

OBJECTIVES AND OBLIGATION OF DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS*

Before becoming an action, dialogue is a contact; even before becoming a contact and in order to be a contact, dialogue is a **spirit**. Only then do we come to the practical event, dialogal action. As our old authors have often remarked, "we act according to what we are". Before having an effect on someone else, we must thus be ourselves; before giving out things or ideas or even giving our love, we must **be ourselves**. Moreover, even in meeting with someone, it is not the place where one happens to be, the office one is performing or the words one says, which constitute the essential; but in depth what one **is**, as a man, as a Christian. Before starting a dialogue, before even thinking of dialogue, one should evaluate and question whether he may be too frivolous, whether he has the necessary weight of humanness and of holiness. This is the first practical aspect.

Freedom, Responsibility, Competence

Being a man is a profession to be exercised with a certain seriousness of purpose; this effort must be exerted if we desire to possess those riches which will benefit others.

First of all man must establish himself as free. So many people in our age have been thrown off balance by external influence and feelings; so many people have been engulfed by their own social group, whose slogans bind them more strongly than the commandments of God; so many people think "like everybody else" and consider what is right and good to be merely what is repeated most frequently. But the free man, however, without denying his bonds with his own group nor what he owes to his traditions, conducts himself, first and above all, by the light which he has sought for a long time and reflected upon in his personal conscience. His conscience is for him that tribunal which will dictate to him his attitude on all essential points; it will guide

* In this article Prof. Masson, addressing the Christian World, exposes the Christian ideal for interreligious dialogue.

him to judge between right and wrong. The authentic man is lucid; he is honest; above all, he is **free**. Neither towards himself nor towards others, would he dream of using violence, or of violating conscience, or of lying, dissimulation, empty promises. His devotion to freedom makes of him a man of frankness and honour, acting and speaking with clarity. This need for clarity towards himself and towards others, must be emphasized from the outset. Misunderstandings, voluntary or involuntary, compromise, well or less-well-intentioned, could only in the long run produce increasing difficulties.

However, free, independent and sincere, the man who is true does not set himself in solitude. On the contrary, he knows and feels himself to be bound up with and responsible to others. Primarily of course he assumes the direction of his own person, but even in his most intimate attitude he realizes himself to be accountable to others; towards God who created him, God whom his own conduct reflects or caricatures and for whom he appears either as a homage or a blasphemy; he is accountable to men in whose eyes, whether he wants or not, he is a sign, for better or for worse. Claudel in his *Chemin de Croix* (*Way of the Cross*), warns every Christian to be attentive, for, he is a sign, and the image, though unworthy, of his Saviour. For this reason, bearing thus in himself the burden of his responsibility, he hides within himself a certain seriousness even in play or relaxation; he evokes around him a certain reflectiveness; his life invites his companions to a deeper understanding of their duties.

The first form of responsibility and service is to create around one an atmosphere of self-awareness, a sensitivity about one's own dignity. Handshaking, joking and jolly-comradeship are far from sufficient for this purpose. Free and responsible, the man who will later be the man of dialogue, must also, consequently, make himself and remain, **capable** of fulfilling his responsibilities. He must be able to assume the whole wonderful burden of the human condition: founding and educating a family; protecting and developing according to his own profession his city or state; provoking and strengthening the fraternity of man and souls. Competence from the very start, constancy until the end, real effectiveness throughout the length of daily tasks, this is the profession of being a man.

If someone does not sufficiently evaluate this responsible and competent freedom which constitutes the real **density** of being human, he would be poorly equipped for a dialogue, even a merely secular one. There can be true dialogue only between men who are valid and integrated.

As it is a question of religious dialogue we must immediately add to the necessity of being a man, the necessity of being a religious man as well, such as an authentic Christian, Hindu etc. Being a Christian is not what false ascetics have sometimes believed—denying or destroying one's duties, rights, human powers; on the contrary, it means consciously and firmly directing one's capacities and aspirations beyond what they can do or even normally expect.

