharia law would be legal under Nigerian law*, 28 March 2001, NGA36566.E, in: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be7e18.html> (2019-02-02).

Conflict of Differences: Christianity, Islam and African

Traditional Religion

Even though Christianity and Islam have contributed positively to the growth of the country; they have also created a history of conflict and violence. This includes a war of words motivated by conflicting beliefs: A good Muslim is one who is able to withstand Christian conversion tactics and campaigns. A good Christian is also one who is able to confront Islam and challenge their instigating utterances. These beliefs sanction symbolic violence, and Muslims and Christians use each other's sacred writings to perpetuate stereotype that expresses fear and anxiety about the domination of others, thereby reflecting a narrow extremist subculture of either their community or their religious group. Violence begins with the discrimination, dehumanization, stigmatization of others. It takes place in cleavages, which can be described as marginalized and defensive groups seen in the Christian minorities or Islamic majority, Intra-Religious groups and State establishments. These cleavages are fairly permanent and their violence could be a quest for freedom from domination, or perceived threat to their sociopolitical position.

In the case of Islam, the rise of this dimension of fanaticism and intolerance through Maitatsine sect, Izala, Islamic Movements and recently the Boko Haram sects has manifested itself in a very dramatic manner over the past years through their activities. Take Izala Movement for instance, is a powerful and orthodox 'return to source' group that emerged under the leadership of Sheik Abubakar Mahmoud Gumi, a former Grand Khadi of Northern Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s, who became the inspirer of a major modern

organization of Islamic reform in Northern Nigeria.¹⁰ The Movement, which has buses and public address systems, organizes regular campaigns in many towns and villages in the north and their recorded cassettes are sold throughout northern Nigeria. Gumi also has the support of a number of well-placed intellectuals and administrators. Yet as the movement grew, so also its leaders became more and more intolerant. For instance in an interview in *This Week Magazine* (6 April 1987) Abubakar Gumi came out strongly against Christians: "... 'What is Christianity?' And even the Christian prophet doesn't know. All that he will say is that Christians are the followers of one who was crucified ..."

Like the Islamic religion, Christianity has divided into numerous sects since the Protestant Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries. In Nigeria, the proliferation of denominations and churches has been on an increase, with everyone trying to identify with his own. The new Pentecostal churches are characterized by their radical approach; they are more militant in their evangelistic and proselytizing movements, particularly with respect to nonbelievers. Christian fundamentalists regard themselves as engaged in a three branched conflict: with Muslims, with mainstream Christians whom they accuse of abandoning the basics of their faith, and followers of traditional religion. Just like the Muslim fundamentalists, they also seek to expand their support base, hence conversion and poaching of followers of other religions through stereotype, hateful preaching, twist and misapprehension of the various religious texts in such manners that promoted bigotry and intolerance in both camps. This reaction is based on the scenario that, a Christian is free to change his or her religion, but a Muslim appears unable and even more dangerous to freely and publicly become a Christian. In the case of the Indigenous religion (ATR), it is hardly noticeable due to the insignificant percentage, except in the regions where it is practiced.

¹⁰ U.A. Tsakuwa, *The Contribution of Sheikh Abubakar Mamoud Gumi to the Understanding of Islamic Ideology in Nigeria* (Sokoto, Unpublished Project from Usman Danfodiyo University, 1999) p. 23.

The way forward

Having known where we are, the next question to ask at this point is where do we go from here? What are the ways forward? One major confrontation associated with plurality and identity (especially in religious beliefs) as seen in our analysis so far, is the temptation of exaggeration of both the differences that existed between the groups. Each group ordinarily would want to project a positive image that will make them look pleasant and unique before other groups. This is very normal. But the danger therein is when this normal impulse is misconstrued; when it is negatively expressed and when it leads to discrimination and antagonism.

This presentation therefore, recommends that in as much as the group would want to project a positive image of itself, they should not lose sight of the fact that the other groups have an image to project too. Therefore, there is serious need for each group to appreciate and respect the needs and aspirations of the other; be it Muslim, Christian or Indigenous Religious groups. Each has an image to project and protect and this will go a long way in ushering an atmosphere of peace in the country. Furthermore, the right culture to be adopted in such plurality should be one that recognizes and respect these diversities. National integration can only be achieved if we accept our differences and be ready to accommodate our each other not minding whatever it is that have divided us, knowing that life is full of contradictions which must be resolved to form a united and stable society. Unity in diversity should be the appropriate model of the unity to be sought.

Conclusion

It is pertinent to note that, a reasonable percentage of people in Nigeria who are Christians or Muslims inherited these religions as hegemony of cultures, traditions and accident of history and birth. This reality must be accepted. Taking cognizance of this plurality, Madu in his book: *Fundamentals of Religious Studies* looks at the pluralistic nature of Nigeria as a reality that we cannot do without. Instead, Nigeria's survival depends on the level of awareness by the different ethnic and religious segments. Being born as a Muslim or Christian or belonging to any ethnic group and more still, whether you are from the predominantly Muslim or predominantly Christian region is the matter

of accidental history. It is my contention to say that all these differences must be there, for it is in these differences that we shall manifest our level of awareness to share our assets and liabilities and be ready to resolve seeming contradictions to our own advantage, growth and development.¹¹ Plurality therefore, is a step to an authentic enculturation and dialogue. This dialogue opens the way for mutual understanding, tolerance and respect of the view point of each group, as long as each group endeavor to listen to one another, understand each other in sincerity and honesty.¹²

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¹² I.U. Nwanju, *Religious Bigotry and Good Governance in Nigeria*. An unpublished paper presented at the 2012 faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University annual conference. Private archives of the author.

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Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. The reception of the document in Germany

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When the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct”¹ was adopted in 2011² it was quite clear that this was not the final point of the ecumenical consultation because the request for reception was laid down in the document itself.

The purpose of this document is to encourage churches, church councils and mission agencies to reflect on their current practices and to use the recommendations in this document to prepare, where appropriate, their own guidelines for their witness and mission among those of different religions and among those who do not profess any particular religion. It is hoped that Christians across the world will study this

¹ In the following the document will be briefly called “Christian Witness”.

² For the genesis of the document cf. the article of Klaus Vellguth in this volume.

document in the light of their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both by word and deed.³

The following article gives an account of how the German churches adopted the document. Therefore, it describes the major steps of the process of reception. The underlying assumption is that the reception promoted two main aspects of Christian identity, an *ecumenical identity* and a *missionary identity*. At the end, the article presents an initiative that indicates a possible and necessary next step, that is to develop similar “recommendations for conduct” on an interreligious level.

The ecumenical platform

In 2012, the *Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland, EMW)* invited representatives of churches, Christian denominations and mission societies for a first meeting. Among the more than 30 participants there were representatives of Protestant mission organizations, the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Roman-Catholic Church, the Council of Christian Churches in Germany and others. Informally, they established an ecumenical platform that planned and pushed the reception of the document “Christian Witness” in Germany. They branded the process as *Mission Respect (Mission Respekt)*. The director of the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany, Christoph Anders, appreciated that the text was about to get attention, and he described the forthcoming process as follows: “From an ecumenical point of view we are entering an uncharted territory and we are going to make important experiences and learn a lot.”⁴ This statement indicates one of the two main aspects of identity that were promoted by the process of reception, an *ecumenical identity*. Right from the beginning the ecumenical identity was not only a side-effect but built

³ *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Recommendations for Conduct, Preamble*, in: <http://missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Christian-Witness-Original.pdf> (15.02.2017).

⁴ “Ökumenisch gesehen betreten wir Neuland und werden damit wichtige Lernerfahrungen machen.” “Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe konkretisiert Empfehlungen für missionarisches Handeln. Erste Ergebnisse für Mitte 2013 erwartet”, press release of 30 November 2012, in: <http://missionrespekt.de/fix/files/pm.pdf> (03.03.2017).

up intentionally. The second main aspect of identity that was fostered in the process of reception becomes obvious when looking at the document itself. It gives recommendations for conduct with regard to “Christian Witness” that can be understood as mission. So, at the origin of the whole process there is the question of mission and that means of an identity marker of Christianity and an essential element of the self-concept of the Christian church. This has been formulated precisely in “Ad gentes”, the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the mission activity of the church: “The pilgrim Church is missionary from her very nature” (AG 2). This self-description can also be found in the document “Christian Witness”: “Mission belongs to the very being of the church.”⁵ From this it becomes obvious that the second main aspect is a *missionary identity*.

The Process of Reception

These two aspects, ecumenical identity and missionary identity, have been promoted to different degrees in each step of the process of reception. Below, three major steps will be pointed out: the International Ecumenical Congress in 2014, the Podium at the German Catholics’ Day (*Katholikentag*) and the Ecumenical Conference, both in 2016.

Mission Respect: International Ecumenical Congress in Berlin in 2014

In August 2014, more than 250 mission workers and church leaders from around the world gathered in Berlin for a two-day congress. The *Mission Respect* congress was sponsored by the *Council of Christian Churches in Germany* (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen, ACK*), which includes the Catholic Church together with a number of Protestant and Orthodox churches, and the *German Evangelical Alliance* (*Deutsche Evangelische Allianz, DEA*), as well as three Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical associations of mission organizations. It was mainly prepared by *Missio*, the German branch of the Pontifical Mission

⁵ *Christian Witness, Preamble*, op. cit.

Society, and the *Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany*. Three aspects of the congress shall be highlighted.⁶

The congress was held in Berlin, and this venue was of course chosen intentionally. It was intended to communicate the concern of “Christian Witness” into the political sphere. Therefore some politicians were invited to participate in the congress, and on one evening high-ranking politicians and representatives of the churches were convened to a meeting. The fact that the churches and denominations presented the document together to the public sphere strengthened the ecumenical identity. And, not less important, it marked a widely shared Christian position on the question of religious freedom.

A brief glance at the programme reveals on the one hand the international character of the congress and on the other hand its missionary approach. The first of the 14 workshops was entitled “Germany: A Mission Country?!” (“Deutschland: Missionsland?!”). Other workshops focused on the missionary presence of Christians in certain sectors of the German society, e. g. “Religious Education and Christian Witness?” (“Religionsunterricht und christliches Zeugnis?”), or “Being Christian at the University” (“Christsein an der Hochschule”). Discussing the document “Christian Witness” obviously stimulated a reflection on the missionary presence of Christians in Germany and thus a missionary identity.

When asked about the congress, two high-ranking representatives made interesting statements. Archbishop emeritus Anders Wejryd, then and now WCC president for Europe, did not only characterize the document but also the congress. He said, “The meeting today in Berlin is one output of the document. I’m grateful to be part of the congress and grateful to the organizers who brought us together to share and to listen to one another.” Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, added, “The document is important, but much more important is that we have to come together, we have to witness and we have to discuss. I’m looking forward to the ongoing discussion among different churches and different religions.”⁷ Both church officials emphasized the importance of sharing and discussing. This

⁶ A complete documentation of the congress in German language can be found at <http://missionrespekt.de/derkongress/dokumentation/index.html> (03.03.2017).

⁷ *We have to build new bridges*, press release of 28 August 2014, in: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/201cwe-have-to-build-new-bridges201d> (15.02.2016).

dimension of dialogue goes beyond the mere text of the document. As it was mentioned with regard to the interdenominational communication, dialogue may be considered as constitutive of the ecumenical identity.

Certainly the congress in Berlin was a main event within the process of reception. It aimed at bringing the document into the political arena and the society. As this was done by a newly constituted platform, this stepping out into the public sphere had also an effect into the other direction. It demanded and promoted an ecumenical identity and due to the religious situation in Germany also a missionary identity.

Two publications can be regarded as results of the congress. There is, on the one hand, the documentation which does not only contain the papers and presentations given at the congress but it also includes the talks and for each workshop a “Listener’s Report”. Thus, it tries to reflect the dimension of dialogue. On the other hand there is a kind of tool for parishes and communities.⁸ This booklet uses parts of the congress material and gives liturgical models as well as methods for discussing the document in groups. Thus it tries to provoke new occasions for sharing and discussing or, in other words, for continuing the ecumenical dialogue about questions of faith and mission.

Mission Respekt at the Katholikentag in Leipzig in 2016

Another main event was the podium at the Catholics’ Day (*Katholikentag*) in Leipzig in May 2016. The German Catholics’ Day can be described as a festival that offers liturgical services, round-table discussions and cultural events. It convenes Catholics and the faithful of all denominations in dialogue. *Missio*, the German branch of the Pontifical Mission Society, took this opportunity to present the document “Christian Witness” to a large, mainly Catholic audience. In an ecumenical cooperation, it organized a podium and developed an exhibition and a video clip in order to present new approaches to the document.

Similar to the congress in 2014, the podium again fulfilled the criteria “ecumenical” and “international”. Out of six participants of the discussion

⁸ The tool in German language can be downloaded at <http://missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Handreichung-letzteVersion.pdf> (03.03.2017).

three were Catholic, three from Protestant denominations; two of them were from abroad. The interdenominational dialogue was put into practice once again. Contrary to the expectations, quite a few people came to listen to the presentations and the following discussion. During the discussion some people from the audience reported on their experiences in the accompaniment of refugees and migrants. Obviously such encounters confront people with questions concerning conversion, baptism and their own faith. Thus, the presence of people from different cultures in which faith and its practice are vital and much more common than in the German society reminds German volunteers of their dormant faith. Being asked about their faith people become aware of their mission as Christians.

During this podium at the *Katholikentag*, a new exhibition was publicly shown for the first time. The exhibition consists of 15 roll-ups. After a brief introduction to the document "Christian Witness" it presents the core of it, the twelve principles. For each principle it gives the headline and the partly truncated explanation. But this documentary part is framed by a photography, a brief quotation and a question. The quotation formulates a personal attitude towards the problem that is focused in the text. The question derived from the principle aims at provoking a personal reflection of the faith. This way of presenting the principles does not go deeper into theological questions of missionary practice but takes them as a missionary stimulus. Obviously, the exhibition was designed with regard to the religious landscape in Germany where the problem is less aggressive missionary activities of Christian denominations but where the established churches lack missionary activities at all. Since the *Katholikentag* parishes can borrow the exhibition and present it in their churches and parish halls. It is interesting to notice that many parishes make use of this possibility in ecumenical cooperation, showing one part in the Catholic, the other part in the Protestant Church. Thus, the exhibition helps creating and maintaining ecumenical contacts.

During the podium at the *Katholikentag* there was also the premiere of a video clip introducing the document.⁹ Two features of the animation film shall be mentioned explicitly. First, it is the fact that the medium film forced the authors to translate a somehow lifeless document into a kind of narration. Therefore, they chose the means of personalization and went back to the very beginning of every Christian missionary movement, the encounter with Jesus

⁹ The film can be watched at www.missionrespekt.de (03.03.2017).

himself. The video starts with telling the story how people met Jesus and told others about their experience. This beginning is quite lively and very different from the end which is listing the principles of the document and therefore less inspiring. The second feature that is worth being highlighted is a dramaturgical break. The video first mentions the conflicts between Christian denominations, continues with conflicts between religions, and comes back to the document "Christian Witness" which is an agreement between Christian denominations. Thus, it emphasizes the ecumenical achievement and at the same time exposes the wider dimension of missionary competition and confrontations.

