Spiritan Interreligious Dialogue Forum

Forum Spiritain de Dialogue Interreligieux
**Table of Contents**

vi  Foreword / Avant-Propos  
*John Fogarty, C.S.Sp.*

viii Editor’s Introduction / Introduction de l’éditeur  
*James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.*

1  Effective Interreligious Dialogue: the non-negotiable Need for Attention to Context  
*Dr. Marinus Chijioke Iwuchukwu*

16  Mission as a Dialogue between Communities and Religions: Experiences in Mombasa and Netherlands  
*Ms. Marielle Beusmans*

26  Interreligious Dialogue as a Peacebuilding Tool in Conflict Situations  
*William Headley, C.S.Sp.*

42  African Traditional Religion in the Context of Christian and Islamic Encounter  
*Innocent Nweke, C.S.Sp.*

48  L’engagement spiritain dans le dialogue interreligieux: un regard sur le chemin parcouru  
*Marc Botzung, C.S.Sp.*

57  Interreligious Dialogue in Zanzibar  
*Most Rev. Augustine Shao, C.S.Sp.*

64  Spiritan Interreligious Dialogue, Kenya: Conflict Management among the Wardei and Pokomo Communities  
*Peter Ndegwa Githui, C.S.Sp.*

70  Comment les religions sont instrumentalisées pour des buts militaro-politique en RCA  
*Olaf Derenthal, C.S.Sp.*

76  Un survol historique à rebours des courants islamiques présents au Cameroun  
*Juan Antonio Ayanz Otano, C.S.Sp.*

90  Spiritans Interreligious Dialogue, Nigeria North-West  
*Augustine Isah Katuka, C.S.Sp.*
On the Path of Interreligious Dialogue: Meeting the Mandjak People of Guinea-Bissau

Michel Gerlier, C.S.Sp.

Spiritan Interreligious Dialogue, Mauritania

Florian Pachel Mbabe Mobizi, C.S.Sp.

Le dialogue interreligieux à Maurice

Maximil Tambyapin, C.S.Sp.

Spiritans and Interreligious Dialogue in Pakistan

Jose Harivola Randrianfanakolona, C.S.Sp.

Spiritan Interreligious Dialogue, India


Dialogue interreligieux au Molenbeek-Centre, Bruxelles

Aurélian Saniko Teponnou, C.S.Sp.

Holistic Interreligious Dialogue in Mindanao, Philippines: Sowing the Seeds of lasting Peace in the Mountains of Iligan

Adam Bago, C.S.Sp., Mike Banós

Spiritan Ministry of Interreligious Dialogue / Le Ministere Spiritain de Dialogue Interreligieux
Bagamoyo, 2012, 1.11

Interreligious dialogue is among today’s greatest challenges.

Le dialogue interreligieux est un des défis majeurs de notre temps
Foreword

Founded in 1703 for the evangelization of the poor, the Spiritan Congregation considers inter-religious dialogue as integral to its mission in the contemporary world. Present in sixty countries around the globe, Spiritans live and minister in many different cultural and religious contexts where the encounter with different faith traditions offers unique opportunities for a dialogue of life, for mutual enrichment, for building bridges between people, and for collaborative grassroots initiatives towards the promotion of justice and the advancement of peace in society.

With the escalating violence today between the followers of different religions, often involving the systematic persecution of minority groups, the importance of interreligious dialogue takes on a new urgency. Pope Francis states unambiguously that “interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities” (Evangelii gaudium, no. 250). This dialogue, in the first place, is a conversation about human existence, a matter of being open to others, of accepting their difference, of sharing their joys and sorrows. “We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is, in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation” (ibid). In addition, interreligious dialogue has a vital contribution to make towards protecting our common home, defending the poor, and building networks of mutual respect and fraternity in a divided world (cf. Laudato Si, no. 201).

The articles in this present volume, published under the auspices of the Center for Spiritan Studies, Duquesne University, were first presented at an international forum on interreligious dialogue in Zanzibar in December 2018. This meeting brought together some fifteen Spiritans involved in inter-religious dialogue around the globe and a number of scholar practitioners with a view to sharing experiences, analyzing current approaches, identifying best practices, harnessing assets, and designing new strategies for presentation at the next general chapter of the Spiritan Congregation in Lichen, Poland, 2020. Written and compiled by Spiritans passionately committed to interreligious dialogue, I have no doubt that their insights, wisdom, and recommendations will be of interest to a much broader audience.

John Fogarty, C.S.Sp.
Superior General.
Avant-propos

Fondée en 1703 pour l’évangélisation des pauvres, la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit conçoit le dialogue interreligieux comme une composante de sa mission dans le monde contemporain.

Présents dans une soixantaine de pays à travers le monde, les Spiritains vivent et exercent leur ministère dans de nombreux contextes culturels et religieux distincts où la rencontre avec différentes traditions religieuses offre des opportunités uniques pour un dialogue de vie, pour un enrichissement mutuel, pour la construction de ponts entre les peuples, et pour des initiatives locales de collaboration favorisant justice et paix dans la société.

Avec l’escalade de la violence entre adeptes de différentes religions qui se traduit souvent par la persécution systématique de groupes minoritaires, le dialogue interreligieux revêt une importance nouvelle et devient de plus en plus urgent. Le Pape François affirme sans ambiguïté que « le dialogue interreligieux est une condition nécessaire à la paix dans le monde, et c’est donc un devoir pour les chrétiens et les autres communautés religieuses » (Evangeli gaudium, n° 250). Ce dialogue est avant tout une réflexion sur l’existence humaine, une expression d’ouverture aux autres, d’acceptation de leur différence, de partage de leurs joies et de leurs peines. « Il nous devient alors possible de faire équipe pour assumer notre responsabilité au service de la justice et de la paix, tâche qui devrait constituer le principe de base de tous nos échanges. Un dialogue qui recherche paix et justice sociales est, en soi, par delà toute perspective de simple pragmatisme, un engagement éthique qui engendre une nouvelle dynamique sociale » (ibid.). En outre, le dialogue interreligieux a une contribution vitale à apporter pour protéger notre maison commune, défendre les pauvres et construire des réseaux de respect mutuel et de fraternité dans un monde divisé (cf. Laudato si, n° 201).

Publiés sous les auspices du Center for Spiritan Studies (Centre d’Études Spiritaines) de l’Université Duquesne, les articles du présent volume ont été présentés pour la première fois à Zanzibar, au Forum International sur le Dialogue Interreligieux de décembre 2018.

Cette rencontre a réuni une quinzaine de Spiritains engagés de par le monde dans le dialogue interreligieux avec un certain nombre de spécialistes universitaires. Objectifs : un partage d’expériences, une analyse des approches les plus récentes, identifier les meilleures pratiques, retenir ce qui fonctionne le mieux et enfin concevoir des stratégies nouvelles à présenter en 2020 au prochain Chapitre Général de la Congrégation du St-Esprit à Lichen en Pologne.

Ces textes sont le fruit de l’engagement passionné de spiritains pour le dialogue interreligieux, et je n’ai aucun doute que leurs réflexions, suggestions et recommandations seront appréciées par un encore bien plus vaste parterre d’intéressés.

John Fogarty, C.S.Sp.
SUPÉRIEUR GÉNÉRAL.
Editor’s Introduction

In preparation for the 2020 General Chapter in Lichen, Poland, the superior general and his council organized a Spiritan Forum on Interreligious Dialogue. This met on the island of Zanzibar, 3–9 December, 2018.


The general council appointed resource persons, who also formed a listening committee and delivered position papers. They were:

- Marinus Iwuchukwu (head of the theology department of Duquesne University);
- Marc Botzung, C.S.Sp. (provincial superior of France);
- William Headley, C.S.Sp. (founding dean of the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego);
- Innocent Nweke, C.S.Sp. (lecturer in African Traditional Religion at the Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST) Nigeria; and
- Marielle Beusmans (a member of the mission animation team of the Dutch province) – Lay Spiritan.

Besides the three Spiritans and the Lay Spiritan who presented position papers, twelve other Spiritans, engaged in interreligious dialogue in various parts of the globe, were invited to also present situations on the ground.

- **North Africa**: Bertrand Mbella from Algeria – presented in powerpoint, text not available;
- **West Africa**: Juan Ayanz Otano from Cameroon; Florian Mababe Mohizi from Mauritania; Augustine Isah Katuka from Nigeria/NW
- **Central Africa**: Olaf Derenthal from Central African Republic; Chrislain Loubelo from Congo Brazzaville – text not available;
- **East Africa**: Peter Ndegwa Githui from Kenya;
- **Mauritius**: Maximil Tambyapin;
- **Europe**: Aurélien Saniko Teponnou from Brussels, Belgium;
- **India**: Jean-François Salomon;
- **Pakistan**: Jose Harivola Randrianjanakolona; and
- **Philippines**: Adam Bago.
Introduction de l’éditeur


Le Conseil Général a nommé des personnes-ressources, qui ont également formé un Comité d’Écoute lequel a présenté plusieurs rapports :

- Dr. Marinus Iwuchukwu (Chef du département de Théologie de l’Université Duquesne) ;
- Marc Botzung, C.S.Sp., (Supérieur provincial de France) ;
- William Headley, C.S.Sp., (Doyen fondateur de la Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies de l’Université de San Diego) ;
- Innocent Nweke, C.S.Sp., (Professeur en Religion Traditionnelle Africaine à la Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST), au Nigeria ;
- Marielle Beusmans, (Membre de l’Équipe d’Animation de Mission de la Province des Pays-Bas, Laïque Spiritaine.

Outre les trois spiritains et la Laïque Spiritaine qui ont présenté des rapports, douze autres spiritains engagés dans le dialogue interreligieux dans diverses parties du monde ont été invités à présenter également des situations de terrain.

- Afrique de Nord : Bertrand Mbella, Algérie, – a fait une présentation Powerpoint dont le texte n’est pas disponible;
- Afrique de l’Ouest : Juan Ayanz Otano, Cameroun ; Florian Mababe Mohizi, Mauritanie ; Augustine Isah Katuka, Nord-Ouest Nigéria.
- Afrique centrale : Olaf Derenthal, République d’Afrique Centrale ; Chrislain Loubelo, Congo Brazzaville – dont le texte n’est pas disponible;
- Afrique de l’Est : Peter Ndegwa Githui, Kenya;
- Île Maurice : Maximil Tambyapin ;
- Europe : Aurélien Saniko Teponnou, de Bruxelles, Belgique.
- Inde : Jean-François Salomon;
- Pakistan : Jose Harivola Randrianjanakolona ; et
- Philippines : Adam Bago.
Michel Gerlier (Guinea-Bissau) was not at the forum, though an English translation of his article on meeting the Mandjak people has been included.


The local Ordinary, Most Rev. Augustine Shao, C.S.Sp. (who also gave a paper), and the provincial superior of Tanzania, Very Rev. Fr. Philip Massawe, C.S.Sp, hosted the conference, with the help of Spiritans on the ground.

The papers are in the language of delivery, except for the Final Document of the Forum that appears in English and French. They are also published as delivered.

We are very grateful to the following whose generous grants have made possible this publication:

- Very Rev. Fr. Jeff Duaine, C.S.Sp., Provincial of the Province of the United States;

- Dr. Kristine L. Blair, Ph.D., Dean of the McAnulty College of Liberal Arts, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh

DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR SPIRITAN STUDIES
Michel Gerlier, (Guinée-Bissau), n’était pas au forum, cependant on a distribué une traduction anglaise de son article sur la rencontre avec le peuple Mandjak.


L’Ordinaire local, Mgr Augustine Shao, C.S.Sp., (qui a également donné un rapport), et le Supérieur Provincial de la Tanzanie, le Très Révérend P. Philip Massawe, C.S.Sp, ont accueilli la conférence, avec l’aide des spiritains sur le terrain.

Les rapports sont publiés dans la langue de livraison, à l’exception du document final du Forum qui paraît en anglais et en français. Les articles sont également publiés tels qu’ils, sont présentes.

Nous sommes très reconnaissants pour les subventions généreuses qui ont rendu possible cette publication, de la part du :

- Très révérend P. Jeff Duaime, C.S.Sp., Provincial de la Province des États-Unis;

- et du :

- Dr. Kristine L. Blair, Ph.D., doyenne du McAnulty College of Liberal Arts, Université Duquesne, Pittsburgh.

DIRECTEUR, CENTRE D’ÉTUDES SPIRITAINES
Spiritan Interreligious Dialogue Forum
—
Forum Spiritain de Dialogue Interreligieux
Effective Interreligious Dialogue:  
the non-negotiable need for Attention to Context

Dr. Marinus Chijioke Iwuchukwu, Ph.D. is Associate Professor and Chair of the Theology Department of Duquesne University. He was awarded his Ph.D. in 2008 from Marquette University, Milwaukee, USA, and joined Duquesne faculty. Dr. Iwuchukwu is Chair of the Duquesne University Consortium for Christian-Muslim Dialogue (CCMD).

Introduction

In a post-Vatican II world, we are obligated to approach our call to mission and evangelization and our entire Catholic theology from the prism of the spirit of Vatican II. We are already experiencing remarkable changes in both our encounter with other religions and the way we interpret them theologically. Vatican II gave us not just Nostra Aetate but also Gaudium et Spes and Dignitatis Humanae. Dignitatis Humanae not only mirrors the Universal Bill of Rights but it is also an official endorsement of the thoughts of John XXIII in Pacem in Terris where the pope argues for the protection of the religious rights of every person as well as the equality of all people both in the eyes of civil law and God. Of course, we know that Vatican II officially moved the Catholic Church from its exclusive theological stance to an inclusive religious and theological outlook in relation to other religions. Vatican II calls for a new sense of how to be a church in the society. One of the theological and practical ways to reflect a post-Vatican II Church is the growing emphasis and significance of interreligious dialogue. IRD’s importance is rooted not just in its significance to the globalized and pluralistic world but also to the church which finds herself in this new world order. Fast forward to today, Pope Francis in his Evangelii Gaudium calls all Christians to a new approach of ensuring the spread of the joy of the good news of Christ. In his appeal to all Christians he said, “I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come . . . It is
not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction’” (Evang. Gaudium, 2013, Nos. 1 and 15).

IRD Calls for a new Sense of How to be a Church in Today’s Society

Fifty plus years after Vatican II, it is critically important that you as the premier agents of the church in her work of mission and evangelization re-assess where you are and how best to both be effective evangelizers and mission agents today. I am proposing in this presentation that you give some thought and consideration to the theology of inclusive religious pluralism as an appropriate worldview necessary in this age for the spread of the Gospel and for more and better harmonious relationships with people of other faith traditions.

Despite the upswing of nationalism in Britain, the United States, India, and different parts of Europe, etc., today’s age does not patiently accommodate people who think themselves superior to others. Nor does it favor or accommodate isolationism. The world today is called a global village, not only because of the development of communication and technology that have shrunk the gap of geographical distance, but also because previous boundaries and silos of race, religion, ethnicity, class, and culture have been shattered significantly or at least punctured. Therefore, in this world of extended neighbors, we need to work intentionally for better human harmony and co-existence. Today, in the religious circle of our world, working on interreligious relations is a norm, hence the appreciation of IRD as an indispensable need for all religions of our world.

As mission agents, the words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:16 have far greater relevance and implication for you all. According to Paul, “For if I preach the gospel, I have no reason to boast, because I am compelled to preach—and woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” A Common English Bible translation of this scripture text reads, “If I preach the gospel, I have no reason to brag, since I’m obligated to do it. I’m in trouble if I don’t preach the gospel.” IRD is itself a healthy and acceptable way of proclaiming the good news, therefore an asset to all who like you must preach the gospel. It is your opportunity to share what is precious and amazing about Christianity and the reasons you are a devotee of Christ. Peter, the Apostle, admonishes Christians, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,” (1 Peter 3:15).

Looking at our world since the fifth century the political establishment of Christianity and the spread of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula, it is obvious that the issue of interreligious relations or dialogue poses more challenges to Christians and Muslims than others for the following reasons:

• their obsessive global mission of converting everyone to each of their faiths;
• the appeal and easy tendency toward theological exclusivism;
• their history of antagonism and even violence toward people of other religions;
• the fact that they are the two largest religions of the world.
Consequently, the focus of my address in this forum is how we, as Catholic Christians, are to promote better relationships with Muslims and forge effective IRD activities and programs with Muslims in our different communities or regions.

**Crucial Documents of the Church Necessary for IRD**

Standing where we are today historically, we are privileged that we have ample resources from the church to support and promote any efforts toward IRD. In the past centuries and decades, several Christians like Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, St. Francis of Assisi, Bartolomé de las Casas, Bartholomeo de Olmeido, Nicholas of Cusa, some of your own confrères etc. had no official support in their struggle against the dominant exclusive theology of Christianity that paid little or no respect to other religions.

We are better equipped today to engage freely in IRD because of the following documents of the church:

- *Ecclesiam Suam*, Encyclical on the Church, Pope Paul VI, 1964;
- *Nostra Aetate, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, Vatican II 1965;

To some degree, we can also appreciate the interest of *Laudato Si’* in IRD. Pope Francis in this Apostolic Exhortation seeks for collaboration with people of all religious faith traditions to address the environmental and ecological challenges of our world.

I recommend these resources to you as foundational and empowering resources, but not as exclusive resources. These documents serve as inspiration for us to evolve and explore other healthy ways to promote and advance IRD. Therefore, my proposal for the theological framework of inclusive religious pluralism is a theological *modus operandi* toward effective IRD. It is the theological underpinning that has extensively corroborated the standard doctrine of the Catholic Church about Christ as God, universal salvation, and the origin of religions in God.

**Why Context is Critically Important in IRD**

While it is necessary to consult with the resources provided by the church and insights of theologians as tools for effective IRD, these are often tools waiting to be implemented. The context in which the tools are implemented is of critical importance. Consequently, I urge you to use the days of this forum to explore how best in your different locations IRD can be achieved. Please bear in mind that an IRD approach that is outstanding in Pakistan may not
yield the same results in the Central African Republic, or an approach that may be fruitful in Algeria may not be effective in the United States.

As well as context, the history, culture, politics, social order, and religions of any context are also important. Consideration and review of these factors are of significant importance in IRD because what is excellently practicable in one context with its peculiar history, culture, religions, social order, and politics may be an abysmal failure in a different context with different experiences of the same factors. Not to stretch our imagination too far we can easily use examples in East Africa where we are located for this forum. The history, culture, social order, politics, religion, and context of Tanzania call for its unique approach to IRD (between Christians and Muslims) different from the IRD (between Christians and Muslims) in Belgium, Northern Nigeria, Central African Republic, Mauritius, Pakistan, Ethiopia, or France. Adapting IRD to context is so critical for the success of IRD that even within the same country, especially in less homogenous countries or regions, an approach that might be successful in one part will not be as successful in another. There are very good examples of such places in Africa, namely Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, the Central African Republic, and the Republic of Sudan, to name a few.