The free man matures in the free Christian; the light of his freedom is the revelation of our divine filiation: If God be for us, who can do against us? The strength of a christian's freedom lies in the example and help of Christ, offered freely and entirely for salvation. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.

The responsible man matures in the responsible Christian; the view which he had of the world—on earth and at the present moment—is immensely broadened until it embraces the entirety of time and space. Everything belongs to you and you to Christ. He consciously inserts himself into the great universal movement of a redemption which one must not only receive but must assume and transmit ceaselessly to others; for, "how shall they hear if nobody calls to them..."? The capable man matures into a radiant Christian, filled with a power which is no longer merely his own but that of Christ, coming through his own powerfulness. "It is when I am weak that I am strong." One must necessarily be a new man, if one wants one day to evoke and sustain religious and Christian dialogue. First of all, one must be; only by being does one already justify the words of Pascal that there is nothing more virtuous than a Christian, nor more lovable.

Nothing more "virtuous," in the Latin meaning of the term, nothing more "virile," manly, more honest, stronger, fuller, more dynamic; and also consequently, nothing more "lovable"; attracting the interest (seeking) and desire of other human beings by one's radiating influence, by one's success at various levels—human and Christian. A success which will in the end make others say: We wish to be like you. In an age when there is a mania for showing off, a rage for agitation, let us say over again that the first practical necessity for dialogue, for each one of the participants, is to be, to situate oneself as a man and as a Christian. This is a long, slow, austere task.

Presence among Men

A second practical condition has to be added to this first necessity; it has already been hinted at above. The very being of

man must be thoroughly intense and dense; but in view of dialogue it is not fitting to be "in the depths of the desert". One must in addition exist, exist in the latin sense of the word, i.e. "to be" "or to stand towards the outside," manifesting oneself externally to others. Not showing off (pretending to be what one is not) would be a comedy, and perhaps hypocrisy; but to show oneself for what one is, without boasting pretensions and without fear, one should not only situate oneself as a man, in oneself and for oneself, but really place oneself next to the other in a concrete relationship of mutual perception, both physical and psychological.

1. Now immediately a question arises. Many Christians are certainly excellent people, some of them have exceptional values both natural and supernatural. But are they sufficiently close to other men, sufficiently involved in them?...Is not their situation sometimes one of partial or total separation? Are not Christian communities sometimes still closed ghettos with special customs reserved for themselves, perhaps leading an intensely spiritual life, but rather closed in upon themselves, and thus hardly noticed by non-Christians. Fr. Lubac in his book: *Paradox et Mystere de l'Eglise*, writes somewhat wistfully: "They assure me that the Church is universal, as open as the intelligence and charity of God...and I notice very often that its members by some kind of fatality, shrink timidly within themselves into closed groups just as human beings do everywhere". This is a serious failure which must be overcome.

As a necessary prelude to dialogue, one must exist for the other person, become a reality for him. This real existence as regards the other person is less frequent than one might think and, as in the Gospel story of the blind man, many men are for many other men merely "like trees walking" (Mk 8:24).

Undoubtedly the fast-moving modern world does make Christians and non-Christians exist in the eyes of each other. Sometimes both are found even in one and the same family, but the difference of belief cannot and should not prevent their mutual appreciation of each other. Furthermore, the common background of education imposes the same kind of existence on both Christians and others. The same is true with regard to professions, although very often men are gathered together only on a technical and official level. Similarly the tremendous progress in the world of transportation and housing has brought about an increased intermingling of various people who but for that would perhaps never have met each other. A similar phenomenon takes place in shopping centres, places of leisure and relaxation and

we know how many contacts—sometimes hardly desired or desirable—are offered by a sea-side and mountain resorts. Even amidst those cross-roads of suffering, huge hospitals are erected in our days, giving man an opportunity to care for others in their troubles, fears and weaknesses.