Ecumenical Conference in Elstal 2016

For the time being, the last step in the process of reception was a conference held at a Baptist theological seminary in Elstal near Berlin in June 2016.¹⁰ The conference was again organized by the ecumenical platform. Members of various Christian denominations participated in the conference and discussed some major issues of a contemporary understanding of mission, for example "Conversion and Baptism as Objectives of Mission" or "Eschatology and Salvation as Motivations for Mission". By discussing these and other topics in an interdenominational exchange it became obvious where the theological concepts of mission are similar and how they differ from each other. But at least as important as the exchange of theological perspectives was the personal encounter with representatives of various denominations. The conference did not pass over the differences, and it did not create an ecumenical identity straight away but it was a unique meeting within the ecumenical cooperation.

The official process of reception which was organized by the ecumenical platform is supposed to end in 2018 with a final ceremonial act. At the same time it is obvious that the effort to come to an agreement about questions of missionary practice cannot stop at this point. The idea how to move forward was already presented. It has been given by an initiative that was launched or at least formulated by two German scholars in 2016.

¹⁰ The conference documentation can be found at <http://www.missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Vellguth-Druckdaten.pdf> (31.05.2017); cf. also Ch. Tauchner, *Theological Consultation on "Mission and Respect"*: Verbum SVD 57 (2016) p. 232-238.

Interreligious Initiative

In August 2016 Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher, a leading member of the World Evangelical Alliance, and Prof. Dr. Christian Troll, a Jesuit and a distinguished German scholar for Islam and interreligious dialogue, published an open letter to Aiman Mazyek, the chairman of the *Central Council of Muslims in Germany* (*Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland*, ZMD).¹¹ In this letter, they reacted to a statement that Mazyek had made in an interview. Mazyek had said, “We expect from the churches that they desist from an aggressive mission work, in the same way as we expect it from Muslims.”¹² The authors of the open letter agree with him that any form of aggressive mission has to be condemned and rejected, especially with regard to the human right of religious freedom. Explicitly, they mention the document “Christian Witness” to mark the consensual position of the Christian denominations.

But then they go one step further and express their regret that this code of conduct exists only for one religion. They refer to the Norwegian document “Missionary Activities and Human Rights: Recommended Ground Rules for Missionary Activities” which was prepared by a project group of *The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief* in 2009.¹³ In this document all religions and Weltanschauungen came to an agreement about a peaceful mission. From this example the two scholars draw the conclusion, “We would appreciate if such a document was promoted also in Germany”.¹⁴

¹¹ Offener Brief von Christian Troll und Thomas Schirmmacher an Aiman Mazyek – bezüglich seiner Warnung an die Kirchen vor aggressiver Mission. Vorschlag eines interreligiösen Ethik-Kodex für Mission, in : <https://www.bucer.de/ressource/details/bonner-querschnitte-362016-ausgabe-431.html> (03.03.2017).

¹² „Wir erwarten von den Kirchen, dass sie von aggressiver Missionsarbeit absehen, so wie wir das auch von den Muslimen erwarten.“ Zentralrat der Muslime kritisiert christliche Missionierung von Flüchtlingen, in: <http://eurasianews.de/blog/zentralrat-der-muslime-kritisiert-christliche-missionierung-von-fluechtlingen/> (03.03.2017).

¹³ http://iirf.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/Oslo_Coalition_Groundrules_for_Missionary_Activities.pdf (21.02.2017).

¹⁴ “Wir würden sehr begrüßen, wenn auch für Deutschland ein solches Dokument auf den Weg gebracht würde.” Offener Brief von Christian Troll und Thomas Schirmmacher an Aiman Mazyek – bezüglich seiner Warnung an die Kirchen vor aggressiver Mission. Vorschlag eines interreligiösen Ethik-Kodex für Mission. <https://www.bucer.de/ressource/details/bonner-querschnitte-362016-ausgabe-431.html> (03.03.2017).

So far, this initiative has not been taken up. But the approach itself shows quite plainly that “Christian Witness” is a big achievement. With regard to the human right of religious freedom it is rather necessary to strive for a similar agreement with other religions, especially the Islam, in order to guarantee a peaceful and harmonious living together of people of all religions and beliefs.

This desirable step forward leads back to the origin of “Christian Witness”. At the beginning, there was the perception of “increasing interreligious tensions in the world today” and of the fact that “Christians too are sometimes involved in these conflicts, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, either as those who are persecuted or as those participating in violence”.¹⁵ Perhaps the time has not yet come to formulate recommendations for conduct in the realm of mission on an international interreligious level. But why not strive for agreements on a national or even regional level? This could help to ensure peace in certain areas and serve as an example for others.

Conclusion

The reception of the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World” in Germany promoted two features of Christian identity, an ecumenical identity and a missionary identity. Of course it must be conceded that the reception was limited to a small circle of insiders. But nevertheless, the document and its reception will be an undeniable part of the ecumenical story and of the story of Christian mission. In order to ensure a peaceful living together in multi-religious societies, also for non-believers, missionary religions are obliged to agree on a code of conduct for their missionary work. For Christians it will be fairly good to start this process with a reflected ecumenical and missionary identity.

¹⁵ *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Recommendations for Conduct, Appendix: Background to the document*, in: <http://missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Christian-Witness-Original.pdf> (15.02.2017).

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On the emergence of an interdenominational understanding of Christian mission. The development of the ecumenical recommendations for conduct relating to Christian witness in a multireligious world

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In a process lasting five years a working group comprising representatives of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) elaborated the draft of a joint code of ethics for Christian commitment to mission, which was ultimately published in 2011 in Geneva under the heading 'Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct'. This document can be seen as an 'internal Christian code of ethics for mission'.¹ It comprises a set of recommendations on the nature of missionary work in which there is

¹ Cf. Ch. Troll, Th. Schirmmacher, *Der innerchristliche Ethikkodex für Mission: Eine Einführung*, "Materialdienst" (Journal of the EKD Institute for Research on Religious and Ideological Issues), 74 (2011) no. 8, p. 293-295.

a special focus on the relationship with other religions. The code of ethics, which was signed by Jean-Louis Pierre Tauran (President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue), Geoff Tunnicliffe (World Evangelical Alliance) and Olav Fykse Tveit (General Secretary of the World Council of Churches), incorporates twelve principles which emphasise the missionary task of the Christian churches whilst simultaneously appealing for respect for the beliefs of non-Christians.²

In its Principles the ecumenical document speaks about acting in God's love, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, about Christian values, about acts of service and justice, about a responsible approach within the healing services, about refusal of violence in mission, about religious and spiritual freedom, about mutual respect and solidarity, respect for all human beings, about not to give false witness, about ensuring personal Commitment and finally about building inter-religious Relations.

On the development of the ecumenical recommendations for conduct

Preliminary work on the drafting of the document began in 2006, when 27 representatives of various religions met from 12 to 16 May in Lariano, Italy, for the international conference 'Conversion: Assessing the Reality', organised on the initiative of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Office for Interreligious Relations and Dialogue of the World Council of Churches. This focussed specifically on questions of religious freedom considered from the perspectives of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and the Yoruba religion. The conference concluded by formulating a joint commitment to religious freedom, as demanded in Article 18.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights³: 'Freedom of religion is a fundamental, inviolable

² The representatives of the Catholic Church, the World Evangelical Alliance and the World Council of Churches were thus acting on behalf of the churches to which approximately 90 per cent of Christians worldwide belong.

³ Cf. P.M. Taylor, *Freedom of Religion: UN and European Human Rights Law and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); J.P. Marthoz, J. Saunders, *Religion and the Human Rights Movement*, in: Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2005* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005) p. 40-69.

and non-negotiable right of every human being in every country in the world. Freedom of religion connotes the freedom, without any obstruction, to practice one's own faith, freedom to propagate the teachings of one's faith to people of one's own and other faiths, and also the freedom to embrace another faith out of one's own free choice.⁴ In addition to this affirmation of religious freedom the representatives of the religions in Lariano also formulated a commitment to the right to missionary witness: 'We affirm that while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating others' rights and religious sensibilities. Freedom of religion enjoins upon all of us the equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming the superiority of our faith.'⁵ Furthermore, the deliberations include a critical examination of Christian missionary practice and underline the significance of interreligious dialogue: 'We affirm our commitment to the process of interreligious dialogue. Its necessity and usefulness have increased exponentially in our times for promoting peace, harmony and conflict-transformation – within and among nations in our speedily globalising world –, especially since religion has often been used, rather misused, to shed blood, spread bigotry and defend divisive and discriminatory socio-political practices.'⁶

The representatives of the Christian churches agreed to pursue an ecumenical dialogue on questions related to mission in order to continue this process of consultation. A working group comprising representatives of the Holy See, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance was set up. In the following years it met several times in Geneva (Bossey) and Rome to draft a code of ethics for Christian mission.⁷

⁴ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue & Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue (WCC), *Report from Inter-Religious Consultation on Conversion* (2006.05.16), no. 2., in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/report-from-inter-religious-consultation-on-conversion> (2017.12.12). Further as: *Lariano report 2006*.

⁵ *Lariano report 2006*, no. 3.

⁶ *Lariano report 2006*.

⁷ The dialogue process was steered by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the Office for Interreligious Relations and Dialogue of the World Council of Churches (IRRD), and the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) and Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance.

As part of this dialogue process, representatives of the various Christian churches met the following year, 2007, at the Institute for Religious Studies and the Theology of the Religions (ISTR) in Toulouse, France, from 8 to 12 August. Attending an international theological conference entitled 'Towards an Ethical Approach to Conversion – Christian Witness in a Multireligious World', they discussed questions of mission in the context of families, schools, education, legislation, business, politics and violence and compiled a catalogue of questions and problems. The point of departure for both theological reflection and thoughts on principles of Christian witness was provided by pastoral and missionary issues relating to these subject areas. All the participants agreed that the freedom (of choice) of the dialogue partners should invariably be respected in the process of Christian mission and, in particular, that any form of violence, intimidation or threat (including the use of drugs and brainwashing) should, therefore, be inadmissible. It was also stressed in Toulouse that Christian mission should never be geared to financial gain. In the lecture he gave in Toulouse, and against the backdrop of the ecumenical dialogue process launched in Lariano, Thomas Schirmacher pointed out that the mere elaboration of a joint theological definition of mission work was insufficient. Instead, he advocated the formulation of a code of conduct 'on which we can all agree and which describes, in ethical terms, what should never occur in the context of missionary work [...]'.⁸

Four years later, representatives of the various churches met in Bangkok, Thailand, from 25 to 28 January 2011 to conclude work on a draft joint code of ethics, which by this time was well advanced. The meeting in Bangkok made it clear once again that all Christian denominations have a vested interest in 'generating joint internal Christian dialogue on the limits of religious freedom and on unethical methods of mission. In the meantime everyone is aware that all denominations face problems concerning the aforementioned issues, which is another reason why a self-critical, internal Christian dialogue is called for.' These were the shared reflections of Thomas Schirmacher, an evangelical missiologist, and Christian Troll, a Catholic theologian, on the consultations in Bangkok.⁹ The participants in the Bangkok consultations

⁸ T. Schirmacher, „Mit Sanftmut und Respekt“: *Zu einer Ethik des christlichen Zeugnisses. Eine evangelikale Perspektive*, „Evangelikale missiologie“ 24 (2008) no. 2, p. 43.

⁹ Ch. Troll, Th. Schirmacher, *Der innerchristliche Ethikkodex für Mission: Eine Einführung*, „Materialdienst“ (Journal of the EKD Institute for Research on Religious and Ideological Issues) 74 (2011) no. 8, p. 294.

succeeded in drawing up a draft code of ethics, which is largely identical with the document signed six months later in Geneva in June 2011 by senior representatives of the Catholic Church, the World Evangelical Alliance and the World Council of Churches.

The group of ecumenical signatories, in particular, must be seen as one of the outstanding features of the document 'Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World: Recommendations for Conduct', which deems mission as elementary to the Church¹⁰ and states unequivocally that mission should invariably be guided by charity, compassion, humility and integrity.¹¹ The code of conduct is the first ever document on missionary work to be signed jointly by the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance. For that reason alone it represents an ecumenical milestone in the history of mission. While the signed code of conduct is not canonical in nature, it does set out fundamental principles of Christian witness.

The text comprising no more than approximately 1,500 words consists of a preamble, a passage on the essential elements of Christian witness, a section on the basis for Christian witness and a concluding passage containing specific recommendations.

Preamble – the objective of the missionary code

In the preamble to the document the Christian churches state that mission 'belongs to the very being of the Church' and is thus essential for every Christian to proclaim the word of God and witness to the world. However, the text states quite clearly that Christian mission can only take place 'according to Gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings.' It is emphasised at the very beginning that the document does not constitute a theological statement (or one on mission, indeed) but rather addresses practical issues

¹⁰ Cf. Vaticanum II, Decree on missionary activity *Ad Gentes* 2. Further as AG.

¹¹ The presence of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) among the signatories was especially noteworthy. The preparation of ecumenical studies on issues such as interreligious or inter-faith marriages (1994-1997), inter-faith or interreligious prayer (1997-1998) and African religiosity (since 2000) had previously been limited to collaboration between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

associated with Christian witness in a multireligious world.¹² Its aim is specified as being to ‘encourage churches, church councils and mission agencies to reflect on their current practices and to use the recommendations in this document to prepare, where appropriate, their own guidelines for their witness and mission among those of different religions and among those who do not profess any particular religion.’¹³ Furthermore, Christians are urged to study this document in the light of their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both in word and deed.

Basis of Christian witness

The document formulates in positive terms that for Christians it is ‘a privilege and joy to give an accounting for the hope that is within them and to do so with gentleness and respect (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).’¹⁴ It subsequently refers to the Trinitarian origins of mission in the *Missio Dei*, in which ‘the Father sent the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit’, recalling the example and the teachings of Jesus and of the early church.¹⁵ In particular the ecumenical reflection of questions concerning missionary ethics on the basis of the *Missio Dei* can be deemed a ‘milestone in ecumenical missiology’. The document mentions the specific challenge for Christians of engaging in dialogue with adherents of other religions and cultures (as stated in the Acts of the Apostles, cf. Acts 17:22-28). In its statements on the basis of Christian witness, the ecumenical document subsequently acknowledges that the right to religious freedom is often restricted nowadays. It emphasises that, even in situations in which living and proclaiming the gospel is difficult, hindered or even prohibited, Christians are commissioned by Christ to continue faithfully in solidarity with one another in their witness to him. In doing so the document draws on the

¹² Cf. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue & World Council of Churches & World Evangelical Alliance, *Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct, Preamble*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20111110_testimonianza-cristiana_en.html (2017.02.02).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, *A Basis for Christian Witness*, no. 2 and 3.

example set by the early church (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).