Theology of Inclusive Religious Pluralism

In the sub-discipline of the theology of religions, there are typically three different worldviews: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.¹ The recommendation of this study is for Christians to adopt a worldview of inclusive pluralism as the most effective worldview for promoting and advancing interreligious dialogue. Inclusive pluralism seeks a blend of the best of inclusivism and pluralism. It is recommended because it honors and highlights the commonalities of religions as well as appreciates their differences.² Adopting inclusive pluralism as a religious worldview puts Christians in the best position to harness the benefits of both inclusivism and pluralism, hence minimizing the reasons people reject either of the two standing alone as separate worldviews. Typically, inclusivism is criticized for being imperialistic and condescending toward the other, while pluralism is often rejected because it is likely to promote relativism.

The question of whether religious pluralism should be considered only as a de facto (a fact of life) or also as a de jure (in principle) reality has been central to the debate on religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. Many pluralist theologians like Jacques Dupuis, Peter Phan, Raimon Panikkar, Leonard Swidler, Hans Küng, Diana Eck, and Gerald O’Collins have strongly weighed in on the question of de jure religious pluralism. Being a theologically charged question, Dupuis responds to it with a thorough theological focus and insight. According to Dupuis (2001), the primary theological point that argues in favor of de jure religious pluralism is: “it is not human beings who have first set out in search of God through their history; rather God has set out first to approach them and to trace for them the ‘ways’ over which they may find him.”³ A scriptural support for his argument comes from the text of the letter to the Hebrews: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and varied ways”
Effective Interreligious Dialogue

(Heb. 1:1). Using this text Dupuis argues that the covenant in Jesus Christ is not the only means God has used to communicate with his people. He affirms what is a common truth in theological history, namely “God has made various covenants with humankind in history, before making a ‘new covenant’ with them in Jesus Christ.”

It is theologically consistent to argue that non-Christian religions are gifts of God to the peoples of the world, as it was God who initiated those covenants in the first place. Since these religions are products of God’s covenant with people in different cultures and at various times, the proper way to respond to the reality of religious pluralism in the world is to receive multiple religions “gratefully as a positive factor that at the same time attests to the sovereign generosity with which God has manifested himself in many ways to humankind and to the manifold response that human beings have made to God’s self-revelation in different cultures.”

We know that the church does not exhaust the Kingdom of God, since the Kingdom of God encompasses all and is open to all humanity, including those outside the boundaries of Christianity. O’Collins reminds us that in the New Testament scripture, “the incarnate, exalted, and omnipresent Christ was more or less equated with the Kingdom of God,” suggesting therefore, that Christ is as all-encompassing as the Kingdom of God. Our standard Christological theology holds that Christ and his Spirit are intrinsically part of the lives of all people of faith, even if we cannot empirically substantiate it.

For any Christian who has come to appreciate the theological significance of de jure religious pluralism, it becomes theologically in sync to contextualize the role of Christ and his divinity in the life and salvation of non-Christians. According to the Johannine account, Jesus said, “No one gets to the Father but through me” (John 14:6). How then is Christ to be conceived as being part of the religious fulfillment or eternal salvation of peoples of non-Christian faith traditions? It is normative in the Christian theological concept of mainline Christianity that Christ is the savior of all humankind, not only of Christians. The Second Vatican Council by its inclusive soteriology has already addressed and affirmed that people of non-Christian faith traditions do and will make it to heaven if they live godly lives, hence are beneficiaries of the same salvation Christians benefit by their faith orientation.

Inclusive religious pluralistic theology requires that Christians approach de jure religious pluralism with the mindset of inclusivity. O’Collins points out that “innumerable people are drawn to God through Jesus, even though they may remain unaware of this role of Jesus.” Further on, he alludes to the impact of Christ and the Spirit in the lives of people of other faith traditions when he wrote of “the personal presence and power of Jesus and the Spirit, a presence and power that shapes the lives of millions of people who may never in their lifetime become aware of this invisible influence.” At this juncture it is sufficient to say, that Dupuis and O’Collins hinge their concept of inclusive religious pluralism primarily on the person and mystery of Christ. Their inclusive approach comes from their Christological theology, which understands the christic event as universally applicable, of cosmic dimensions, and absolutely divine. These thoughts resonate with the “Cosmic Christ” of Pierre Teilhard de
Chardin and the “Universal Christophany” of Ramundo Panikkar. According to Panikkar (2004), “Christophany stands for a manifestation of Christ to human consciousness and includes both an experience of Christ and a critical reflection on that experience.”

The Christian understanding and theology of inclusive religious pluralism is not meant to demean or minimize the importance of other faith traditions. Rather it is a Christian way of affirming and validating the religious traditions of the other. It is similar to an African indigenous religious person’s appreciation of the one Christian God by relating it to their understanding of the Creator God. African indigenous religious people who reverence the importance of other faith traditions’ revered personalities convince themselves of the significance of such personalities by associating them with parallel ideas and personalities in their faith traditions. Therefore, inclusive religious pluralism for a Christian is a self-prescribed medication for validating the importance and significance of the living traditions of people of other faith traditions using a model or a parallel totally comprehensible to a Christian and drawn from a Christological theology. For the most part, inclusive pluralist theologians from the Christian tradition are not stating their position as an arrogant or smug attitude against people of other faith traditions but an honest demonstration of their appreciation and recognition of the value of people of other faith traditions.

Inclusive Religious Pluralism in the Bible

There are a number of texts in the Bible that suggest an appreciation or recognition of either religious pluralism or inclusive religious pluralism. Many of the biblical texts that allude to universal salvation can be understood theologically as inferring either religious pluralism or inclusive religious pluralism.

For a constructive appreciation of biblical texts with either religious pluralism or inclusive religious pluralism, it is critical and imperative to begin by referencing the same text used by Peter, as reported by Luke, to authenticate the experience of the apostles on the morning of the birth of Christianity, namely, Joel 2:28-29. According to that text, “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.” When Peter referenced that text as a scriptural support for the unique experience and expression of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles who had emerged from the Upper Room that morning, he was validating and authenticating the glossolalia experienced and witnessed to by all who were gathered that morning in Jerusalem. People who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Shavuot, came from different parts of the world of the time. The crowd consisted of people of diverse religious faith traditions, including Jews, proselytes to Judaism, Cretans, and Arabs. Peter was inferring that it is the same Spirit of God known to and appreciated by Judaism that was at work and impacting all present, both the audience and the apostles, regardless of people’s religious, cultural, or ethnic differences.
This scriptural reference from Joel, while pointing toward the restoration coming from God in the messianic age, also hints at the generosity of God pouring out God’s Spirit on all people, hence alluding to the inclusiveness of the same Spirit evident in the lives of all people regardless of their race, nationality, religion, and culture. Therefore, by extension, this text also reflects the Spirit’s presence in the religions of all people. Peter was not using the text with an understanding that his new community of faith supersedes or replaces the old or existing order of faith. It is rather an invitation to the Jews and non-Jews listening to be open to the fact that God is capable of richly and meaningfully impacting the lives of all people even against the expectations of men and women who hold the older order as normative and exclusive.

Prior to Peter’s speech on the morning of the birth of Christianity, Acts 2:1-13 gives an account of the beginning of Christianity through the experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at the Upper Room in Jerusalem. In an earlier publication, I argued, One of the highlights of that event based on age-old theological interpretation is its twist of typology with the Tower of Babel. In this case, the New Testament Pentecost is the event of the Tower of Babel coming full circle by a theological contrast. For while God multiplied human language in Genesis 11, the same God united human language in Acts 2. This time the unity or oneness is not expressed in human words, but as directed by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is not about producing one language for all people, but enabling speakers of all languages to understand simultaneously the one language of God through the Holy Spirit . . . The spirit simply demonstrated an inclusive pluralism, where all available human languages are honored and united in the Holy Spirit who addressed all people gathered through the apostles. The spirit becomes the agent of inclusive harmony in a pluralist forum.12

In the light of the manifest presence of the Spirit in Acts of Apostles as narrated by Luke, there are several other accounts of not only the pivotal role of the Spirit in the communities of Ephesus, Samaria, and Caesarea but also in the lives of non-Jewish and non-Christian individuals. Two such cases stand out, namely the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8:26-40, and the conversion of Cornelius and his household, Acts 10:1-11.

In the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch, O’Collins reminds us that this individual is “someone who is most probably a Gentile . . . and is more likely ‘a leap to the extreme . . .’”13 which is to suggest, as he reasons, being “an African and a eunuch, the Ethiopian is doubly an outsider.”14 The Ethiopian Eunuch does not fit into the mold of people considered as beneficiaries of such a rich encounter with God. Whatever became of the Ethiopian Eunuch after his encounter with Philip is a substantial topic for speculation, but it is quite instructive that the Lord found the devotion of this man acceptable and worthy of recognition, which necessitates the Lord sending an angel to instruct Philip about the man.15 The same Spirit or Lord
who has been responsible for stirring and directing the ministry of the apostolic church validated the spiritual quest of the Ethiopian Eunuch. The inclusive operation of the Spirit in the lives of all God’s people is significantly highlighted in the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch. The use of Philip (a Jew) by the Spirit to minister to the Ethiopian Eunuch’s spiritual needs further demonstrates the spiritual relationship of all God’s people, regardless of cultural, ethnic, and religious differences.

The event of the conversion of Cornelius and his household, Acts 10:1-48, significantly propelled the mission of the apostolic church to the Gentiles. We are once again presented with the activities of the angel of God and the Spirit concurrently in the lives of both a supposedly bona fide Jew, Peter and some Gentiles, the centurion (Cornelius) and his household. The same God who encountered Peter through a vision also interacted with the centurion. Therefore, the meeting of Peter with Cornelius and his household was scheduled and made possible by the same God and God’s Spirit. Peter was so bamboozled by the whole experience that he made one of his most inspiring statements: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35). This statement of itself is one of the clearest expressions of religious pluralism. It is a recognition that the same God indeed is at work in the lives of all men and women regardless of their different ethnicities, cultures, and religions.

A significant passage in Acts of Apostles that points toward inclusive religious pluralism is Paul’s address at the Areopagus in Athens, Acts 17:22-31. Here Paul had a unique opportunity to address some of the respected scholars of the time. In his address Paul shared his appreciation for the religious fervor of the people of the city, but especially lauded the similarity of religious beliefs or religious orientation, which he shares with the people of Athens in these words: “as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). While not dwelling on analyzing the rhetoric of Paul, which smacks of some arrogance and condescension, it is valid to appreciate the inclusiveness of Paul’s appreciation of Athenian religious devotion to the “unknown god.” Alan Race also alludes to Paul’s positive evaluation of the Athenians as an inclusive appreciation that both the Athenians and Christians are worshipping the same God.16

One of the texts of the gospels, which Christians down the centuries have used to justify an absolutely exclusive privilege toward salvation for Christians is John 14:6, which reads: “Jesus said to him (Thomas), ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” As I argued in an earlier publication,

A different but profound theological exegesis of the apparent totalizing and exclusivistic text of [John 14:6] is given by John Cobb, highlighting its inclusivist pluralist assumption. Cobb’s approach to this text is based on the Johannine prologue and the divine logos status of Christ. Cobb correlates this logos to the content of the text of Psalm 119:105 (“Your word is a lamp to my
feet and a light to my path”). Based on his argument he diffuses the seeming
tension presented in [John 14:6], “No one comes to the Father except through
me.” He argues, if we understand that the ‘me’ in question is the word of which
we read in the prologue, we need not see this assertion as denying access to
God to all who do not relate primarily to the historical Jesus. Since nothing
came into being except through the word, and since the word is the light of
understanding in all people, it is not surprising that we cannot come to God
apart from that word.17

This exegetical analysis by Cobb appropriately reflects an inclusivist pluralist assumption
because God’s Word is available to all God’s people and it is through God’s Word expressed
in different ways and languages through different religions that God both interacts and shapes
the lives of all people.

It is appropriate to conclude this theological analysis of selected biblical references to in-
clusive religious pluralism by highlighting the very poignant and relevant words of Jesus in
the priestly prayer found in John’s Gospel. According to John 17: 9-11 Jesus prayed, “All mine
are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in
the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in
your name all that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” This prayer of
Jesus for his apostles and all followers of God specifically requests “that they may be one as I
and the Father are one” (v. 11). Oneness here can be understood to imply the inclusiveness
Jesus recommends for all followers of God. Verses 20-21 also reads: “I ask not only on behalf
of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may
all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be [one] in us.” While
Christians have validly interpreted this text as a call for the unity of all Christians, it is also
theologically valid to see this text, in the light of Christocentric inclusive pluralism; an inclu-
sive pluralism, which appreciates a constitutive Christology, operative in the life of all seek-
ers of God and indeed all creatures of God.

Inclusive Religious Pluralism as an Asset in Pluralistic Contexts

Since context is of critical importance in the application of IRD, it is relevant to stress that
inclusive religious pluralism is an ideal theological mindset for non-homogenous contexts.
Many of you here today come from parts of the world where Catholicism or Christianity is
not the only religion. In fact, some of you come from parts of the world where Christianity
is a minority religion among other religions. For you, inclusive religious pluralism is an ideal
mindset to have in your interaction and relationship with people of other faith traditions.
Even if you come from countries like Portugal, Spain, Italy, the Philippines, or countries of
South America, you know that wishing that your communities would not accommodate other
religious tradition is a mirage. It is not only that we may never recover that world of
Christendom, but that we are going to further experience that people’s choice of faith will continue to get more complex and even more diversified. Many of you might already know that the number of Catholics or Christians with multiple religious identities is on the rise (that is definitely true here in Africa). In addition, the number of religions practiced today continues to increase.

Most of Africa has three dominant religions: Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous religions. For effective dialogue between Christians and people of different faith traditions to occur in Africa, it is imperative that Christians adopt an appropriate theological worldview that will accommodate and promote dialogue with these religions. Regardless of arguments to the contrary (which we may find in parts of the Middle East, Iran, Japan, China), societies today are normatively pluralistic—consisting of cultural, ideological, racial, and religious pluralisms.

It follows that we will simply be talking to ourselves if the opening line or the strong argument of our evangelization is to convince people that only baptized Christians are smart, live longer, go to heaven, live a happy or fulfilled life, or are wealthier. People are no longer easily convinced that only Christians are the so-called new “chosen people” of God. Or even to repeat the old worn refrain which claims that “only Christianity teaches you about the one true God.” Vatican II has already debunked all those claims. The question then is how do we appropriately relate with other religions in such a way that we do not act or speak condescendingly or arrogantly to or about them? This question is what inclusive religious pluralism substantively addresses.

Application of the Four Forms of Dialogue in Different Mission Contexts

Dialogue and Mission from the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions introduced the four different forms of dialogue, while Dialogue and Proclamation of 1991 further endorsed it. These documents remind us that IRD is not just about people coming together in a round table discussion about religious differences and commonalities. Interreligious dialogue entails more human activities and interactions. The four different forms of dialogue are:

- Dialogue of Life
- Dialogue of Action
- Dialogue of Theological Exchange
- Dialogue of Religious Experience

In your different contexts, it is important to not only recognize the viability and value of these forms but also to identify which ones are more successful. I will like to highlight the first two, dialogue of life and dialogue of action.

These two are powerful tools for integration because they bring people to bond more naturally and sustainably. The dialogue of life needs to be actively promoted and encouraged in every religiously diverse society and community. As we speak, there are parts of the world
where this is a major deal breaker and its absence makes peaceful co-existence for people of diverse religions difficult to achieve. I think of the situation in parts of France, Belgium, Northern Nigeria, Bosnia, Sarajevo, the Central African Republic, and the Republic of Sudan. Many communities in these different parts of the world need a significant measure of dialogue of life to heal and become more accommodating of religious and cultural differences.

If you explore the possibilities of the dialogue of action between a Catholic Church and an Islamic organization in the Gambia for instance, there is a high possibility of success given the history of Christian-Muslim relations in that country. I recommend that the Church can begin to explore how to work with Muslims to address a number of social needs, like running a co-op, running schools or health clinics, soup kitchens, shelter, etc. The first thing to do is to identify some of the common good needs of the community you have in mind, identify one that you think will attract the support of both Catholics and Muslims in the area and one you can collaborate effectively to serve the community’s needs. If it is a farming community, you can consider a co-op that provides agricultural services or materials to the community and have both a Catholic parish and a Muslim community collaborate to sponsor and run the coop. This will involve pooling both financial and human resources from both communities. The human resources can include both volunteers and paid officers from both communities.

**Conclusion**

Today, dialogue is not only an imperative for peaceful coexistence of the multiple religions that inhabit most cosmopolitan cities, it also provides the most creative way for mission success. Through the four forms of dialogue, the fundamental requirements for dialogue can be achieved, namely an honest and clear articulation of one’s faith and faith claims; respect for the faith claims of the other; genuine openness to differences of faiths; an embrace of commonalities and collaboration to promote a common vision and shared goals. These fundamentals of dialogue require that a Christian state her or his claims of faith and values of Christianity; the core ingredients in the proclamation of the Christian message. The message of Christianity will definitely highlight what St. Paul identifies as the gifts of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22). Therefore, through dialogue the core message of Christianity can be healthily preserved and passed on. However, in the spirit of dialogue, a Christian not only freely shares his cherished good news of faith, he is also amenable to receiving the messages from the faith-filled lives of people of other faith traditions he is in dialogue with. Every interlocutor engaged in inter-religious dialogue knows that one of the ends of dialogue is the openness of interlocutors to be converted to God, albeit dialogue is not actively designed for that end.18

The assumption in dialogue for people to seek to be converted to God recognizes that any conversion should be a voluntary and conscientious act from the individuals concerned as directed by the spirit of God. Therefore, a dialogue-driven mission of Christianity today should not only promote the most healthy, conscientious, and progressive conversion to Christianity,
but also enable the values and teachings of Christianity to have a more extensive reach and impact in the lives of people beyond those who nominally identify as Christians.

In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul states: “I was not called to baptize, I was called to preach the good news.” Paul is not denouncing the practice of baptism, but as you all fully recognize, he was clearly stating that the primary duty he has is to preach the good news. Therefore, our pre-occupation should be more about how faithful we are at spreading the good news and the impact of the good news on the lives of those who receive it than simply how many people sign up as members of our church.