2. All the more is it necessary for vigilant Christian to seize these opportunities for existing with other men. Today men might find themselves thrown together for whole days, weeks, months and yet remain apart, separated by a chasm: introversion, selfishness, inattentiveness, even repulsion towards others. The human personality encloses an almost paradoxical movement: that of turning in upon its own self in order to make sure of itself and that of going out towards the other in order to communicate. The former should lead into the latter: the riches accumulated should overflow on to others. This is like a reflection of the act of creation which should be found again the inter-human communication. Remaining "non-existent" would ruin every possibility of progress for mankind.

3. We must be truly for the other. But how, what steps should be taken? Sometimes it would be the other man who himself takes the initiative to introduce himself, to become for us no longer some object which we ignore (something), but an interesting person, *somebody*. One can think of cases, fairly common these last years, of non-Christian religious leaders asking to be received by the Holy Father Pope and in fact being received; they are mainly Buddhists, particularly Japanese, but sometimes also, Muslims or Jews, all anxious to establish a personal relationship between their own culture and the Christian culture.

If we want to exist for the other it is for us Christians to promote the movement. In the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*¹ Paul VI warns us: *Oportet nos primi petamus cum hominibus colloquium neque expectemus dum alii ad colloquium nos vocant* (It behoves us to be the first to seek dialogue with men and we should not wait for others to call us to dialogue).

And the Pope himself has given the example by going out to encounter Judaism and Islam in the Holy Land, Hinduism and other religions of India, in Bombay and the whole world at the United Nations. This first step of actual presence is not the total goal; but in the eyes of the crowds it has considerable importance; it has made the Pope "exist" for these hundreds of millions of men for some years now.

1. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (Vatican: 1964), p. 642.

Each Christian, in his own humble degree, in his much more limited situation, should have the same goal and should take these first steps.

4. We have just spoken of the physical presence of Christians among non-Christians, in the interplay of modern collective structures; but this physical presence ought to become a conscious and methodical *human* presence. At this point, the other man becomes, as Fr. P. de Grandmaison used to say: "an ego, individual, who is living, knowing, willing and loving, who cannot without injustice, be treated as a mere thing; who cannot, without being lowered, consider himself such."² A fine ideal for encounter.

At first, we shall reach it by making the best possible use of the groupings mentioned above. Thus, in a pluralist family setting, the Christian members ought to be the best and most efficient parents for children. In a professional setting, Christians must show themselves to be the most honest, the most active and competent, and also the most loyal, friendly and serviceable: briefly, the most dedicated. In the setting of social or educational services, the special role of Christians will be to promote projects with disinterested devotedness, having visions of total progress [and not merely material progress, as the Decree, *Ad Gentes*, (no. 12)³ points out so well.] In situations of leisure or relaxation just as in those of rest or hospitalisation, certain moments of calmness or reflection will permit serious conversation, seeking mutual understanding and appreciation.

In short, every Christian in every given situation must appear, in the words of Chesterton, as a "superman," wholly involved in the great dreams of life.

5. It is all right to make use of a given situation in order to exist for the other but yet it is still better to seek to create such situations, thereby revealing one's self. In the hundreds of places where men of today meet, it will always be possible to sow the smile of Christian joy, to lend a good journal, or to slip in a word of introduction to our real selves and our faith.

In India and elsewhere, there are markets where the Church too has a shop for gramophone records, pictures, pamphlets, books...and useful conversations. It is well known how the Bible Society has dedicated millions of dollars to simply placing the text of Holy Scripture in hotel-rooms. In a certain number

2. *Le dogme chretien*, p. 292.

3. *Ad Gentes* is a Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Missionary Activity of the Church (Rome: December 7, 1965)

of towns, the Church has an "emergency telephone number" to be used by troubled souls; other cities have a welcome Centre with an "Open Door". Full use must be made of one's imagination to find out precisely what is appropriate. The Bishop of Liege lends a church to Muslims for various religious ceremonies. In this he is but imitating the Cardinal of Cologne. The Bishop of Vial Cabral in Angola invites Muslims to join in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima; and the Christians of Algeria write to the Muslims about to commence Ramada fast: "Our hearts are close to you."

