

Go,
Rebuild
My Church!

**Comprehensive
Course on the
Franciscan
Mission
Charism**



Dialogue with
Other Religions:
A Franciscan Way

Lesson Unit 15

The documents of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* have deeply affected the understanding of mission. Constant efforts are being made to clarify its purpose and objectives, and to determine the most appropriate methods to carry it out. *Go, Rebuild My Church: A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism*, provides a particular context to stimulate dialogue about the many dimensions of mission and the inevitable recognition of the equality, dignity and humanity of all persons. The course is unique, since it is genuinely inter-Franciscan and inter-cultural. An ongoing process for exchange among all members of the Franciscan Family from six continents provides for a creative meshing of the best in current theology, Franciscan research and pastoral practice. The vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent our search for a fuller understanding of humanity in the light of the Gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ.

As Franciscans, with the world as our "cloister," we welcome this refreshing moment of intercultural dialogue. Francis was the first among founders to situate the missionary dimension of the Gospel call clearly within his rule. This study reawakens us to the challenge and genuineness of Francis' message for our own times.

Imprint

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Second revised edition including the suggestions of the International Congress of the CCFMC, Assisi 1994

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Africa Edition

Publisher: Comprehensive Course
on the Franciscan Mission Charism
CCFMC Africa Secretariat
PO Box 21197, Nairobi, Kenya



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Cover Design:

Kolbe Press

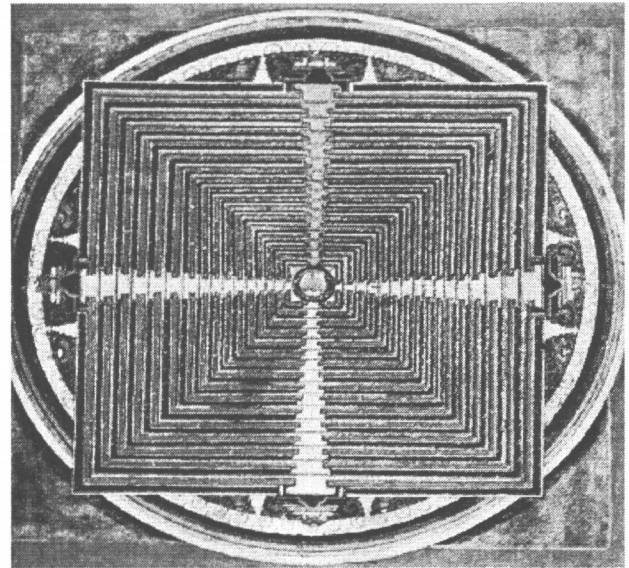
Printed by:

Kolbe Press, PO Box 468, Limuru, Kenya



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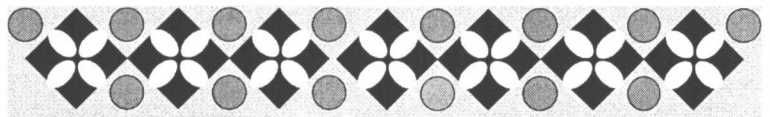
Dialogue With Other Religions: A Franciscan Way



Lesson Unit 15



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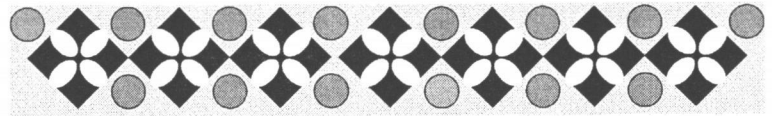
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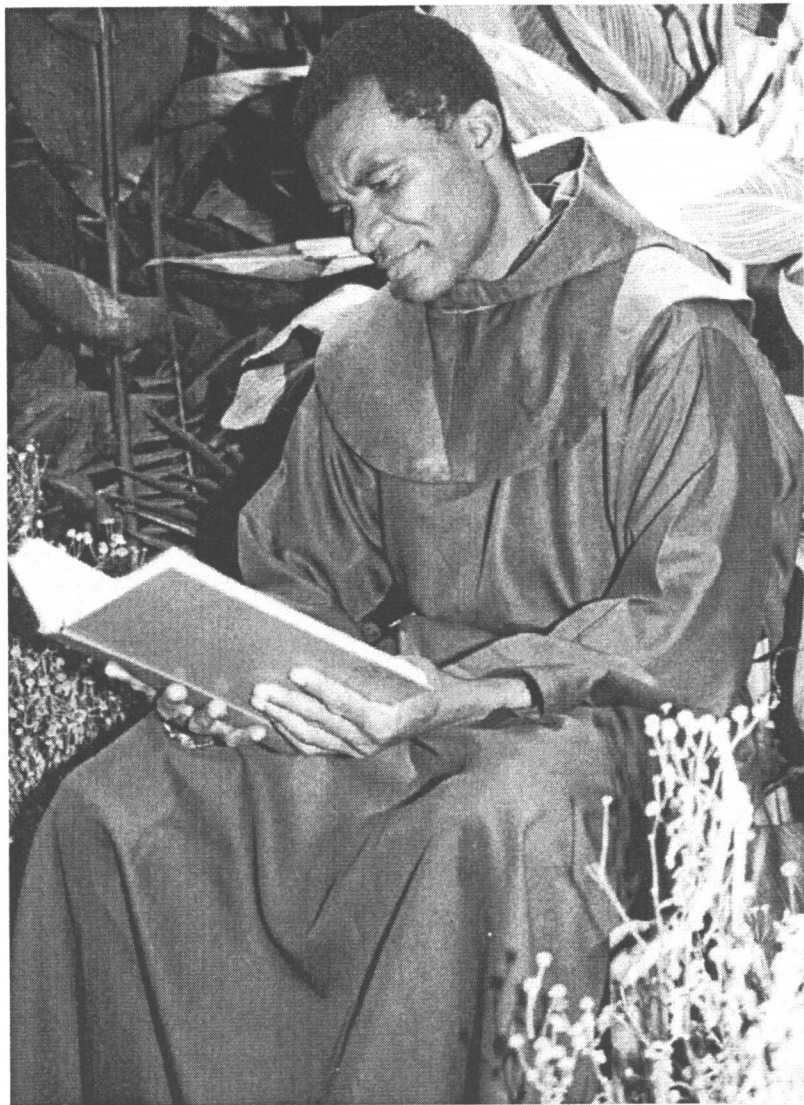
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by Francis of Assisi Respected Written Words

Whenever Francis would find anything written, whether about God or about humanity, along the way or in a house, or on the floor, he would pick it up with the greatest reverence and put it in a sacred or decent place, so that the name of the Lord or anything else pertaining to it would not remain there.



One day, when he was asked by a certain brother why he so diligently picked up writings even of pagans or writings in which there was no mention of the name of the Lord, he replied: "Because the letters are there out of which the most glorious name

of the Lord God could be put together. Whatever is good there does not belong to the pagans, nor to any other human being, but to God to whom belongs every good (cf. 1C 82).



