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Which is the Bridge that unites us and gives Peace to the World?

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Building bridges

" Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. " (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, introduction, 4).

For its part, the Church wants to be a credible partner in society, rather than being relegated to the role of an authority, reduced to blessing or censuring. Indeed, the Church, in a constructive attitude of dialogue, would like to participate in the innumerable studies for purpose. The language of faith must, in fact, take account of this true social and cultural transformation (*ibidem*, *Gaudium et Spes*) in all of its forms of expression. For its part, the Observatory, "Faith and Culture" of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, is a place where culture today nourishes its dialogue with faith.

The Church calls on all its faithful to actively engage in interreligious dialogue. This dialogue between Christians and believers of other religions, in a certain sense, does not exist. Moreover, the personal character of all interreligious dialogue enables us to establish the fundamental principles of any dialogue and to measure the demands.

If we take a look at what has happened, and what happens in religious circles, especially in recent years, we find that an ever-increasing number of faithful of various religions have met, perhaps by chance, not only in distant countries, but also and especially in the Middle East and Europe.

Another observation prevails: thanks to Mass Media, it is impossible not to recognize that Christianity, although it remains the predominant religion in the West, is on the international level only a religion among others. Indeed, where

other religions have played the same role, Christian communities are only very small minorities.

It is in this context that the Church has become aware of the need to establish contacts in a cooperative manner with these various religions (cf. The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) . This policy of dialogue requires the adoption, at least, of some fundamental principles, which enables building bridges between peoples, no matter what religion they belong to.

1- Those who want to build bridges to engage in communication, or rather, in dialogue with others, must, first of all, ***have a deep and sincere respect for their interlocutor***, whoever they may be. It is absolutely necessary to recognize their right to be different. It is even necessary to be touched by this difference.

If it is true that we must let ourselves be challenged by others, it follows logically that we must be ready to challenge them. Failing to do so, would be lacking respect for others, which is the very foundation of dialogue. Indeed, where the two partners in a dialogue are not strong enough to question each other, we can wonder about the identity of their meeting.

That is why :

A) We are called to deeply respect the man who faces us and his religion. However, it must be admitted that in the context of interreligious dialogue, if one does not make an effort, as much as possible, to understand the religion of others, they can not truly respect that religion.

B) This respect must be theologically and anthropologically sound. A Christian must be able to explain to himself and explain to his Christian brothers and sisters, as well as to his interlocutors, why and how he can remain totally faithful to the Christian faith and yet have a profound respect for other religions.

2- Nothing that is true and holy in other religions must be rejected.
(Inculturation, Vatican II, Nostra Aetate, 2)

"Every Christian must regard with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects

from the ones the Church holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men." (Nostra Aetate, 2)

The Muslim and Jewish religions are, of course, not left out in Nostra Aetate. On the contrary, because of the special ties which bind them to the Church and which stem from the rooting of the three traditions in the Abrahamic faith and their attachment to the One God, the Council exhorts Christians, Muslims and Jews to make an effort to better understand each other.

In their reflections on interreligious dialogue, the Fathers of the Council themselves chose to speak of the perception among peoples "of the inherent hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events," that is of Traditional Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism. It would be good to ask the representatives of these different religions to give a brief overview of each of the religions mentioned above.

Conclusion: Interreligious dialogue is the vocation of Christianity.

In a panel discussion entitled Religions in Dialogue, professors of theology and history of religions at the Catholic Institute of Paris, analyzed the attitude of the great religions towards Christianity and that of Christianity towards those great religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and the religion of China). In their analysis of the word "dialogue", first of all, and then of the Church's involvement in this dialogue, these professors saw that this commitment was very often interpreted by those to whom the Church addressed itself, as a new and well disguised method of proselytism.

For us, it is incumbent upon us to make the interreligious reality be often perceived as the vocation of Christianity. Indeed, the urgency of this dialogue stems from the Christian vision of man, from the faith in Jesus Christ, the Word of God made man, and from the action of the Holy Spirit. Basically, the commitment to interreligious dialogue concerns Christians in a particular way. It belongs to their own vocation and must be integrated into their spiritual life. Christians should always remain humble before the mystery of Christ and ready to open themselves to the spiritual intuitions of others in order to be able to penetrate them better. When Christians genuinely engage in interreligious dialogue, this humility can radiate and become the best testimony of their real respect for the mystery of God and, of course, for that of man. In the light of this concept, we can certainly go so far as to say that engagement in interreligious dialogue is inseparable from the mission that every Christian receives at the moment of their baptism. The vocation

of the Christian, and therefore of every man, consists in building bridges between men to preach solidarity and spread peace through the love of the Creator of the world and of the neighbor, a citizen of planet Earth. Every man possesses, indeed, a depth which no one, except God, will ever be able to probe completely. To deny this would go against what makes the dignity of man in the Christian faith. Unfortunately, our daily relationships with others rarely reflect this reality.

The Church in Vatican II "exhorts all of her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men." (Nostra Aetate, 2). In his Encyclical, Redemptoris Missio, Saint Pope John Paul II, stresses the permanent value of the missionary precept, which springs from baptism, and says: " Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way. The contribution of the laity is indispensable in this area, for they "can favor the relations which ought to be established with the followers of various religions through their example in the situations in which they live and in their activities." Some of them also will be able to make a contribution through research and study. (Redemptoris missio, 57).

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