Lally, the missionary of Japan, and Ulliana in Siam occasionally teach in Buddhist universities or convents; the Missiological Faculty of the Gregorian invites a Buddhist monk to expound his religion while the University of Cairo, the famous Al Azhar, calls to its rostrum Cardinal Koenig, who has- tens to accept. Presence, mutual presence, existence of one for the other in a concrete, living fashion. These forms of "inter- presence" can be the first step on the way to the good of mutual sharing or co-existence.

Co-existence

We pass on to a third and later practical stage of dialogue which we should denote by a single word: Co-Existence. Man cannot exist in himself alone; he must also exist for the other; then co-existence must be intensely lived, not a mere juxtaposition of Christians and non-Christians. To realise with all others a *convivium*, a real *convivenza* by mutual exchange is the essence of co-existence.

This living together is, moreover, the necessary destiny of man. We are by nature *with* others, we are *for* others; life is a "perpetual encounter of give-and-take" in the words of Senghor, President of Senegal. But how can we make this encounter succeed?

1. Its success depends above all on the dispositions of the participants. It might be completely ruined and reveal only discord, separation of hearts; then truly as J.P. Sartre remarked bitterly: "Hell is other people." It might indicate the unfruitful meeting of an open, dedicated soul with another soul still obstinately closed in; that is very painful. St. Augustine used to say that this confrontation of the "good" and the "bad" (to use his vocabulary) is the purgatory of the former which may lead to the conversion of the latter. An encounter may and should finally

flourish in peace and charity, when each one loyally gives credit and does justice to the other in all that he has, in all that he is. 2. But in ordinary life, **what have we in common with non-Christians?** What is the "human space" which we share? Where can we really **co-exist**? This space is situated at various levels which we might enumerate in ascending order.

a) There is first the level of "amusement" in the Pascalian sense; this flight outside oneself by which many people today seek to escape from their worries, their problems and responsibilities, this complete immersion of the person in the general mass, has become a fashion of our day. It is sometimes thought that the Christian and even priests have to follow their fellow-men in this very escapism, becoming superficial themselves with them and for them. Nothing is less true, nothing in fact, is more false. We must certainly go out and seek people where they actually are; the doctor must be with the sick, the brother with his wounded brother; and we have seen saints like Ignatius of Loyola playing dice with soldiers so as to make himself accepted by them. But it is quite useless for the doctor to catch the sickness, for the orderly to be wounded himself. This must never be forgotten.

b) Apart from this escapism which is a universal phenomenon in contemporary human life, one may describe the desire and effort to achieve "progress," particularly technical progress as another common factor which binds our life today. The Christian desirous of dialogue should not despise such a pre-occupation with progress. On the other hand, he should respect it, esteem it and positively foster it; he has a duty to promote the progress of people, as the last Encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, has reminded him. Still more must he contribute in giving to the idea of progress all its breadth and depth; it is his particular task and it is also his opportunity for dialogue: Technical planning is conditioned by a total view of man, by ethical and religious considerations of his nature, his aspirations and his destiny. These plans succeed finally only in so far as they refer to ultimate values in the name of which efforts, discipline and sacrifices may be demanded. It will be possible in certain cases to show to those with whom Christians work for the earthly cities (*cities charnelles*) that "they are the stuff of the City of God" according to the lines of Charles Peguy. We are explicitly invited to go forward starting from the common action recommended by the conciliar documents (A.G. no. 12) which call upon laymen to give witness by the consecration of the world (LG. 34).

c) Another dimension common to Christians and non-Christians at a much deeper level is the **problematic aspect of existence**. Addressing a non-Christian audience in Bombay, Paul VI said: "*Anche voi sentite l'insecurezza* (You too feel the insecurity)." And nobody contradicted him. These enigmas which surround us all and for whose solution all human efforts converge have been described in two conciliar documents. First, in a very broad manner in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (nn. 4-10), and then in a briefer and perhaps more striking way in the Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, on non-Christian religions:

What is man, what is the meaning and the aim of our life; where is the good, where is sin; what is the origin of pain and where does it end; which is the way to true happiness; what is the meaning of death, judgments, reward in another world; whence do we come, where are we going; this is the indescribable mystery which surrounds our life (N.E. no. 1).