The code of conduct also rejects the use of inappropriate methods of exercising mission, making explicit mention of ‘deception and coercive means’, which it describes as a betrayal of the Gospel.¹⁶ The Second Vatican Council similarly renounced the use of coercion and violence saying: ‘All the more is it a violation of the will of God and of the sacred rights of the person and the family of nations when force is brought to bear in any way in order to destroy or repress religion, either in the whole of mankind or in a particular country or in a definite community.’¹⁷ Focussing specifically on the numerous aberrations which have occurred in the history of mission, Christian Troll and Thomas Schirmmacher recall the fact that Christianity often employed improper means in its missionary work and that it would be wise to prevent any relapses into its past misconduct. All the more important, therefore, is the long overdue signal that is sent out ‘when Christians now make an official joint declaration, as in the present code, that they reject such methods as immoral and unchristian and therefore incompatible with the true meaning of mission’.¹⁸

It is precisely this type of frank admission of its own past transgressions which gives ecclesiastical documents the authority to address appropriate methods of mission both now and in the future. With regard to the history of mission, the Second Vatican Council conceded that ‘in the life of the People of God, as it has made its pilgrim way through the vicissitudes of human history, there has at times appeared a way of acting that was hardly in accord with the spirit of the Gospel or even opposed to it’.¹⁹ Nine years later, the World Evangelical Alliance also issued self-critical statements in what is probably the most influential of evangelical documents, the international Lausanne Covenant of 1974²⁰, admitting:

¹⁶ Ibid, ... A Basis for Christian Witness 6.

¹⁷ Vaticanum II, Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* 6. Further as DH.

¹⁸ Ch. Troll, Th. Schirmmacher, *Der innerchristliche Ethikkodex für Mission: Eine Einführung*, “Materialdienst” (*Journal of the EKD Institute for Research on Religious and Ideological Issues*), 74 (2011) no. 8, p. 294.

¹⁹ DH 12.

²⁰ Cf. Th. Schirmmacher, „Mit Sanftmut und Respekt”: *Zu einer Ethik des christlichen Zeugnisses. Eine evangelikale Perspektive*, “Evangelikale missiologie” 24 (2008) no. 2, p. 38.

‘At other times, desirous to ensure a response to the gospel, we have compromised our message and manipulated our hearers through pressure techniques.’²¹

The section on the basis for Christian witness concludes with the pneumatological assertion ‘that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47).’²² Tribute is thus paid to the commitment of Christians who bear witness, but the ground is also laid for an interpretation of mission which eschews categories of ‘human feasibility fantasies’ or the power of conviction, viewing mission rather as the work of the Holy Spirit.²³

Principles of Christian witness

In its third section the document sets out twelve principles of Christian mission in a multireligious world: acting in God’s love; imitating Jesus Christ; Christian virtues; acts of service and justice; discernment in ministries of healing; rejection of violence; freedom of religion and belief; mutual respect and solidarity; respect for all people; renouncing false witness; ensuring personal discernment; and building interreligious relationships.

In this third section, more than anywhere else, the document (implicitly) builds on numerous statements contained in various documents published in connection with the Second Vatican Council. Thus, with regard to the exemplary character of Jesus Christ for an appropriate form of witness, the Council Fathers noted in *Dignitatis Humanae*, the declaration on religious freedom, and with reference to Matthew 11:29: ‘This truth appears at its height in Christ Jesus, in whom God manifested Himself and His ways with men. Christ is at once our Master and our Lord and also meek and humble of heart. [...] He refused to be a political messiah, ruling by force.’²⁴ The fathers thus

²¹ Cf. World Evangelical Alliance, *Lausanne Covenant*, Article 12.

²² *Christian Witness in a Multireligious World...*, A Basis For Christian Witness 7.

²³ Cf. M. Biehl, *Zum Umgang mit dem ökumenischen Dokument*, in: *Trägerkreis des Kongresses MissionRespekt, Studienausgabe zum ökumenischen Dokument, Christliches Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt* (Hamburg: Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland; Aachen: Internationales Katholisches Missionswerk Missio, 2014) p. 26.

²⁴ DH 11.

stated that all forms of Christian evangelism should aspire to be an *Imitatio Christi*, particularly as regards conduct, in order to ensure that it is of a genuinely Christian character.

Traditional lines of thought in *Dignitatis Humanae* can also be discerned in respect of the use of violence in missionary endeavours. In their declaration on religious freedom the Council Fathers rejected all use of violence in Christian evangelism: 'However, in spreading religious faith and in introducing religious practices everyone ought at all times to refrain from any manner of action which might seem to carry a hint of coercion or of a kind of persuasion that would be dishonourable or unworthy, especially when dealing with poor or uneducated people. Such a manner of action would have to be considered an abuse of one's right and a violation of the right of others.'²⁵ *Ad Gentes*, the decree on the mission activity of the Church, had already stated quite unequivocally that all forms of coercion or pressure in the exercise of Christian mission are inappropriate: 'The Church strictly forbids forcing anyone to embrace the Faith, or alluring or enticing people by worrisome wiles. By the same token, she also strongly insists on this right, that no one be frightened away from the Faith by unjust vexations on the part of others.'²⁶

It goes without saying that the rejection of all forms of violence in missionary activity is by no means 'exclusive to Catholicism', having found its way into the ecumenical code of conduct from a specifically Catholic theological source. The World Council of Churches, for example, also clearly opposed any use of violence in its document entitled 'The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness'. Here the World Council of Churches explicitly described what it deemed impermissible in church missionary practice, 'e.g. – employing any kind of physical violence, moral compulsion and psychological pressure, e.g. the use of certain advertising techniques in mass media that might bring undue pressure on readers/viewers; – using political, social and economic power'²⁷ as a means of winning new members for one's

²⁵ DH 4.

²⁶ AG 13.

²⁷ By way of a comparison see S. M. Michael, *Challenges to Christian Mission. Problems and Perspectives* (Pune: Ishvani Kendra, 2014) p. 33. Writing from a sociological perspective, Michael suggests that conversion cannot be viewed as an isolated indicator of a (cognitive and spiritual) decision of faith, since it always has economic and social implications as well.

own church; – extending explicit or implicit offers of education, health care or material inducements or using financial resources with the intent of making converts; – manipulative attitudes and practices that exploit people's needs, weaknesses or lack of education especially in situations of distress, and fail to respect their freedom and human dignity.²⁸

Recommendations

In its concluding recommendations, the document 'Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct' explicitly addresses the various 'churches, national and regional confessional bodies and mission organisations, and especially those working in interreligious contexts'²⁹ recommending that they study the issues set out in the code of conduct and, where appropriate, formulate guidelines for conduct regarding Christian witness applicable to their particular contexts. In the meantime numerous churches, mission organisations and ecumenical initiatives have taken up this invitation to adopt the document in ways relevant to their own situation.

In a further recommendation, the document advocates building relationships of respect and trust with people of all religions, in particular at institutional levels between churches and other religious communities. It points out that these forms of interreligious dialogue can provide opportunities for 'resolving conflicts, restoring justice, healing memories, reconciliation and peace-building'³⁰ in many different contexts.

Furthermore, the document encourages Christians to strengthen their own religious identity and faith while deepening their knowledge and understanding of other religions. The combination of these two consecutive recommendations – open-mindedness towards interreligious dialogue and strengthening one's own Christian identity – demonstrates that in the interests

²⁸ *Report from the Fourth Phase of the International Dialogue (1990-1997) between the Roman Catholic Church and some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders, Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness*, in: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/pentecostals/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_1990-1997_evangelization-proselytism-common-witness_en.html (2018.12.12), §19.

²⁹ Christian Witness in a Multireligious World...

³⁰ Ibid.

of interreligious dialogue, which is both necessary and rewarding in a religiously pluralistic world, there is no intention of pursue any form of religious indifferentism that might lead either to an amalgamation or sublimation of religious identities. Religious pluralism, or multi-religiosity, is not viewed as a threat to religious culture but rather as a source of richness which is only now emerging via the shared dialogue.

In a fourth recommendation the document calls on Christians to cooperate with non-Christian religious communities engaging in interreligious advocacy towards justice and the common good. It urges that an approach restricted to a single religion or denomination be overcome so that interreligious coalitions can be formed in the interest of the common good, particularly in the realm of civil society activities.

The fifth recommendation is that governments be called upon to ensure that freedom of religion is properly and comprehensively respected. No clear distinction is made here as to whether an appeal should be made to governments to guarantee the right to religious freedom in their respective countries or in a global context. However, the recognition 'that in many countries religious institutions and persons are inhibited from exercising their mission'³¹ suggests that the reference here is to both the granting of religious freedom in individual countries and the global advocacy of religious freedom. From the perspective of the Catholic Church the appeal to governments to uphold religious freedom derives from *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Second Vatican Council's declaration on religious freedom. Referring to John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*,³² it says: 'The protection and promotion of the inviolable rights of man ranks among the essential duties of government. Therefore government is to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws and by other appropriate means. Government is also to help create conditions favourable to the fostering of religious life, in order that the people may be truly enabled to exercise their religious rights and to fulfil their religious duties, and also in order that society itself may profit by the moral qualities of justice and peace which have their origin in men's faithfulness to God and to His holy will.'³³ However, even though fifty years have passed since the

³¹ Christian Witness in a Multireligious World... Recommendations 5.

³² Cf. John XXIII, *Encyclical 'Pacem in Terris'*.

³³ DH 6.

adoption of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the reference to the safeguarding of religious freedom naturally remains of relevance. In truth, the right to religious freedom is still violated in many of the world's countries to this day.³⁴ The Ecumenical Report on Religious Freedom of Christians Worldwide in 2013 cited disturbing statistics in this respect. In 160 countries around the world people are prevented from practising their faith freely or from making a profession of faith to a religious community of their choice.³⁵ Christians are particularly affected by these restrictions on religious freedom: they are deemed to be under pressure or persecuted in a total of 111 states.³⁶

The recommendations in the fourth section of the document "Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct" conclude with an invitation to pray for one's neighbours and their well-being. Here, too, a formal and textual proximity to *Dignitatis Humanae* is readily apparent, for the Second Vatican Council's declaration on religious freedom also concludes with a call to impartial prayer for Christians and non-Christians alike. In doing so it refers to the First Epistle to Timothy, in which "first of all, supplications, prayers, petitions, acts of thanksgiving be made for all men... For this is good and agreeable in the sight of God our Saviour, who wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:1-4)³⁷.

³⁴ Cf. K. Krämer, K. Vellguth (eds.), *Religionsfreiheit. Grundlagen – Reflexionen – Modelle* (ThEW 5) (Freiburg: Herder, 2014).

³⁵ Cf. Th. Rathgeber, *Ökumenischer Bericht zur Religionsfreiheit von Christen weltweit 2013. Das Recht auf Religions- und Weltanschauungsfreiheit: Bedrohungen – Einschränkungen – Verletzungen* (Bonn: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz / Hannover: Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland 2013) 9.

³⁶ It is quite explicitly not the intention here to imply that Christianity is forced into the role of a 'natural religion of victims' which is opposed by 'natural religions of perpetrators'. A simplistic comparison of this kind would not be to the point. On the one hand, it is the case that members of religions placed under pressure or persecuted in one country may themselves harass or persecute members of other religions in another country. On the other hand, there can be no overlooking the fact that violations of religious freedom frequently correlate with political, economic, historical or ethnic factors or are propelled by them. Cf. H. Reifeld, *Religionsfreiheit als Menschenrecht: Analysen und Argumente. Perspektiven deutscher Außenpolitik*, Berlin 2013, p. 6, in: https://ordosocialis.de/pdf/Reifeld%20KAS/Reli_Freih_a_univers_Menschenrecht-de.pdf (2018.02.02).

³⁷ DH 14.

What's new?

The reference to the traditional lines of thought, connecting factors and correlations with Catholic theology and with statements in documents published by the Catholic Church indicates that the character of the document "Christian Witness in a Multireligious World" is catholic and ecumenical in the best sense. At the same time, it would doubtless be wrong to assert that, thanks to the Ecumenical Code of Conduct, a Catholic interpretation of mission now influences the reflective processes in other churches. The specific value of the document in the most positive ecumenical sense is that 'it is primarily consistent with the thought structures of the three organisations and not simply an ecumenical document.'³⁸

"Today marks an historical moment in our joint witness", said Jean-Louis Tauran when the Ecumenical Code of Conduct was published in Geneva. Yet what is historical about this document, which apparently fails to reflect a major refocusing, a reorientation? As regards the substance of the ecumenical document, the General Secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance, Geoff Tunnicliffe, summed things up succinctly during the joint signing ceremony in Geneva in saying: "We might be surprised that the document does not say 'anything new' – after all, it states what many would consider to be obvious to the core of Christian mission. And yet, it has never been said before in this way! At least not so clearly and not within the context of collaboration between three Christian families of faith that jointly represent about 90 per cent of all the Christians on the planet. This is a powerful document!"³⁹ Ecumenical harmony is the innovative feature here, which was previously missing in (mission) documents published by the churches. Shanta Premawardhana worked at the WCC's Office for Interreligious Dialogue during the elaboration of the document. When it was presented at the 2011 International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston (Jamaica), he declared that the Code of Conduct constituted a declaration on mission,

³⁸ Th. Schirmacher, *Christliches Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt – zweieinhalb Jahre später*, in: <http://www.missionrespekt.de/fix/files/05wasBisherGeschah-Schirmachertext.pdf> (2018.02.02).

³⁹ G. Tunnicliffe, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Comments* (Chicago: World Evangelical Alliance – 2011.06.28), in: http://www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/2011_0628_Christian_Witness_comments_GT.pdf (2018.02.02).

the significance of which stemmed from its ecumenical genesis.⁴⁰ His assessment was shared by Indunil J. K Kodithuwakku, representative of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, who remarked: 'It is the first document of its kind in history',⁴¹ adding: 'The document marks the birth of a new ecumenical theology of mission.'⁴²

In a six-year process a joint 'standard of Christian mission' was established by the churches which represent the overwhelming majority of Christians worldwide, creating a benchmark which no one now wishes to, or indeed can, fall short of. With a view to the dialogue with non-Christians on aspects of Christian mission, it is particularly helpful that there is no longer any need to resort to statements by individual churches on specific forms of Christian evangelism. In the past this doubtless resulted in non-Christian dialogue partners questioning the relevance of particular guidelines.

The present Code of Conduct is a document which can serve as a reference text for a fundamental understanding of Christian mission. It does not supplant existing theological documents on questions of mission, which are formulated by the respective churches and express the ecumenical abundance of different missiological theologies. However, it is a basic document containing statements which can be included in ecclesiastical mission documents. An instance of this is the Affirmation on Mission published by the World Council of Churches (WCC) entitled 'Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes'.⁴³

Three aspects of the document 'Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct' are particularly noteworthy from a missiological perspective. On the one hand, mission is given joint emphasis as an essential characteristic of the Church as a whole and the *Missio Dei* is accepted as the basis for an ecumenical understanding of mission founded

⁴⁰ Cf. M. Biehl, p. 26.

⁴¹ I.J.K. Kodithuwakku, *Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, "International Bulletin of Missionary Research" 37 (2013) p. 111.

⁴² Ibid, p. 112.

⁴³ Cf. World Council of Churches, "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes. New WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism", in: *EMW, Christus heute bezeugen. Mission auf dem Weg von Edinburgh 2010 nach Busan 2013* (Hamburg 2013), p. 93.

in the Trinity.⁴⁴ On the other hand, interreligious dialogue is specified as one of the core challenges in missionary work. Finally, the advocacy of religious freedom is embedded firmly within an ecumenical or interreligious process.