Introduction

A



The Influence of the different religions on the life of the people

There have always been different religions, which, each in its own way, influenced the life of the people. In the past there was hardly any confrontation between these religions on the level of their teaching. That was admittedly different in the Catholic Church. She understood herself as the only true way to salvation. This self-image determined the Church's attitude and her relationship towards other religions. She believed that the followers of other religions could only be saved through conversion to Christianity. Therefore conversion was the priority goal of the Christian mission. But with time, other world-religions also claimed to be responsible for the salvation of the whole world. A growing confrontation was the result.

The World Parliament of Religions, 1892 in Chicago, tried to bring together representatives of all religions, in order to promote a mutual understanding and to foster the spirit of partnership among the world religions. This gave the interreligious dialogue a strong impulse.

Vatican Council II acknowledged the other religions as legitimate ways of salvation and thus opened the door for a dialogue with the leading world religions. In her new understanding of other religions and a new way of relating to them, the Church now also spoke of traces of the activity of the Holy Spirit in other religions. She discovered in God's incarnation His basic attitude towards humanity and drew new conclusions from it for relationships among the religions.



Francis in dialogue with the Sultan of Egypt, at Damietta.

For Franciscans Francis remains the convincing model. Even today his encounter with the Sultan is still a valid example of a reverent dialogue between believers from different religious backgrounds.



Survey

B



Dialogue as a Principle

The understanding and practice of dialogue that we advocate today was evidently neither known nor practised as such during the time of Francis. However, from what we know of his life and his relationship to people of his own faith, and to others of a different religion, one might say that his approach was the very model of dialogue. Therefore, the first part of this lesson unit will try to examine the term *dialogue* in its modern interpretation. The second part will set out to show how dialogue between Christianity and other reli-

gions is being carried out, theologically and practically.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council must obviously be consulted in the first place, given their decisive importance for the new attitude of the Church towards other religions. Furthermore, some recent theological trends will be mentioned. This will help us to grasp the implications of "*dialogue in everyday life*". Finally, "*ten commandments*" for a Franciscan dialogue will contribute some practical ideas.

Information

C



Dialogue:

Explanation of Concept and Basic Rules

Definition

Dialogue is a mutual progressive communication on the levels of relationship, ideas, action, experience and a silent listening to God's voice in us. These key-ideas are meaningful and need an explanation.

Mutual: Dialogue is an exchange of ideas or opinions on a particular issue between two or several persons or parties, who mutually respect and acknowledge each other.

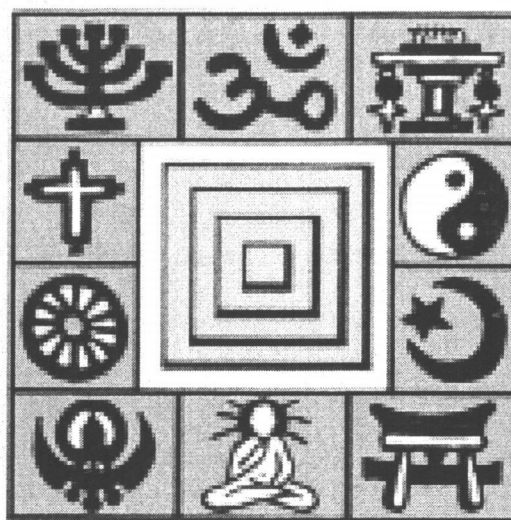
- Progressive:** Dialogue wants to set a growth process in motion, i.e. a higher and more mature level should be reached.
- Communication:** Dialogue is participation and allows others to participate. It is a giving and receiving.
- On the level of relationship:** Dialogue is an awareness that we need one another and are dependent on one another.



- On the level of ideas: Dialogue is a sharing of knowledge, of views of life and of the world.
- On the level of action: Dialogue is action and co-operation.
- On the level of experience: Dialogue is the exchange of experiences in the different economic, political, ethnic, geographical, social, cultural and religious areas.
- On the level of silent listening: Dialogue is a process that presupposes openness and listening to one another. Silence is needed if we are to become aware of the working of the Holy Spirit in us. Only this enables us to understand each other and to recognise the love of the other one, even without words.

Dialogue is a pilgrimage in great humility and has as its goal the reaching of an interpersonal understanding. Without humility and love no dialogue is possible.

We have to accept that there are many religions and that they all have their own point of view and understanding of the world. All religions can contribute from their self-understanding to a better understanding of the religions among each other.



The most important religious groups are listed here:

1. Judaism, Christianity and Islam,
2. Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism
3. Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism,
4. The original religions of Africa and America
5. New cults and religions.

Presuppositions

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Real dialogue presupposes that the partners recognise the respective position of each other and respect the opinion of the other one as it is. It also presupposes that they acknowledge the tasks and projects that are of common concern, the possibility of mutual exchange, the will to explore the ways through which they might be able to address the tasks together.

Dialogue that is worth the name, can only

take place on an equal level, on which there is neither superiority nor subordination. There may also be no claim of possessing a greater share of the *truth*. A meaningful dialogue is only possible if the partners approach each other in an atmosphere of equality of status, of respectful tolerance towards each others' beliefs, viewpoints and different ways of living and if they are willing to give as well as to receive.



The goal of the dialogue is the improvement of one's mutual understanding and of interpersonal relationships.

The goals of dialogue could be diverse, for example: to understand each other, to learn from each other, and to work together.

However, the basic goal of dialogue is as old as the practice of dialogue itself. It can be seen best in the Greek philosopher Socrates. To counteract the damaging influence of the Sophists (a philosophical school that was lead-

ing many people into error by claiming to know and to prove everything), Socrates, by asking questions, engaged them in dialogue, in a conversation that would lead them to see the truth for themselves. Interested only in bringing the truth to light, and not in winning an argument or converting the others to his own conviction, his dialogue is nothing but a humble search for truth. In our time, too, dialogue should have no other goal than a humble search for truth.

The urgent necessity of Dialogue

In these days, many factors are contributing to make dialogue an urgent priority. There is an increasing acceptance of the real worth of the human person and the consequent respect for freedom, known to be the essential characteristic of human nature. As much as human dignity is violated in many countries, just as much the awareness is growing that this is a grave injustice. This leads to the demand to respect human freedom. In connection with this, people wish and expect that religion is humanely expressed and meaning-

fully presented. In no way must it be forced upon others. An approach through dialogue, therefore, is alone capable of fully respecting such wishes and expectations.

Dialogue is also necessary because we are historical beings and it characterises human life. We are aware, as never before, of our time-bound, gradual and progressive evolution and development in all aspects and spheres of our life, including the religious one. One might even say that the religions themselves have become conscious of their historically

conditioned development. They have ceased to lay claim to such former doctrines as "the full possession of truth" and "the only way to salvation". If the truth in its fullness is not a given historical factor, then all must set out on the way to seek the truth in humility. Dialogue is this way.

The necessity of dialogue also results from an important phenomenon which we call *globalisation*. Our earth has become a "global vil-



We are called upon to create an understanding between persons, nations and cultures.



lage", mainly due to the tremendous ease of international travel and instant communication across vast distances. For the first time in the history of humanity, all peoples share a common world history, and whatever happens in any part of the world affects everyone.

On the other hand, this fact has also created new problems. Today one constantly encounters people from other cultures and races, from other religions and ideological convictions. This existential and intellectual closeness has brought about a loss of identity and autonomous traditions. We are all called upon to create an understanding between persons, nations and cultures, respecting the innate dignity and freedom of each one. If there is one medium capable of accomplishing this task, it is dialogue.