Today, mission presupposes that the old political principles based on colonial, imperial, and neo-colonial control that superfluously privileged a Western cultured Christianity to spread across the world has crumbled, thanks to the more global influence of democracy, egalitarianism, dignity and the authenticity of all cultures and religions. In this new world order, the language of hate, demagoguery, supersessionism, demonizing of non-Christian religions, and fear should not only be unacceptable but also obsolete. People do not have to convert to a Christian church anymore because it is the only guaranteed access to Western education, provision of healthcare, improved quality of life, and job guarantee. Today responsible governments and civil organizations, including other religious agencies, and NGOs, should adequately and effectively provide those services and support. It should indeed be one of the goals of the church today to ensure that the government organizations that receive funds from the public for such services are truly held accountable to the people or the cause they serve. Therefore, enticing people to convert to Christianity needs to be much more refined and spiritual. Above all, Christian mission should no longer be exclusively measured by the mere numerical growth of Christians, but more importantly how widely the message and values of Christianity impact society and the people in society.

Many of you here can attest to what I am alluding to and calling for in your own mission situations. Let me demonstrate what I mean by using the example of the Gambia, where Christians are only about 4% of the total population of the country and Muslims constitute about ninety-five percent of the population. However, because of the impact of Christian education and other charitable mission activities, most Muslims in the Gambia have not only embraced many of the Christian ideals but also respected and appreciated their Christian neighbors. That was clearly manifested when the people of the Gambia voted Yahya Jammeh out of office after his attempt to declare the country an Islamic state.

If Christian values become globally observed, you as agents of mission and evangelization would have succeeded in setting up a global society guided by the norms and values of the Kingdom of God, where people will be guided by the same moral obligations stemming from the gospel as laid out in Matthew 25:35-40: “I was hungry, you fed me. I was thirsty, you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, you welcomed me. I was naked, you clothed me. I was sick, you took care of me. I was in prison, you visited me. As long as you did this to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me. Come you that are blessed by my father, share in the inheritance of the kingdom prepared for you before time began.”
Let me end with the words of Pope Francis in his first apostolic exhortation:

God’s word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mark 4:26-29). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.20
Endnotes

1. For more details about the three worldviews, see Marinus Iwuchukwu (2009), Media Ecology and Religious Pluralism, 83-86.
2. For more information about inclusive pluralism, see Marinus Iwuchukwu (2013). Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria, 161-166.
4. Ibid.
5. In addition to Jacques Dupuis’ significant advocacy for inclusive religious pluralism, Marinus Iwuchukwu, in his seminal work focuses extensively on advancing this theological assumption and argues strongly for Christians to adopt inclusive pluralist mentality in dialogic encounters with non-Christian religions. See Iwuchukwu (2010), Media Ecology and Religious Pluralism.
6. O’Collins, Salvation for All, 259.
7. LG, 16.
8. O’Collins, Salvation for All, 259
9. Ibid.
11. O’Collins appropriately argues that the positive appreciation of people of other religions received in biblical history are despite such people belonging to religions that were either unidentified or different from Judeo-Christian religions. See O’Collins, Salvation for All – God’s Other People, 54-58.
14. Ibid., 149.
15. The point in citing this episode by O’Collins and in this article is not to theologically extrapolate the content of the scripture text he was reading or even that he was reading a Hebrew scripture. The point is to underscore God’s recognition and appreciation of the spiritual efforts of this religious outsider.
17. See Iwuchukwu, Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria, 161-162. However, for more about religiously diverse interpretation of some Christian scriptural texts see John B. Cobb and Ward M. McAfee (eds), The Dialogue Comes of Age, 14ff. I profoundly apologize to my readers that in that previous publication there is a typographical error that repeatedly quotes John 14:16 instead of John 14:6.
18. Scholars like Peter Phan, Michael Fitzgerald, and Jacques Dupuis all refer to the conversion to God as the ultimate goal of interreligious dialogue. See Fitzgerald, Interfaith Dialogue; Phan, The Joy of Religious Pluralism, Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions; pp. 234f.
19. This paper is not calling for an end to all the great common good deeds Christian Churches have provided to different economically deprived or indigent communities. No, it is only asking that Christians refrain from using those as baits for conversion to Christianity or the catch for why people should convert to Christianity.


**References**


Mission as a Dialogue between Communities and Religions: Experiences in Mombasa and Netherlands

Marielle Beusmans is a Lay Spiritan in the Netherlands since 1991. She received a Masters in mission theology from the University of Theology and Pastoral Work, Heerlen (1991). Marielle has worked on women pastoral development programs in Same diocese, Tanzania (1991–1995) and from 2003 to 2007 was engaged in pastoral development among the Maasai of Tanzania. She became advisor in interreligious dialogue for religious leaders in Kenya (2008–2010). Marielle is part time member of the mission animation team of the Dutch province and serves as staff member/chaplain of Social Works in the diocese of Roermond, the Netherlands.

Mombasa, Kenya

I arrived in Mombasa just a few months after the elections in 2007. People were still in shock at the violence that had stricken the country after the results were announced. Mombasa was one of the places that had suffered a lot of violence. Soon I learned that Kenya is a melting pot of almost every sphere of life. The numerous ethnic groups, languages, cultures and religious persuasions make up a complex diversity in the society.

In November 2001, a dynamic organization called Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC) was established. Several years before the official start of CICC, religious leaders working in the Coast Province of Kenya came together to reflect on the increasing violence. The immediate cause was the terrorist attacks. In 1998, many people died in bomb blasts in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and of course, the effects of 9/11 threatened people worldwide.

Bishops of different denominations, sheikhs who are members of different Muslim organizations for Imams, and leaders of the Hindu community were convinced that the religious community had to act. The difference now was not to act as a particular church or Muslim organization but to put their strength together and to act as one. This unity is a prophetic sign and shows that religions have a positive role in society to promote peace.

CICC was aware that religious leaders can play a key role in the peace keeping process.
Religious leaders are aware of tensions in the communities and have often a long history of involvement in the societies they serve and are familiar with the context and history of conflicts. Because of their role in church or mosque, they have a moral and spiritual authority that helps them to diminish religious conflicts. In their preaching and teaching religious leaders can share ideas about peace, peace-building, justice and development in the communities and mobilize their followers for peace-building. Religious leaders are also in the position to challenge traditional perceptions and introduce new ways of thinking.

CICC received a grant from the Dutch NGO Mensen met een Missie in 2008 and was able to open a special department for interreligious dialogue. I was responsible for this department and I was supposed to train staff members and religious leaders. I experienced a hunger among religious leaders to share more about their faith and religion at a simple (not academic) level. I saw how faith connects people in a community and how it can promote peace. As an advisor of IRD and conflict transformation, I was given the task to build up that ability of staff and to make training materials available for religious leaders. I did this in various ways.

**TRAININGS AND RESEARCH**

Once a week I gave a training on IRD to my colleagues of CICC. The aim was to give them background information. For me it was even more important to have them talk together and to discuss what was important in their lives; what were their values and faith; what did they experience in their church or mosque etc.

In the first year, I was asked to investigate the understanding of interreligious dialogue among religious leaders. This field research (we chose to organise special workshops to do the research) was carried out in three pilot districts. Religious leaders discussed questions in small groups on the following subjects:

1. What is the link between the local culture and religion?
2. Which role does religion have in giving people an identity?
3. What caused the tension between Christians and Muslims?
4. Why do religious groups become involved in conflicts?
5. What have you learned from other religions?
6. What symbols and/or symbolic actions can be used in praying together?
7. How does the renewal/revival of certain churches affect your church/mosque?
8. Are issues of fundamentalism/extremism discussed in your own church?
9. How do you deal with people belonging to your church/mosque who switch to another religion?

The religious leaders sat together in mixed groups and they loved to discuss those questions. For most of them it was the first time to think and talk about these questions. I was happily surprised by the many answers. It was a sign that there was a need to talk together and a challenge for me to get them talking on relevant issues.
RESOURCE CENTRE AND MATERIALS
The CICC office had almost no material available and so I looked at the possibility of setting up a documentation centre as so many things were happening in Kenyan society at the time: the threat of terrorism, conflict, peace building, trauma healing, a new constitution and the place of Kadhi courts etc. The result was that a year later we had a small resource centre with information on IRD, peace, reconciliation, trauma, conflict management etc. I had bought books dealing with the East African context and written in practical and simple English.

On the internet a lot of information was available too. But many Kenyans—even most members of the board of CICC (bishops of different denominations and sheiks)—were without internet access. I decided to put relevant texts together in small readers. Each reader was dealing with a specific topic. All the board members got a reader and we had extra copies of the readers in the resource centre.

Readers

1. Early warning, timely response.
2. Religion and terrorism.
3. The ambivalence of the sacred; religion, violence, and reconciliation.
4. Religion, conflict and reconciliation; seeds of conflict in a haven of peace; religions view religions.
5. Towards a theology of conflict transformation.
6. Religion and politics.
8. Interreligious peace building; working for reconciliation.
10. Religious leaders treating trauma.

WRITING A BOOK ON INTERRELIGIOUS HARMONY
I had a practical dilemma. Our funds to conduct training sessions in villages was limited and my mission in Mombasa was for only two years. Therefore, I decided to write a simple book on how to improve interreligious dialogue at grass root level in the hope that when I was gone they would be able to continue on their own. In the book entitled, Towards Interreligious Harmony, theory meets praxis. The method in the book is based on the pedagogy of the oppressed from Paolo Freire. Everybody is a teacher and a learner. I had used this method also in Tanzania when I was working for the Catholic women’s movement in Same diocese and later on when I was working in Maasai communities. It is an excellent method to get people actively involved, to participate fully, and to talk. Instead of having long monologues, I used different ways to improve the sharing in small groups or in plenary sessions.

The book’s contents are as follows.
• Chapter 1: about the organization CICC.
• Chapter 2: the basics of IRD.
• Chapter 3: Results of a field research.
• Chapter 4: twenty-five exercises to promote IRD in the communities.

About the twenty-five exercises:

• some exercises deal with IRD and daily life experiences;
• other exercises help religious leaders to reflect on religion and religious concepts;
• there are a few exercises especially for young people;
• the final exercises contain case studies and stories requiring practical work.

All these exercises can be used as “intra-dialogue” in a religious community, church, or mosque. They can be used in meetings or workshops for religious leaders or other participants of different religious backgrounds. They can be used in specific groups, like a woman’s group or a youth group.

**TRAINING OF TRAINERS**

To write a book is one initiative. However, I wanted to be sure that the staff members, board members, and religious leaders at district level knew how to use the method and the exercises. Two special “Trainings for Trainers” were organized. I asked my former Maasai colleague to assist me in giving the workshops. The trainings were a great success. From the beginning, we had them involved in the method. This was new for them and a big challenge. Nevertheless, they did their very best when they had to present a new exercise from the book.

Many awareness workshops have taken place to train religious leaders about IRD. In one year alone, we had the participation of 44 senior clerics, 177 clerics at district level, and 810 clerics at local level.

I was happy that I succeeded in several ways to do something meaningful for the CICC organization and particularly for the religious leaders in the field. Unfortunately, I did not get funds to continue this work with Procmura (program for Christian Muslim relations in Africa) in Nairobi. So, I had to return to the Netherlands and to find another job.

**Roermond, Netherlands**

Soon I was asked to become a chaplain on social affairs in the diocese of Roermond with a special mandate for Catholic women organizations and farmers. Fortunately, we have a strong team with some very committed members. Financially we had to look for funds to get our work paid. The diocese pays the salaries of the (part time working) priests and not of the (two full time working) lay pastors! To get money you have to be aware of the interests of the NGO to whom you send your proposals and work plan. Therefore, my work field had changed
Marielle Beusmans

a bit. Together with my colleague, I also carry out programs for refugees and interreligious dialogue.

Networking at national level is also very important in our job. So we take part in national committees that have a link with our work. I was asked to become chairperson of the Advisory Board of Mission Activities of the NGO *Mensen met een Missie* (set up in 1931 by mission congregations in the Netherlands).

First of all, let me say something in general about the situation of interfaith dialogue in the Netherlands. As you know, the Netherlands is highly secularized, which has consequences for interfaith dialogue.

**THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN SOCIETY IN THE NETHERLANDS IN 2018**

Religiously radicalized groups and individuals who threaten the peaceful coexistence of people negatively influence the way in which society views religion. That is why dialogue is needed more than ever. Dialogue can be a sign of hope. Only the path of dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect can prepare us for the future. This is a challenge for the religious communities. It is problematic that when religion is mentioned, the media pays more attention to the potential for conflict than to the bridging potential of religions. For example, the media give more attention to a mosque that is set on fire than to a synagogue that opens its doors and says, “you are welcome here!” to Muslims whose mosques have been burned down.

*Dialogue is not an option, but a vital necessity*

The dignity of the human person is fundamental to interfaith dialogue. This human dignity applies to every human being and therefore includes relations with other people and communities. One of the first aims of interfaith dialogue is the promotion of a peaceful and harmonious coexistence. In this way, interfaith dialogue provides an important and direct service to society. I see a great tension between openness and identity. How can people preserve their own identity without cutting themselves off from the believers of another religion? How can people open up to the believers of another religion without losing their uniqueness /individuality?

In recent years, a great deal of attention has been paid to identity. Think of the following:

- the “Black Pete” discussion (the black help of Santa Claus);
- new political parties that are very focused on identity;
- the victim behavior of second generation migrant youngsters from Morocco.

*The Language of Religions*

In a society that is so searching for its self /identity, there is a need for people who have an understanding of inter-religiosity and who are able to talk about other religions from their own ideological point of view and can make a translation. Different religious traditions form different religious contexts, so there are different religious languages. The believers of different religions have, simply put, different experiences. Even if religions use the same categories, such
as God, love, peace or justice; these words will mean something else precisely because they derive their meaning from the particular religion in which they function.

Because of secularization, the younger generations are unaware of religion, its role in the past, its values and its rituals. Older generations are frustrated (including traumatized by the sexual abuse in churches) and negative and have turned away en masse from everything that has to do with church. They have detached themselves and “liberated” themselves from the straitjacket of religion.

**Interreligious dialogue in my work**

I have been a chaplain of social work in the diocese of Roermond since December 2010. I have been sent to attend pastoral work at women’s organizations and the farmers’ organization. Over the years, other social themes that have everything to do with justice and peace have also been taken up. We (the DKS team) are present in many places in society and the church and try to follow developments and trends in society. Our task is not to carry out practical tasks, but to raise awareness, mobilize and support people to take the initiative themselves, form networks and be present when another social organization organizes an activity in one of our fields. We are largely dependent on provincial subsidies and sponsors. This means much lobbying, submitting work plans, drawing up reports and sometimes taking up a work field that attracts sponsorship and that is also in the interest of the diocese!

**COOPERATION ON SOCIAL ACTION**

**Asylum Seekers Centre (AZC)**

There was a meeting at the end of December 2016 of participants from the government (who run the asylum seekers centre), churches, synagogue and mosque. It was made clear that during their stay in an AZC, asylum seekers would be provided with information about the Dutch Constitution, in particular “Article 1 on equal treatment.” Discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, political affiliation, race, gender or any other ground is not allowed.

**Training set up from an interreligious Perspective**

We took the initiative to provide special training (using the Paolo Freire method). In an interactive way, we had two good trainings with asylum seekers. Everyone had been touched by the mutual openness and the way in which so many personal experiences were shared. All listened attentively not only to customs practiced at a religious gathering, but also to believing customs in daily life. The training ended with a visit to a neighboring church and mosque. Everyone, Christian or Muslim, young or old, wanted to light a candle at the statue of Mary!

**Goody bags for Women in the Asylum Seekers Centre**

When the chairperson of Limburg’s largest women’s organisation finished her term she took the initiative to do something special for female refugees. She asked the members of the
women’s organisation to send in “pampering products” that could be given to refugee women in the AZCs’ in Limburg. We visited six asylum centres. Each visit was exciting and different. I made a power point with lots of pictures to explain more about our women’s organization. An interpreter translated everything into Arabic. The women were excited to hear that there were women groups in the villages. It can help the refugees to make contact with Dutch women when they have their residence permit.

**AWARENESS**

*Meetings between Dutch Women and People with a different Faith*

The director of the Limburg Refugee Council clearly explained the refugee situation, particularly their journey to get to Europe/Netherlands, and their stay in the different centres before they secure refugee status. His colleague, who fled Iraq sixteen years ago, told her story. It aroused many emotions among the women. In the afternoon, there was an opportunity to talk in small groups with one or two refugees who already spoke a little Dutch. Most of them are Muslims. The day ended with an inspiring prayer service. One day a group of twenty-two refugees was present. The day ended with a performance by the folk dance group. Such days were also organised for widows.

*Refugee Buddy*

Municipalities are already doing much to accommodate refugees. But to have them integrated in the community is more complicated. We set up the project called “Refugee buddy” in parishes. It is a very simple project. Dutch refugee buddies welcome refugees with a (temporary) status who have come to live in the municipality/parish. They help them to find their way in the village. Often practical help is needed to furnish a house and practice the Dutch language. We made flyers to recruit parishioners to become refugee buddies. We also trained the buddies in intercultural communication, prejudice, understanding Islam etc.

*Migrant Women’s Organization*

These women have experienced for themselves what it is like to find their way in the Netherlands as foreigners. It is a very mixed group of migrants and refugees, young and old. Everything was translated into Arabic and/or Turkish. It was great to see the involvement and resilience in these women’s groups. Some of them were buddies for refugees.

*Day of Judaism*

The Day of Judaism in the Netherlands was established a few years ago by the Dutch Bishops’ Conference. The aim was to strengthen the dialogue between Christians and Jews and to learn more about Judaism. I presented a paper in 2016 entitled, “The foreigner: threat, enrichment or left to themselves?” This was discussed from a biblical perspective and from a historical perspective.
Stop Radicalization
Radicalization is a sensitive issue. With this meeting, the organizers of a migrant organization want to create awareness. People from the local community, migrants who live in that community, and police officers discussed possible solutions to radicalization.

Iftar Meals
Iftar meals (the meal eaten by Muslims after sunset during Ramadan) were organised by the police for Muslims living in the asylum centre.

Council of Churches Roermond
A walk from a mosque to a church to mosque. In the Turkish mosque a guided tour was given and then a group of people walked to a Roman Catholic church where the diocesan priest from Latin America explained the history of the church building. The walk ended with a communal iftar meal at the Turkish mosque.