On these basic problems we must have a reply. And the reply is made, (1) by our very being, by **facing** these problems in the light of a revelation freely accepted and generously lived, (2) by **existing** for others in the actual exercise of this fundamental option, (3) by **co-existing** with others in the spontaneous radiation of this same exercise.

These are occasions of essential living together, but one must also create new opportunities of living together especially with the spiritual and learned leaders of various religions.

It was with this end in view in 1951 and 1955 that the meetings were held of a Committee of Islamic-Christian cooperation of Bhandoun (Lebanon) at Alexandria (Egypt). It was in the same spirit that a Study-Week was held at Manila in 1962 under the auspices of UNESCO and Pax Romana on the difference between the great religions of the world and the actual lives of peoples. As the President declared: "It is not a question of arriving at syncretism but merely of giving the occasion for an exchange of views."

We might recall that in the year, on the 14th of January, under the inspiration of Cardinal Bea, there was an Assembly in Rome of leading personalities and students belonging to eighteen religions. Two years later, in Bombay, the encounter of the Pope with the representatives of the religions of India took place. This is but another hopeful sign of the times. Certainly Christians are not the only one pursuing this same objective. The World Council of Religions met in New Delhi in 1965 and at Paris in 1966. There the necessity of mutual

knowledge and collaboration was stressed. Rabbi Saul went so far as to demand a permanent organisation for contact and communication between different religions.

It is, therefore, important and urgent for Christians qualified spiritually and scientifically to be present at such meetings; it is even desirable that they organise such meetings themselves.

d) But perhaps the most favourable common ground at present for a coming together, leading later to dialogue, is reflection and effort towards peace. Anything that a Christian may do in this field will put him straight away in union with the whole non-Christian world.

Peace must be possessed and manifested first of all by the Christian in his own life. "Peace of Christ" is the certainty that God loves us and that "for those who love Him everything will finally turn out well." If Nietzsche reproached Christians for "looking as if they were not saved," every Christian who "looks saved", confident and peace-loving will constitute a point of attraction for the innumerable anxious people of our troubled age. And perhaps they will ask him to reveal to them the secret of this peace, so that they themselves can take advantage of it, so that the world may profit from it; and perhaps they will listen, with respect in any case, at times even with personal interest, to the assertion that "our peace is Christ Himself." The experience of the Pope at the United Nations authorizes such a hope. But let us take note: the world looks for peace only as the indispensable setting in which life may blossom out and flourish in security and joy. What man seeks is to live, and still more, to survive; this is why death is often for him the most brutal shock and the most urgent mystery. It was the wife of a Hindu seer more than 3000 years ago who exclaimed regarding the spectacular riches promised to her: "If now, sir, if this whole earth filled with wealth were mine, would I be immortal thereby?"⁴ The question of after-life remains a universal pre-occupation; it exists even for those who deny it in words. In this last problem, all of us are in communion; considered not as an instrument of terror but as a grave enigma, it can furnish a ground for common reflection for Christian and non-Christian alike. Still more must Christians, since they claim to have resolved the problem, manifest in their lives the assurance of their faith, the firmness of their hope, as people say, simply but correctly, that they believe in it.

4. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2. 4. 2. (tr. by Robert Ernest Hume, 2nd ed. Oxford : 1968, p. 98).

3. To briefly summarize this spirit of co-existence, men and women of future dialogue, fully grounded in their natural surroundings and acting upon them at every possible opportunity, should appear as the children of light, as witnesses of charity, as an authentic and vigorous ferment for the kingdom of God in the total leaven of humanity. Only in accordance with these necessary conditions will it be permissible and possible for them to realise effectively the next step in the dialogue, responding to a deeper requirement.