The development and substance of the document 'Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct' demonstrate in this Reformation Year 2017 that the Christian churches are far more united than they are divided on the issue of mission and its practical conduct. Hence it is all the more important to continue the interdenominational missiological debate triggered by this document.

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⁴⁴ Cf. K. Vellguth, *Wieviel Pneumatologie brauchen wir in der Ekklesiologie?* in: T. Keßler, A.-P. Rethmann, Pentekostalismus (eds.), *Die Pfingstbewegung als Anfrage an Theologie und Kirche* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2012) 176-190. Th. Schirmacher, *Missio Dei. Die Mission aus dem Wesen Gottes* (Hamburg: Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, 2011). G. F. Vicedom, *Missio Dei. Einführung in eine Theologie der Mission* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1958).

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Religious Pluralism, Islam in Europe and Missiological Orientations

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The secularization of Europe is an undeniable social fact, and it is progressive though highly uneven. An increasing majority of the European population has ceased to participate in traditional religious practices, at least on a regular basis, while still maintaining relatively high levels of private individual religious beliefs. At the same time, the number of unbelievers is increasing in this continent. In this respect, one should perhaps talk of the *unchurching* of the European population and of religious individualization, rather than of secularization. Grace Davie has characterized this general European situation as “believing without belonging”.¹ At the same time, however, large numbers of Europeans, even in the most secular countries, still identify themselves as “Christian,” pointing to a hidden, subtle, and submerged Christian cultural identity. They belong to the religious and cultural traditions of the country, i.e. the church, but they do not want to adhere to the traditional practices in the local Church. In this sense, Danièle Hervieu-Léger is also correct when she offers the reverse characterization of the European situation as “belonging

¹ G. Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (London: Willey Blackwell, 1994) and *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000).

without believing.”² “Secular” and “Christian” cultural identities are intertwined in a complex and rarely verbalized mode among most Europeans. Some would like to articulate their Christian identity, but most of them not and would like to be free individuals.³ Apparently, the general trend is to think that just cultural or national identity is sufficient.

The statistics of the European Union on religion vary depending on which perspective is used for analyzing the data. The majority is Christian or has a Christian heritage (75.4% in 2010) and this is likely to decrease 65.2% in 2050. Nearly 6% are Muslims (with the inflow of migrants it could be more now) and it is expected to be 10.2% in 2050 and spread all over Europe. There are smaller groups, which include Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, and some of East Asian religions (each 0.2%), and most of these are concentrated in Britain and France and with small pockets in other countries.⁴

1. Challenges to Religious Pluralism

Over the years, Europe has become open to other religions and cultures. Thus there is no longer a single religious identity, but it is becoming more multi-religious in every country. Religious pluralism brings a lot of challenges, and what is mission in this context? This needs to be further clarified and understood. John Borelli identified some challenges, and I would like to develop some of these challenges of religious pluralism in Europe. Certainly more reflection is needed to understand the subject.⁵

Religious pluralism has become a reality, and, due to secularization, individualism and the pushing the religion into the private sphere, this has become a concern too. Secular Europe does not want role for religion in the

² D. Hervieu-Léger, *Religion und sozialer Zusammenhalt*, „Transit“ 26 (2003) p. 101-119.

³ J. Casanova, *Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration*, „Transit“ 27 (2004) p. 65-92.

⁴ D. Masci, *Europe projected to retain its Christian majority, but religious minorities will grow*, in: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/15/europe-projected-to-retain-its-christian-majority-but-religious-minorities-will-grow> (2018.12.12).

⁵ J. Borelli, *Challenges to Religious Identity in the Twenty-First Century*, in: S. Sinn & M.R. Trice (eds.), *Religious Identity and Renewal in the Twenty-first Century: Christian and Muslim Explorations* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2015) p. 74.

public sphere. The freedom of people is respected by governments. They wish to honor this freedom, and thus religion is pushed into the private sphere. How far one could go is a challenge to the society and people at large, for example with Muslims in Europe. “While excluding God is welcomed in secular societies, excluding divine authority from any Muslim’s lifestyle is tantamount to blasphemy to many Muslims”.⁶ A recent court ruling in Switzerland, where a European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) practically forced Muslim parents to send their daughters to school swimming lessons with boys. A panel of seven judges found that freedom of religion had been “interfered with” but that the move was legitimized by the aim of “social integration”. It was “seeking to protect foreign pupils from any form of social exclusion”.⁷ Many other issues like wearing a head scarf or special swim wear in public, etc. have come to public debate, but the governments want to look at the social consequences rather than looking at any of these issues from a religious perspective.

Identity of one’s religion gives identity to a person. Today, some want to have this identity with a religion, but others want to identify with their nationality and that seems to be satisfied by this secularized world attitude. Relating with migrants and other colored people, Europeans normally tend to think of them not only from a cultural point of view but also from a religious one. Regions which come through migrants tend to keep the structure of religions rather than its life-giving principles. Therefore, emphasizing living our faith would be more necessary than to lean on the structures of religion that one has is an uphill task. Yes, this is not easy, because the question comes on how one lives his/her faith authentically.

Dialogue between Christians, Jews, Muslims and other religious groups is not easy. In every country the majority syndrome plays a role, and the traditions and history of each group certainly influence their relation with others. Christians, Jews and Muslims joining together in dialogue and in promoting dialogue as a way of being has to affect one’s attitude, relationship and daily interaction with the others. It cannot be left to experts to design the dialogue and to establish relationships. Ordinary citizens need to grapple with this

⁶ C. Goerzig & K. Al-Hashimi, *Radicalization in Western Europe: Integration, public discourse and loss of identity to Muslim communities* (London: Routledge, 2015) p. 63.

⁷ L. Dearden, *Muslim girls must swim with boys in Switzerland, European court rules after parent refuse classes*, in: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/switzerland-muslim-swimming-pool-school-mixed-lessons-ruling-girls-boys-echr-a7518981.html (2018.12.12).

challenge of dialogue and of life with other religious groups. Convincing each religious group is a big challenge, because all try to retain their ghetto-mentality in which they find security and support.

More than knowing other religions and learning the good elements in other religions, some have gone even further and spoken of their experience of “multiple belonging”, i.e., belonging to more than one religion. Double identity with other churches and even with other religions is growing. Some people are not averse to this idea, or even to living, with these associations. There are new theological reflections and publications on this phenomenon. Michael Amaladoss speaks of “double identity”, asking questions about whether it is necessary or possible in a pluri-religious context to hope for ‘pluralism-in-unity’ based on Asian religio-philosophical traditions.⁸ The basic question asked by people is, what is important, belief in God or belief in religious traditions? Further theological reflections on this topic are needed. This opens up discussion on religion and identity in the pluri-religious world. Panikkar who had been writing on many issues of religious identity says, “I have been insisting that we cannot have a pluralistic system, follow a multiplicity of philosophies, or belong to a plurality of religions. What we have is a personal religiousness which may have integrated, more or less harmoniously, the tenets of several religious traditions. This positive symbiosis does not make us a split personality.”⁹ Well, understanding the role of Jesus Christ in salvation history and of Jesus Christ as Savior would pose the question of how one can have personal faith and at the same time have religiousness with several religious traditions.

While discussing religious pluralism in Europe, our own Christian history cannot be forgotten. The various Christian denominations, the divisions and disagreement on dogmatic and practical approaches and attitudes of various Christian groups have their own historical underpinnings. In this context, Jews, Muslims and members of other religions who are here in Europe now to see what we intend to do and how we could build a society respecting other religious traditions. While dealing with religious pluralism, ecumenism needs to be stressed, so that dogmatic problems do not penetrate into the society

⁸ M. Amaladoss, *Double Religious Identity: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary? The Indian Experience*, “Vidyajyoti” 73 (2009) no. 7, p. 532.

⁹ R. Panikkar, *Religious Identity and Pluralism*, in: A. Sharma & K.M. Dugan (ed.), *A Dome of Many Colors: Studies in Religious Pluralism, Identity, and Unity* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999) p. 39.

and there is a missiological approach for a peaceful society. When Christians form stronger ecumenical bonds the world may believe they are serious, and Jews and Muslims might pay attention to and admire our missionary efforts towards them for a peaceful society. Otherwise we will be condemned “to live the consequences of our collective history; yet, we should work at developing a stronger desire to define ourselves in relationship with one another than by what separates us in the politics and developments in the Middle East.”¹⁰ This desire of uniting ourselves is a challenge to deal with religious pluralism in the context of Europe.

2. Muslims in Europe

The crisis of religious pluralism in Europe is reduced to a crisis of Europe’s engagement with Islam, a problem related solely to the particularities of Islam and the phenomenon of Muslim migration to Europe. Although other religions do exist, there seems to be no special concern in Europe about this pluralism, though the history of Jews and their struggles cannot be ignored. This depiction marks the ways in which Europe is reflective of the historical anxieties about the governance of religious subjects. As experienced now, the crisis of religious pluralism in Europe is mainly with regard to Islam and its growth, with Muslim migrants, Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic terrorism. The problem is related to the interpretations and schools of thought within Islam rather than Islam as religion.

Islam’s allegiance to an authority beyond the state, the strength of Muslims’ convictions and related questions of loyalty and obedience are deemed a barrier to Muslims’ inclusion in the public sphere and, consequently, a threat to social cohesion and to the state. Muslims, defined by an essential and unalterable religiosity, are understood to pose a particular challenge for social cohesion due to their inability or unwillingness to integrate into a secular European society.

This concern is articulated in two related ways. The first identifies elements of Islamic theology that are said to be directly incompatible with secular society. Primary among these is an understanding of Islam as an all-embracing

¹⁰ J. Borelli, *Challenges to Religious Identity in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 70.

religious system for which, as Charles Taylor asserts, “there is no question of separating politics and religion (in Islam) the way we have come to expect in Western liberal society.” Islam, therefore, appears as a system lacking the separation of civil and religious spheres fundamental to a secular society. The second points to a variety of social and political problems found in regions with majority Muslim populations, and all these problems are attributed to Islam.¹¹

In real life, the Muslim communities are characterized by vast diversity. European Muslims are not uniformly pious, primitive, and fundamentalist. Various migrant groups, from the Middle East, Africa and other countries, have come to Europe. Their behavior and cultural pattern are not the same, and some groups have undergone changes too. All but a few are law-abiding and have never participated in riots, either inside Europe or their own countries. But due to the possible influence of the fundamentalist group of Islamic State (ISIS) over the migrants from of Iraq and Syria who escaped the war in Middle East, and among the Africans who seek a greener pasture in Europe, many Europeans are rethinking their approach towards Muslims in Europe. Therefore, taking into account the various realities of Muslims in Europe, the policies of European states should distinguish terrorists from the mainstream Muslims. Some think we should “meet the aspirations of mainstream Muslims [...] – Islam recognized as a Western religion, Muslims as full citizens and avoid the creation of closed communities, ghettos, and minority status”¹² Well, this needs more discussion. Policies in the political arena regarding citizenship cannot be discussed here, but we can only see how well Muslims could be integrated into Society, thus creating harmony in Society. Some say that integration could follow the process of integration into Christian roots and heritage, and others say that it could be integration into secular society without keeping Islamic traditions. But there are also Muslims who want to integrate into European society but keep their Islamic identity too.

Alar Kilp and Andres Saumets assert in their conclusion of the study on *Religion and Politics in Multicultural Europe*, “The road to mutual acceptance and accommodation between Muslim communities and European societies

¹¹ *The Crisis and Governance of Religious Pluralism in Europe*, “Insight Turkey” 16 (2014) no. 3, p. 56.

¹² O. Roy, *Europe’s Response to Radical Islam*, “Current History” (2005) no. 104 (November) p. 363.

is neither free of tensions nor is it uniform and linear. However, in order to efficiently integrate Muslims into European society the policies of integration should be applied on those needing integration, not on anyone adhering to Islam.”¹³ But this leaves a big question. Could Muslims be allowed to keep up their Islamic traditions, religious and cultural, or should they change their mentality and integrate into a secular world view which has Christian heritage?

There is also another complex question. It would not be correct to say Europe is secular and immigrants are religious. There are many variables. Europe is secular, but there are religious heritages. Christianity has its roots and growth, but political standings are different. Among the Muslim migrants, one has to identify from where they come, and what political participation Islam has in their country of origin. There are large differences to understand within Islam as a religion and its impact on the faith, life and political life of the people. In the analysis of the migration of Muslims, the study “Researching Third Country Nationals’ Integration as a Three-way Process-Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of Integration” in 2013, Jocelyne Cesari says,

*The political culture and existing norms of the region and nations in which Muslims live need to be identified, because these are as important as their identification to Islam. This refers particularly to the religious distance between Muslim believers and the rest of the population. First, the gap is between “religious” migrants and “secular” Europeans. Across European countries, the level of self-declared religiosity in the general population is systematically much lower than among immigrant groups. In other words, the general context of religiosity and social legitimacy of religions in each country is the real... factor that must be understood is getting to grips with the situation of Islam and of Muslims.*¹⁴

¹³ A. Kilp, A. Saumets, *Religion and Politics in multicultural Europe*, in: http://www.ksk.edu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/KVUOA_Toimetised_12-Kilp-Saumets.pdf (2018.12.12).

¹⁴ J. Cesari, *Religion and Diasporas: Challenges of the Emigration Countries*, INTERACT RR2013/01, p. 24, in: <http://interact-project.eu/docs/publications/Research%20Report/INTERACT-RR-2013-01.pdf> (2018.12.12).

To deal with the religious pluralism in Europe, the wider understanding of Muslims must take into account these aspects. More importantly, Islamic fundamentalist groups influence some in Europe, and some members of their members have entered Europe too. This is the biggest problem that Europe is trying to deal with today.

Discriminations against Muslims

There is a general tendency to equate Muslims in general or even moderate Muslims with Islamic fundamentalists, and to see every Muslim as a “terrorist. This general attitude harms a fraternal relationship with Muslims in Society. Some of these attitudes are developed due to the reports of what Muslim fundamentalists do to Christians and to their enemies, especially in Arab countries. The Shia and Sunny groups fight against each other and torment one another with violence. In Europe, Islam is apparently seen as a religion of violence. But one has to look at Islam as a religion. Islam is a peace loving religion and all its adherents are not terrorists, though some fundamental Muslim groups have adopted violence as a way of life and this is certainly frightening for other communities. People in Europe do commonly discriminate against Muslims. After extensive study on the *Comparative Overview of 15 European Countries*, Anna Triandafyllidou says that discrimination is shown towards Muslims, blacks/colored people and the Roma (Gypsies) community. All these three groups face the worse discrimination and prejudice in most countries in the European Union. All three groups are subjected to widespread discrimination in the labor market, in education, housing and in social life in general.¹⁵

3. Missiological Orientations

In this complex situation in Europe, with its vast history and with the twists and turns to the growth of Christianity, religious pluralism is not easy to accept. But history and traditions are rather different from the present day realities

¹⁵ A. Triandafyllidou, *Addressing Cultural, Ethnic and Religious Diversity Challenges in Europe: A Comparative Overview of 15 European Countries*, ACCEPT PLURALISM Research Project, 2011/2, p. 18, in: https://www.academia.edu/17390377/Addressing_Cultural_Ethnic_and_Religious_Diversity_Challenges_in_Europe_A_comparative_overview_of_15_European_countries (2018.12.12).

and challenges. Thus, in the changing European situation, some Missiological orientations are outlined, though they are not exhaustive.