People with a Mission
This NGO is set up by religious institutes in the Netherlands for pastoral development. Projects deal with the social power of religion. Preference is given to projects dealing with justice, peace, reconciliation, inter-religious dialogue. MM is active in India, Philippines, South Sudan, Cameroon, Uganda, Bolivia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Congo, Burundi and Colombia.

A committee monitors the projects. I am the chairperson. We support the following projects.

Pakistan: working for a peaceful and inclusive society
In Pakistan, the influence of Islamic extremist groups has increased in recent decades. Violence, discrimination, and injustice against religious minorities and women are on the increase.

Indonesia: Bringing together women of different religions
At a special women’s school (supported by People with a Mission), women are trained to be open to other religions and lifestyles. In the first phase of the training, the women talk about each other’s faith, rituals and holy books.

Philippines: peace-building through mediation
This is how we are working for peace.

• Bringing together young people from different religious backgrounds in order to overcome prejudices and tensions between them;
• Development of information material for inter-religious peace-building;
• Support to victims of conflict, through aid and legal aid;
• Campaign and lobby for land rights for the Lumads in Mindanao.
Conclusions and Recommendations

My engagement in interfaith dialogue has been very diversified for the past ten years. I often used my creativity to combine experiences and ideas from elsewhere in order to create something new. Interreligious dialogue is an inescapable part of our time. Our society in the Netherlands treats religion, in particular Islam, with a certain negative sensitivity. I think interreligious dialogue is the best way to resolve tensions in our society and to prevent conflicts or separation.

The contribution of interfaith dialogue can be seen from the fact that:

- The world needs it.
- Religions are not there for their own sake, but for the sake of humankind and to serve it.

AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL, DIALOGUE CONtributes TO BETTER RELATIONS

We have to recognize that there is only one world and that we are meeting each other increasingly in that world. Relations between peoples, cultures, and religions are becoming increasingly direct, and the need for greater cooperation is essential. That is one way of preventing local conflicts from arising that lead to wars between people in their own country, region, or spreading further afield. Dialogue is not soft. The condition for a good dialogue is that difficult issues are not avoided.

Themes that could usefully bring up the dialogue between religions

- Care for creation. Care for the environment, for food and for plant animals and humans is not just a technical problem, nor can it be solved purely by means of technical solutions.
- Religion and tolerance. The trend in the Netherlands now is that tolerance is untouchable. In other words, I may express my freedom, even if I insult the other person with it!
- Religion and citizenship. Interfaith dialogue can make an important contribution to a positive connection between religion and citizenship.
  - Church/mosque members are involved with others (financial: giving money to the poor; commitment: voluntary work);
  - Church/mosque people: talk to each other/ debate/forum.
- Religion and upbringing. How do we make a future generation sensitive to the values of humanity and holiness of life? The transmission of values has changed radically in our society under the influence of secularisation, which calls for a reorientation and mutual exchange.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Basic

• Our pastoral ministry should not only focus on liturgy and sacraments. It is also about serving (*diakonia*) and community building to/for all.
• Make time/staff available for it.

Networks

• Work together with representatives of other religions/religious movements. Get an approval by the highest representatives. Next, start with those who are like-minded.
• Form a network of religious leaders of different religions/denominations. Have regular consultations and work together in an emergency situation.

To the community

• See how you can make a certain topic open for discussion by a target group. Make use of different methods (creative, active, theoretical, etc.). Discuss a theme that evokes little aversion but in which you can still get your message across:
  – Peace work: conflict transformation
  – Resilience: against radicalization
  – Celebrating together: interreligious dialogue
• See how to involve schools (basic/medium level).
• Visit each other’s prayer houses and have an exchange moment: what each one believes, how do they express what they believe, what they are proud of etc.
Interreligious Dialogue as a Peacebuilding Tool in Conflict Situations

Fr. William Headley, C.S.Sp., Ph.D., is a sociologist and counselor. Bill was the Major Superior (1979-85) of the USA-Eastern Province. He was the first President of the Africa Faith and Justice Network/USA and was instrumental in starting the Washington Office on Haiti. Bill was appointed the first Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation coordinator in the Congregation (1987–92). He established a graduate program in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies at Duquesne University (1993–2000) and has worked with Catholic Relief Services at executive level (2000–07). In 2007, Bill became the founding dean of the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego from where he gives leadership to the Catholic Peacebuilding Network’s (CPN) efforts to engage the church in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa.

Precis

This work begins with what I know best, that is, interreligious peacebuilding. Then, I will bring into the discussion interreligious dialogue as an aid or tool in furthering peacebuilding. Realizing that our group leans toward practitioner-scholars rather than its converse, the last segment of the paper will focus on our shared practice of interreligious dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding. I will conclude with some signs of hope.

Introduction

In starting a School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego, California in 2007, I spent a great deal of time making presentations about the new School. Included were remarks about why we even need an emerging new discipline of peace studies. Then, I went a step further noting that making peace is everyone’s business. I would note on these occasions that peacebuilding is too important to leave to ministers of state, diplomats, and UN officials.

For fellow Spiritans in this forum, I argue this point more specifically by saying that there
is a special urgency for religious actors to include peacebuilding as part of their ministry. One of my stock phrases on this topic is a bit sharper and goes, “Peacebuilding is too important to leave only to those in high office who sign peace accords on mahogany tables. If that were the case, most common people in conflicted environments would not experience peace.” Yes, when it comes to making peace, we need trained peacebuilders as well as politicians and diplomats. We must go even further. Advancing peace is the task of virtually everyone regardless of his/her status in society. We saw this recently and powerfully illustrated in the awarding of Nobel prizes (October 5, 2018) to people addressing the evil of sexual assault as a weapon of war.

Nadia Murad was an ISIS State (IS) enslaved rape victim turned activist. I don’t want to get ahead of my more nuanced message about the integration of interreligious peacebuilding and interreligious dialogue. Still, Ms. Murad stands as too obvious an example of personal involvement of “ordinary people” in peacebuilding. She spoke out not only for herself but also for her Yazidi people, a religious minority persecuted by IS militants in Iraq. In 2016, Ms. Murad became the UN’s first Ambassador of Goodwill for the Survivors of Human Trafficking.

Dr. Denis Mukwege, Ms. Murad’s co-Nobel prize-winner, is not so religiously engaged. He is a gynecologist who served war rape victims in his native Democratic Republic of the Congo for decades. His actions make the point that one does not need to be a holder of high office nor a trained peacebuilder to make peace. Words attributed to him on the occasion of the award suggest that he sees peace and the prize as the work of all: he could see in “the faces of many women how they are happy to be recognized.” Neither of these prize winners was a political leader or a UN official. Peacebuilding was part of what they did every day. In addition, peacebuilding is too important for religious actors to ignore.

**Peace: Negative and Positive**

What is the peacebuilding that I will be talking about? There are probably as many definitions in use as there are attendees in this forum. I propose for our working definition the one given by Dr. Ima Merdjanova, a researcher who has followed the Balkan conflicts. Dr. Merdjanova continues to follow post-conflict situations there. She speaks of peacebuilding as, “All social mechanisms a society develops in order to promote greater understanding and cooperation toward peace.” Thanks to the seminal work of Dr. Johan Galtung, credited by some as the founder of peace studies, we make the distinction between negative and positive peace. A concise way of thinking about negative peace is “the absence of violence or the fear of violence.” When a group or society is engaged in negative peacebuilding, it is working to curtail violence. In Yemen, for example, persons of good will who strive to end violent civil war are working toward negative peace—simply stopping the violent conflict. Having reached a state where a group or society has fairly well contained its violence, peace-building moves toward positive peace. In this environment, ongoing peace work remains. There is the service of laying a foundation or starting restoration in a post-conflict setting.
Here is a definition of positive peace. It is when the “attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies” are operative. It is important to note that positive peace does not demand the cessation of all conflict. Conflict can itself be positive if managed well. Conflict can lead to new ideas and fresh ways of doing things, and can ultimately help identify new leaders who take a community in a new direction because they question the status quo. The UN’s “Global Goals for sustainable Development,” if implemented in a given society, might be considered an ideal expression of positive peace. The Institute for Economics and Peace, a research institute, has done something similar in work on identifying eight pillars that undergird a peaceful community. The eight pillars are:

1. Well-functioning government;
2. Sound business environment;
3. Equitable distribution of resources;
4. Acceptance of the rights of others;
5. Good relations with neighbors;
6. Free flow of information;
7. High levels of human capital;
8. Low levels of corruption.

Where are the Peacebuilders? Lederach’s Triangle

A famed American Mennonite peacebuilder, Dr. John Paul Lederach, uses a humble visual to answer this question. The aid is a simple triangle (see illustration). From it, he builds a model of those in a given society who use peacebuilding mechanisms. Lederach divides a hypothetical society or group horizontally into various levels or strata of leadership—top, middle, and grassroots. As one moves up the triangle vertically from the base, the number of persons decreases from large numbers at the base or grassroots to relative few toward the top of the triangle. Based on years of field experience in violent conflicts across the globe, Lederach observes that there are parallel strata of peacebuilders. The same persons in a given leadership strata can serve as a peace promoter.

Neither here in the discussion of the triangle nor in the references to the two Nobel Peace prize winners is it suggested that the top leadership is either most important nor unimportant in a peacebuilding initiative. Engagement in the peace effort is conditioned by the individual acting in a given situation. Leaders in the top strata of the triangle have a wide view, a big picture of the social context. They are, however, often far removed from local concrete happenings in the daily lives of the majority. People in the base of society are more inclined to add a nuanced understanding of their immediate context. They, in turn, often lack the wider view of what is going on in the group or society “written large.”

According to Merdjanova, the most effective peacebuilding happens when the leadership in various groups cross all the boundaries of their strata and work collaboratively with
leaders of other strata. Leadership in the middle strata is often positioned so as to be able to play a brokering role between top and grassroots leadership. I cannot resist making an important and often overlooked application here. Many of you are likely members of a minor religious tradition in a country. I would think that this is particularly true in Asia. Should there be two larger faiths struggling with one another, or, should a major religion be feuding with the government? Because of their minority status, Catholics can sometimes serve a helpful mediating role. Catholics in such situations “do not have a dog in the fight.” On such occasions, an individual or a small group can oscillate between leadership strata.

Lederach mentions in lectures the example of a respected bishop in a small African country, where he can have coffee in the morning with the country’s president and, that same day, an afternoon confirmation in a small distant village; such privileged encounters might provide grassroots and top leadership perspectives on a given issue during the same day. Archbishop John Odama, from the Acholi region in Uganda, and his Acholi Religious Leaders’ group seem to play this role. He reports that religious leaders are able to communicate with the military, militants in hiding, and fellow bishops in the Uganda Bishops’ Conference.

Dr. Merdjanova adds a further refinement to the Lederach Triangle, which will be particularly helpful as we reflect more specifically on the role of religious actors.\textsuperscript{11} She notes that the various strata can contain internal groups with a common (religious) orientation toward a conflict situation. These clusters can be composed of youth, a gender grouping, ethnic ties, individual religious actors (RAs) or religious clusters (RC) of such actors. This last grouping,
of course, is of major interest in our treatment of interreligious dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding. Depending on the standing in a community and potential for collaboration, the religious groupings can be a powerful force for peacebuilding. In this, we find the critical grounding for interreligious dialogue.

Here is an example. During research of South Africa’s apartheid, I watched the working of an interfaith leadership group. Seemingly, there were frequent interchanges with various government offices and these religious leaders. On occasion, a given religious leader had a falling-out with a particular government official because of something he, she, or their church members had said or done. To conduct the religious leaders’ business, another member of their religious leadership group, who was in good graces with the official, would do the interchange on behalf of the group. This South African example leads one to think that such mediation role plays are reserved to top religious leaders. I might be able to persuade you otherwise with another example.

I was training lower middle class lay Mexicans in peacebuilding skills. A particularly horrendous summer of public executions had just occurred in their city. As we talked about this in class, I had a sense that class participants, when they talked about members of local killer gangs, spoke of gang members as though they were complete strangers, visitors, if you will, from another planet. Feeling that we established a good level of trust in the class, I talked about this dissonance that I was feeling between them and gang members. I asked if this were really so. Did not one of the participants know a gang member? If so, were they not missing opportunities to enter dialogue? After a long silence, a hand was hesitantly and self-consciously

Who are the grassroots peacebuilders?

Illustration B: Mexican Relationships
raised. Then, another. Before long, half the class acknowledged knowing one or more gang member.

The basic lesson that Lederach and Merdjanova teach us is that a society moves more efficiently and effectively toward peace if there is collaboration between and within a society’s/ group’s social levels.

Religious Actors as Peacebuilders

In this section, I want to move up from the previous generic discussion of everyday peacebuilders to the more specific role of the religious actors as peacebuilders. You will obviously and rightly see yourselves as Spiritan missionaries in this role, but the appellation “religious actor” is broader and embraces others, both Catholics and those of other religious traditions.

RELIGION REVISITED

I start at a seemingly basic question: What is religion? Fearing that I might offend you with the simplicity of the topic, let me rush to explain. Some of the religious traditions we interact with may not be self-identified as religions. Buddhism is sometimes called a philosophy. A Hindu specialist in our program claims that Hinduism-as-a-religion is a colonial imposition. Are traditional religions, in fact, religions at all? An educated review at a commonly used listing of religious components could help identify entry points for dialogue. On the contrary, the same list might offer clues as to where not to go in dialogue for fear of offending. Examples, again, help.

The book that I am about to examine is an unusual personal statement of dialogue with another faith: Without Buddha I Could not Be a Christian. The title of the book tells it all. Paul Knitter, the author, is a lifelong Catholic, former missionary priest, and now a prominent theologian. He took fundamental faith questions he had from Catholicism and found dialogical entry points with Buddhism. Knitter found a way to shuttle between the two faiths with major theological questions. His book traces this personal dialogue. On this most personal level, he is seemingly a practicing Buddhist who still holds to a range of Christian beliefs.

Peter Phan, a well-known Vietnamese-American Catholic theologian, suggests a far more cautious path for Westerners engaging Asians interreligiously. He advises them—mostly North Americans and Europeans—to adopt a mindset in dialogue that emphasizes hope, service of the poor, and universal harmony. He suggests that such an adaptation is not easy for the Westerner seeking interreligious dialogue. Thomas Merton—an American Cistercian monk, author and peace activist—spent much of the last year of his life with monastic monks in Asia. He attended their meetings, visited their monasteries and had serious faith discussions with them. Merton built a good rapport with his hosts. Perhaps, the practice of silence as a Cistercian was an advantage: He knew how to listen and when to keep his mouth shut.
Here is William Alston’s list of religious elements as highlighted in *God’s Century*:

- A belief in a *supernatural being*;
- *Prayer or communication* with that or those beings;
- *Transcendent realities*, including heaven, nirvana, etc.;
- Distinction between *sacred and profane*; ritual acts and sacred objects;
- *A view that explains the world as a whole and humanity’s proper relations to it*;
- A *code* in line with the worldview;
- *A temporal community bound by its adherence to these elements*.15

Alston is quick to acknowledge that not every religion incorporates each of these elements. According to the author, most religions address most, if not all, of these elements.

**GLOBAL RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

*Religion: Past*

As a native born in and presently resident in North America, I live in an environment often characterized as secularist. Our young adults increasingly tend toward having no institutionally-supported faith (Nones). Or they declare themselves as spiritual but not religious (SBNR). Paradoxically, in the United States the majority of Americans report that religion is important to them. No developed country can claim this.16 In summary, it is fair to say that America is a religious country. Stepping back to take a broader view, religion worldwide has in the last forty to fifty years made an impressive comeback.17 Vatican II was a major factor in this religious upswing. Many major religions experienced similar, if lesser, renewal.18 Emblematic of this change are snippets from the writings of America’s foremost religious sociologist, Peter Berger. In the early 1960s, at the zenith of secularism’s chokehold on the world’s educated class, Berger wrote, “... by the 21st century, believers are to be found in small sects huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture.”19 When religious resurgence was in full flight, forty to sixty years later, the same Peter Berger wrote,

> The assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was and, in some places, more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature historians and social scientists labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.20

*Religion: Present*

Let us take a summary look at religion as we find it today, as reported by a prominent research center. Eight out of ten people worldwide identify with a religious group. To be more precise, 5.8 billion people or eighty-four percent are religiously affiliated.
This was the distribution of religions in 2010:

- Christians: 2.2 billion or 32%
- Muslims: 1.6 billion or 23%
- Buddhists: 500 million or 7%
- Hindus: 1 billion or 15%
- Jews: 14 million or 0.2%
- Traditional or folk religions: 400 million or 6%
- Others: Bahai, Jainism, Sikhism, etc. 58 million or 1%
- No religious affiliation, e.g., atheists, agnostics, NONEs, SBNRs: 1.1 billion or 16%

If the religiously non-affiliated were a denomination, they would be the third largest in the world. The non-affiliated group is growing, but its growth is somewhat frozen. Unlike Muslims and Christians, they are not reproducing offspring significantly. As a category, the non-affiliated face somewhat of a dead end. Demographics play a key role in this. Lots of attention is given to non-affiliated in the developed west, yet three-quarters live in Asia-Pacific.

Where are the Muslims located?
- Asia/Pacific: 62%
- Middle East and Northern Africa: 20%
- Sub Saharan Africa: 16%

Christians are the most dispersed of major religious groups.

Religion: Future

It could be argued that the robust nature of religion today is a passing phase. The argument would go, “In a few years, the trend will reverse itself.” Religion could again lose its resilience and cease being of interest to world populations. This, of course, is all possible. One way of checking trends is to look ahead. The Pew Research Institute did this. In brief, here are its findings from a period stretching from 2010-2050. World religions are changing largely due to fertility rates. Here are some of the paraphrased highlights:

- In 2050, Christians will still be the largest religious group, though Muslims will be growing faster;
- The number of non-affiliates will decrease except in certain Western countries, such as France and the United States;
- Buddhist numbers will remain about the same;
- By 2050, ten percent of religious peoples in Europe will be Muslim;
- India will be majority Hindu, but, also, the largest Muslim country;
• American Christians will be down from three-quarters in 2010 (seventy-eight percent) to roughly two-thirds (sixty-six percent) in 2050. Muslims, not Jews, will be the largest non-Christian group;
• Four out of every ten Christians will be in sub-Saharan Africa.

Religious Actors at Work

In discussing the strata on Lederach’s triangle, I noted that clusters of persons within a given social strata or across various strata can have a common identity. I noted, also, the obvious fact that religion can be such an identity marker within and across strata. When the attention and action of such religiously-oriented persons focuses on peacebuilding, they can be a powerful force for peace. As used here, religious actors as treated in God’s Century, are: “Any individual, group or organization, that espouses religious beliefs and that articulates a reasonably consistent and coherent message about the relationship of religion to politics, e.g., Martin Luther King.”