Opening up, Welcome, Offering Oneself

After "being in oneself," "existing for the other," "co-existing with and for the other," the fourth stage can now be described as putting a question to the other man or drawing him into a conversation. First through our life, then by word, we may offer the other a proposal or suggest an option which may finally lead to our faith in Christ. Such a question must not be avoided.

1. In the name of a misunderstood respect for conscience, false ideas may have been spread on this subject of witness; we must stress again that it is a matter of Christian witness. The Christian who shows himself capable and devoted to the service of his brothers is surely doing very useful work, often hard and sometimes heroic. However, even more is asked of him: in various ways and at all given circumstances, he must make of this service a witness to Christ before men. It is desirable that he should love his neighbour for the love of God and that, whenever possible, he be the radiant bearer of a mystery which is perceptible to the other and calls his attention.

As the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* notes (no.92), the mysterious sign which should radiate from Christians and thus initiate dialogue is that of *fraternity*. It is "fraternity which permits sincere dialogue and strengthens it," on the condition that it be expressed in effective deeds rather than in words or sentiments.

2. The opportunities for such a challenge may be very different. It is impossible to define exactly what opportunities will be furnished by the multiple circumstances of an individual life. Yet we might say something about the opportunities offered by organised public life.

a) Verbal witness may be expressed at congresses of religious studies, or at meetings of people of different religions:

b) Verbal witness may also resound, and even more widely although more anonymously, by the use of the means of social communication. We all know what can be done by these instruments of modern life, in which human expressions are preserved and transmitted. For five centuries, we have known the printed book; for more than three, the newspaper; in the past hundred years, we have acquired the record and cinema. All these means of communication can render an important service to the actual exponents of dialogue, for, a book, a record or a film can often serve as a link between the two parties and afford a starting-point for reflection and dialogue.

c) The combination of press and post has given rise to an initiative which apparently has good results for contact. We mean correspondence courses of religious studies. Their announcements in the newspapers bring in thousands of request for information which set in motion hundreds of serious contacts and deeper studies.

d) Communication is fostered at present by radio and television. In fact, it is almost impossible now for any observer or listener to remain at a distance from religious realities; they are present and are offered; they sometimes even provide the occasion for passionate arguments and violent contradictions. It is better to challenge at the risk of being contradicted than not to challenge and to fall certainly into oblivion.

Encounter, Co-existence

This dialogue brings to light a fifth requirement. Being, existing, co-existing, challenging. All these have been explained. The next step is "encounter": **true encounter** up to an advanced level of symbiosis. Encounter means perception of the other in the deepest level. In order to perceive, one must be "born again with" the other. One must also live the other person's process of thought and attitude, participate in its development and occasional inspirations.

1. Does not an increasing identification, even suggesting a symbiosis, find its maximum model and original strength in the union of men with Christ and afterwards with each other? Various aspects of such a transforming symbiosis, where the other is Christ Himself have been described by St. Paul in unique and striking terms. What is essentially necessary is conformity to the image of the Son (Rom 8:29). Then everything becomes

common: the members rejoice together (**congaudent**, Rom 12:26); they share their troubles together (1 Peter 4:13) in the common hope of collective glory (Rom 8:17). They all live the same drama of Christ; buried with Him (Col 2:12), they hope to rise with Him (Eph 2:6).

The Apostles appear with Him in the Shadows of His death as well as in the splendours of His Resurrection (Phil 3:10, 12). This progressive assimilation attains a supernatural identity which makes St. Peter say (2:1-4) that we share a Divine nature and St. Paul say (Eph 3:6) that humanity of Christians and non-Christians as well is "concorporeal", of the same body as of Christ the Saviour.

One must delve into this mystery if one wants to **really** understand all that is signified: "being," is symbiosis with another in every domain even the most profound is transformed. Symbiosis is a response to God's plan of fraternity and charity which results in mutual sharing, mutual communion, and mutual transformation.

2. Therefore, there is a need for deep assimilation; yet this leads to the practical and concrete forms of dialogue.

a) A symbiosis in dialogue necessitates a similarity of "life-style." The two differing parties must be very careful to conform themselves to the customs of their surroundings, to observe the rules of politeness, to adopt the manner of living, and to learn the language.