Christian Identity and Attitudes towards Migrants

Ingrid Storm in her study explores associations between individual religiosity and attitudes to immigration in four Western European countries: Great Britain, the Netherlands, Ireland and Denmark. She states in her conclusion, “there is no evidence that Christianity per se, and certainly not church attendance, makes one any more likely to hold xenophobic attitudes. However, a Christian identity is associated with thinking immigration is a threat to national identity, particularly in Britain and Denmark. This could be because ‘Christian’ is used as a label to signify ethnic heritage and cultural tradition rather than faith.”¹⁶ At the same time, practicing Christians have something different; the faith permeating into the lives of the people changes their attitudes towards immigrants. In her research, she says, “Christian practice as measured by church attendance has either a negative or no significant relationship with anti-immigration.”¹⁷ Faith makes a person change his attitude, faith not just an identity but following a faith make a difference towards the relationship with other. This is broadly consistent with other findings from European and North American studies of the effect of church attendance upon prejudice and tolerance.¹⁸ Understanding the European context, the results from all four countries indicate a prevalence of Cultural or Ethnic Christianity, where religion is used to identify with national traditions or ethnic heritage rather than faith.¹⁹ Therefore, if one deepens the faith, the attitudes of Christians towards immigrants are more likely to change. Well, that is what faith is supposed to do. Faith is known not by one’s words, but by deeds. (Jam 2:18, 1 Jn 3:18).

¹⁶ I. Storm “*Christian Nations*”? *Ethnic Christianity and Anti-Immigration Attitudes in Four Western European Countries*, “Nordic Journal of Religion and Society” 24 (2011) no. 1, p. 92.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁸ P. Scheepers, M. Gijssberts, E. Hello, *Religiosity and Prejudice against Ethnic Minorities in Europe: Cross-National Tests on a Controversial Relationship*, “Review of Religious Research” 43 (2002) no. 3, p. 242-265; R. Wuthnow, “Overcoming Status Distinctions? Religious Involvement, Social Class, Race and Ethnicity in Friendship Patterns”, *Sociology of Religion*, 64 (2003) no. 4, p. 423-442.

¹⁹ See I. Storm, “*Christian Nations*”?

Acceptance of Muslims: More than Tolerance?

Most would argue that we need tolerance towards Muslims and their ways of living. The discussion now is on liberal intolerance, i.e. to point out what is not to be tolerated and to ban specific practices or limit freedoms of association. Especially in the case of Muslim or gypsies (Roma) populations, the category of intolerable practices and symbols becomes larger and larger, and the ways in which disapproval is expressed become more and more violent. To that extent, the notion of tolerance is that others have to behave as a particular country wishes. With anything that is related to Islam, worship patterns and Islamic culture, Muslims have to follow a pattern that is approved, and this is notion and approach is applicable to other religious adherents too.

Some argue that a more critical perspectives concerning toleration of differences is needed. They basically argue that toleration alone is not enough, and that minorities are entitled to full recognition and equal treatment in society. An example is the case of Muslims in Britain who demand a more equal position in British society. Their demands include the accommodation of their dietary requirements or religious festivals in public life, the recognition that the discrimination which they may suffer is indeed religious rather than ethnic, and also the creation of state-aided Muslim schools. From the perspective of the tolerated, toleration by the majority can be unsatisfactory. Instead of their being seen as merely a minority group whose practices are to be “tolerated”, the tolerated demand acceptance and equality from the majority.

Each country has make decisions about integration. From the missiological perspective of what would help to maintain peace and joy in society, dialogue seems to be buzz word. This has to be promoted, nurtured and lived with. The basic principle is that God has created every human being as his image, and thus the divine in each human being is to be respected. This respect leads to integration and communal living. The building of the Kingdom of God cannot be done by Christians or a particular ethnic community alone, but only with the participation of everyone. Here, the marginalized, excluded, the weak and poor have special place. Thus, establishing human relationship and building a peaceful community is a way forward. What should be required by the European community, as well as by Muslim migrants and other groups, is respect, recognition and to integration with one another. This is more than just tolerance.

Promoting Harmony

Jesus Christ is continuing his Spirit-filled mission of restoring peace and harmony with God and among humans. In virtue of Christ's Spirit of communion in love, his disciples are called to be effective signs of union with God and the unity of human kind, and to sustain human harmony with commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation.²⁰ "Jesus' mission is at the service of God's mission. It does not replace it. Taking a kenotic form, it collaborates with other divine self-manifestations in other religions as God's mission moving towards its eschatological fulfillment. As disciples of Jesus we must witness to the Abba and his Kingdom of freedom and fellowship, love and justice."²¹ This is a process towards social harmony. In the context of religious pluralism, harmony among people can be promoted when the different religious groups are committed to this goal. "A dialogue (with other religions) which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical conditions, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation." (EG 250) Social harmony implies promoting the values of the Kingdom.

Here, the understanding of other religions is important. Openness to the truth of other religious traditions, their richness of scriptures, their worship patterns and their religious practices are vital in order to relate with them and to dialogue for harmonious living. In India, efforts are made to promote harmony, but for political reasons fundamental groups do not promote dialogue and a good relationship with other religions. Religion is intermixed with politics, and fundamental groups want to gather their people together to gain political advantage by segregating themselves from other religious groups rather than promoting religious ideals and spirituality. This is the Hindutva ideology to keep Hindus together, and Muslims and Christians are treated as enemies. Yet in this hostile situation, some efforts are made to promote harmony in society. The people of Varanasi, the holiest city of Hindus in northern India, set an example on December 21, 2016, when they jointly celebrated the feasts of five religions. Local Christians took a lead in celebrating the birthdays of Prophet Muhammad (Dec. 12), Jain Tirthankar Parshvanath (Dec. 23) Jesus

²⁰ Cf. *Asian Christian Perspective on Harmony, FABC Papers* (no. 75), in: http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_paper_75.pdf (2018.12.12).

²¹ T. Malipurathu, L. Stanislaus (eds.), *A Vision of Mission in the New Millennium* (Mumbai: St. Paul's Publications, 2001) p. 203.

Christ (Dec. 25), tenth Sikh Guru Govind Singh (Jan. 5) and the Hindu feast of Makar Sankranti (Jan. 15). The event was marked by chanting of Vedic *slokas* from Hindu and Jain scriptures by Jain teachers from Syadvad Vidyapeeth, Bhadaini, Varanasi. Tanveer Mainuddeen Warsi, a Muslim, sang *ghazals* and couplets on communal harmony and patriotism, and a Christian choir comprising members of seven denominations sang Christmas carols. The aim of the program was to promote communal harmony, peace and inter-religious collaboration. The United Forum of Communal Harmony of Varanasi, consisting of various religious leaders and groups, promotes these activities as part of dialogue of action.²²

Another example is from Udaipur (India). The *Peace Rally* was started on the occasion of Christmas to unite various religious leaders and for people to have peace in the town. When it started 10 years ago, there were only 25 people who went around the town holding banners on peace, but in December 2016, there were nearly 25,000. People marched together, people of all religions came together spreading the message of peace on the occasion of Christmas. The interreligious center in Udaipur also celebrates the important feasts of Hinduism and Islam, and children and ordinary people participate in competitions to show their talents on these occasions. There are many centers where leaders promote harmony in society by bringing the religions together.

If people wish to support the dialogue of action, then close relationship has to be established first, but these types of exercises can be successful. Knowing other religions is helpful, helping to get rid of prejudice towards other, and allowing space for one to grow. The growth of harmony in society requires people not to assert their supremacy or to exclude other in society. Creating occasions for dialogue, celebrations and social actions between religions could pave the way for peace, justice and fraternity. More importantly, reaching out to migrants is to be regarded as commitment to the Gospel, commitment to God's mission. Harmony necessitates the local people to extend help to migrants who are in need of a place to live and maintain their life. In this regard, Pope Francis has reiterated the need to reach out to migrants, and called to the attention of the world leaders, particularly the European leaders, the need to pay special attention to them. The faith in our God calls us to act, irrespective of any religious affiliation.

²² www.mattersindia.com (December 23, 2016).

Pope Francis, in his address for *The World Day of Migrants and Refugees* 2017 (January 15), underlined mainly the need to take care of child migrants. He said, “We need to work towards protection, integration and long-term solutions. We are primarily concerned with adopting every possible measure to guarantee the protection and safety of child migrants”.²³ The Churches in Europe and the NGOs appeal to the governments to manage migration in a dignified and humane way. By strengthening the framework for legal migration, expanding safe and legal routes for refugees, and protecting the rights of everyone who arrived in Europe. From the Church point of view, caring for migrants is the command of the Gospel.

Conversion to Christianity among the Muslim migrants has become another discussion in Europe. Does converting them make the society more open towards harmony? Some report that more migrants/refugees are converting to Christianity today. Some doubt this conversion as a play to remain permanently in Europe. Well, in the given context, conversion to Christianity has to be studied further to know the mind of the people and their faith.²⁴

Education is identified as a most important area where action can be taken to foster tolerant and respectful behaviors towards diversity. Schools would be a good platform to teach harmony and peace and the value of other religions. Some of the steps could be the following:²⁵

Revision of national and European history curricula with a view to valorizing the contribution of emigration and immigration experiences in each country’s history.

²³ Francis (Pope), *Address for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2017 (January 15)*, in: w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html (2018.12.12).

²⁴ L. Dearden, *Muslim refugees are converting to Christianity in Germany*, in: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/muslim-refugees-converting-to-christianity-in-germany-crisis-asylum-seekers-migrants-iran-a7466611.html> (2018.12.12); C. Charlton, *Thousands of Muslim migrants convert to Christianity in mass baptisms after reaching Europe... but are they just desperate for asylum?*, in: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3611073/Thousands-Muslim-migrants-convert-Christianity-mass-baptisms-reaching-Europe-just-desperate-asylum.html> (2018.12.12).

²⁵ J. Keast, *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book for Schools* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2017).

Creating links and drawing parallels between the countries' histories is an important and fruitful way to pluralize national history and include immigrants and migration related minorities in it.

Since vast numbers of migrants are Muslims, imparting the values of Islam and its orientations would be helpful to develop positive attitudes towards them.

Emphasis on removal of prejudice towards Muslims is important to establish good relationships. The Churches have responsibilities to educate Christians regarding the attitudes and approaches to migrant Muslims, to show that they need care, love and affection.

Revision of citizenship courses, putting an emphasis on civic citizenship values that are inclusively based on each country's constitution.

Prophetic Dialogue

In the context of religious pluralism, interculturalism, and even with terrorism and fundamentalism, where one wants to impose truth on others, thrust one's ideas and views on others, dialogue seems to be the better way forward. Dialogue is to offer the vision of truth without forcing anyone. Dialogue is the acceptance of the conviction that we can only propose the truth to others and invite them to share our vision of it, and also to listen to others' articulation of truth and their vision. And in the context of religious pluralism, dialogue is a way forward for establishing relationships with others.

The document on *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP) gave the significant view of God's work in the world and among religions. "God, in an age-long dialogue, has offered and continues to offer salvation to humankind," and so "in faithfulness to the divine initiative, the Church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all men and women." (DP 38) Because of the positive approach of Vatican II, the Church shifted its attitude to other religions from the conquest mode to a dialogue mode. The crucified Christ or 'powerful Christ' has now become the dialogical Christ, and the Church's evangelization is not just proclamation alone, but now effected through the practice of dialogue.²⁶ Dialogue opens a way to know other religions and cultures. This is a way to express our convictions, truth and experiences of God to others and at the same time listen to other's experiences of God and how the Spirit has been active in their lives and religions.

²⁶ E. Chia, *Mission, Dialogue and Missionary Congregations*, "SEDOS" 34 (2002) no. 2, p. 53.

Prophetic dimension is inherent to the mission of the Church. She is called to announce the Good News, the Good News of a gracious and compassionate God. She is called to denounce evil. As John Paul II put it, the “gospel of life” is the “good news” that the church needs to preach with “dauntless courage.” But such good news has to be preached and lived out in confrontation with the “culture of death” (*Evangelium Vitae* 1). The church is called to show witness to the truth, showing alternatives to evil, and showing these through living a life of courage and embracing the truth. We have many examples to portray this prophetic value: George Fox, Katherine Drexel, Cesar Chavez, Mary McKillop, Thea Bowman, Chico Mendez, Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day, Valsa John and Jerzy Popieluszko. Prophetic dialogue is not a contradiction, but in dialogue one sees prophesy as an important component. Dialogue is not just to relate or talk, but more of listening, accepting, recognizing and challenging one another for establishing a society to enjoy peace, joy, fraternity and freedom. Thus, prophetic element becomes a challenge to sharpen one another’s thoughts, life patterns and mode of action.

Dialogue opens the door to see other human beings. In this way the Congregation of the Society of the Divine Word, which introduced this concept of *prophetic dialogue*, notes:

*We are called to acknowledge our own sinfulness and to engage in constant conversion, and that we witness to God’s love by sharing our own convictions boldly and honestly, especially where that love has been obscured by prejudice, violence, and hate. It is clear that we do not dialogue from a neutral position, but out of our own faith. Together with our dialogue partners we hope to hear the voice of the Spirit of God calling us forward, and in this way our dialogue can be called prophetic.*²⁷

In the context of Europe today, Prophetic dialogue is a paradigm of mission,²⁸ where dialogue plays a part to welcome, listen and engage with other cultures and religions. At the same time, prophesy does not accept everything

²⁷ *Documents of the 15th General Chapter, 2000, the Society of the Divine Word*, no. 54.

²⁸ S. Bevans & R. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

from others, but values the others with the prism of the Gospel, and challenges others' attitudes and fundamental approaches related to their religions. This is not to negate other religions, but more of accepting the good and negating the evil practices and harmful traditions.

Steve Bevans who has promoted this paradigm says:

*Mission is done in dialogue. Mission is done in prophecy. The two go together. While we can distinguish them to better understand the whole, we cannot and are not to separate them. Mission is prophetic dialogue. It is dialogical prophecy. The question is not "is it one or the other?" The question is rather when should the dialogical aspect of missionary service be emphasized or employed more fully, when should one act or speak prophetically in action, in words, in confrontation. Like life itself, engaging in God's mission is art. One needs to be in touch with the sources of creativity, the Holy Spirit, to know just how to proceed. It is the Spirit who opens our ears to listen, and who anoints our tongues to speak, who enflames our hearts to witness.*²⁹

Interreligious dialogue is indeed prophetic dialogue, the dialogue partners are invited to listen, show respect and empathy and at the same time to be prophetic in their relationships and actions in building a just society. Here, "love of God and love of neighbor" are the key principles. This relationship and amicable living in a society are not just tolerance or adjustability, but importantly they recognize that everyone is a human being, a child of God, and establish a peaceful atmosphere. "In the coming decades of the twenty-first century, the Church's promotion of interreligious dialogue may be one of its greatest mission services in a world that may very well resort to confrontation and violence... than God's method of patient listening and gently yet unmissable commitment to truth."³⁰ This entails one to adopt to prophetic dialogue with courage and with compassion towards one another.