A bewildering range of people—including religious actors—adapts political pursuits, including various forms of peacebuilding, in the name of religion. But, how do religious actors come to a form of political thinking and action? Here is one answer from the same source: “Religious actors arrive at their political theologies through reflection upon their religious texts and traditions and their foundational claims about divine being(s), time, eternity, salvation, morality and revelation, etc.” This reflection concludes with a segment that has special meaning to my life as a peacebuilder. The citation ends: “particular context, political theology translates basic theological claims, beliefs and traditions into political . . . Contemporary circumstances (emphasis added); however, matter as well in ideals and programs.”

At a time that “contemporary circumstances” intervened in my life with a prompt toward peace, I was the Spiritans’ Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Coordinator at the generalate. In the midst of a series of workshops in Nigeria for Spiritans, I came upon a local newspaper in one of our community rooms there. It read that Muslims and Christians were killing each other in a certain part of the country. That contemporary event—far away from my everyday life—prompted me to think about the peace content of my ministry. Eventually, it led to a profound change in the peace direction of my ministry.

Religious Leader as Religious Actor

A priest, deacon, imam, Buddhist teacher or other prominent faith leaders have a decided advantage as religious actors. Such a person has a “Bully Pulpit.” This may be a religious leader’s actual pulpit in a house of worship. Or it may be a facsimile in the form of a public platform from which one’s thoughts will be heard by a relatively large, receptive audience. When these religious actors speak and/or act, they carry with them the respect and authority of their office. They more readily use evocative religious, persuasive, and emotionally impactful language.
This often reaches beyond one’s attentive, even if not devout, co-religionists. It can appeal to a larger, more diversified, and attentive audience. Quite frequently, such a religious actor either has special oratorical skills acquired through training or comes upon it somewhat naturally, e.g. Rev. Ian Paisley, Northern Ireland’s fiery Protestant pastor, politician and leader during Ireland’s “Troubles.”

Other historical figures reach a special prominence as notable religious actors: Archbishop Tutu, Martin Luther King, Jr. and, in a similar way, Gandhi. Our own Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga and his interreligious colleagues took advantage of this asset for the cause of peace in the Central African Republic. The much-publicized team of the Imam and Pastor in Nigeria did the same.

**PRACTICE: INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FOR PEACE**

In thinking most concretely about practical strategies for interreligious dialogue as an aid to peacebuilding, I have found helpful a typology attributed to the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC). It is referenced widely and interreligiously. I will work with one of these mutations. This ordering system has four overlapping categories, each of which we will examine. When I work the four areas with a number of examples in a seminar or workshop, I find that it jogs a group’s recollection about what they and colleagues of other faith traditions have done interreligiously to advance peace. Hopefully, it will provide a similar assistance for you. Allow a caution, however. A specific peacebuilding strategy does not fit in every situation. The application of an approach is not a matter of one action fits all settings.

One way of testing the appropriateness of a method is to examine one’s “theory of change.” This begins by simply asking, “What do I/we want to see happen that will have a positive and peace-filled outcome in this conflict?” Follow this with a second question: “Which of the available approaches will advance peace in a given context?” This is far better than doing something that potential change-makers are “good at,” “saw it done elsewhere,” or you have the “resources to do it.”

**FABC’S TEMPLATE**

As suggested above, there are four general categories of interreligious peacebuilding approaches in the FABC’s model. I invite you to work through them with me. First, I briefly explain a category. Then, I follow each with examples exemplifying the category. For experienced missionaries such as yourselves, I suspect that this will be but a reminder of what you know, tried, or have experienced. It is in “working” the examples and providing your own in group work, which will, hopefully, make a difference.

Not every interreligious effort ends in success! Let me share a recent personal failure. San Diego is one of the most ethnically diverse parts of our country. Despite growing restrictions on immigration, the Islamic segment of the community continues to grow. So, too, do tensions between the various groupings of people, e.g., the bombing of a Jewish synagogue in Pittsburgh.
I designed an education and training program for imams and Catholic clergy. Religious specialists were to give short courses on the two faith traditions. Participants would together learn basic conflict resolution skills. We added shared meals and visits to mosques and churches, including interaction with local congregants. The operative theory of change was built on the theory of learning, which argued that once exposed to a positive interfaith experience, these religious leaders would pass on insights and learnings to their institutional members through various interactions. Despite initial enthusiasm and promises of support from institutional leadership to recruit imams and clergy, the program died for lack of participants.

Examples

- Shortly after 9/11 when interfaith and cultural tensions were high in the U.S., an interreligious coalition put together a team of Christian and Islamic ministerial personnel. This team traveled about the region for several months, both listening to the fears and concerns and offering an educational experience. The good work of our Spiritan Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga, C.S.Sp., and his interfaith companions did something similar in his Central Africa Republic.
- On one occasion, the mahogany table gave way to a synagogue. An erudite mixed-faith congregation listened intently to skilled pastors and theologians give a presentation on their common father, Abraham.
- Our local bishop in San Diego, Bishop Robert McElroy, plays a leading role in the U.S. Bishops’ Conference when it comes to ecumenical and interreligious matters. On two recent occasions, he brought together Islamic and Christian theologians into a “Catholic/Muslim Dialogue.” An evening session during such events is open to the public. Topics handled in the closed sessions of the dialogue are more generally shared with this broader audience.

b) Dialogue of Life where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit. This form of dialogue acknowledges the potential for interfaith exchanges and growth that happen, often unnoticed, at a local community level. It points to, honors, and celebrates peacebuilding from the ground up.

Examples
• Fr. Peter Phan, as a child in Vietnam, was raised as a staunch Catholic when there was antipathy between Catholics and Buddhists. Father Phan tells the story of going recently with his mother for a visit to Vietnam. He was startled when this very Catholic woman asked to visit a Buddhist temple. Her intent was to light candles for her Buddhist friends at home. Her son asked, “Why?” She told of Buddhist Vietnamese friends back in the States who were so very kind taking her to the store and to doctors. When they learned that she was going home, they asked her to light candles for them. So, she did.

• In December 2004, Banda Aceh became the epicenter for a huge tsunami. The community was overwhelmingly Islamic. As a response to the tragedy, the U.S. military, Catholic Relief Services, and other aid groups came to help. Religiously, many of the responders were Christian by background, if not in practice. Certain Islamic schools absorbed many orphans. In one case, religious pride prevented the school from accepting food from the Christian-oriented Catholic Relief Services. Quiet negotiations led to “Christian” food being delivered at night in unmarked CRS trucks.

• In Northern Ireland when the “Troubles” between Protestants and Catholics reigned, a Protestant man passed through a separating wall into the Catholic side. He was killed. Members of a live-in ecumenical center baked a cake for the wake. It was the custom for a Catholic priest and Protestant minister associated with the center to carry the cake to the wake of the murdered person as a sign of solidarity and sympathy.

c) Dialogue of Action in which persons of all religions collaborate for the integral development of all. I noted earlier that the FABC categories overlap at times. This is particularly true when one juxtaposes dialogue of action and dialogue of life. It is helpful, when I teach this to graduate students, to treat Dialogue of Action as the peacebuilding efforts of various religious groups or institutions.

Examples

• CRS, a major American Catholic relief, development, and justice and peace agency, has worked in peacebuilding for better than 20 years. For the last few years, the agency has concentrated on developing peacebuilding models for Islamic/Christian grassroots communities. The models have been field tested, scrutinized by its worldwide team of peacebuilders, and written up and culled into a book for general use, Interreligious Action for Peace.

• Pacific Institute is a Sufi organization with branches all over the world. It is particularly known for establishing schools. In southern California, their interreligious outreach includes programs that counter religious extremism, good will gatherings, and sponsoring cultural enrichment trips to their native Turkey.

• I give a presentation on the work of humanitarian services by Islamic organizations
to graduate students. Inevitably, someone in a class will ask, “Why don’t Muslim groups provide human services such as we see Lutherans, Jews, Catholics, and other faith traditions do?” The answer is simple: They do. I usually finish off this discussion by listing, as I do here, a number of Muslim groups chosen at random that offer such services. I cannot witness to the effectiveness of the groups, but they are engaged doing good as they see it and to the degree that they can. Here is a somewhat dated list of humanitarian Muslim organizations in America: Islamic Society of North America; Zaytuna Institute (1st Islamic University in America); American Society for Muslim Advancement: builds bridges with the Muslim and non-Muslim communities; Muslim Public Affairs Council: works for the civil rights of Muslims and connects with political representatives; Council on American Islamic Relations: the largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy group; and American Muslim Alliance: trains and supports Muslims in the US political system.

d) Dialogue of Religious Experience. When a conversation deepens to this level, one’s dialogue with another about his/her religious experience occurs. This is probably the most difficult form of dialogue for the ordinary person to grasp. I will offer a piece from the short and fabled interreligious document of Vatican II to help. Men expect from the various religions’ answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment, and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going? (NA, no.1)31

Examples

• I did research in Thailand about the low intensity war along its border. A young junior Buddhist professor at a university in northern Thailand was my guide. My visit was along the Thai-Malay border. This resulted in long car trips with my guide. Our relationship, though very new, had grown. Soon, we had gone deep into our personal faith lives: prayer, afterlife, peace, being married or single.

• Earlier in this paper, I spoke of Thomas Merton, the American Cistercian monk. He spent much of his adult life searching the deeper questions of spirituality. Toward the end of his life, he hungered to share the intimacy of the spiritual life with monks and nuns of Asian faith traditions. Merton’s life was cut short while he was engaged in this very exchange process.32

• I am not an impulsive buyer, except for books. It took me about four minutes to decide on the book that I am about to describe, Peacemaking and the Challenge of Violence in World Religions.33 At the time of the purchase, I was preparing a course with the improb-
able title, “Warmongers and Peacebuilders: Religious Extremism.” This particular book is designed in a special way. Seven faith traditions are treated. The first section of each of these chapters explores a particular faith, its history, development, and key personalities of the faith. It is the second part of each chapter that gives expression to dialogue of religious experience. At that point, the text delves into each of the faith traditions and identifies a theological and/or spiritual contribution that a certain faith makes to peacebuilding.

Conclusion

I started with a somewhat impassioned plea that everyone, with a special emphasis on religious persons, should be a peacebuilder. A discussion followed of peace—both negative and positive—and those who pursue it. I gave extra care to locating peacebuilders in a given society or group. I attempted to show how they interact. Attention next turned to the formation and functioning of the religious peacemaker.

Finally, I offer messages of hope for interreligious peacebuilding:

- Sarajevo, located at the heart of the recovering, but still tense, Balkans offers the first sign. Three seminaries—Islamic, Orthodox and Catholic—are working together. They are forming a common master’s degree in peacebuilding. The hope here is that young clerics entering the ministry will augment their ministerial training with peacebuilding competencies.
- The episcopal conference of an African country (name withheld) recently submitted a large funding proposal for interreligious dialogue project for the entire country. The hope: this nation-wide program will focus on training for interreligious dialogue.
- This hope began with a 2010 peacebuilding planning process held in Bujumbura, Burundi. Regional conferences of the East and the Great Lakes Regions participated. Subsequently, conference-countries of the Great Lakes Region designated the Catholic University of Bukavu as their regional center for peacebuilding. Last fall, this University admitted its first cohort of candidates for an MA degree in peace studies. This hopeful university sign in Bukavu expanded into a third one last November, when representatives of seventeen universities, either with peacebuilding programs or plans for them, gathered in Entebbe, Uganda. They formed a working group. The Africa Working Group affiliated with the predominantly American Catholic Peacebuilding Network. The Network, based at the University of Notre Dame, is composed of twenty major Catholic universities and service institutes.

Hope, the saying goes, springs eternal. May it continue to express itself in interreligious dialogue as a tool for peace-building.
Endnotes

1. Interventions into violent conflict are alternately referred to as peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Peacebuilding can apply as the broadest term, applicable to pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict situations. This wider term is used here.


6. Ibid.


8. Institute for Economics and Peace, Ibid.


11. Ibid.


22. Ibid.


25. Ibid., 24.

26. Ibid., 27.

27. Ibid.


32. Atkinson, (CD)

African Traditional Religion in the Context of increasing Christian and Islamic Encounter

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Introduction

Religion according to Karl Marx is the opium of the masses. Religion gives answers to a lot of things and problems people face in the world; at the same time religion has also ruined a lot of people because of the way people understand it.

African traditional religion is one of the religions of the world. This religion has contributed a lot to humanity because it is the bedrock and pace setter to all other religions of the world like Christianity, Islam, etc. This same religion that was and still is the bedrock of all other religions in the world has suffered tremendously at the hands of other religions. Nevertheless, granted that it has suffered intimidation, she still struggles to make an impact in the lives of the people directly or indirectly. These impacts will be examined as this work unfolds. Among the things that affected and is still affecting African traditional religion is secularism. This work will try to expose what different religions like Christianity and Islam are all about, the role of African traditional religion, factors militating against it and then its role in increasing Islamic and Christian religion before the conclusion.
What is African Traditional Religion?

Indigenous religion in Africa is the way Africans understand and worship their god. This religion is found in almost all the activities of the African man. Awolawu and Depamu (1979) stated that this is a religion that has no written literature yet it is everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the people as myths and folklores, in songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in proverbs and pithy sayings.1

This religion has no founder and that is why it is called an indigenous religion. It is a religion that is full of life and activities through ceremonies, festivals etc. It places emphasis on virtues, values, and morals. African traditional Religion is found in almost all activities of the African man.

African traditional religion cannot be discussed without mentioning that it is the way of life of the people of Africa and so cannot be differentiated from the politics, education, and socialisation, etc. of the people which are all together. Thus Olikenyi asserts that culture can be defined as the entire way of life of members of a community or language, morality, knowledge, worldview, symbols, kinship, social relationships, types of economy, forms of government, science, religion, tools, technology, ways of feeling, attitudes, behaviour patterns, etc.2 From the definition above, we can see that culture summarily is a way of life of the people.

What is Christianity?

This is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christianity is a missionary religion holding that Christ’s message, as intended for the whole world, is not just for a particular area or people, instead it is for everyone as we can see in Mark 16:15 ff. Jesus gave the injunction “Go ye into the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” The basic beliefs of Christianity are stated in the Apostles’ Creed. The concept of God as a benevolent and forgiving rather than vengeful is a main tenet of the Christian faith. Christianity holds values and morals in high esteem. Another Christian belief is that even though humankind has sinned and separated itself from the love of God, all can be saved by repentance.

What is Islam?

This is one of the world’s greatest religions founded in the seventh century AD by Mohammed. The word “Islam” means submission to the will of God. Followers of this are called “Muslims”, meaning those who submit (to the will of God). They have their written scripture called the Koran. Islamic religion has also its beliefs and doctrines like God, apostles, Koran, angels, last judgment, etc. They equally have five obligations: profession of faith, ritual prayer, almsgiving (Zakat) Ramadan fast, and pilgrimage.
What ATR is Not

African traditional religion has been seen by many from a negative point of view. This input might have been caused by those who claim that they are ATR adherents yet they go to the extreme in order to convince people that their religion is powerful. Those excesses are, as far as we are concerned, not ATR. Some negative terms used for ATR:

1. **Archaic**: this implies old, old fashioned, antiquated, no longer in use. Having observed very well from what we have already discussed, ATR is not archaic because it is the life of the people which has to do with the day-to-day life of an African.

2. **Paganism**: the term, pagan, derives from the Latin word for a rustic, village dweller, and its use in English connotes polytheism. ATR is not a polytheistic religion, rather a monotheistic one. It cannot be paganism.

3. **Animism**: this is a belief that spirits inhabit some or all classes of natural objects.

4. **Heathen**: this implies an uncultured or an uncivilised person or religion. ATR is seen as a religion that is not refined, but crooked. But if it is the religion of the people that has to do with their way of life, ATR then is not heathenism.

5. **Idolatry**: this implies a religion that worships idols. ATR does not worship idols; its adherents worship the Supreme Being just like every other religion.

Functions of ATR in increasing Muslim and Christian Society Liturgy

According to Tagbo,3 “Liturgy is the prescribed form of ritual for public worship. It is the vehicle of communication between man and the Divine being. And since liturgy is the set pattern of worship in each cult, we have reason to believe that it has been preserved without being much distorted.” Africans have been grounded in liturgy; they know the importance of worship. This knowledge was an advantage over Islamic religion when they enter into African territories. They have mastered the attribute of gods and deity. According to Idowu, “... from the invocation and prayer we learn the names, the attributes of Deities and the divinities, the confidence and hopes of the people, capabilities attributed to divinities, and general relationship between Deity and man.”

Songs and Dances

Some practices of Islamic religion were just a continuation from African cultures. Africans love songs and dances so much so that in almost all situations they find support and consolation in them. So, when some Africans were converted to Islam they continued with what they already learned. There are so many traditional songs and dances in African religion. There are just enough to reflect different situations in life such as a traditional wedding, naming ceremony, funeral, wrestling, working on the farm, praising people, going to war, etc.
dancing to the rhythm of the songs, religious feelings are also exhibited. These songs and dances tell stories of the peoples’ past. They convey the faith of worshippers and also express joys and sorrows of the people, their assurances, hopes and fears of the future and life after death.

**Religious Syncretism**

In modern society that is saturated by Islamic thought and emerging movements, we still observe some notable influence of African traditional religion in the affairs and religious lifestyle of some adherents of Islam. Muslims still exhibit some syncretic characteristics which show their affinity to their indigenous religion. It is still observable that many Muslim adherents patronize the traditional medicine men and soothsayers from whom they hope to get answers to their many problems. This behavior however does not suggest that these Muslims do not trust in Allah; it shows rather the fact that Africans find it very difficult to leave their way of life, especially in matters of religion.

**Polygamy**

In Islam today, polygamy is permitted, and in some cases, even encouraged. Polygamy is the practice of one man taking more than one wife. This practice was and is still common among the adherents of traditional African religion. This implies that polygamy may not be understood as in itself. What is clear however, is the fact that it has two sides, depending on the perspective one in coming from. Economically, we know that in modern society polygamy has not really fared well since we see the difficulty for men catering for extra-large families.