Connected with globalisation is *pluralism*. It is only today that we are in a position to recognise the true nature of pluralism. This, too, makes dialogue necessary. Today pluralism, which in fact has always existed, is experienced as a value in itself. Until recently, one was not interested in tolerating pluralism. One justified this stance by applying the simplistic pattern of the principle of "Non-contradiction" that is to say: if there are diverse positions (ideologies, religions, etc.) they are to be thought of as alternatives contradicting each other. This obliges people to decide, which is *right* and which is *wrong*, because all convictions cannot be equally true as they have different concepts.

Today, such an "Either-Or" way of thinking in the area of theology and philosophy is considered as no longer valid. Religions can neither be considered contradictory alternatives, since their points of departure are generally different; nor can they even be compared with one another, as the convictions they represent do not stem from similar assumptions or prerequisites. Pluralism, then, must be accepted as the rich manifestation of an inexhaustible and boundless reality. Today, it is no longer a question of excluding and denying other people's opinions. A new urgency exists: to become acquainted with, and to accept the rich pluriformity of reality. Thus, dia-

logue has become the most needed instrument to restore and maintain peace and harmony within a highly pluralistic world.

In consequence, our understanding of truth has greatly changed. Truth could well be thought of as something *monolithic* like one single rock. However, it is our perception and comprehension of truth that is never complete or perfect. In Indian philosophy there exists a certain traditional concept of truth which could eventually meet our modern idea of truth in a pluralistic reality. In order to stimulate discussion, we would like to present some aspects of this Indian understanding of truth.



Symbols of World Religions.

For Indians, truth is a centre which the various religions and philosophies are trying to reach. Truth is not something that can be fully possessed at any definite time. As long as humans are limited creatures, living in time and space, their efforts at comprehending truth are comparable to a journey in the direction of the centre, where all the radii cross and meet. While fullness of truth really and truly exists at the centre, the various philosophies and religions are only on their way to this centre. Perhaps some of them have a longer way to travel to arrive at the centre than others. For this reason it would be more



correct to say that although all of them share in the Truth, certainly none of them is perfectly true. On the other hand, although all of them have deficiencies, it is equally certain that none of them is completely erroneous. Accordingly, religious truth is essentially a matter of dialectics. Whatever has been said about religion, there is always something more to be said; whatever has been asserted as *true*, must continually be corrected in its turn by a new assertion. In any case, it is always possible for everyone to develop and to make progress on the road to greater truth. Obviously, the path to be used to this end is dialogue.

What also needs to be mentioned here is the flood of information through electronic media and networks that is boundless. We be-

come more and more interconnected through networks of communication. This offers not only undreamed-of possibilities for global communication, but also for dangerous and manifold manipulation. The ceaseless advertising becomes the modern seducer. Needs are awakened, unmixed happiness is promised. There is place for everything in the unlimited competition, also for ideological and political propaganda as well as religious indoctrination.¹ A flood of information without any ethical norms overwhelms the people and influences their ideas of values, their attitudes and convictions. What counts is the profit and not truth. Therefore, this over-supply of information must be constantly examined, analysed and reflected in a critical dialogue with the media.

Revelation

15.

At this point, an important question arises: However correct it is to state that humanity is indeed finite and essentially incapable of grasping the full truth, what happens when God reveals Himself?

It is beyond all doubt that God can reveal Himself if He wishes to do so. This one question, however, brings in its train several other questions: What does revelation mean? Does it only mean truths that can be expressed in words, or also the experience of becoming aware of God's presence in us? Who could possibly possess the true Revelation of God, as more than one religion and tradition lay claim to being *the* revealed religion? How can we make sure, whether the recipients of a particular tradition have really understood and transmitted it faithfully without falsifying its message? Is not the transmission of God's revelation bound to become imperfect,

since the person who receives it and passes it on, is imperfect?

These and other questions become all the more significant when we become aware that we are historically conditioned creatures and that all religions and traditions have their own share of errors and imperfections. In addition, the positive social sciences, like psychology and sociology, have brought sufficiently to our attention the fact that each person and all human groups perceive the world and understand reality, and also revelation, with the help of concepts formed by, and available in, their own particular culture and situation. Thus once again the conclusion that we may draw is the same: even if there has been revelation - and of this we have no doubt - we are in need of dialogue with all cultures, traditions and religions in order to recognise it as fully as possible.

¹ Influence of thinking and acting under ever broadening elimination of the freedom of the individual.





Christianity and the Other Religions

2

The Church was not always a Church ready for dialogue. Indeed, we must even deplore the fact that in the course of history the Church has shown a great inability to pursue dialogue. Based on wrong theological concepts the Church has denied other religions their claim to be paths to salvation and often ignored or despised the religious traditions of the people to whom she had been sent. People were baptised forcibly and a one-sided Western form of Christian life was imposed on them.

How is it today? What concept of mission do we have today? How do the other religions understand their mission? We need to dialogue with them, in order to clarify these questions. We must come to a mutual understanding. Otherwise we must not be surprised, when other religions want to deny us Christians the access to their area.

What are the different theological trends which clearly show the self-image of the Church and her understanding of the other religions?



Pope John Paul II invited Leaders and Representatives of World Religions, different Churches and animists for a Day of Prayer for Peace to Assisi in 1986.

The Second Vatican Council

21

The Second Vatican Council (1965) marks an important change in the encounter of the Church with cultures and religions. Therefore, it is probably necessary first to deal with the teaching of the Council.

"As for the non-Christian religions, as far as I know it is the first time in the history of the Church that a Council has so solemnly laid down principles" (Cardinal Bea).

For the first time in history the Church has acknowledged her serious duty to enter into an honest dialogue with the other world religions.

In the following paragraphs some fundamentally important doctrinal statements made by the Second Vatican Council with reference to the other religions are given:

- The Council reaffirms the possibility and the universality of salvation (LG 16). *"God wills that all should be saved"* (1 Tim 2:4).
- No one can be saved, however, except through Christ. All salvation comes from Him (cf. Acts 4:12), Who is the perfect Revealer of the Father and the only Mediator between God and Man (1 Tim 2:5).



In Him and through Him is everything made (1Cor 8:6; Col 1:16) and His light is the light for all who come into this world (Jn1:9).

- The Council acknowledges that the non-Christian religions possess many positive values, such as truth, goodness, grace and holiness (Nostra aetate 2).
- Continuing in the spirit of the doctrine elaborated by the Fathers of the Church, the Council regards these positive values as a kind of hidden presence of God, as "Seeds of the Word" (AG 11) and the fruits of the Spirit. In a certain sense, these values are the preparation for the

Gospel (LG 16; AG 3), the path that leads to Christ, in Whom all things are united. Non-Christian religions attain their perfection in Christianity.

- Among other things, it is emphasised that the Church is "the general path to salvation" (Unitatis Reintegratio 3) and "the Universal Sacrament of Salvation" (LG 48).