²⁹ S. Bevans, *Mission as Prophetic Dialogue*, in: www.relforcon.org/sites/default/files/Transform_Wkshp-MISSION_AS_PROPHETIC_DIALOGUE-final.pdf (2018.12.12).

³⁰ S. Bevans & R. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004) p. 385. The 12th Chapter of this volume on "Mission as Prophetic Dialogue" deals extensively exploring the various dimensions of mission.

Conclusion

In the context of religious pluralism in Europe, the mission of the Church is to actualize the Reign of God, bringing peace, joy, freedom, fraternity and unity. There are many variables of beliefs and practices among Christians (Church goers and non-Church goers, believers in the Catholic and other Church traditions, believers in Jesus without attachment to any Christian structure), and there is growing number of secularly minded people. Relating to other religions, or even understanding them, is not easy. The Church has to play the vital roles of unifying Christians and serving others who are needy in society. It must grow in the Christian faith, and also respect other faiths, teaching the Christian values and emphasizing their observance, but relating with other religions without prejudice. It must share space with others to live in dignity, growing in dialogical way of life, especially with promoting harmony with other religions and prophetic dialogue, etc. This is a road less travelled in Europe.

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Religious Identity in the post-Cold War era: Islamic Revivalism and Christian Mission

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In his book *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* the Dutch missiologist Hendrik Kraemer¹ pointed out the danger of a one-sided Westernization. “When we look at the world of today, we are struck by two seemingly contradictory facts. Never before in human history has the world and mankind been such a close unity, and never before has it been such a discordant disunity”. We cannot deny, states Kraemer,² that “in political, economic, social and cultural respects the world has become one great body”. Over the last fifty years all the non-Western people of the world have experienced radical changes in their individual and corporate lives. All these changes are tending towards a similar pattern and standard of reference. “This similar pattern and standard is, as is universally known, presented by Western forms of political, economic and social organization and method”. These changes affect not only the outward forms, but also the inner content of the life of people. “Many serious men and women are living in the expectation of a coming world-culture”, states

¹ H. Kraemer, *The Christian message in a non-Christian world* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1937) p. 2.

² *Ibid*, p. 3.

Kraemer.³ But, “it seems very doubtful whether this dream of a grand cultural synthesis ... has any chance of becoming true”. Some sort of unity will emerge, but not without difficulties. “We have a foreshadowing of this in the fact that never before has the world offered such a disquieting spectacle of disunity.”⁴

“The Western Penetration was in the nineteenth century an expression of the Western hegemony in the affairs of the world. During that period the East reacted to it either with sullenness or with eager enthusiasm ... Both attitudes were essentially reactions in the passive sense of the word”, says Kraemer.⁵ “The great change that has come in the twentieth century is that the victims have become actors. Mainly passive impulsive reaction has become conscious action”. The Western hegemony in the affairs of the world belong to the past. “All prognosis about the future religious and spiritual development will have to adjust itself to the new fact that all great religions and conceptions of life may become world-wide in their effects and possibilities.”⁶ Kraemer wrote these sentences exactly eighty years ago. There is a striking similarity with the contemporary “clash of civilizations” rhetoric.⁷ The aim of this contribution is to explore the “awakening of the non-Christian world”, and its significance for Christian mission. This contribution will have two parts. First of all, we will analyse Islamic revivalism and then we will reflect on Christian mission. We will conclude with an epilogue.

Islamic revivalism

In his book *Wo der Glaube lebt*, the Swiss missiologist Walbert Bühlmann⁸ predicted that the percentage of Christians in the world population would decrease from 31% in 1955 to 16% in 2000. His main argument for this likely

³ Ibid, p. 4.

⁴ Ibid, p. 3.

⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

⁶ Ibid, p. 21.

⁷ S. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of the world order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

⁸ W. Bühlmann, *Wo der Glaube lebt. Einblicke in die Lage der Weltkirche* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 1974).

decrease was the population growth in the non-Christian, especially Asian, countries. From contemporary statistics we know that this prediction did not come true. It is generally accepted that the percentage of Christians in the world's population did not decrease but has remained stable, and according to some will grow to almost 34% by 2025⁹. In this sense, Kraemer's notion of a "non-Christian world" must be modified. But Büllman's other prediction did come true. The centre of the world has gradually shifted from the West to the East, both in terms of demography and economy with shifting power relations.¹⁰

For many people, at least in the West, the world does not look the same now as it did before September 11, 2001. This look appears to be overly Eurocentric. For Europeans and Americans life has undeniably changed because they must live with the new and frightening thought that the 'centre' of the world can be attacked by the 'periphery' and that they permanently must live with strict security measures. But for many people the world became 'not the same as before' after the trans-Atlantic slave trade, after the Vietnam war, and after the fall of Salvador Allende, which coincidentally also happened on a September 11th.

However, this may be since September 11, 2001 the "clash of civilisations"¹¹ rhetoric has become quite fashionable. According to this view those events clearly show that we are facing cultural differentiation, not cultural homogenisation. For Huntington international conflicts are no longer about political or economic ideologies but have become struggles for cultural hegemony. Three superpowers are going to determine the future course of human history: Christian culture in the West, Islamic culture in the Near East, and Confucian-Asian culture. Five other cultural zones will switch sides periodically in tune with developments in the mentioned three: Japanese culture, Hindu Indian culture, Orthodox culture in Russia, Latin American culture and African culture.

⁹ D. Barrett, *World Christian encyclopedia. A comparative survey of churches and religions in the modern world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ K. Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

¹¹ S. Huntington, op.cit.

It is obvious that these cultural entities are influencing today's world trade and political alignment. But there is quite a lot of culturalism in Huntington's statement, interpreting culture as a determining factor. In the 1960s scholars thought that all problems were economic and political, calling for economic and political solutions.¹² This view was clearly reductive. At present there is an opposite trend. Some scholars suggest that all problems are cultural and religious and can be solved by intercultural and interreligious dialogue. This too is a reduction.

Many conflicts in Asia and Africa do not primarily relate to religious and cultural differences, but to a struggle for fertile land and clean water, as well as for control over natural resources like oil, gas, gold, diamonds and tropical hardwood.¹³ Undoubtedly struggles for scarce resources are breeding grounds in which inter-groups conflicts can flourish.¹⁴ But they are complex and require a multi-dimensional, poly-methodical approach.¹⁵ Therefore to believe that interreligious dialogue (alone) can resolve the problems is naive and simplistic.

Sometimes it is said that the clash between Muslims and Christians is the sequel to the clash between communism and capitalism which took place during the Cold War era. This too seems simplistic. Anti-Western and anti-Christian sentiments have been prevalent in Africa and Asia ever since Europeans started penetrating these continents. These sentiments are closely related to the history of colonisation and mission. Christianisation and Westernisation often went together in health care and education, and even at that time they triggered 'counter-missions', as evident by the Ramakrishna Mission (1887) and the Ahmadiyya Mission (1889), both founded in India, the Muhammadiyah movement founded in Indonesia (1912) and the Muslim Brothers founded in Egypt (1928).

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt, in 1928 by Sheikh Hasan al Banna (1906-1949) and was to encourage social, educational and missionary activity and parliamentary action. The Brotherhood's aim was

¹² J. Habermas, *Theory of communicative action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

¹³ I. Elbawadi, N. Sambanis, *Why are there so many civil wars in Africa? Understanding and preventing violent conflict*, "Journal of African Economies" 9 (2000) no. 3, p. 244-249.

¹⁴ M. Sherif, *Group conflict and cooperation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Press, 1966).

¹⁵ D. Taylor, F. Moghaddam, *Theories on intergroup relations. International Social Psychological Perspectives*. Westport (London: Praeger, 1994).

to de-secularise Egypt. Grass root cells were set up in universities, schools, industries and the military establishment. The Muslim Brothers' doctrine is expressed in five succinct slogans:¹⁶ "God is our objective; the Qur'an our constitution, the Prophet our leader; struggle is our way; and death for the sake of God is the highest of our aspirations". The Muslim Brothers call for a return to pure Islam and avoidance of the Western world. According to them Islam is the answer to all the needs of the people. Minorities – Jews and Christians – must be confined to strict *dhimmi* status; that is, they are 'protected' people, but they have various obligations (e.g. paying a protection tax) and are not allowed certain behaviour (e.g. marrying a Muslim).

The Muhammadiyah movement was founded in Yogyakarta in 1912 by Ahmad Dhalan to fight the backwardness of Muslims and to counter-balance the penetration of Christianity in Indonesia. Its main mission is to modernize and purify Indonesian Islam. It promotes the upward mobility of Muslims through modern education and health care. The movement runs many schools, universities and hospitals. On the one hand it fights local syncretic practices and on the other it supports local culture and promotes religious tolerance. Although its members are active in social welfare and politics, the Muhammadiyah movement never formed their own political party. It is mainly known as a reformist and charitable organization within Indonesian Islam.¹⁷

Now mission is a concept in most world religions.¹⁸ This was foreseen by missiologists such as Hendrik Kraemer, as was shown in the introduction. In his *Christianity in World History*, the Nijmegen-based missiologist Arend van Leeuwen¹⁹ wrote a chapter on "The Western impact and the 'awakening' of the non-Western world". In his preface to John Taylor's *The primal vision*, Max Warren²⁰ urged: "What we are called upon to realise is that in the world

¹⁶ R. Mitchell, *The society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

¹⁷ H. Latief, *Islamic cabrities and Social Activism. Welfare, dakwah and Politics in Indonesia*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Utrecht 2012.

¹⁸ A. Ghiloni, *World Religions and Their Missions* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

¹⁹ A. Van Leeuwen, *Christianity in world history. The meeting of the faiths of East and West* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1964) p. 349-398.

²⁰ M. Warren, *General introduction*, in: J. Taylor, *The primal vision* (London: SCM, 19630, p. 6.

of our time there is a widespread revolt against any form of domination by the West”.

This is exactly what scholars observe in Africa²¹ and Asia.²² The collapse of the colonial system has led to the waning of Western hegemony in the world at large and the demise of inferiority feelings in the non-Western world. Consequently, there is a revival of old cultures and religions, a rise of new religions in former colonies and a resurgence of a missionary élan among non-Christian religions.

But, what we are seeing goes far beyond a clash between Muslims and Christians. It is, in general, a clash between *Tradition and modernity*,²³ where modernisation stands for Westernisation and, in the Western view, the rest of the world has just one option: take it or leave it. As former president Bush of the United States of America put it, those who are not with us (in the struggle against terrorism) are against us. Not surprisingly, many people in Third World countries, Christians and non-Christians, sympathised with the people who made the September 11th, 2001 attacks, albeit without justifying them.

Researches in East Africa and South-East Asia clearly show an Islamic revival without becoming extreme or radical.²⁴ The Muslim world regained confidence in itself based on the belief that it is “the best nation ever brought forth to men” (Sura 3:106). In his book *The New Asian Hemisphere*, Kashore Mahbubani²⁵ observes a world-wide ‘march to modernity’. He also observes that this modernization is accompanied by a massive de-Westernization, particularly in Asia and the Muslim world. The non-Western societies accepted modernity, but not its European form. De-secularization goes together with de-Europeanization.²⁶

²¹ A. Mazrui, *Islam between globalization and counter-terrorism* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006).

²² Mahbubani, op.cit.

²³ K. Gyekye, *Tradition and modernity. Philosophical reflection on African experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁴ F. Wijsen, *Religious Discourse, Social Cohesion and Conflict. Studying Muslim-Christian Relations* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013).

²⁵ Mahbubani, op.cit., p. 161.

²⁶ Ibid.

Christian mission

What does the 'awakening' of the non-Western world signify for Christian Mission? In its declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* the Second Vatican Council recognises the freedom of conscience, including the freedom to have a religion, to profess a religion and to spread one's religion; but this freedom is mutual and reciprocal.²⁷ Thus, there is a tension between commitment and openness. Can Christians cope with this ambiguity and complexity? Yes, they can.

In a paper that was read at a meeting of European and African theologians in Yaoundé, in April 1984, the Kikuyu theologian Samuel Kibicho²⁸ argued "that the Spirit of the One God, who was in Jesus of Nazareth and through whom alone God brings men and women everywhere to a saving knowledge of faith in himself, seems to have been no less fully present and accessible in the Kikuyu community of faith, independently of the Christian revelation in both the pre- and post-Christian eras of Kikuyu history".

For Christians to be able to acknowledge that there is saving knowledge of God in African Religions and in other genuine non-Christian religions "a radical re-interpretation of Revelation is called for," says Kibicho.²⁹ What is needed is the idea of a fully pluralistic revelation instead of the traditional monolithic one.³⁰

Kibicho realises that his radical reinterpretation of revelation calls for an equally radical reinterpretation of Christ and evangelization. "If there was full and fully salvific revelation in pre-Christian religions," asks Kibicho, "why did God find it necessary to send Christ as the Saviour of the world"? Kibicho³¹ answers: it was necessary not only for those destined to be saved through this

²⁷ F. Arinze, *Religions for peace. A call for solidarity to the religions of the world* (New York: Doubleday, 2002) p. 124-143.

²⁸ S. Kibicho, *The mission of the church of Jesus Christ today from the perspective of the younger churches*, in: A.Ngindu Mushete (ed.), *The mission of the church today* (Kinshasa: Bulletin of African Theology, 1984) p. 17-27.

²⁹ S. Kibicho, *The teaching of African Religion in our schools and colleges and the Christian attitude towards this religion*, "Africa Theological Journal" 10 (1981) no. 3, p. 37.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 36-37; see also S. Kibicho, *Revelation in African Religion*, "Africa Theological Journal" 12 (1983) no. 3, p. 172, 175.

³¹ Kibicho, *Revelation in African Religion*, p. 172-173; Kibicho, *The mission of the church of Jesus Christ today from the perspective of the younger churches*, p. 24.

particular stream of revelation, but also for the continual mutual correction and upliftment of religions. And “if we remember that we are talking about God in his universal saving work, we should have no problem in acknowledging the fact that this divine Spirit who was in Jesus Christ was fully present and well known in African religious communities of faith.”³²

A similar re-interpretation is needed of the traditional understanding of evangelisation. “In the present day pluralistic society, each religion must evangelise as if it is the only carrier of the only fully-saving revelation,” says Kibicho.³³ “However, in its continuing dialogue and cooperation with other religions, every religion must acknowledge and accept the claim of uniqueness and ultimacy or finality in every other genuine religion.”