**Belief in God**

God is real and unique to the African. He is believed to be the absolute controller of the universe. He is a Supreme Being. The concept of Supreme Being is universal in African Traditional Religion. The clear-cut belief in the Supreme Being by Africans is demonstrated by the names given Him by Africans. The principal god of Igbo is called “Chineke” or “Chukwu”. The first means the creator god while the second means great god. Among the Nsukka people the name “Ezechitoke” is frequently used for the supreme being. It means the king spirit that is the creator. Here emphasis is placed on the creative activity of God. In fact, this fundamental belief in God, the creator, is something one knows without being taught. One only needs to come to the age of reason in order to realise this. This is to say that the belief in the Supreme Being in Igbo religion as well as in African religion is axiomatic.
Christian Artifacts

Today, Africans carried traditional practices into Christianity, especially in their quest to protect life and property. Africans love artifacts, an imaginary representation of their smaller god. Hence, it gives them the assurance of God’s protection and guidance for them. Thus, these things, formerly condemned as fetish, can be seen in today’s Christian societies. They are modernized and given new names, but the ideas come from African traditional religion. Christians now have different categories of artifacts with each assigned different powers, all geared towards protection and guidance. Thus, Africans who love to move around with their \textit{chi} and charms for protection and guidance can now freely carry Christian artifacts for protection. Such artifacts are the scapular, olive oil, and holy water, and moulded pictures of different saints.

Community Life

Community life practices among religious groups in Christian societies must have had its teaching and foundation in African traditional religion. Community life is one of the core values cherished by Africans in ancient and modern times. This has become the bedrock for the formation of Christian religious congregations.

The Meeting Point of the three Religions

Every religion has something good to offer to humanity. The three religions we are discussing can still come together and cohabit. For this to happen, each must see something good in the other. Let me take the areas where the three religions can cohabit without much difficulty:

1. \textit{Values}: each of the three religions has core values of hospitality, honesty, peace and each is struggling to preach this in their own different ways. The approach may differ, but these values are evident in the three religions.
2. \textit{Morals}: this has to do with the principles of right and wrong behavior, especially for teaching right behavior. Each religion has this, they have a way of teaching its morals so that when you are born, you follow the traditions of the people.
3. \textit{Circumcision}: circumcision cuts across the three religions. ATR encourages male circumcision, Christianity encourages male circumcision, but Islam encourages female circumcision mostly. Islam circumcises females to tamp down the libido that may push them into looking for men outside marriage.
4. \textit{Scripture}: each of them has scriptures, ATR uses unwritten scripture, Islam uses the Koran, while Christianity uses the Bible. All these different scriptures are used to educate people the way forward and on how to live with each other in their religion. The foundation of each religion is embedded in their scriptures.
5. **Means of protection**: each religion has its own means of protection and its own work for them. Looking critically at each religion it serves the same purpose. The functionality of this protective means is what we are interested in and not the components. ATR uses charms, Christianity uses stickers, holy rosary, crucifix, holy water, olive oil, etc. and Islam uses Chesbi as an object of reaching Allah for protection.

6. **Marriage**: each of the three religions encourages marriage but have their own understanding of how it works for them. Christianity encourages monogamy, ATR encourages polygamy, while Islam encourages polygamy. Each has its reason and basis for what they practice and has no problem with it.

7. **God**: each is a monotheistic religion. They worship one God. ATR has “Chineke”, Islam has “Allah,” and Christianity has “God.”

**Summary and Conclusion**

Religion according to Ugwu⁵ can be seen as faith practices involving the relationship between humankind and what is regarded as sacred. Religion generally includes belief in the supernatural and a code of ethical behavior. This definition of religion takes care of the religion we are talking about. Moreover, each religion is important and has a lot of things others can learn from. No religion should be seen as superior to the other. My humble advice is that each should encourage the other, see something good in the other, appreciate the other, applaud the other and equally condemn the negative sides of the other. Hence, no one should single itself out as the best because they are all monotheistic by nature. By doing this ATR, Christianity, and Islam can co-habit and have peace, love, unity and understanding between them.

**Endnotes**

L’Engagement spiritain dans le Dialogue interreligieux: un Regard sur le Chemin parcouru


Introduction

Il y a une trentaine d’années un confrère spiritain me demandait vers quelle type de mission j’envisageais de m’engager. Je lui ai parlé de mon intérêt pour un contexte fortement musulman, ce que mon stage en Algérie avait à la fois fondé et encouragé. Il me répondit alors que ce type de mission ne faisait pas partie de la mission de la congrégation, mieux valait pour moi aller chez les Pères blancs ou accepter une mission plus spiritaine. Cet échange m’a fait réfléchir par la suite sur ce qu’avait pu être la mission de la congrégation dans le passé et sur les évolutions qui aboutissent jusqu’à notre rencontre aujourd’hui. Du chemin a en effet été parcouru, dans la congrégation (mais peut-être pas partout !), dans l’Église et bien sûr dans la situation du monde. Disant cela, je dis aussi que notre congrégation a discerné et discerne encore aujourd’hui les signes des temps et que le dialogue interreligieux fait partie de ce que « l’Esprit dit aux Églises » en ce temps. Cela a donc des conséquences aussi sur la mission de notre congrégation aujourd’hui.
Quelques flashs du passé lointain

La lettre du P. Libermann au roi Eliman de Dakar est l’une des rares sources, peut-être la seule, écrite par un de nos fondateurs à une autorité politique et religieuse non-chrétienne. Le ton y est poli et respectueux, la forme simple. L’attitude est positive et à un impact diplomatique, en cela nous sommes dans un climat proche de celui décrit ces jours-ci lors de l’arrivée des premiers Spiritains à Zanzibar.


Il évoque ensuite les situations de personnes qui, prises individuellement, peuvent être de diverses tendances. Il parle encore de la situation des mourants, il recommande globalement de ne pas les baptiser car un baptême clandestin ne permettrait pas des funérailles chrétiennes et risquerait d’entrainer des mouvements hostiles contre la Mission. Sa conclusion, enfin, de ce point sur les musulmans me paraît très éclairant pour comprendre la réaction du confrère dont j’ai parlé en introduction : « en tout cas, tant qu’on aura de vrais Infidèles à évangéliser, on se gardera de perdre son temps, sa peine et son argent près des populations musulmanes : ce sera déjà beaucoup que d’essayer d’arrêter la progression de leur propagande. »

Suit le numéro 67, intitulé « animistes et fétichistes », pour lesquels il écrit :

ici, nous sommes sur notre vrai terrain, celui que, depuis longtemps nous avons entrevu et cherché. (. . .) Les ouvriers de l’Évangile devront : connaître la langue indigène, le pays, la tribu évangélisée, la religion et les superstitions locales, les coutumes familiales et sociales, sans compter le nom des villages et de leurs chefs, ce qui, du reste, ne peut se faire que peu à peu, mais sans arrêt, et avec le concours d’un carnet de notes et de fiches qui pourront être utilisées, à l’occasion pour des lettres, des rapports, des études suivies, et, en tout cas, servir aux successeurs.

Mgr Le Roy a pratiqué cela lui-même, il était d’ailleurs connu pour ses œuvres ethnologiques. Il en vient ensuite aux attitudes aux avoirs : « Inspirez respect, affection et confiance (. . .). Respecter les coutumes locales en ce qu’elles ont de bon ou d’indifférent (. . .). »

N’oublions pas non plus que durant le Concile Vatican II, Mgr. Lefèvre, qui y représentait la congrégation comme supérieur général, s’opposa aux ouvertures faites aux autres religions, avec notamment un refus net des textes Dignitatis humanae, sur la liberté religieuse,
texte qu’il considérait comme étant une forte déviance par rapport à la tradition, et *Nostra ætate*, sur les religions non-chrétiennes, qui lui fait suite d’une certaine manière.

Je conclus de cette partie que les positionnements, convictions et attitudes des Spiritains sur le dialogue interreligieux pouvaient connaître des variations, mais que celles-ci étaient probablement simultanément une grande fermeté des principes et des comportements plus respectueux des situations et des personnes.

**L’apport du Concile et les années qui suivirent**

Dr Marinus Iwuchukwu a déjà rappelé plusieurs textes fondateurs de dialogue interreligieux durant le Concile Vatican II, de même qu’il a évoqué l’encyclique *Ecclesiam suam*, publiée par Paul VI en 1964, et qui donne à mon avis une clé herméneutique de lecture de l’esprit du Concile.

J’aimerai rappeler encore deux autres phrases célèbres du Concile. D’abord celle qui ouvre la Constitution *Gaudium et spes* :

> Les joies et les espoirs, les tristesses et les angoisses des hommes de ce temps, des pauvres surtout et de tous ceux qui souffrent, sont aussi les joies et les espoirs, les tristesses et les angoisses des disciples du Christ, et il n’est rien de vraiment humain qui ne trouve écho dans leur cœur. Leur communauté, en effet, s’édifie avec des hommes, rassemblés dans le Christ, conduits par l’Esprit Saint dans leur marche vers le Royaume du Père, et porteurs d’un message de salut qu’il faut proposer à tous. La communauté des chrétiens se reconnaît donc réellement et intimement solidaire du genre humain et de son histoire (n° 1).

Ce texte implique une solidarité avec tous qui inclut aussi la diversité religieuse, même si celle-ci n’est pas explicitement nommée.

Ensuite cette partie de *Lumen gentium* qui définit le rôle de l’Église dans le monde :

> « L’Église est (étant), dans le Christ, en quelque sorte le sacrement, c’est-à-dire à la fois le signe et le moyen de l’union intime avec Dieu et de l’unité de tout le genre humain » (n° 1). Le point qui me paraît important ici est que la mission de l’Église, et donc celle des leaders religieux que nous sommes, ne peut se réduire à la défense des seuls intérêts d’un groupe, fut-il notre communauté catholique locale. Or il peut arriver que cette communauté locale comprenne difficilement que son responsable soit actif dans une attention ou une collaboration avec d’autres croyants.

Ne négligeons pas non plus l’impact d’un texte comme celui qui fera suite à un Synode sur la justice et où le travail pour la justice sera désormais déclaré comme élément « constitutif » de l’annonce de l’Évangile. L’annonce de l’Évangile se fait donc bien de diverses manières, en paroles et en actes.

Ces textes impactent la manière de concevoir la Mission de l’Église et ils vont être reçus
peu à peu dans la vie de la Congrégation, laquelle va exprimer de manière plus variée qu’avant l’actualisation de son charisme. En étudiant aux archives générales de la Congrégation à Chevilly-Larue (France), les archives de Mgr. Michel Bernard, qui fut évêque de Mauritanie de 1966 à 1973, après avoir été évêque au Congo, j’ai pu voir comment il a cherché à mettre en pratique ces recommandations nouvelles dans le cadre d’une République Islamique. Il a consulté, réfléchi avec d’autres au niveau régional (Afrique de l’Ouest) et au sein de la Congrégation, puis proposé des orientations pastorales originales pour son contexte, prévoyant d’une part certains prêtres pour le service pastoral des communautés chrétiennes (d’origines étrangères) et d’autres prêtres appelés à s’investir dans une plus grande connaissance du pays, de ses cultures et de sa religion.

Il conviendrait de souligner aussi que la Congrégation a eu en son sein quelques personnalités qui ont œuvré pour que le dialogue interreligieux devienne part de la Mission spiritaine, souvent en alliant expérience de terrain et réflexion théologique ou pastorale. Je citerai notamment : René ou (Algérie), Raymond Zimmermann (Maurice), John O’Brien (Pakistan), Robert Ellison (Gambie), Patrick Hollande (Sénégal), mais il faudrait rajouter encore les noms de ceux, probablement plus nombreux qui ont exprimé un profond intérêt pour les rencontres avec les religions traditionnelles.

Ce travail aboutit à intégrer le dialogue interreligieux comme une partie intégrante de la mission de la Congrégation lors de l’édition de la Règle de Vie Spiritaine (RVS), dont le contenu fut discuté lors du Chapitre général de 1986.7

Les numéros concernés sont :

- RVS 15.3 : « Dans certaines circonstances il ne nous est pas possible d’annoncer explicitement la Bonne Nouvelle par la parole. Nous sommes alors mus par la certitude que l’Esprit Saint nous précède et que notre présence est témoignage et service au nom de l’Évangile pour le Royaume (Ad gentes, 6) ». Cet article me semble viser directement l’expérience de Spiritains présents en contexte très fortement islamisés tels que l’Algérie ou la Mauritanie. L’inscription de ces expériences dans la Règle de Vie authentifie par conséquent leur réalité missionnaire comme véritablement spiritaine.
- RVS 16.3 : « Nous dialoguons et collaborons loyalement avec les responsables et les croyants des autres religions, ainsi qu’avec ceux qui ne croient pas en Dieu ; et nous sommes confiants en l’Esprit Saint qui nous mène, les uns et les autres, vers la vérité toute entière (cf. Jn 16,13) ». Je pense qu’il convient de citer également en un certain sens RVS 16.1 : « Afin que le témoignage chrétien rejoigne les hommes dans leur culture et devienne une force de libération dans l’histoire actuelle de chaque peuple, nous favorisons de tous nos moyens une rencontre féconde entre l’Évangile du Christ et les traditions culturelles et religieuses...
locales. » Cet article vise probablement en priorité la relation avec des religions traditionnelles, mais il n’exclut pas un dialogue fécond avec les grandes traditions religieuses de l’humanité. Ce dialogue porte quelquefois sur des éléments relativement extérieurs, mais il faut voir aussi dans ce texte l’allusion à ces nombreux dialogues intérieurs qui se vivent dans les croyants confrontés jusqu’au plus profond d’eux-mêmes à diverses adhésions, allégeances ou convictions.

**Des changements majeurs quant aux religions dans le monde**


Évidemment parmi les mutations religieuses récentes il faudrait parler encore de la sécularisation croissante, en Occident notamment mais peut-être pas uniquement, de la formidable vitalité des Églises protestantes du Réveil et de l’impact d’internet et des communications actuelles sur le fait religieux.

**Des rencontres spiritaines internationales consacrées au dialogue interreligieux et quelques publications**

Plusieurs rencontres internationales furent organisées par la Congrégation pour établir des partages d’expériences, apprendre des situations et des hommes, en somme intégrer la dimension du dialogue interreligieux dans le concret de la vie de la Congrégation. Plusieurs de ces rencontres donnèrent lieu à des publications. Rappelons notamment :

- Banjul (Gambie), juillet 2002, Colloque « Les Spiritains et l’Islam ».
- Rome (Italie), septembre 2011, « Rencontre sur le dialogue interreligieux et le dialogue avec les cultures ».

Ce regard critique mérite d’être entretenu pour ne pas verser dans diverses naïvetés et illusions. J’en rappelle donc quelques termes :

Ce point d’attention fait également ressortir que les pratiques religieuses elles-mêmes peuvent être sources d’oppression et de marginalisation. Dès lors, il ne s’agit pas de se contenter de connaître les situations, mais bien d’avoir un regard critique sur ces fonctionnements pour les remettre en cause et se faire l’avocat des pauvres. Évidemment cela concerne aussi la vie en Église (cléricalisme, communautarisme, exploitation).

Pour être crédible le dialogue interreligieux ne saurait se contenter d’idées ou de discours. Il passe par la transformation du quotidien et l’amélioration des conditions de vie des personnes. Nombreuses peuvent être les initiatives communes : projets de développement, lutte contre la pauvreté, respect de l’environnement et reboisement, travaux d’entretiens et de salubrité publique, etc.

Finalement si le dialogue est un esprit et un art de vivre, notre vie quotidienne et notre méthode de travail en disent plus sur nous-mêmes que nos rôles. Nos méthodes sont-elles ou non dialogue ?

Mon expérience comme coordinateur spiritain pour le dialogue avec les musulmans


Je lui ai succédé dans cette responsabilité et j’ai diffusé de 4 à 6 messages annuels par le biais d’un carnet d’adresse et d’une adresse mail spécifique (csspislam@gmail.com). Le contenu
diffusé pouvait être des partages d’expériences, des textes divers (dont le texte diffusé chaque année par le Conseil pontifical pour le dialogue interreligieux à l’occasion de ‘Ayd al-Adha/Tabaski), plus rarement la diffusion d’une vidéo, etc. J’ai cessé d’émettre des messages en 2015, lorsque j’ai été élu provincial de France, n’ayant plus le temps nécessaire pour ce travail. Après le Chapitre général de Bagamoyo déjà, le Conseil général m’avait proposé d’élargir le sujet et le cercle des correspondants à tout le dialogue interreligieux, mais j’ai résisté à cette appellation qui dépassait mes connaissances et capacités.

Quelles conclusions puis-je tirer de cette expérience ? Il est sûrement utile d’avoir un minimum de coordination entre Spiritains œuvrant dans le dialogue interreligieux. En effet, cela permet à la fois de recueillir et de diffuser des informations utiles sur un plan assez large (environ 200 adresses de mon temps . . . ). La traduction de textes (français et anglais) pouvait cependant faire difficulté. La mise en place d’un carnet d’adresse des confrères intéressés a été privilégié sur une diffusion à tous, afin de ne pas accumuler des informations multiformes ce qui finit par tuer l’information. Nous avons donc privilégié un public précis, mais dont certains confrères n’étaient pas directement en situation de dialogue. Un coordinateur permet d’initier des nouveaux venus dans ce domaine, par des conseils ou par le transfert d’informations déjà diffusées précédemment.

Il me semble nécessaire dans le contenu diffusé de revenir régulièrement sur les fondements chrétiens et spirituels du dialogue et sur nos motivations, car les résistances sont nombreuses aussi bien chez les chrétiens que nous rencontrons que parmi les autrement croyants. Comme le dit l’évêque Augustine Shao, de Zanzibar, travailler au dialogue c’est souvent aller à contre-courant. Or c’est fatiguant de le faire, d’où la nécessité de développer une spiritualité du dialogue qui se nourrisse des rencontres faites.

Avoir un coordinateur permet enfin de rester vigilant sur les formations, spécialisées notamment, dans le domaine de la langue arabe ou des études sur l’islam ou plus largement concernant le dialogue interreligieux. Cela permet donc aussi de savoir si des confrères se forment effectivement !

Il est logique que le coordinateur soit déjà bien informé et que ce sujet fasse partie de son travail habituel, sinon il ne fera les recherches que pour cette diffusion et il ne s’en donnera pas le temps . . . Selon les compétences, les finances et les disponibilités, le confrère coordinateur peut donner quelques formations en maisons de formation initiale, ce que je n’ai pas fait. Un budget de 1.000 euros/an m’était alloué, mais j’ai peu eu besoin de ces fonds sauf pour organiser la rencontre de Rome en 2011.

**Conclusion**

Notre assemblée est composée de nombreux confrères plus jeunes que moi, alors qu’en 2011 encore je faisais figure de jeune. C’est une bonne nouvelle car cela signifie que des confrères jeunes se sont investis ces dernières années dans le dialogue interreligieux. Les initiateurs,
souvent européens, ont presque tous disparu, mais aujourd’hui de divers horizons la dé-
marche est reprise.