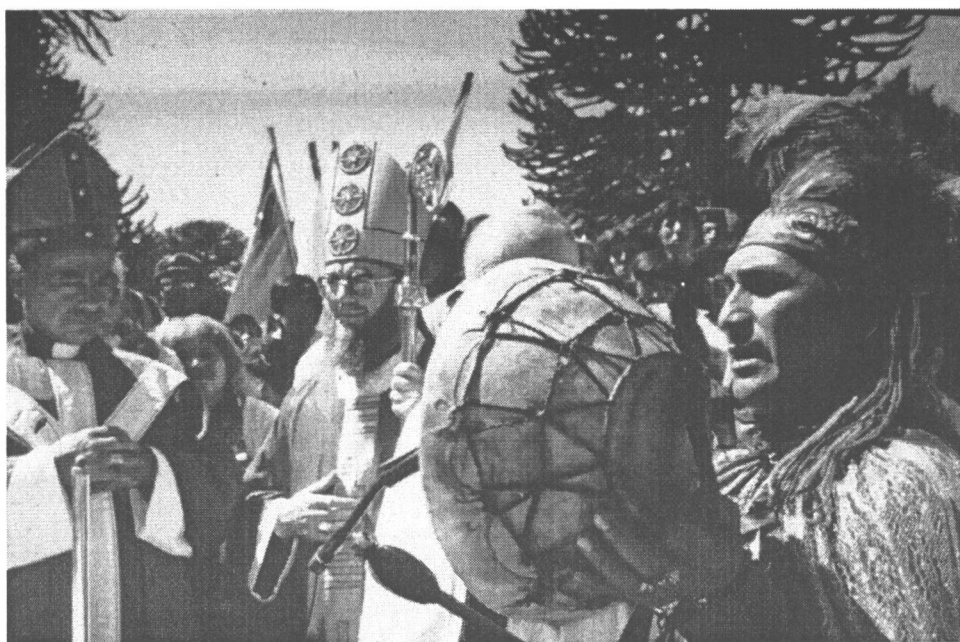
According to the teaching of the Council, other religions can be regarded as ways to Salvation in the Divine Plan of Salvation (LG 16). Compared to Christianity, however, the perfect and universal means of Salvation, they are but extraordinary and imperfect means.

After the Council

2.2.

It ought to be asked whether the statements of the Council don't fall short of the attitude of St. Francis towards another religion. For Christians who have practical contact with members of other religions in their daily lives, it has probably said too little, and certainly it has said too little for the members of other religions.

In practice, there will certainly have to be more of a venturing forward. New thoughts must be developed on this problem; perhaps bold hypotheses should even be advanced in the cause of truth. In any case, it can be asserted that in the Council the Church has given up its exaggerated ecclesio-centrism of the past.



High in the Andes, along the border of Chile and Argentina, in the land of the Mapuche-Indians: A bishop together with a Machi, a traditional Priest of the Mapuche. He sings the blessing accompanied by the rhythms of holy drums.

Having broken out of the self-made and narrow enclosures, the Church is now less concentrated upon herself and has turned receptively towards others. The new official opinion of the Church has advanced towards meeting the other religions to a considerable degree. With regard to the theological foundation of dialogue, however, there are still further steps to be taken.





Theological Tendencies

The recent theological tendencies move away from the ecclesiological positions of the past and are now concentrating on Christ above

all else. Specifically, they focus on the polarity between the universality of salvation and the uniqueness of Christ.

Dialectical Theology

3.1.

According to this version of theological thinking of Protestant origin, the specific revelation in Christ stands in an insurmountable contrast to all other religions. Revelation comes "from on high", from God, while all other religions are no more than strenuous human attempts, searching for God "from below". Consequently, Christianity is absolutely unique. It faces all other religions

dialectically and marks a radical break with all other human and religious traditions. Therefore a real dialogue with other religions is impossible. This so-called dialectical theology was expounded mainly by Karl Barth and also by Hendrik Kraemer. It was produced on European soil; no concrete experiences with other religions preceded it.

The Theology of Fulfilment

3.2.

In comparison with this "dialectic theology", the theology of fulfilment has a much more subtle and tolerant attitude towards other religions.

According to this theory, Christianity is the fulfilment of the other religions. It responds to the yearnings of the religious person which, in God's plan of salvation, find their expression in the various world religions.

In the theory of fulfilment, other religions already contain that for which they are seeking. In God's plan of salvation, they are ascribed a role or a definite positive value, because they are stages on the way to fulfilment. Every righteous religious person will be saved through Christ who has laid the "Seed of his Word" in their hearts.

That does not mean to say that the other religions lead to salvation in the same way as Christianity. Other religions have only a preparatory function in the Divine Plan. They are but "the preparation for the Gospel". They are destined to dissolve after the appearance of Christianity, which is their continuation and fulfilment.

This "theology of fulfilment" was very successful in India during the twenties and thirties of the 20th Century. Its protagonists developed it with an eye towards the dialogue between Hindus and Christians. The most well-known among them were John Nicol Farquhar and Pierre Johans.



On the part of Western theologians the "theory of fulfilment" has enjoyed great support; among others, Henry de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar. It was implicitly recognised by the Second Vatican Council in various docu-

ments, with reference to the theology of the Fathers of the Church on the "Seed of the Word", regarding Christianity as the crown and fulfilment of all religions in the world.

3.3. **The Theology of Anonymous Christianity**

The theology of fulfilment prepared the way for the "theory of Christ's presence in the religions of the world", also known as the "theory of anonymous Christianity".

This theology was also first developed in India, in the context of dialogue between the religions. Its representative is Raymond Panikkar. One of his books bears the very significant title: "The Hidden Christ of Hinduism". The views of R. Panikkar are shared by many Western theologians, for example by Karl Rahner and Robert Schlette.



Sacred Dance as an experience of God.

The basic thesis of this speculative theology is as follows: It is not enough to admit that the saving grace of Christ will reach every righteous person who seeks God. Salvific

value must also be ascribed to the universal religions in their capacity as institutions and as historical phenomena. Therefore, it is not sufficient to concede to the other religions merely the role of "a preparatory stage on the way to the Gospel", as the thesis of the "theory of fulfilment" maintains. It must be acknowledged, moreover, that these religions have had, and still have today, a genuine salvific function.

All are saved through Christ, but - and thus do the theologians of this new thesis define their position - these people are saved within the religions they confess and through them. Christ is still at work today, in a hidden way, in the religions of the world. A good Buddhist, just as a good Hindu, is an "anonymous Christian", and their religion can be designated as "anonymous Christianity" (K. Rahner). Their religion is, for those who confess it, a means of salvation.

According to this theory, therefore, individuals ought not to be separated from the religious community to which they belong. For the salvific grace of Jesus Christ does not reach them in their isolation but normally within their historical context, in their total socio-cultural situation, in their membership of a specific religion with its rites and practices. Human persons are religious within their religion. The "Seeds of the Word", referred to by the Council, were not simply planted in the depth of their hearts, but in the religious traditions they have inherited (cf. AG 11).

The following objection could be made against this theory: If the salvation of the individual is no longer at stake and the salvific value of the other religions is not denied, what importance can still be ascribed to the mis-



sionary commitment and activity of the Church? If it is sufficient, for a Buddhist, merely to be "a good Buddhist," and for a Hindu, to be "a good Hindu" why should the missionary still have the right to confuse such people who are acting in good faith and who are allowed to go on acting like that legitimately?