In the same sense, the Indian theologian Stanley Samartha³⁴ says that we must be fully committed to our own faith and fully open to the faith of others. His main argument is that for the absolute mystery of God, no religion or religious figure can claim to have final or full truth. Even Jesus did not do that. Samartha refers to the metropolitan George Khodr³⁵ of Lebanon who elaborated on the *filioque* controversy. According to the Greek Orthodox position, the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father, not of the Father and the Son. If the Father is the sole source of the Spirit, “then there will be far more theological space for the Spirit proceeding from the Father to breathe freely through the whole *oikoumene* which includes neighbours of other faiths as well”, says Stanley Samartha.³⁶

On the same lines as the Orthodox doctrine of “the two hands of the Father”, Karl Rahner³⁷ spoke about God’s twofold mission. God sends the Word into history as a human being, and he sends the Spirit into history as an empowering gift. The sending of the Word results in incarnational singularity, the sending of the Spirit results in general openness to God’s grace. Thus, God

³² Kibicho, *The teaching of African Religion in our schools and colleges*, p. 34.

³³ Kibicho, *The mission of the Church of Jesus Christ today*, p. 24-25.

³⁴ S. Samartha, *Between two cultures* (Bangalore: Asia Trading Company, 1997).

³⁵ G. Khodr, *Christianity in a pluralist world*, in: S. Samartha (ed.), *Living faiths and the ecumenical movement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971) p. 131-142.

³⁶ Samartha, *Between two cultures*, p. 193.

³⁷ K. Rahner, *Einzigkeit und Dreifaltigkeit Gottes*, in: A. Bsteh (ed.), *Der Gott des Christentums und des Islam* (Mödling: St. Gabriel, 1978) p. 119-136.

communicates with the world in two ways which are distinct but not separate since both are extensions of the persons of the trinity. Consequently, a pneumatological approach takes us back to a trinitarian approach.³⁸

In its dialogue with the Greek Orthodox Church the Roman Catholic Church tends to interpret the relationship between Christ and the Spirit in complete agreement with the Greek Orthodox view.³⁹ It states that there is a “legitimate complementariness” between the theologies of the two traditions and that the Father is the sole source of both the Son and the Spirit, thus assigning God’s action through the Spirit a certain autonomy. In theory, the ecumenical debate on the *filioque* issue has the potential to open up the inter-religious debate. This has happened in mission history before. Dialogue with other Christian churches (‘small ecumenism’) has paved the way for dialogue with non-Christian religions (‘big ecumenism’).

Epilogue

Can this view of mission be justified according to the Christian tradition? Yes, it can. Let us be reminded of the fact that fullness of truth is eschatological, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “what I know is only partial, then it will be complete (1 Cor 13: 12), and that God is always greater, as the Church Fathers already knew, “Deus semper maior”.

This comes close to an authentic Muslim understanding of God which is beyond any conceptualisation. Sura 5, 47 reads: “For each We have appointed a Shir’ah and a patterned path. And had God willed, He would have made you one nation; but that He may test you by what He has conferred upon you, (He willed it that way). Therefore, strive in competition for good deeds. To God shall be your return altogether, then He shall apprise you of that on which you were at variance”.

³⁸ W. Valkenberg, *Christ and the Spirit*, in: T. Merrigan & J. Haers (eds), *The myriad Christ* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000) p. 126.

³⁹ Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity, *Traditions regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit*, “Eastern Churches Journal” 2 (1995) no. 3, p. 35-46.

I am not that pessimistic as Catherine Cornille is in her book on the *Impossibility of Dialogue*.⁴⁰ It refers to the pioneers of interreligious dialogue in the second half of the 20th century, who believed that dialogue between religions might eventually lead to convergence between them. Cornille⁴¹ writes that at present “few would still share the optimism of these pioneers of dialogue. After some decades of significant effort at interreligious dialogue, there is little noticeable growth in religious traditions. In fact, one too often notes a contrary tendency to sharpen and reassert the boundaries of one’s own distinctive identity in the face of religious diversity.”

I am more in line with Ali Mazrui,⁴² who claims that “over the last hundred years or so, there is no doubt that the trend has been towards greater convergence between Islam and mainstream Christianity”. At the local level, Muslim militants “may not always know where to draw the line between being anti-Western and anti-Christian”, says Mazrui. But, “since the end of World War [II], the global situation is pulling Islam and mainstream Western Christianity closer together as allies in an increasingly irreligious world”.

Despite the clash-of-civilizations rhetoric, the post-Cold War era is less violent than before. In general violence has decreased over the past centuries because of the development of nation-states and common sense.⁴³

In his Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (Foreword No. 3) Pope Francis⁴⁴ wrote that a Catholic University has an evangelizing task to spread the gospel in the modern world. But he also writes: “The good theologian and philosopher has an open, that is, an incomplete, thought, always open to the *maius* of God and the truth”. This is in harmony with the Catholic teaching about dialogue with people of other religions and philosophies of life during the past fifty years (Van Oers 2015).⁴⁵

⁴⁰ C. Cornille, *The impossibility of interreligious dialogue* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008).

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 209.

⁴² Mazrui, *Islam between globalization and counter-terrorism*, p. 224.

⁴³ S. Pinker, *The better angels of our nature. The decline of violence in history and its causes* (New York: Penguin Books Limited, 2011).

⁴⁴ Francis (Pope), *Apostolic Constitution “Veritatis Gaudium”. On Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties*, Rome 2018.

⁴⁵ B. Van Oers, *In dialogue with people of other religions and philosophies* (Utrecht: Secretariat of the Dutch Bishops’ Conference, 2015).

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Identity, Cultures and Crossculturalness. The challenge of Evangelization

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The interest of this communication concerns the mission of the Church in complex times such as ours. At first, it might seem that the mission has nothing to do with the dynamics of our times that maybe, are just an obstacle. For this, I would like to recall some participation that can be useful for this issue.

The work of the Dombes Group about how Christian communities live their identity and their changes—dates back to 1991. Careful of changes taking place in the lives of Churches, the work showed – first of all – a basic *Christian identity* to be meant as a belonging to Christ, founded in Baptism and nourished by the Gospel and the Eucharist. The *ecclesial identity* as a second, considered as a participation in the saving mystery of the Church that is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Lastly, Christian communities are characterized by a *confessional identity* formed in a given period but characterized by a spiritual and doctrinal profile that distinguishes every Christian denomination from another. The text focuses on a discernment of these identities to consider each of them as a grace of God for all other Churches, as far as they become a help and a support in the journey of fidelity that all churches need to their only Lord. Thinking about similar dynamics, even if in a different context, Paul Ricoeur has written that “the future of the past left unfulfilled is perhaps the richest part of the tradition”¹

¹ The French text: *Sur la traduction* (Paris: Bayard, 2004) collects three different contributions published by P. Ricoeur in different years. See the English translation: *On Translation*

And this is the complex work that Dombes calls conversion; there is no identity without conversion and vice versa.

A year later, in 1992, Kwame Bediako (+2008) published the text of his second doctorate, awarded to Aberdeen:² *Theology and Identity. The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*. Presbyterian, Bediako comes to theology relatively late but develops a remarkable activity. Abandoning the vision of mission as an expansion, typical of K.S. Latourette, Bediako noted that the bishops and theologians of the second and third centuries after Christ have based their thinking on the scriptures, but without being cut off from their cultural and historical roots. In this attitude, Bediako sees the presence of a clear strategy: certainly it is about the wish to contextualize the faith but there is also a commitment to shape a Christian identity able to face the challenges and the problems of those churches. Taking a deep analogy between the work of those early theologians of Africa and those of his contemporary, Bediako concludes that the mission has its purpose in creating a Christian identity and that is the result of allegiance to revelation and of a Christian engagement in dialogue with a specific cultural context.

A first conclusion: the Christian identity is the result of the revelation of the God of Jesus and of his gifts, but his personal appropriation and his testimony is given only in the social and historical context in which people live. In clearer terms, the Christian identity includes a hermeneutic of the gospel: his translation in personal life should always be accompanied by an intellectual commitment because, to be truly personal, faith must be free and intelligent. That's how *Dei Verbum* 5 describes the faith. Act as intelligence and will, the faith is the attitude with which a person «commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals

(London – New York: Routledge, 2006). I used an Italian translation: *La traduzione. Una sfida etica* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001) p. 84.

² K. Bediako, *Theology and Identity. The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992). The text is a resumption of work presented for his second doctorate entitled: *Identity and Integration: An Enquiry into the Nature and Problems of theological Indigenization in selected early Hellenistic and modern African Christian Writers* (University of Aberdeen 1983). Bediako is also the author of the book *Christianity in Africa: the Renewal of a non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him».³ Hence the commitment to open to the gospel cultural resources and the genius of different peoples.

1. Inculturation and identity: the role of faith

With Vatican II and the 1974 Synod on evangelization, the debate on inculturation became stronger. Congar observed that the Christian faith is not a cultural fact but, notwithstanding this, is related to life and human history set in motion by Jesus; for this reason, he observed that inculturation can exist only as faith re-expressed in the forms of people's life.⁴ The risks of this work are well indicated by Giancarlo Collet when, fearing both an absolutism of cultures as unitary compact and its consideration as disorderly mines from which one can draw for a renewed presentation of Christianity, he will denounce both the cultural romanticism and the theological vandalism.⁵

We must recognize that the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century have been marked by a mono-Western acculturation and Roman uniformity. This explains why, after the council, the 70s have been marked by a kind of "fever of inculturation". The climate was dominated by the enthusiasm of those who believed the last providential chance to root Christianity in the lives of many people. The result will not live up to expectations. In terms of method, Swami Simon Amalorpavadass recalls that the inculturation is not a simple coating but always involves a transformation of a culture, an action on its own center to make it suitable to express the gospel.⁶ In terms of content,

³ Vaticanum II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (1965) no. 5.

⁴ Y. Congar, *Christianisme comme foi et comme culture*, in: *Evangelizzazione e culture. Atti del Congresso internazionale scientifico di missiologia. Roma 5-12 ottobre 1975*. 3 vol. (Roma: Pontificia Università Urbaniana 1976) p. 83-103.

⁵ G. Collet, *From theological Vandalism to theological Romanticism? Questions about a Multicultural Identity of Christianity*, "Concilium" 30 (1994) no. 2 (*Christianity and Cultures: a Mutual Enrichment*), p. 25-37. The article is also reprint in: G. Collet, "... bis an die Grenzen der Erde". *Grundfragen heutiger Missionswissenschaft* (Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder Verlag, 2002).

⁶ D.S. Amalorpavadass, *Inculturation is not Hinduisation but Christianization*, in: D.S. Amalorpavadass (ed.), *Indian Christian Spirituality* (Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1982) p. 107-114.

Aloysius Pieris will say that, despite a mission of centuries, in many of those lands Christianity remained a baffling “bonsai”.⁷ Years later, it is easy to grasp uses and abuses of this central theme. This issue remains crucial to establish genuine local churches and to develop authentic contextual theologies. Inculturation is a talent to make, not a flag to wave.

Aloysius Pieris, founder and director of *Tulana Research Centre* at Kelaniya in Sri Lanka, said that an “Asian theology” must be developed from two poles: the first – that’s called “Third Worldness” – is characterized by widespread poverty, common to many peoples of the southern hemisphere and the second – which indicates as “Religiousness”⁸ – is typical of Asian culture, world marked by great spiritual quests lived in a plurality of religions. To these two aspects it may be added a third, the “multiculturalism”. In many Asian countries, different cultures and religions live together some of them, more articulated and reflected, belong to the elites but some others were born or have been adapted to most popular forms. Despite their multiculturalism, these regions maintain their units: a kind of unity in diversity able to keep a certain social identity.⁹

This unity in diversity arranges in a very special way both the civil life and the religious belonging. In Asia religion has been lived rather in experiential manner than intellectual; religion is a „way”, an experience in which we enter under the guidance of a teacher, a guru, in search of *moksha* or liberation. In this

⁷ A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988). French translation: *Une théologie asiatique de la libération* (Paris : Centurion, 1990). Italian translation: *Una teologia asiatica di liberazione* (Assisi: Cittadella, 1990). The author believes that the fever of inculturation [in the West] could be understood as a desperate effort of the last minute to give Asian expression to a Church that failed to “plant” a inculturated Christianity in Asia because it did not dare break the Greek-Roman vase in which it was confined after four centuries, like a stalwart bonsai.

⁸ In the Asian context, religions, rather than internal ones, develop a pervasive ethos of all human existence.

⁹ This set of differences is not seen as opposition but as harmony. Because God-talk is made relative to God-experience, it is a “inner harmony between word and silence [...]”; it is the Spirit, the Eternal Energy that makes every Word spring from Silence and lead to Silence, every engagement spring from renunciation, every struggle spring from a profound restfulness, every freedom spring from stern discipline, every action spring from stillness, every development spring from detachment and every acquisition from non-acquisition. Because silence is the *word unspoken* and the word is *silence heard*” (Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 85).

path, we can distinguish different ways: some focused on action, others on knowledge (*jnana*) and others put on all the worship (*bhakti*).¹⁰ «Religions are historical forms of human opening to God, signs of God's presence in the world. [...] In their peculiarity, they show the different faces of the ultimate mystery that never runs out; in their diversity, they help us to experience deeply the richness of the One. Meeting in the dialogue gives rise to a communion where the differences become at once complementary and points of communion».¹¹

The inculturation of the gospel in Christian communities life and their witness of its cultural and human vitality involve a plurality of forms but they express the unity of the evangelical root and the fraternal communion of churches able to enrich mutually. «Sacrament or sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race»,¹² the Church cannot accept cultural and racial conflicts, antagonistic and corporative interests or contemptible conditions of democracy and misery. The different identities have to be opened to the universal logic of the unique, community and human journey. The specific characterization of Churches, in this effort, becomes an advantage.

Churches of Asia have found a significant meeting point in the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC). Founded in 1970 in Manila and defined in its nature and its tasks in 1971 in Hong Kong, FABC held its first General Assembly in Taipei (Taiwan) in 1974 and in 2016 held its 11th General Assembly in Sri Lanka.¹³ FABC reaffirmed the centrality of Jesus in the mission and indicated in the dialogue the Asian historical form of Christianity that the

¹⁰ For dialogue on *bhakti*, see C.J. Kuttianikkal, *Khrist Bhakta Movement: a Model for an Indian Church? Inculturation in the area of community building* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2014).

¹¹ M. Amaladoss, *Theology of Religious Pluralism*, "Jeevadhara" 19 (1989), p. 160. By the same author, see also *Making all Things new. Mission in Dialogue* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1990) p. 211-241.

¹² Vaticanum II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium"* (1964) no. 1.