Le travail paye. Pour porter du fruit dans ce domaine, comme dans beaucoup d’autres, durer et s’investir par une relation impliquant à la fois le terrain et l’étude finit par porter du fruit. Comme le dit l’Évangile : « en semant peu, on récolte peu. En semant beaucoup on ré-
colte davantage ». Je vous encourage donc non seulement à persévérer, mais aussi à vous in-
vestir dans le travail d’études selon les contextes où vous vivez. S’intéresser aux cultures, à la
religion et aux langues de ce qui vous accueillent disent, plus que des discours, l’intérêt que
vous leur portez.

Nous récoltons aujourd’hui des fruits plantés depuis des années. Les nominations comme
cardinaux des évêques de Maurice, Mgr Maurice Piat, et de Bangui, Mgr Dieudonné
Nzapalaïnga, me semblent être des signes que l’investissement spiritain en matière de dia-
logue interreligieux est fécond. Il est désormais reconnu par l’Église universelle et en certains
endroits (Belgique, France, Cameroun, Mauritanie, Maurice), cette compétence et ce savoir-
faire sont attendus de nous.

Ce ne sont pas les religions qui dialoguent, ce sont des personnes. Pour durer dans le dia-
logue il est nécessaire d’approfondir des relations avec certaines personnes concrètes, en un
mot de se faire des amis : personnes très simples, pauvres peut-être ou leaders religieux. Sans
 cette touche bien vivante et conviviale comme l’amitié il est difficile de durer et de continuer
to croire que cette relation est possible. Il s’agit donc bien de « recevoir » de ces dialogues que
nous vivons avec d’autres.

Endnotes
2. Directoire général, 115.
3. Ibid.
4. Voici la suite de la citation : « . . . en se faisant une obligation de conscience d’éviter tout ce
qui pourrait éloigner de nous et de la religion que nous représentons ; d’où nécessité d’être
toujours justes, fidèles à la parole donnée, patients, exempts de toute colère ou brutalité, sans
rancune, comme sans préférence et sans faiblesses. »
5. Ibid.
6. Son opposition à certaines évolutions du Concile n’était pas représentative de la pensée de
tous les confrères, ni même de celle des évêques spiritains présents au Concile. Il est toutefois
difficile d’imaginer qu’il fut le seul à penser ainsi . . .
7. La promulgation de la nouvelle Règle de Vie Spiritaine fut précédée de quelques mois par la pa-
Aux frontières de l’évangélisation ». Cette publication visait sans doute déjà la préparation du
Chapitre général.
8. Nous qualifions de millénaristes certains mouvements islamiques contemporains qui développent un imaginaire symbolique et d’action qui correspondent à une compréhension de l’époque où nous vivons comme celle de la fin des temps, un temps où se déroulent le combat final entre forces du bien et forces du mal. Ces mouvements radicaux et hyper-violents se démarquent selon nous de l’islam politique du type de celui des Frères Musulmans, dans la mesure où une vision politique comme celle des Frères Musulmans s’accompagne d’un projet de société, de phases progressives de réalisation, d’une organisation en partis, de l’acceptation de compromis, etc.


Interreligious Dialogue in Zanzibar

Most Rev. Augustine Shao, C.S.Sp., is Bishop of Zanzibar diocese, Tanzania. He was ordained a priest on June 4, 1983 at Usa River, Tanzania. Following pastoral ministry in Zambia (1983-86) and missionary animation at Knechtsden, Germany (1986-89), he was elected Provincial Superior of the then East African Province of the Spiritans (1990-1996). He was appointed by the Holy See to be the Bishop of Zanzibar on February 7, 1997, and ordained on April 27 the same year. Bishop Shao is a member of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

A Short History of Zanzibar

Zanzibar consists of two sister Islands, Unguja and Pemba, and has been part of the United Republic of Tanzania since 1964. Before the union, Zanzibar was a separate state and had a long trading history with the Arab world. The population of the islands is about 1.6 million, made up of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Bahia’s and other minority faiths. However, in Zanzibar, interreligious dialogue takes place mainly between the Muslim majority and Christian minority who make less than 2% of the population.

During the age of exploration, the Portuguese empire was the first European power to gain control of the Islands in the year 1499. They soon established a trading station and a Catholic mission run by Augustinian friars.

For the next 200 years, Christianity would remain in these islands until Zanzibar fell under the control of the Sultanate of Oman in 1698, ending Portuguese control. After the Portuguese retreat, only a few Goan Christians remained on the islands. They had neither church nor priests but maintained their community through private devotions.

The Omanis developed a thriving economy of cash crops and trade in ivory and slaves from mainland Tanzania, the then Tanganyika. Plantations were developed to grow spices, which earned Zanzibar its name, “the spice islands.”

In 1890, only a few years after the Berlin Conference, Zanzibar became a British protectorate
and it gained its independence from the British in December 1963 as a constitutional monarchy with the Sultan as the head of state. However, just a month later, the bloody Zanzibar Revolution, in which a number of Arabs and Indians were killed or expelled from the islands, resulted in the emergence of the Republic of Zanzibar. On April 26th 1964, the Republic merged with mainland Tanganyika and became the United Republic of Tanzania, of which Zanzibar remains a semi-autonomous region.

In 1860, the bishop of St. Denis in Reunion sent two diocesan missionaries, six religious sisters (Filles de Marie) to Zanzibar; the arrival of the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1862 marked the official beginning of continuous evangelization in the islands, which has continued to this day.

**Spiritans and Interreligious Dialogue**

The success of the Spiritans in Zanzibar is partially due to their skill in interreligious dialogue. Anxious to avoid any trouble with the Sultan, and recognizing the realities of life in Muslim Zanzibar, the Spiritans limited their activities to education, pastoral work among the city’s small Roman Catholic Goan community, and health care, opening the sultanate’s first European-directed hospital, famously known as “The French hospital.” They did not embark on direct evangelization or conversion of the island’s Muslims. They lived out the advice from their Founder Fr. Libermann who urged them to be African with the Africans; to understand their aspirations; and learn their culture.¹

The Spiritans continued to enjoy good relations with both the Sultan and their neighbors and, in 1894, he gave permission to build St. Joseph’s Cathedral. Its cornerstone was laid on July 10, 1896. Bishop Allgeyer celebrated the first mass in the new cathedral on Christmas night, 1898.

The Sultan, Majid of Oman (1834-1870), in 1868 offered a vast tract of land to the Spiritans to build the first mission in East Africa in Bagamoyo on the mainland, Tanzania. The mission built on that land is still active today.

Sultan Majid also strongly supported the work of the German linguist, Dr. Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810-1885), sent by the British Church Missionary Society. He compiled the first grammar and dictionary in the Swahili language, and translated the Book of Genesis into Swahili. Spiritans such as Fr. Longmann and Fr. Secule used these to produce books for elementary education.

**The Purpose and the Importance of Interreligious Dialogue**

Interreligious dialogue in Zanzibar aims singularly at enabling people of different faiths (mainly Muslims and Christians) to come to mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences.

The very fact that Muslims and Christians make up over 50% of the world’s population makes dialogue and cooperation imperative. A letter signed by one hundred and thirty eight
Muslim Scholars and Leaders from across the Muslim world and sent to Christian leaders in 2007, says:

Muslims and Christians together make up over half the world’s population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.²

The Catholic Church and Interreligious Dialogue

The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator; in the first place among them are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day (LG, no. 16).

The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate, portrays the positive attitude towards dialogue with Muslims that is reflected in most Christian denominations.

This document urges Christians and Muslims “to work sincerely for mutual understanding” and “to make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, as well as peace and freedom” (NA, 3). However, as said by Fr. Shorter:

It is important that, in reacting to the shortcomings of dialogue, we should not fall into the opposite extreme of subordinating dialogue to proclamation, conversion work and church implantation. Evangelization and inculturation seek the conversion of peoples and cultures, the permeation of human culture by Gospel values. Dialogue results in a conversion of Christianity. Indeed, it is an essential aim of dialogue that all the parties involved undergo conversion in a wider sense of the word. In dialogue, Christians challenge others and are challenged by them.³

Interreligious Dialogue and Islam

In Islam, when referring to the attitude that Muslims should have towards Christians and Jews, the Holy Quran⁴ says “argue with them in ways that are best” [16.125] and calls on Muslims to “compete in good works” (i.e. to out-do Christians in their good works).

The existence of different religious communities is recognized in the Quran: “Had thy Lord willed, he would have made mankind one nation” [5.48]. Muslims are also called on to be patient in dialogue: “Bear, then, with patience, all that they say, and celebrate the praises of thy Lord, before the rising of the sun and before (its) setting” [50.39]. It is, then, fair to say that, at least officially, both Islam and Christianity call for dialogue and cooperation between them.
Forms of Dialogue that take place here in Zanzibar

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue\(^5\) highlights four forms of interreligious dialogue:

a) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values. There is little of this happening in Zanzibar.

b) The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. This is happening in Zanzibar in a casual manner.

c) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute. This is practiced informally perhaps.

d) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. This is the form of dialogue most widely practiced in Zanzibar.

In this presentation, I concentrate on this last form of dialogue, the dialogue of common action. In his book *Evangelization and Culture*, Shorter, a well-recognized anthropologist, argues that the dialogue of action is probably the most practical form of dialogue, as it does not require the immediate collaboration of theological elites.

Here in Zanzibar, for example, without the need for theological experts, Muslims and Christians live in the same neighborhoods or villages, use the same shops, markets, hospitals and transport and go to the same schools. We also face the same societal challenges to which we try as best as we can to respond to them together. This daily interaction between Christians and Muslims provides a platform for dialogue, cooperation and respect.

Areas of Collaboration and Dialogue of Action:

a) *Peace Building Committee*. We have a nine-member peace building committee made up of Muslims, Catholics and some other Christian denominations working hand in hand with both the government, civil societies, and some international organizations to promote peace and make immediate interventions where peace is being threatened in our islands. The Mufti of Zanzibar is the chair of the committee while the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Zanzibar is the vice Chair. This committee meets regularly to discuss matters relevant to peace maintenance and conflict resolution where conflict resulted from electoral dispute, religious misunderstanding or any
other source. But, the main purpose of this committee is to prevent conflict from occurring for whatever reason.

b) **Educational, Medical, and other social Services.** When in 1992 the Government of Zanzibar allowed the provision of education and other social services to involve the private sector, the Catholic church was the first to take advantage of this liberalization. We immediately got involved in the provision of educational, medical, and many other social services that bring us into daily contact with people of other religions. In our nursery, primary, secondary schools and other educational institutions, in our dispensaries and medical centers, in our various seminars on entrepreneurship or counseling sessions, the great majority of those who are immediate beneficiaries of these services are our Muslim brothers and sisters. This interaction provides us with an opportunity for dialogue at the level of action. When you bring people together for service, and specifically the youth and children, you are building future peaceful co-existence.

c) **Diocesan Pastoral and Development Offices.** They create another platform for dialogue in action by dealing with wide ranging issues including justice and peace, human trafficking, HIV-AIDS intervention and human rights, to mention only a few. The scope of this paper does not allow me to go into much detail with regard to what our diocese does through these offices. Briefly, through various programs and activities organized by these offices we have achieved quite much:

- Educating women and children in their basic rights through seminars at all levels of education and our involvement with women groups. Through these programs and seminars we have managed to bring about a significant reduction in child abuse and child marriages; we have offered education and basic services to victims and potential victims of human trafficking that end up here in Zanzibar and those who could potentially end up in the Arab world. We have been able to influence government decisions on issues of great concern for us as a society.
- We offer services to HIV victims who attend clinic in our Chukwani center. Here we offer counseling and other relevant services including education to reduce stigma that society attaches to this kind of illnesses and the family crisis that proceeds from being an AIDS victim.

We have a close collaboration with the government and some of its institutions like One Stop Center and the Zanzibar Aids Commission (ZAC). Our collaboration with the One Stop Center is very effective as it brings together the police, counselors, doctors, nurses, and a lot of other professionals that very effectively help victims of rape, drug abuse, kidnapping, human trafficking, and other issues.
Obstacles to Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue in Zanzibar is not without its share of obstacles. These obstacles are several and not unique to Zanzibar. In general and around the world, there is a tendency for both Muslims and Christians to generalize their perceptions of each other. This leads to stereotyping, such as “All Muslims are terrorists or support terrorists,” and “All Christians are decadent, immoral, or unjust.” Fortunately, our experience has taught us that the vast majority of Christians and Muslims are none of these things.

Another significant obstacle to dialogue is self-sufficiency. This is a false belief that we, Christians and Muslims, have nothing to learn from or offer to each other. In addressing this problem, Fr. Shorter acknowledges that, while we Christians have largely accepted dialogue and its consequences, the great majority of our Muslim brothers and sisters have not. We, Christians, have largely abandoned explicit disrespect for Muslims in our pulpits, official declarations, publications, and in our seminars. The Second Vatican Council explicitly asks Christians and Muslims to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On the other hand, some Muslims continue with their anti-Christian propaganda, publishing materials that may be harmful, offensive, or disrespectful to Christians. Sometimes Christians are openly condemned as unbelievers and some mosques continue tacitly, and sometimes explicitly, to inspire their members to maintain a hostile attitude.

We have these challenges. Nevertheless, we are determined to address them together with our brothers and sisters of other faiths.

Conclusion

Here in Zanzibar, just like in most other places, some people are simply unaware of the need for interreligious dialogue. This group includes religious and political leaders on both sides. Some are simply not interested, while others actively oppose interfaith cooperation. These facts have not stopped us in our efforts to build interaction and understanding between Christians and Muslims. However, I would like to call formators, wherever they are in the congregation, to make interreligious dialogue a central focus of formation. Without dialogue between people of faith, the vacuum in communication and understanding can easily degenerate into gossip and mistrust that fuels the prejudice that leads to unnecessary violence.

Some Examples of sectarian Violence

One prominent Muslim scholar who spoke out against extremist behavior in our islands paid a heavy price for his convictions. In 2013, Sheikh Fadhil Soraga, secretary to the Grand Mufti of Zanzibar, had acid thrown in his face apparently from people of his own faith for saying that Islam is a religion of peace and that it did not support violence. He stood firmly for peace and understanding among people of different faiths and he paid a heavy price for it.
The Catholic diocese of Zanzibar has suffered violence mainly directed towards some of the few priests serving in this diocese. Fr. Ambrose Mkenda was shot and seriously wounded at the gates of one of our schools as he returned home on Christmas day. Fr. Anselm Mwang’amba had acid thrown in his face in broad daylight in downtown Zanzibar. Fr. Evaristus Mushi, a Duquesne university alumnus, parish priest of St. Joseph’s cathedral, was shot dead as he arrived at an outstation.

While we have no hundred percent proof that these attacks were religiously motivated, their common denominator points only in that direction. All the victims were Catholic priests and the attacks were punctuated by additional small attacks on some of our churches and random name-calling towards our people on our streets. Our experience has taught us that religious intolerance is usually fed by fear and acute ignorance. Without continued dialogue and mutual respect, extremism, hatred, and random violence will only grow.

**Abbreviations**

*LG* *Lumen gentium*, Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

*NA* *Nostra aetate*, Vatican II Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

**Endnotes**

The Role of Interfaith Dialogue in Conflict Management among the Wardei and Pokomo Communities in Tana River County, Kenya

Fr. Peter Ndegwa Githui, C.S.Sp., is a member of the Province of Kenya with mission experience in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Kenya. He serves as parish priest of St. John the Baptist Wenje Parish, Garissa Diocese since 2005 and is a member of the Tana River County Steering Group (CSG). Peter holds a Bachelor’s degree in theology and in education. He currently pursues a Ph.D. at Pwani University where he was awarded a Master of Science in Environmental Studies (Community Development) in 2015. He has published “Assessment of Factors Influencing Food security in Wenje Division, Tana River County, Kenya,” in the Journal of Food Science and Quality Management.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to assess the role of interfaith dialogue in conflict management among the Wardei (Muslim) and Pokomo (Christian) communities living in Kinakomba Ward in Wenje Parish in Tana River County, in the Coastal Region of Kenya. In general, in Kenya about eighty percent of the population is Christian while about twenty percent is Muslim, Hindu, African Traditionalists, and other smaller religions. In the coastal region in Kenya about eighty percent of the population is Muslim and twenty percent is Christian. Over ninety-nine percent of the Wardei are Muslims while the majority of the Pokomos are Christians. Wardei are pastoralists, while Pokomos are farmers. Thus the two communities have different cultures and lifestyles.

Initial Experiences

Religious leaders in this area play a very important role in interfaith dialogue because conflict is part and parcel of the daily living of the two communities. Despite the fact that the two religions are Abrahamic, the two communities have differences based on their religious be-
liefs. The other factors at the bottom of the conflict include the struggle for natural resources which are the basic needs of the two communities. The River Tana, which is the longest river in Kenya, passes through here and its water is one of the sources of the conflict. The other sources of conflict include land and pasture. Historical marginalization is also an important factor because it has left both communities living in poverty.

The area only having the two religions makes religious tensions the order of the day. Originally what would happen is the Christians would preach in market places against non-Christians condemning them to hell for their unbelief. The Muslim preachers in turn would turn up in the market place with the Bible and Quran, and reading from different sections, they would disapprove what the Christians had preached earlier and this was a recipe for chaos because there was no way the two would convince each other. As religious leaders we met and wondered aloud what this discourse was all about. It had gone to a point of confrontation between the two religions, so we asked the security operators to intervene otherwise the situation would have deteriorated to a point of no return.

From this point on several initiatives started coming up on how the two communities could co-exist harmoniously. Religious leaders were key here and I started looking at the bigger picture. One of the main issues was that the two communities lived in abject poverty. We are located in an arid and semi-arid area. The area experiences drought after every three years and there is serious flooding every year. These two disasters combine to make a bad situation worse because the pastoralists have no pasture because of the drought while the farmers have no harvest because their crops are swept away by the floods on an annual basis. The area where the farmers stay is a flood plain, the area is flat for hundreds of kilometres and the river is very old meandering towards the Indian Ocean. Farmers have settled on the river bank and cultivate their crops for their livelihoods there. So it does not need to be raining for the floods to come. When there is rain upstream the river is filled with water from the tributaries and other waters coming from seasonal rivers all converge in an area occupying over 200 metres on either side of the river thus displacing all the farmers without a drop of rain.