The answer is that the theology of anonymous Christianity does not throw doubt on the pre-eminence of Christianity or, rather, it does not doubt the advantage that Christians enjoy in comparison to adherents to other religions. Nor does it deny the legitimacy of a missionary commitment of the Church. The non-Christians do not know Christ, the person of Jesus of Nazareth; they do not know the Gospel. But they are saved in Christ, the "Sacrament of God's encounter with humanity". More precisely: they are saved "in the mystery of Christ". This mystery of Christ is present in other religions, although it is fully revealed only in Christianity by means of the Church. The experience of the mystery of Christ (which non-Christians possess in their own religion) is one thing; the full recognition of this mystery in Jesus of Nazareth is quite another: The first experience is a condition for salvation, while the second is the privilege of Christians. Or, as Schlette maintains, the path to salvation leads usually and ordinarily through membership in non-Christian religions, while Christianity represents the extraordinary and pre-eminent means of salvation.

However outrageously this affirmation may appear to many, statistically the theory of

Schlette is right. The mission of the Church consists, accordingly, in creating among adherents of other religions an awareness of what they already unknowingly possess, in order to facilitate the transition from an implicit experience of Christ to an explicit and complete recognition of this mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God.

This theology of the "presence of the mystery of Christ" in the religions of the world has proved useful in deepening our understanding of the inner relationship existing between the universality of salvation and the unique character of Christ's Redemption. Yet, it still produces a certain perplexity:

It does not do justice to the necessary link between the Cosmic Christ Who is "all in all", (1 Cor 15:28) and the Christ of history, in Whose name the Christians have been baptised.

In the light of this theory, *conversion* seems to be reduced to a form of transition from anonymity to an explicit acknowledgement, from a kind of *unveiling* of what up to then had been hidden, although present, in the other religions. In this sense, mission would be nothing more than a kind of awareness-building, making people conscious of what they have unconsciously been already.

If this is true, then where is the newness of God's revelation in Christ Jesus? According to Holy Scripture, - is conversion not rather a *metanoia*, an about-turn, a complete change, a new life, a real break with the past?

The Theology of the Logos-Christology

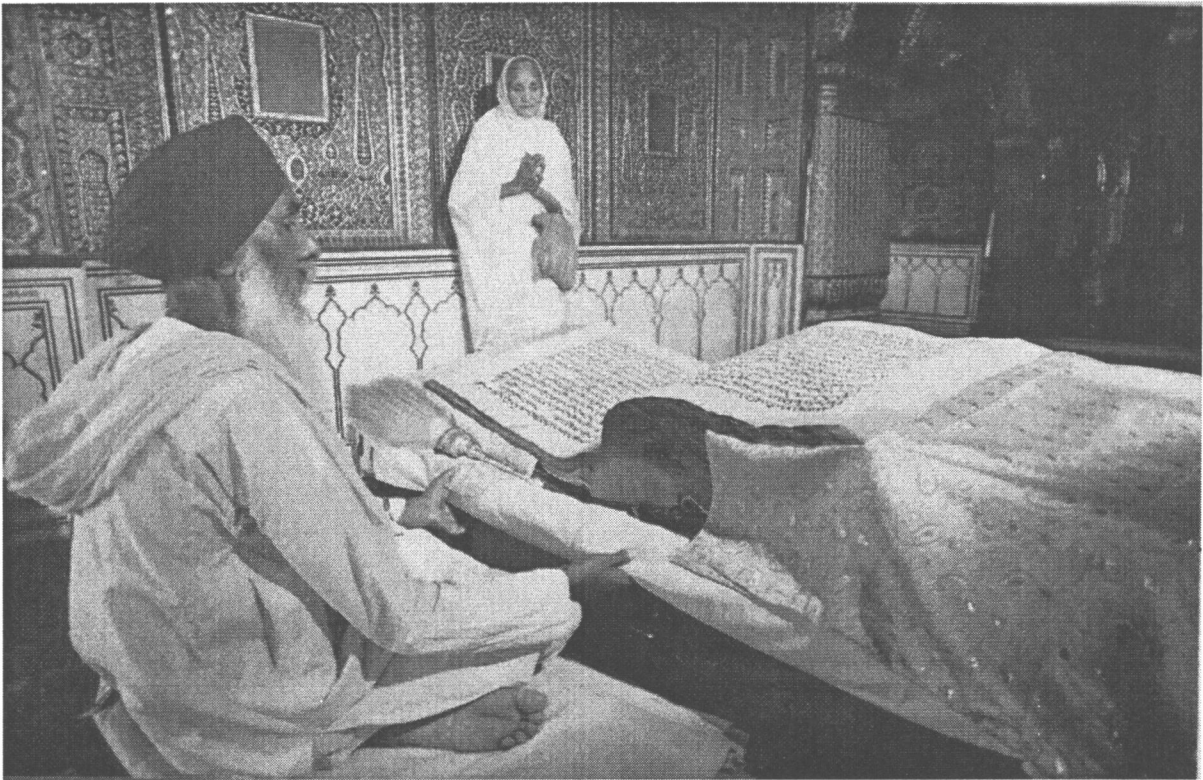
3.4

This theology adheres to the uniqueness of Christ, but it holds that Western Christianity has not yet fully grasped the implications of this uniqueness.

Logos-Christology, as it is represented by the Indian Anil Sequeira, starts from the interpre-

tation of Christ in the Fourth Gospel. John, while speaking of Christ, affirms not merely that He is the one Saviour and Mediator, but also something more and really totally unique: Christ is designated as Logos, i.e. the Word. The prologue of St. John describes Him





The Holy Book of Sikhism by Guru Granth Sahib.

in far more universal terms than we are normally used to. John speaks of Him as the Eternal Being, having an intimate relationship to God, being very active in the process of creation and then limiting Himself to the condition of a human being.

Everything that is comes into being through Him. Every becoming has its source in Him.

In this Cosmos, therefore, there is nothing which does not owe its *being* as well as its *becoming* to the eternal Logos. Everything that we know or understand, - be it about God and the human person, world and life, sorrow and blessedness, grace and salvation, - all truth and understanding, are all gifts of this Logos to humanity. The entire evolution and development, too, that we recognise today, are ultimately the gifts of the Logos.

Seen from this background, what are we to make of the statement that the Logos "*became flesh and dwelt amongst us*"? At least two things are evident:

- The Word, by reason of its Incarnation, came to submit Itself to limitations, historicity, and the conditions of this world.

Hence the incarnate Logos cannot be as universal as the eternal Logos; and accordingly does not exhaust the whole of reality and truth. For this reason, it is sensible that Christianity, in its historical guise, cease to claim fullness of truth and revelation. Like all other religions, it finds itself on the way to the Centre, to the eternal Logos.

- The fact that the Logos became incarnate must be for us a paradigm of our human religiosity. Just as Jesus became *the Christ* through His Death and Resurrection, so too all humanity, and indeed the whole cosmos - is destined to attain *Christification*, to become Christ-like.