¹³ The history of the FABC is documented by 5 volumes: G.B. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 1970-1991* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 1997); F.J. Eilers (ed.), *For All Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 1992-1996* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 1997); F.J. Eilers (ed.), *For All Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 1997-2001* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2002); F.J. Eilers (ed.), *For All Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 2002-2006* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2007); V. Tirimanna (ed.), *For All Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 2007-2012* (Manila: Claretian Publications, 2014).

proclamation of Jesus has to be taken.¹⁴ The Bishops will identify this dialogue in three different stakeholders: the cultures, the religions and the poor of their country.¹⁵ This broad perspective of ecclesial commitment is what the FABC indicates as “active integral evangelization”. Through this path, the Christian communities of Asia find their identity and develop a commitment through which «the life and meaning of the Gospel may be ever more embodied in the rich historical cultures of Asia, so that [] Asian Christianity may help to promote that all is “authentically human” in these cultures».¹⁶

Presumably, the ultimate meaning of these indications is inspired by the choices of Asian episcopate reaffirmed in *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999). The fourth chapter of the document is titled «*Jesus the Savior: Proclaiming the Gift*» and, while is dedicating Nos. 19-20 to *The Primacy of Proclamation* and *Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia*, however, want to clarify that «this insistence on proclamation is prompted not by sectarian impulse nor by spirit of proselytism nor by any sense of superiority. The Church evangelizes in obedience to Christ’s command, in the knowledge that every person has the right to hear the Good News of the God who Reveals and gives himself in Christ». This attitude of respect does not cancel the commitment to proclaim the Gospel in its fullness. Thus

¹⁴ “If we summarize the orientation of the FABC in one word, then it is dialogue. It is around this focal point that the FABC’s understanding of the Church and its mission revolves” (F. Wilfred, *The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences: Orientations, Challenges and Impact*, in: G.B. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All Peoples of Asia*, I, p. XXIII). The same perspective in: C.G. Arevalo, *The Tome of the Heirs*, in: G.B. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All Peoples of Asia*, I, p. XIX-XX: “The most basic mode of mission in Asia must be dialogue, Missionary dialogue of course. We must explore the interface of the Gospel’s meanings and values with the realities of Asia and its many peoples – its histories and cultures, religions and religious traditions and especially its ‘poor masses’ in every country. These realities – cultures, religions, life situations of poverty – make up the ambience and context where the Gospel is to be proclaimed”. This program is both missionary and pastoral commitment of the Church.

¹⁵ See the Assembly in Taipei (1974): *Statement* art. 12. 19. G.B. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All Peoples of Asia*, I, p. 14-15. This choice will then be forcefully in the fifth Assembly of the FABC, held in Bandung in 1990: “mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God’s Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia’s poor, with its local cultures and with other religious traditions” (G.B. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All Peoples of Asia*, I, p. 280).

¹⁶ G.B. Rosales, C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All Peoples of Asia*. I, 9.

«to bear witness to Jesus Christ is the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia, for it responds to their profound longing for the Absolute and it unveils the truths and values which will ensure their integral human development».¹⁷

This kind of choices is also in the path of Latin American Churches. Their methodology is built around the «ver – judgar – agir», that is «see – judge – act». This choice comes from Joseph Léon Cardijn, founder of the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* but will found its widest application in Latin America. The three classic moments have been explained in various manners. Léonard Santedi, African teacher in Kinshasa, reads the “see” as a contextualization of thought which stands in front of the reality and its dynamics. He speaks of “judgment” as an effort of decontextualization aimed to a coming out the real issue and, finally, describes the “act” as a contextualization again which is, however, willing for a more human future. Other summarizes all this in an incisive «thinking globally and acting locally». More simply, I think that the “see” expresses the need for a serious and documented analysis, an analysis that does not start from ideologies but from reality, from the human beings and from their problems and their way of confronting; the “judge” leads to an external point of view: to tradition rooted in ethics and/or in the gospel; finally the “act” needs a program which may include different times but requires a clear determination about what, when, and how it has to be done.

To clarify the Latin American position I will use the *Concluding Document* of the *V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean* (CELAM), in Aparecida held 13 to 31 May 2007. The title of the document is *Discipulos y Misioneros de Jesucristo para que nuestros pueblos in him they vida*. “Yo soy el Camino, la Verdad y la Vida” (Jn 16.4). The text develops a reading of the Latin American reality from the experience of life of this people; nos. 4-8 of the Document clearly shows it.¹⁸ In this perspective, the

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation “Ecclesia in Asia”* (1990) no. 20.

¹⁸ “The Gospel reached our lands as part of a dramatic and unequal encounter of peoples and cultures. The ‘seeds of the Word,’ present in the native cultures, made it easier for our indigenous brothers and sisters to find in the Gospel lifegiving responses to their deepest aspirations: ‘Christ is the Savior for whom they were silently longing.’ The appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe was a decisive event for the proclamation and recognition of her Son, a lesson and sign of inculturation of the faith, manifestation and renewed missionary impetus for spreading the Gospel” (*Concluding Document of the V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America,*

understanding of reality has turned in an encounter with Christ and in a way of being Church; the first focuses on the consciousness of being called to become witnesses of the gospel¹⁹ whereas the second emphasizes the dedication of the Church to a real commitment to the gospel.²⁰ The third moment is built around a strong pastoral conversion, able to accept Jesus' life: it is a personal conversion, an apostolic renewal of communities and their universal openness. This is the face of the disciple-missionary who lives in a universal way – *inter gentes* – its opening to life lived locally and globally.

For the African world, I would go back to the thought of K. Bediako and that of A. Walls that, first, he had drawn.²¹ Scholar of the methods of the Christian faith's transmission, Walls researches and deepens, in the history of the mission, the presence of constants: abandoning a centralized view of the mission, he believes that every place reached by the gospel, becomes – in turn – the starting point of new, original missionary dynamism. This theory – *World Christianity* – speaks of Christianity as a religion of migration. For these studies, Walls will give rise to *Center for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World* in Aberdeen, now *Center for the Study of World Christianity* at Edinburgh.

in: <https://pl.scribd.com/document/257681153/General-Conference-of-the-Bishops-of-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean-concluding-document-2018.12.12>, no. 4.

¹⁹ These theologies illustrate the life of Jesus and our in a minority status and social marginalization. See: O.E. Costa, *Christ outside the gate: mission beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982); S. Escobar, *Changing Tides: Latin America and World Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); S. Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003); R. Padilla, *Mission between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, Mich., William B. Eerdmann, 1985).

²⁰ “As Church embracing the cause of the poor, we encourage the participation of the indigenous and Afro-Americans in church life. We view with hope the inculturation process discerned in the light of the magisterium. It is crucial that Catholic translations of the bible and the liturgical texts be made into their languages. More must likewise be done to promote vocations and ordained ministries from these cultures” (*Concluding Document of the V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America*, n. 94).

²¹ Both – A. Walls and K. Bediako – related to the Presbyterian denomination. Walls passes ten years as a teacher in Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria, then come to Aberdeen and Edinburgh; Bediako, a Ghanaian, studied between Aberdeen and Edinburgh with Walls before returning to Ghana where he is founder and director of Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture. The Institute is at Akropong, dozen kilometers from Accra.

The relation between faith and cultures is analyzed with care by Walls²² that will get two dynamics between which a certain tension persists; he indicates the first as *indigenizing principle* and the second as *pilgrim principle*. The *indigenizing principle* aims to welcome people, to make them feel at home, to accept them with their social and historical reality, with their world of relationships marked by beauty, injustice and wickedness. The announcement of the Gospel does not happen in a *vacuum* but in a story that, even after our decision to believe, continues to influence our faith. The *pilgrim principle* reminds that the gospel – even honoring the person and the group’s reality – aims to transcend every peculiarity in view of a universal love, universally shared. Even if Father welcomes us the way we are, but he does it to lead us to a transformation. A third dynamic will be added later: the *translation principle*;²³ even if the translation does not have the power of the „flesh” in the Incarnation, it celebrates the glory of Our Lord.

A special mention deserves the Asian Mission Congress, held October 18 to 22, 2006, in Chiang Mai in Thailand, on the theme *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia*.²⁴ The report of H. Exc. Mons. L.A. Tagle – then bishop of Imus and now Manila Archbishop Cardinal – keep still a great interest and a considerable value. He has indicated in the narrating the form of the gospel’s proclamation more suited to the Asian mentality.²⁵ The telling is about the gospel’s care and not worshiping the curiosity’s ashes; telling the story of Jesus includes an afterthought in the life of people and highlights that a believer can listen and serve the Gospel as a testimony of love rather than as a doctrinal knowledge.

²² Mostly A.F. Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture”, “Culture and Coherence in Christian History”, “Culture and Conversion in Christian History”, in: A.F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History. Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books ; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 3-15, 16-25, 43-54.

²³ A. F. Walls, *The translation Principle in Christian History*, in: A.F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History. Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books ; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) p. 26-42.

²⁴ See M.S. Dias (ed.), *Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia: A Celebration of Faith and Life* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2006).

²⁵ The relationship of Mons. Tagle, was titled: *Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus* and was presented to Congress on 19th of October 2006. The author has taken up and republished it in L.A. Tagle, *Telling the Story of Jesus: word-communion-mission* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

2. Crossculturalness: new challenges

Crossculturalness is not a simple variant of inculturation but refers to coexistence of different cultures living one beside the other, one inside the other. Such a lifestyle for centuries has been lived in the Indian world, China and Asia generally but represents a novelty and a challenge in the western world where it has produced an expansion of individual liberties and a crisis in the predominant way of life. In a situation of multiculturalism, people confronted with multiple possibilities of interpretation of life; if this enhances individual freedom, at the same time it increases the discomfort and difficulties of those who has to build a clear identity and a consequent social belonging. In the Indian world, this unity in diversity is configured with the theme of harmony, but in the Western world – now oblivious to the fact that every civilization is a mediation of different historical elements, stratified in time – the distance between individual expectations and social offers led to an individualism and consumerism that hides the inability of common and not superficial life.

In the Western world, personal identity, modeled freely and still considered a value itself, is now in trouble: its effort to clarify and develop those unifying values – cultural, ethical and spiritual orientation – that every life needs – fails. In such a context, as well as positive effects, the introduction of multiculturalism can produce – and took place – closed identities and impervious personalities to dialogue and discussion.²⁶ I think that the crossculturalness is now a fact and not an issue; our task is how to live it, without pretending it does not exist. Multiculturalism requires a reinterpretation of life, a rethinking of personal identity and social commitments; if one believes that this can happen without discomfort, without tensions and difficulties, is anachronistic.

The result is a heated debate on personal identity and social belonging. In a confrontation between cultures that have focused on the individual person and his freedom, and cultures that have, however, focused on community life,

²⁶ See two opposing views, even if two different seasons: O. Fallaci, *The Trilogy: The Rage and the Pride – The Force of Reason – Oriana Fallaci interviews herself – L'Apocalypse* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2004); F. Cardini, *The Hypocrisy of the West. The Caliph, the Terror, the History* (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2015). The thesis of Cardini is not a justification of the atrocities of *Daesh* but is an invitation to recall the memory of our past responsibilities and to understand clearly what is happening. Another question would be what to do.

many questions arise. Individual freedom has to be defended from meddling social or community life or has to be protected from the destruction of individualism? where does the wisdom of the people and where they begin his fears? Does not the defense of the value of tradition attack the courage in new paths, full of hope for all? If culture is, first of all, contact with life, with its reality and its problems, it will be recognized that people look at his life in the same way only in an ideological perspective. The differences are always so large that make the value of a culture not as an imposition of the pattern, but in a relationship of intelligence and freedom of the people dealing with life, opening the door to democratic choices that would later become socially challenging. And who would dare to say that the Western world is a cultural space in which freedom is established in the fullness of the human person and for all the people? For this, there are a lot of human, social and religious items that we can learn from other cultures.

Cultural attitudes, faced with this reality, are mainly three:

- a) The „integration” essentially aims to assimilation of the other, until you plug it into an existing social reality; the assimilation of the other, called to look like me, is the basic data. In such a policy, the knowledge of the other is not very relevant: the goal is to assimilate the newcomers and make them socially active citizens in an already predetermined pattern.
- b) The „transcultural” intends to emphasize those anthropological constants that cross all cultures and, in some way, approach them and make them similar. This basis of common values refers to an attitude of „recognition” rather than mutual assimilation; It does not aim to integrate but to create the possibility and space of an enriching communication.
- c) The „intercultural” will harness the „complexity” of a multicultural society in which different personal and social identities come together and mingle: the discomfort and imbalance that these introduce, should form a temporary basis for a future synthesis of a future leap forward. This strategy, rather than to „integration” or to „recognition”, dreams of a „new humanity” and assumes a situation where diversity, interacting with each other, achieves a higher synthesis of culture and humanity

Crossculturalness moves along a dynamic balance which aims to transform the inevitable tensions in a different and better future signs.

Multiculturality has imposed an intersubjective and relational conception of living: the opening to the other is no longer a choice but a structural and unavoidable necessity of our history. One comes to knowledge of himself

only through the relationship with the other. This dynamic must recognize the other with his dignity but also be recognized by him. The story unfortunately teaches that this mutual recognition is under the threat of misunderstanding: there is always the risk of not being understood or being rejected.

3. The Gospel of the kingdom and its communication

To introduce the evangelization of this world in swift evolution, it is necessary to think in a framework of universal history of salvation which embraces all the humanity and the cosmos. In theological terms, this frame begins from creation, develops through the alliance with Israel, and reaches its apex in the Incarnation, the Paschal mystery which prolongs its action through the Spirit, the gospel and the Church. Here you find the mission of the Church: is to live and to keep that gospel you have received; its job is to communicate to all mankind that word which includes the meaning of human history and opens, beyond it, to eternal communion with God.

Three aspects define the mission of the Church: the gospel of the kingdom as content, the *dunamis* of the Spirit and the apostolic task of community as an historical way of communication, the imitation of the behavior of Jesus as a spiritual animation and support of missionary life. In the most profound and true aspect, the mission depends on the work and the grace of the crucified / resurrected; he, „when he is lifted up from the earth, he will draw everyone to him” (J 12:32). The mission, therefore, lives of the mandate of the Risen Lord who sends his disciples to the world and assists them with his presence and the gift of his Spirit (see Mt 28:18-20; Mc 16:15-16; Acts 1:8) and makes use of the witness of that community of disciples (see Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35).

In the likeness of Jesus, our being with others and share other's life must be a liberating and joyful service; Jesus knows how to meet people with their history and their problems and how to lead them to a renewed life. This aspect is the inclusiveness of his personality: Jesus is not only „with” others but „for” them. According to his original plan, Jesus commits his life to die for us. Jesus is „for us”. The human-divine structure of his person makes Jesus the revealer of a God who is for every man; despite the presence of sin is the root of violence, lies and divisions, Jesus reminds everyone that the grace of God is already at work in this world and that the gift of himself and the fraternity are possible paths.

It should be added that the Church's mission becomes significant to the extent that the evangelical communication follows on anthropological research on the way of life and the task of the people. The testimony of this gospel is shown in the person of the evangelizer and is absolutely required for those who accept the gospel. The mission is always personal meeting of two paths able to enter into dialogue and to seize the chance of stimulation and growth that is one for the other. In this relation, it is not important "what" or "how" people communicate but the ethical and spiritual relationship that is established between them; because every relationship with a "you" is never objectified or exploitable, evangelizing must always require an attitude of mutual respect and acceptance, dialogue and openness.

However, the other is always promise and limits, that's why the Gospel's communication has a risk that the "become neighbour to each other" does not cancel but includes. It is in this spirit that we look at the future of the mission, aware that the size of the mission passes through the needle's eye of human dynamics; live the universality of love, confided by God to those who make their way on the road of their Teacher, means to show its greatness in the limited commitment of the personal historicity without being overwhelmed. Knowing life is to walk in the footsteps of the disciple-missionary several times mentioned by Pope Francis.

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