A missionary has written: "Japan is not desert in which you can act and move about and build in full liberty; it is a city already completely and perfectly built to which you must adapt yourself in order to live there." This observation is valid for every country. As we have just said, we must learn to speak a common language. How can we attain depth, intimacy, confidence if the two parties are ignorant of each other's language? Christians must make a more serious effort than previously to learn the languages of others.

b) Purely external conformity (dress, food, housing, and even manner of speaking) is less important than conformity of mentality and criteria of judgment. There is in every culture a particular way of looking at life, a special manner of adapting oneself to it, of reacting to it; it is sometimes called a "feeling," or "sense" of a particular vision of existence and its values. The two parties of the dialogue should aim reciprocally

at reaching and mutually acquiring this inner vision. This requires a fundamental humility which does not automatically presume one's own attitude as an absolute; it demands a sympathetic openness, so that one may be interested and impressed by the other's attitude; long periods of quiet listening to the other, a taste for inter-personal harmony. Obviously there can be no **dialogue at a cheap price**: Like every vital and authentic reality, dialogue is worth precisely what it costs.

c) Moreover, we should not only cultivate a common point of view for things; the parties should in addition **work together** on the actual state of things to effect improvements, and to foster progress. A practical focus must seek to heal all social ills: hunger, poverty, sickness, ignorance, and hatred—"You too, like us, are committed," said the Pope. This dialogue must be **true**; then it can go very far to the extent of building a common place of worship, say, for Christians and Muslims together.

Through this shared work itself, we will already be discovering and defending common values. But this discovery will be fully realised if it is preceded by methodical study. For this serious study and deep reflection is essential. Outstanding among the missionaries who have struggled with this problem of serious study and adaptation, are: Father Ricci in China and Father de Nobili in India. In the modern age, Father Johannes and Abbe Monchanin are notable for their work in India while Father Dournes has faced a similar task in Vietnam.

This study must not be enveloped by a quest for the exotic nor by any sustained sense of exaltation; these "artificial stimulants" would not last long. One can only persevere in such an effort by starting out with the most spiritual and, therefore, the most firm motives and resolutions; real fruit is only gathered after many years of slow growth.

Such a study demands rigorous standards of exactitude. How often has one seen generous Christian writers, in a misplaced desire for concord emphasize only similarities, while forgetting essential differences. This is a very bad tactic even from the point of view of the dialogue, for such concealed divergence will not fail to be revealed some day, and their discovery will be all the more painful because the parties will have been living for a long time in a deceptive well-being. **Only the truth makes us free**; only the "whole truth" taught by the divine Spirit makes

a durable foundation for reciprocal understanding. We must "know each other as we are known;" understand as one is understood, in mutual and complete lucidity. "For a fruitful dialogue, each one of us must understand the other. We desire to know you better", said Paul VI at Bombay. It is not necessary perhaps to say everything immediately; but, as soon and as far as possible, we should perceive and know everything about each other.

Dialogue: Recognizing and Respecting

How shall we realize this, how shall we consequently reach the stages of dialogue properly so-called?

1. The first phase is that of mutual information and exchange of information. Each one sets out precisely his own views; each learns from the other and teaches the other. This first activity has obvious advantages. It does not justify suspicions, but it disperses from the very start a whole host of misunderstandings, dissects stereotyped inexactitudes, reveals to each the complexity and the wealth of each other's positions, presents the positions with all the force of a reality actually lived. This same mutual discovery enriches the spiritual life of each with the treasures of the other's spiritual life. Numerous examples might be quoted: that of Gandhi recognizing the values of the Gospels and especially the Sermon on the Mount; reciprocally, that of Christians finding in the *Upanishads* or the *Dhammapada* formulae of wisdom, consonant with the Christian message yet expressed in a language new to them. Thus we have seen Catholics and Protestants joining together in India, at Kareli near Nagpur, in order to meditate, with and in the light of the Gospel, on passages of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavadgita*.