This becoming Christ-like will be the true Salvation of humanity and of the universe itself (cf. Rom 8:18-23). For Salvation is not only a redemption *from* something, but also *for* something. We are saved for fullness of life in God, and not merely saved from sin. When we speak of Christ we mean this fullness of life in God. Therefore, one can say, that Christ represents the nature and goal of everything



that exists. It is a Christ that is still in the process of becoming. It is not yet perfected, as long as the whole world has not yet arrived at the fullness of Christ (cf. Col 1:15-20).

As a religion, even Christianity is called upon to undergo a *Christification* (becoming Christ), with the additional responsibility to under-

stand and to proclaim the mystery of "the whole Christ". This will be accomplished only when it has understood all the religions and traditions of this world in their relationship to the Logos. Therefore, dialogue, for Christianity, is not in any way a luxury, but an urgent necessity.



A Rabbi reading the Torah with students.

Dialogue in Daily Life

Normally, any dialogue between the religions takes place on the level of personal encounters and experiences rather than on the level of theoretical concepts, often ambiguous and

incomplete. An existentialist approach to dialogue is generally more easily accepted than any theoretical discussion, especially when such a dialogue has only just begun.

Dialogue on the social level

There is a common area where people can easily meet: in the sphere of social commitments and co-operation for the liberation and

the integral development of the human person. Dialogue among Christians and people of other faiths includes the sharing of pov-



erty and insecurity, the demand for justice and peace.

The option for the poor has become a matter of conscience for all people of good will, for all those who believe in God, whether they are Christians or not.

Co-operation in this area offers people an opportunity to deepen their own conviction and

to discover the demands of the option for the poor in their own faith. The Second Vatican Council urges us "to forget the past", "to protect and to further social justice, moral values, peace and freedom for all people" (NA 3, cf. AG 11, 12, 15, 21; GS 40, Ecclesiam Suam, in AAS 56, 1964, 655).

Meetings for Dialogue

42.

The dialogue of life also includes formal meetings, during which Christians and people of other faiths share their spiritual experiences. In India this has, in fact, been the most frequent form of dialogue between Hindus and Christians for the last thirty years. Hindus and Christians meet in small groups of 10 - 20 persons to exchange views on an agreed topic. They share their personal experiences with one another by asking, among other things:

- ◆ How do you pray?
- ◆ Have you discovered God? If yes, can you tell us how you have discovered God?
- ◆ Have you experienced suffering in your life? Has your religion helped you in such moments of sorrow?
- ◆ How is your love for your neighbour expressed?

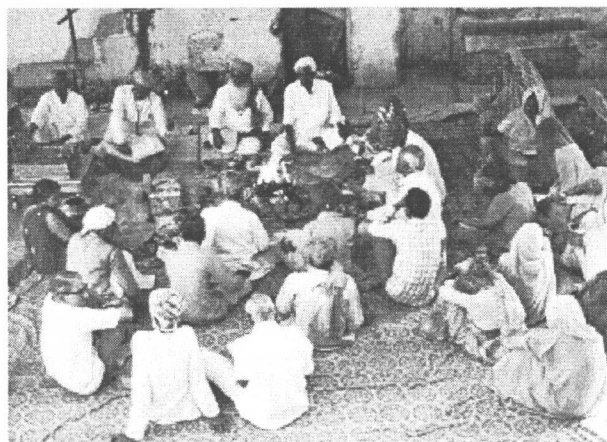
At the beginning, this kind of dialogue is not always easy. Success often depends on the skill of the moderator or facilitator. But experiments show that a personal exchange of views leading to mutual understanding among members of different religions is of great importance.

There are not always specific topics to be discussed. People may also meet in order to pray with one another, especially during vigils of great national or religious feasts. On such occasions, the surprising wealth of other traditions of prayer can be discovered and their spiritual depth appreciated. Communion of

hearts is most profound in common prayer, in the praise and worship of God. Then one discovers the other one as one's brother or sister, a son or daughter of God, no matter under which name God is being invoked.

Finally, there exist still other forms of dialogue, which are not so common, such as the *Satsangas* (extended meetings between Hindus and Christians) or the *live-ins* (i.e. encounters for prayer and sharing that take two or three days at a time).

In all these forms of dialogue Christians learn from adherents of other religions new ways of loving and worshipping God with their whole being. On the other hand, such Christians are given the opportunity to witness to Gospel values as they are being lived. (See also LU 16, Section 5).



A personal exchange of views leading to mutual understanding among members of different religions is of great importance.





Franciscan Dialogue

It is one of the main objectives of this *Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism* to promote dialogue:

- in our own ranks;
- in order to seek out opportunities for missionary co-operation within the whole Franciscan family in all its branches;
- through dialogue with the whole world outside the Order:
 - ◆◆◆ with the secularised world;
 - ◆◆◆ with the world of science and technology;
 - ◆◆◆ with politics and economy;
 - ◆◆◆ with the world of the poor, in their search for liberation, justice and peace;
 - ◆◆◆ with the different cultures and traditions;
 - ◆◆◆ with other religions.

Such a universal Franciscan dialogue is perfected in life and through the Word. It is supported by prayer and formation.



Franciscan dialogue is supported by prayer and formation.

It is easy to find a common denominator, therefore it will not be necessary to refer back to the various sources of Franciscan commitment to dialogue. However, a "*Decalogue of Rules for a Franciscan Dialogue*" may be helpful, composed of general principles especially apt to further dialogue with other religions.

Dialogue animated by prayer

5.1.

Dialogue with members of other religions is not simply an encounter at a human level. It is a gift from God. Therefore it must be rooted in prayer. Before Francis went to the Sultan he prayed for strength and confidence (cf. LMj XI:9). The encounter ended in a surprising manner, for the Sultan asked Francis: "*Pray for me, that God might reveal to me the Law and*

the Faith that is pleasing to him" (Jaques de Vitry). Francis' heart must have been filled with joy at that request. It certainly reminded him of his own experience at his first conversion when he too "*prayed to God to show him His path and to teach him to do His will*" (1C 6; L3C 10; cf. PrCr).

Subject to every human creature

5.2.

Franciscans should put themselves not only at the same level as the others, but even more

as *Minors* taking up a lower position than the others. In their encounter with members of



other religious faiths the brothers and sisters are *“to avoid quarrels and disputes and are to be*

subject to every human creature for God’s sake” (ER 16:6).

To be yourself

5.3.



Dialogue is an encounter between two or more persons or groups who want to understand one another. It is not only important where one meets, the role one fulfils, or the words one speaks, but above all, who one is.

Francis required of the friars who were engaged in dialogue with people of other religions to be honest and upright, *“bearing witness that they are Christians”* (ER 16).

To be among them

5.4.



“If any of the friars is inspired by God to go among the Saracens or other unbelievers...” (ER 16; LR 12). Francis used the expression *“among the Saracens or other unbelievers”*, and not *against*.

The Brothers and Sisters who enter into dialogue with people of other religions must *“live among them, with them”*, sharing their conditions of life.

To seize the initiative

5.5.



Francis did not wait for the Sultan to come to him. He went out to meet him. If we want to approach one another, it is our task to start the process. *“We must be the first”*, Paul VI warns

us, “to ask people for a conversation, and not wait for them to request an encounter with us” (ES in AAS 1964, 642).

To trust in the other

5.6.



We must trust others by conceding they are honest and upright in their own belief and have profound reason for having decided upon the religion they hold. Without trust and respect for people and their religious convictions, there can be no dialogue. Jacques de Vitry noted that, during the friars’ mis-

sion to the Orient, the Muslims liked to listen to the friars preaching about their faith in Jesus Christ, *“but as soon as the friars spoke about Mohammed and condemned him openly as a liar and a deceiver they were overwhelmed with blows from the Muslims and were driven out of the town”* (HO 32).

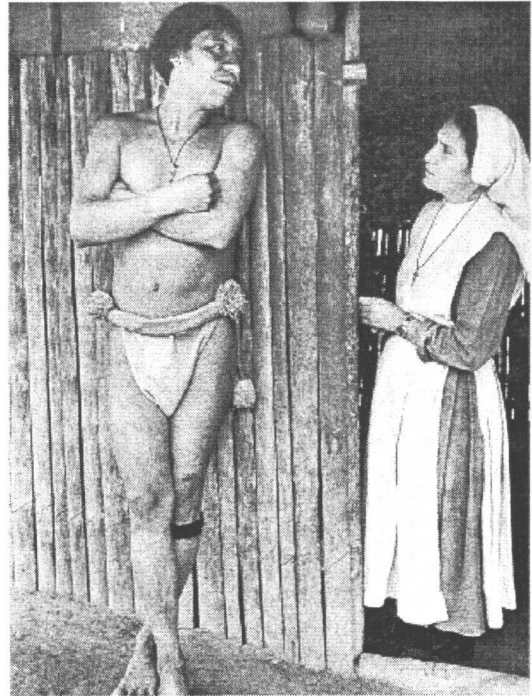


To share the Good News in word and deed

5.7

Francis distinguished between two forms of dialogue: dialogue in life and dialogue through words (ER 16). He preferred the first to the second: What impressed the Sultan most, was not Francis' convincing eloquence, but his way of life. "He was touched by his poverty and by his detachment from earthly things" (cf. LFl 24; LMj IX:8; 1C 57; Lesson 13).

*Without trust and respect for
people and their religious convictions,
there can be no dialogue.*



To work with one another

5.8

Following the example of Christ, Francis sent his friars two by two into different regions in order to preach peace to the people. (cf. 1C 29). He himself, accompanied by Brother

Illuminatus, went to the Sultan (cf. LMj IX:8). The spirit of co-operation and the feeling of fellowship and belonging to the same family is quite essential for Franciscan mission.

To understand rather than to be understood

5.9

In humility and in his readiness to listen, Francis learnt much from the Sultan. He was impressed by the reception he received and

by the zeal with which the Muslims prayed. On his part, the Sultan admired Francis and listened to him kindly (LMn III:9).

To be an instrument of peace

5.10

After Francis had preached peace to the Crusaders in vain, he went to the Sultan, not in order to fight him, but as an instrument of

peace and he experienced that the Sultan met him in the same attitude.



Church Documents and Franciscan Sources

Scripture	Jn 1:9; Acts 4:12; Rom 8:18-23; 1 Cor 8:6; 15:28; Col 1:15.20; 16; 1 Tim 2:4f.
Documents of the Church	AG 3; 11; 12; 15; 21; LG 11; 16; 48; NA 2; 3; GS 40; RM.
Franciscan Sources	PrCr; ER 16; LR 12; 1C 6; 29; 57; 82; L3C 10; LMj 9:8f.; LMn 3:9; LFI 24.
Inter-Franciscan Documents	
OFM, OFMConv, OFMConv	
Poor Clares	
Third Order Regular	
Secular Franciscans	
Supplements	

(Note: The references may be supplemented by the communities)

Exercises

D



Exercise

Questions:

1. Are there people of other religions in your country?
2. How many are there approximately?
3. What do you know about their faith, their feasts and rituals?
4. What direct contacts do you have with people of other faiths?



Exercise

Compare the "Decalogue of the Franciscan Dialogue" quoted in this lesson under 5.1.-10. with the following "Ten Commandments of Dialogue" by L. Swidler:

1. The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change oneself and to

grow in the perception and the understanding of reality and, as consequence, to act accordingly.

2. Dialogue between religions and between ideologies must be taken up as a double project, *within* the communities them-



selves and *between* the respective communities.

3. Each participant must enter upon the dialogue with complete sincerity and honesty. The reverse also holds true: each participant must presuppose the same sincerity and honesty in his/her partner in dialogue.
4. In any religious dialogue, we should never give in to the temptation to compare our ideals with the practices of our partners, but our ideals with their ideals, our practices with their practices.
5. Every participant, personally, has to explain and clearly define his/her own position. If any interpretation is necessary, because of language difficulties, the person whose words have been interpreted must be in a position to recognise himself/herself in the interpretation.
6. On beginning the dialogue, no participant may hold unchangeable assumptions.



Exercise

7. Dialogue can only take place between equals; "*par cum pari*", as it is expressed by the Second Vatican Council.
8. Dialogue can only take place on the basis of mutual trust.
9. Participants in an interreligious dialogue must possess a minimum of self-criticism in respect to their own religious or ideological traditions.
10. Finally, every participant must seek to experience "*from the inside*" the religious convictions of the partner.

Questions:

1. What similarities and differences do you recognise?
2. Do you know of Franciscan goals that are not expressed in this Decalogue and which could continue it?

3.

Tasks:

1. Try to communicate in words, either by sharing with the members of your community or in writing, the thoughts of *Logos-Christology* (see 3.4. above).
2. Let your partners in dialogue read this passage of the lesson unit and ask them whether they can recognise in it what you have said.

4.



Exercise

Read the following texts:

1. From the Secretariat for non-Christians: "*The Attitude of the Catholic Church to the*

Followers of other Religions - Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission", 1984:



No. 17: Among the numerous examples from the history of Christian mission, the guidelines which St. Francis gives his brothers are significant. In his Rule of 1221 he tells the brothers who 'by divine inspiration, want to go among the Saracens: They can live spiritually among them in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but, to be subject to every human creature for God's sake (1Pet 2:13) and to acknowledge that they are Christians. Another way is to proclaim the Word of God when they see that it pleases the Lord.'

The last century has experienced, how, in the world of Islam, Charles de Foucauld lived his mission in an attitude of humility and silence, united with God, in solidarity with the poor and in a spirit of universal brotherhood.

2. From "Redemptoris missio", Encyclical of John Paul II, 1990:

No. 29: Thus the Spirit 'who blows where he wills,' (Jn 3:8) who 'was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified' (AG 4), who 'has filled the world..., holds all things together and knows what is said' (Wis 1:7), leads us to broaden our vision so as to ponder his activity in every age and in every place. I have often called this fact to mind and it has guided me in my meetings with a wide variety of peoples (Dominum et vivificantem,

No. 53). The relationship of the Church with other religions is derived from a twofold respect: respect for the human race as it seeks answers to its profound questions regarding human life, and respect for the working of the Holy Spirit in the human heart (address to representatives of the non-Christian Religions in Madras, 5. February 1986: AAS 78/1986, 767). The interreligious assembly held at Assisi was meant to exclude any ambiguity and to confirm my belief that 'every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person (address to the Roman Curia, on 22. December 1986, 11: ASS 79/1987, 1989).