2. Naturally the sharing will result in a "putting together" of what we have in common: in studying together, in agreeing together, in reflecting together, in praying together. This stage presents more problems than some good souls imagine. It is often said for instance that the "Our Father" constitutes the ideal formula for inter-religious prayer, understandable and admissible by all. Now, we are very far from this.

The "Our Father" in its full meaning can only be said by Christians. The followers of Islam, who while admitting almost the whole text, must on reflection experience some difficulty

about the meaning of the word "Father." Whether it signifies the first Person of the Trinity or whether it indicates simply a paternal relationship with humanity; it implies a questionable tenet for the Muslim. For the Hindu, the formula can only appear "provisionally" exact; those who become perfect must go beyond any formula of prayer to find their identification with the Supreme.

Indeed, **Theravada Buddhists** question the very idea of prayer. Thus these religions can only join us in a reverential silence, in the face of this ultimate Mystery. As soon as one begins to speak, the religious attitude seems doomed either to indeterminateness or to divisiveness. We must never conceal from ourselves the existence of this serious problem.

3. This is perhaps why a third phase will be still clearer, more lasting, more true: Recognise and respect what is different between us. The words of Abbé Couturier: "The walls of separation do not reach right up to the sky" have sometimes been taken erroneously. They are exact from the eschatological, subjective point of view. No separation which is inculpable can prevail over the good intentions of a sincere and loyal conscience; therefore such a conscience ensures final salvation. The words are exact also from the subjective and objective points of view of the charity exercised: Mutual love can draw souls together, even when difference of opinion separate their minds. But from the point of view of the "truth," that truth of which the Truth itself is eternally the source and historically the revealer, the separations remain real, even between hearts which love each other. It is not a matter of indifference whether one accepts or refuses: the Trinity, the Fatherhood of God, the doctrines of Creation, Incarnation, Revelation, and Redemption. . . Even from the natural point of view, one should no longer abandon the principle of contradiction, the rules of logic, or the history of salvation. In the objective reality, false irenism has no place; no well-intentioned camouflage is of any value. Here we ought to cite a statement made by **Ad Gentes Divinitus** regarding ecumenism among Christians:

It is much more realistic and basically more sincere to know each other and knowingly appreciate each other as different. All exchange, all discussion and progress are conditioned by such sincerity.

Max Scheler said very justly: "Silence is proper to the person. Individuals can only be known if they reveal themselves." And

they only reveal themselves through love." It is true of God; it is true of ourselves, who are all His sons and have a part in his mystery. If they truly have love for men and love for what is true, the parties of the dialogue, Christian and non-Christian, doubtless will be in agreement not to present their position as their individual wealth of which they are the proprietors, not to consider it *my* truth or *your* truth. That truth remains always to be "understood" and to be lived in a continuous effort towards an inexhaustible ideal.

Nor shall we even be able to possess this Truth perfectly like an object; it is a truth which more and more will take possession of us, just as life conquers and takes possession of the living being. Truth is also life, the most profound life; like any life one cannot give it to oneself, but rather one receives it. It is the Spirit who gives it to men and who makes them capable of transmitting it to others in their turn.

Dialogue which does not reach this point remains below the level of its possibilities and obligations. But this last supreme phase cannot be taught; it lives by its own life, since it is life.

Conclusion

Perhaps it was expected that this article would set out a series of neat formulae to ensure the success of a well-organised dialogue. We might easily have drawn up such a catalogue, but we did not wish this. No doubt it will be admitted that we have provided a certain number of practical hints; yet we would consider them unreal if they are not based on fundamental requirements and universal attitudes of which they are only "variations," infinitely diverse and always to be revised.

On the other hand, the accumulation of the vast requirements for true dialogue, such as we have enumerated above, might at first sight discourage some. Our intention, however, is the exact opposite. For the dialogue of today as for the eternal colloquy with the Father to be realized later, "there are many mansions" and for each one of us the grace of the Lord "is preparing a place" suited to us.

Translated from French, by

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