Questions:

1. What connection do you see between dialogue and mission?
2. Are there passages in the New Testament that describe such an attitude of dialogue?
3. How would you explain that after 800 years the Church adopts Francis' attitude towards other religions and makes it her own?

Applications

E



Applications

Arrange a group meeting among yourselves or with a group of people of another religion and practise the methods of dialogue, using the questions in the lesson, section 4.2.

Questions:

1. How do you pray?
2. Have you discovered God? If yes, can you tell us how you have discovered him?
3. Have you experienced suffering in your life? Has your religion helped you in such moments of sorrow?
4. How is your love for your neighbour expressed?





Application

2.

Read the following texts:

Dialogue with the cultures and religions of Asia:

Franciscan brothers and sisters in present-day Asia should ponder more on the 'good' and the 'bad' examples of their missionary predecessors. The example of understanding among the peoples given by John of Piano di Carpine as early as 1246 (see Lesson 8), has unfortunately remained almost unknown up to the present day, while, on the other hand, an error such as the one committed by Antonio Caballero, has never been completely atoned for by modern Franciscans. Apparently, we are still lagging behind.

In spite of our vocation, 'to be present in the midst of the people', we are still far too concentrated upon ourselves. We get caught up with feelings of our own superiority, this sad legacy of our past! It is the complex of people who imagine themselves to be the sole guardians of the Good News, with which we now present the 'heathen', those 'poor types' who 'knew nothing' until now. We behave like wealthy people, dispensing knowledge.

This attitude must change, but also the missionary method, so that we may at long last become capable of discovering and recognising in other religions and cultures the truth 'that has been hidden there since the beginning of time' (Eph 3:9).

Asian cultures and religions are very rich. The Catholic Church has not yet got to know them, has not yet understood them. If there is something we should defend, then it is exactly those cultural and religious values that testify to God's presence among his two billion Asian children. Time should no longer be lost worrying about irrelevant liturgical details - which supposedly do not conform enough to Western rituals - while so great a cause is at stake.

Franciscan brothers and sisters should form a vanguard in an eminently Franciscan, genuine and fraternal dialogue. Let us give up our defensive

attitude in order to build up, in humility and simplicity, the Church in Asia. This demands of us a continual conversion to God and to our Asian brothers and sisters (Sr. Grace Chu, FMM, Hong Kong; Ambrose Nguyen Van Si, OFM, Vietnam).

Developmental aid with missionary commitment in Sri Lanka:

I think that evangelising is in the first place the equivalent of an attempt to live the values of God's Kingdom among people, that is, to create brotherhood.

Injustice must be overcome, for it is impossible to lead a life worthy of human beings if not even the barest necessities of life are available.

In such a commitment for justice, hatred must never be the guiding impulse. We must remain brothers and sisters even in the midst of struggle. Inner fortitude must prevail over physical force.

In this sense we have tried to promote cultural values. The people should become aware of their Buddhist values, which could just as well be considered Christian values, such as: compassion, respect, understanding towards others.

We believe that we shall be able to bring Christ nearer to them by living these values among them, they as Buddhists, we as Christians, even if we do not speak openly of Christ to them (Sr. Marlene Perera, FMM, Sri Lanka).

Task:

What is your response to these statements?





Application

3.

Read the following contribution from India:

Whatever the differences among religions, the essential and basic elements are all seen to be common to them. Of primary significance: one dimension they are all invariably known to stress is the dimension of life beyond the material and physical and which to lay hold of means to enter the fullness of life. It is the dimension of the 'Holy,' and no matter how it is understood or represented, it is described as 'a pearl of great price' (Anil Sequeira OFM Cap, India).

Question and task:

1. What conceptions about life after death do you know from other world religions?
2. Seek out further elements that the world religions have in common.



Application

4.

The World Conference for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, in Seoul 1990, has made the following resolutions as the third concretion of the covenant between God and humanity:

We want "to deepen our biblical understanding of creation and revive old traditions (for example the patristic teaching on creation) and develop a new theological approach to an understanding of creation and of the position of humanity within creation. We are prepared to learn from the experiences of the indigenous peoples and from people of other religions and philosophies, as well as from the inherited knowledge of women; in our church communities we want to make room for a spirituality that acknowledges the sacramental character

of creation and questions consumerism" (Final document and other texts of the World Conference in Seoul, Republic of Korea, 5. - 12. March 1990, ÖRK Route de Ferney 150, CH-1211 Geneva 2).

Question and task:

1. Do you recognise in the thinking and acting of your community, your Church, any effects of the obligations of Seoul?
2. Formulate the obligations anew in accordance with the world-wide changes and needs that have developed since the World Conference Meeting in Seoul.





Application



“Healing the World - Religions for Peace”, this was the theme of the VI. Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) in 1994 in Rome/Riva del Garda. Read the following excerpts from the so-called “Riva Declaration” published by the conference:

We who have gathered are of different religions and different countries, we celebrate different traditions and are shaped by different cultures, yet we have all come with a common commitment to seek peace, to pursue justice, and to protect our environment and our future as embodied in our children. We are also committed to the development of a vision of common healing.

In this time of transition, as the world passes from the cold war to a new order yet uncertain, we race to keep up with events and technology. As ideologies collapse and relationships become more ambiguous, signs of brokenness abound. The encounter of richly diverse peoples, languages, religions, cultures and economic systems is providing impetus for a new world community. Yet, poverty, injustice, lack of access to resources, oppression, discrimination and violence continue to burden the lives of billions people. Amidst this, healing is evident, where, after long struggle, injustice is being

transformed to justice, oppression to freedom, discrimination to equity and violence to peace...

A vision of a world community with rights and responsibilities is taking shape. The human rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our society - women, children and minorities - are increasingly recognised. Yet discrimination persists in our world, indeed even in our religious communities. The sacredness of the earth and our unity with it are deeply felt in many places and remind us of our responsibility to act as stewards of this fragile ecosystem which nurtures us and sustains us. Yet the natural environment is devastated at unprecedented rates...

... The movement from division and brokenness involves a process of healing. Religious groups find inspiration and motivation for this ethical and social project in their own traditions. They must avoid the danger of becoming instruments of economic, social or political agendas, thus losing their spiritual-prophetic dynamism...

... Religions themselves need to be healed of any narrow fanaticism and exclusivism, precisely in the broader context of the Whole that transcends the limited experience of the group. Such healing releases the prophetic and spiritual dynamism of each religion for the transformation of society.

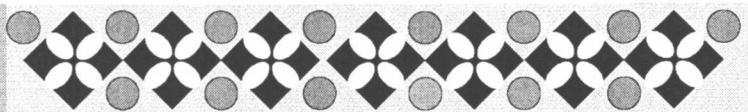
Questions:

1. What contribution does your religion and culture offer for the solution of the world-wide problems of humanity?
2. How can other religions contribute to this healing process?
3. What concret possibilities do you recognise in your surroundings, your region, your country, which enable you to cooperate with members of other religions in this healing process?



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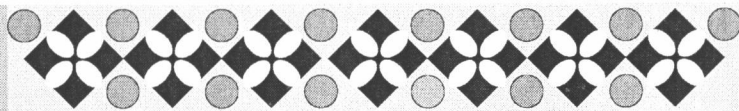
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