I responded to this situation by making emergency interventions for the victims of the drought (Wardei Muslims) and floods (Pokomo both Muslims and Christians). Because the situation was cyclical as a result of climate change, I intensified these interventions with support from the donor community. As the intensity of these interventions continued, the Muslim villages called me and sat me down. They asked me why I was being so generous to them and they wondered aloud if the interventions were geared towards converting them all to the Christian faith. They got very worried since they needed the food and non-food items desperately, yet they loved their religion. We had a long discussion that took weeks as I had to explain to them that the interventions were meant to save lives, because they were in danger of dying from hunger, disease, and malnutrition. I took time to explain to them the “Sphere Standards” and the “Good Enough Guide,” and they understood that it was just like the government or the Red Cross doing an intervention, and so that was the first step towards an interfaith dialogue that I experienced.
We made progress here but the problem now came from the Christians who started wondering why the Muslims were getting the same treatment from us, yet when they had donations from their sources they distributed them only at night to their Muslim brothers. Again, I had to go through the same explanation to make everyone understand that our obligation was to all humanity without discrimination based on creed, race, tribe or color.

Struggling for natural resources brought us even more challenges. The Pokomos who stay along the river and the Wardei who stay in the hinterland share the same river, but the Pokomos claim ownership of the river. This means accessing water in the river is a cause of conflict. The issue becomes even more serious because to access the water the pastoralists must pass through the farmers area since the farmers occupy the entire strip along the river. The government has made corridors called Malkhas through which the pastoralists can pass while going to water their animals. These corridors do not have fences and most of the time it is children who take the animals for watering, with the result that most of the animals end up in the farmers’ plots, destroying entire crops. The farmers’ response is to beat the animals causing death and the conflict deepens. The children take the message back and war breaks out causing death and destruction of property.

In Tana River County ninety percent of the land is trust land, meaning land adjudication has not been done. So the pastoralists can move in any direction and settle anywhere without any documentation. Even the farmers along the river do not have papers for their land. This is a very contentious issue because the rich have demarcated the land into ranches limiting the community to settle in congested traditional/colonial-like villages. The Pokomos claim the land belongs to them and that the Wardei are migrants who came here in the sixties and so have no claim to land ownership. These historical factors continue to bring tension anytime the issue of land is mentioned by any side especially if the Wardei are looking to develop land.

Pasture is another contentious issue because of frequent drought brought about by climate change. Every year the dry months are known to be the conflict months, because animals do not have pasture and the only green areas are along the river and that is a no-go zone, as it is occupied by the Pokomos. One of the challenges here is that it is the children who go to graze the animals; because of the existing prejudices, the children often raise false alarms. The last disaster in 2012 that had over a thousand people killed in tribal clashes was because a boy raised a false alarm, saying the Pokomos had killed some animals and, without verification, war broke out.

**Interventions**

Faced with all these challenges we decided to intervene with an interreligious dialogue approach. Firstly, we were faced with the problem of the *Al Shabaab*. This is a national challenge with Kenya going to war in Somalia. At our level the problem of radicalization is real. Religious leaders are very influential and they are close to the people. They are in the mosque and
church on a daily basis and so they can contribute to a peaceful co-existence. With this in mind, I formed three groups to unveil the puzzle. The first group is that of opinion leaders. We work in fourteen villages so we asked the community to select for us six opinion leaders from each of the fourteen villages. The opinion leaders would be the people that are “gatekeepers” of their villages; they are respected and their opinion counts in all the decisions that are made by their community. They speak on behalf of their people and represent their interests in all the meetings. These would be retired teachers or civil servants. They could also be politicians, but since politicians have a bad name as most of them are known as pathological liars, the community keeps them at bay. So opinion leaders include members of the council of elders, respected women, the youth, and people living with disabilities. So this is the composition of opinion leaders from a village, namely one elder, one woman, one youth, and one person with disability, one religious leader, namely the imam, pastor, or catechist and the area chief.

The second group that we formed is that of the peace committees. Here again we asked the community to select eight members from each of the fourteen villages. Out of the eight, three must be women. The criteria for a peace committee member is that they must command respect among the villagers; they must be objective and neutral when solving cases. They must command respect even of the neighboring communities because they might be called to solve a case involving their sworn enemies, and if they are not neutral the other community will refuse to sit in such meetings. It is a voluntary job so no payment is given. It is a job to be done for three years after which a new committee will be selected. So this democratization is for sustainability purposes. The committee then elects its officials and they are encouraged to register with the Social Services as a group, so that they can access support from different sources.

The third group is not very different from the second. These are the paralegals. We asked the community to select for us two paralegals from each of the fourteen villages, (both Wardei and Pokomo villages). The difference here is the paralegal must have passed the fourth form. This is because the kind of work they do and the kind of training they undergo has a lot of legal terminology so they need to be able to understand and speak English. They must be one male and one female from each village. Their main task is to represent their village’s interest in the courts, they will deal with the alternative dispute resolution mechanism, and they will work with the magistrates to pass the point on the interests of their community. Alternative dispute resolution is in the Kenyan constitution.

So we formed these groups and trained them thoroughly for a number of years. These groups then started working as we continued to train them. They turned what used to be a source of conflict into an asset. The relationship with the Muslims improved tremendously and people started seeing each other as brothers and sisters and as same people facing the same problems. They then turned their focus on fighting against poverty. We met severally and discovered many innovative ways we could use to tackle our challenges. One such way was how to prevent the farmers from being killed by crocodiles. This is a big issue here
because literally nearly each family has lost a member through a crocodile attack. The pastoralists also faced the same problem for their animals were also being eaten by crocodiles.

Results

From these interventions two results came out that are a lesson for interreligious dialogue. One was that the opinion leaders became more sensitive in their approach to issues that concern the communities. Instead of just defending the interest of their community, they started considering their neighbors also as deserving justice. The religious leaders from the Muslim and the Christian communities became peace ambassadors, preaching peaceful co-existence in their mosques and churches. The preaching during public occasions like weddings and burials focused on what brings us together rather than what divides us.

The second result was that conflicts between the two religions, the two communities, reduced considerably. The peace committees got active, they started resolving the majority of the cases in their villages. They started to command respect from both communities and became a reference point whenever a problem arose. They were given space to be innovative in solving problems. This reduced very much the problems that were reported to the police, because the peace committees were able to solve them. In Duwayo village, the community re-introduced their traditional methods of solving their problems by having a public cell where one is kept for a day when the crime is a public scandal and a disgrace to the community. This reduced petty crimes considerably because once you are in the public cell, which is a pole at the centre of the village, everybody sees you there and it is a shame for you and your family. Your children will want to know what happened and they will cry a lot. So to avoid this kind of a situation, crime in the village has reduced considerably. Again this is just one method the villagers decided to use, and it is working for them.

The third result was that with peaceful co-existence human development became possible. We were able to implement several projects for both the Muslims and the Christians in common farms and groups. We together started drilling wells along the river to pump water using solar energy to supply it to the people for both irrigation and domestic purposes. We rehabilitated water pans for pastoralists. We gave water tanks to the villagers to store the pumped water and use it for drinking. We supplied enough water to areas from 2 to 3.5 kilometres distant from the river. With this intervention, we were able to relocate the farmers from the flood plain. They can produce food throughout the year and have water supply inside the villages and are removed from the danger of crocodiles. Through interreligious dialogue we have been able to change the lives of the most marginalized from abject poverty to sustainable living. That is how after working in this place for the last fourteen years and making such interventions along with many others not mentioned in this paper, I was recognized as a National Hero in Kenya on the Mashujaa Day, on 20 October, 2018.
Conclusion

From this experience, it is clear that interreligious dialogue is a tool for conflict management. It has supported the two communities of Wardei (Muslim) and Pokomo (Christians) to promote peaceful coexistence through common activities in their irrigation schemes. It has enabled them to reduce and resolve a majority of their conflicts without referring them to a higher authority. Thus they have acquired a sustainable peaceful coexistence through this dialogue. Interreligious dialogue has brought hope to the community, a hope that you can live in peace with your neighbors even when you differ in your beliefs. A hope that you will be treated justly by your neighbors and supported when you have problems. Thus, fear has been replaced by hope.

It is also evident that interreligious dialogue breeds values of peace and human development. After a long journey of training, the two communities of Wardei and Pokomos started appreciating each other’s ideas. This led to discussions that yielded a common destiny to solve the problem of food security that was affecting all of them. This enabled the two communities to own the project as a joint one so no one would vandalize it, since it was theirs.

Lastly, interreligious dialogue enhances our sensitivity to the feelings of people of different religions. The power of religion can be used as a major force of unification among different groups, and can play a key role in the promotion of communal peace and reconciliation, by bringing varying groups like the Wardei and the Pokomos together in order to establish and maintain constructive channels of communication and sustainable collaboration. Interreligious dialogue advances world peace by uniting faiths and by fostering reciprocal understanding, acceptance, and tolerance among people of different faiths. Interreligious dialogue breaks down walls of division and barriers that stand at the center of numerous conflicts, with the objective of achieving sustainable peace. People take their religious beliefs very seriously and so issues surrounding religion need to be handled with great care, respect, and tolerance.
Comment les Religions sont instrumentalisées pour des Buts militaro-politiques en RCA


« Les chrétiens, ils veulent nous chasser de la Centrafrique.
Nous tous qui sommes des musulmans.
N’avons-nous pas le droit de nous défendre ? ».

Introduction : un Aperçu de notre Situation à Mobaye, RCA

Depuis l’an 2013 la République Centrafricaine est plongée dans une rébellion meurtrière que le pays, malgré son instabilité permanente depuis l’indépendance, n’a jamais connue. Une fin des violences qui persistent jusqu’à nos jours n’est pas encore en vue.

Au cœur de la rébellion se trouve aussi la question des religions, notamment du christianisme et de l’islam. Les médias occidentaux veulent nous faire croire qu’il s’agit d’une « guerre de religion ». Or, c’est une perception très erronée et dangereuse. Cependant, il serait faux aussi de dire que la guerre fratricide n’a rien à faire avec la religion. Il faudrait dire plutôt que, d’une manière pernicieuse, la question religieuse se greffe sur le conflit militaro-politique et lui donne une dynamique accélérée. Et pourtant, le cœur de l’instabilité provoquée, c’est l’avidité de l’argent, de l’or, des diamants, du pouvoir politique.

Dans le pays entier, on considère l’entente entre chrétiens et musulmans comme la clé qui pourra ouvrir la porte à un avenir plus paisible. Aujourd’hui, il y a des villes en RCA où chrétiens et musulmans vivent toujours ensemble, il y a des échanges à tous les niveaux. D’autres
villes connaissent l'expulsion d'un de ces groupes, ce qui fait que dans une ville où vivaient jusqu'au début de la crise les adeptes des deux religions harmonieusement ensemble, il n'y a qu'une seule communauté religieuse aujourd'hui. Ou bien, les villes sont séparées en deux : il y a le quartier musulman, il y a le quartier chrétien. Essayer de franchir la ligne rouge met la vie en danger.


Mais si on parle d'un « dialogue interreligieux » en Centrafrique en 2018, il ne faut pas oublier une troisième « religion » qui n'est pas du tout apparente comme le christianisme et l'islam, mais qui habite toujours les cœurs des gens, à savoir les croyances traditionnelles. En réalité, on trouve des convictions traditionnelles profondément ancrées aussi chez les chrétiens baptisés et des musulmans convaincus. Il ne nous semble pas faux de parler d'une « double identité religieuse », un mélange de la foi chrétienne ou musulmane bien définie avec des croyances transmises par les ancêtres et qui sont beaucoup moins saisissables, mais qui exercent, par contre, une influence très forte. Nous y reviendrons.


**Expérience du Dialogue interreligieux dans notre Pays: conflictuelle, collaboratrice ou indifférente ?**

Nous rappelons ce que nous venons de mentionner ci-dessus : souvent on pense que la pierre d’angle de la reconstruction du pays, c'est le dialogue islamochrétien qui serait le garant d'une cohésion sociale durable au sein d’une société marquée par une déchirure sanglante. La méfiance importe sur la confiance entre les groupes différents de la société. Mais attention : si on insiste uniquement sur le dialogue entre chrétiens et musulmans ce serait comme si on reconnaissait que les croyances différentes institutionnalisées (divergences entre Eglises et Mosquée) seraient à l’origine de la guerre fratricide. Mais ce n'est pas le cas, comme nous l'avons démontré ci-dessus.

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Au niveau national c’est l’archevêque de Bangui, le Cardinal Mgr. Dieudonné Nzapalainga, C.S.Sp., qui est le représentant catholique de la plateforme religieuse. Son autorité morale sur toute l’étendue est immense ; c’est lui qui a, à maintes reprises, empêché des nouvelles flambées de violence au pays. Lui, il travaille main dans la main avec un pasteur de l’Eglise ELIM, le représentant de toutes les Eglises Protestantes du pays, et un imam qui représente la communauté musulmane.

Ce modèle de la « plateforme » a été imité dans un grand nombre de ville un peu partout en RCA.

A Mobaye, une telle plateforme a existé aussi. Jusqu’à nos jours, les communautés chrétiennes et la communauté musulmane entretiennent des relations amicales et confiantes. Or, à un moment précis de la crise, quand la grande majorité de la population avait fui au Congo, une nouvelle ONG a vu le jour qui s’appelait « Acteurs de la paix ». Le pasteur et l’imam en faisaient partie ; nous, les pères catholiques, n’y sommes pas entrés, parce que cette ONG nous semblait perdre sa neutralité dans le conflit, et l’aspect religieux disparaissait derrière l’impulsion politique. C’est pourquoi la plateforme en tant que tel perdait son importance, tandis que la collaboration entre les communautés religieuses et leurs leaders continuent à porter ses fruits au premier et deuxième niveau, à savoir au niveau du « dialogue de la vie » et du « dialogue des œuvres ».

D’ailleurs, nous soutenons les quelques rares institutions de l’État qui se trouvent sur place, à savoir le préfet, le sous-préfet, etc., même s’ils n’ont aucun pouvoir vis-à-vis des groupes armés présents dans notre région. Dans une situation de l’anarchie totale où la population est livrée entre les mains des rebelles ennemis, nous considérons comme fondamental de montrer notre soutien aux autorités légitimes. Nous n’entrons pas dans les jeux politiques entre les groupes armés, mais nous appuyons tout effort de l’État pour rétablir le calme et l’ordre dans le chaos que nous vivons.

Dans le contexte de la RCA, chaque « dialogue interreligieux » est hautement politique ! Cette influence « politique » a le potentiel de calmer les esprits. Nos homélies sont congruentes : à l’église catholique, dans les églises de tradition protestante, à la mosquée de Mobaye, on entend d’une manière unanime l’appel au désarmement des maisons, mais aussi des cœurs de nos fidèles. Personne ne peut justifier ses crimes en s’appuyant sur son Dieu, même si un grand nombre de rebelles des deux côtés confirment qu’avant chaque combat ils se confient à Dieu à travers la prière et le jeûne. C’est le grand défi de la collaboration interreligieuse : « Faire comprendre à tous les croyants que notre Dieu est Un, qu’Il n’est pas un Dieu de guerre ! »

Les Défis au Dialogue interreligieux dans notre Contexte

Le grand défi est de ne pas se laisser entraîner dans la logique d’une appartenance religieuse qui se construit en érigeant des murs. L’exemple suivant illustre bien la manipulation des jeunes : un jour, un rebelle musulman du mouvement des « Seleka » m’expliquait ceci : « Les
chrétiens, ils veulent nous chasser de la Centrafrique. Nous tous qui sommes des musulmans. N’avons-nous pas le droit de nous défendre ? » Les Seigneurs de guerre savent très bien qu’ils ne peuvent pas suffisamment motiver leurs éléments en leur promettant du butin. C’est plus efficace de leur inculquer qu’il y a des ennemis (autre tribus, autre religion) qui veulent les expulser, ou pire, même exterminer. La religion sert à ce que les jeunes perdent leurs scrupules, ils deviennent prêts à tuer pour « survivre ». Au nom de Dieu. C’est ici que le dialogue islamochrétien doit démontrer le « vrai visage » de notre Dieu qui est le Dieu de la vie.

Deuxièmement, le dialogue interreligieux doit se faire avocat des opprimés et des sans-voix. Il y a trop de victimes qui souffrent silencieusement car il n’y a personne qui leur permet de faire entendre leur voix. Les leaders religieux doivent unir leurs voix pour dénoncer les crimes – et non pas collaborer avec ou bénéficier des rebelles d’une manière ou d’une autre.

Les victimes de la rébellion en RCA qu’on trouve, bien sûr, des deux côtés, ont besoin de notre soutien, mais pas seulement « par notre bouche », mais aussi par des actions concrètes.

Le premier pilier pour reconstruire le pays, c’est investir dans l’avenir. Et ça, c’est toujours l’école. A Mobaye, nous avons une école fondamentale catholique. Grâce à l’ONG nationale « Enfants sans frontières », nous avons pu y offrir l’éducation scolaire gratuitement. En fait, si on avait demandé une participation financière de la part des parents, on aurait eu très peu d’élèves, puisqu’au milieu de la rébellion qui continue à faire ses ravages, les parents n’ont pas les moyens pour payer la scolarité de leurs enfants.

Nous considérons notre école avec ses 370 élèves comme l’un des noyaux de la cohésion sociale entre chrétiens et musulmans, car 30% de nos élèves sont des enfants musulmans. C’est à l’école qu’ils peuvent apprendre le respect de l’autre dans son altérité, et, comme base de tout, l’amour de Dieu qui a créé chaque homme à son image. Dans un pays ou la violence, et après, l’impunité totale fait partie de la vie quotidienne, rien ne va plus de soi. Même pas le respect de la sainteté de chaque vie humaine.

En plus, parmi le collège des enseignants qui sont tous des maîtres parents, nous avons aussi embauché un jeune musulman. Le dialogue de la vie, la collaboration au sein des œuvres pour la promotion du développement intégral trouve sa place dans notre école catholique. Nous voulons montrer aux enfants qu’il ne faut pas imiter les violences commises au nom de la religion, mais le « vivre-ensemble » au nom de la religion. De plus, une fois par mois, nous avons une messe scolaire, une célébration eucharistique à laquelle participent tous les élèves – catholiques, protestants et musulmans ! La sensibilisation par rapport à l’idée d’un Dieu qui est le Dieu de tous est toujours une pensée importante pendant ces célébrations.

Un autre champ sur lequel nous essayons de rendre témoignage d’un Dieu qui aime ses enfants sans distinction, c’est l’hôpital catholique de Zangba et d’autres postes de santé publiques que nous soutenons. L’hôpital est le lieu de neutralité par excellence en faveur de toute victime. L’aide qu’on apporte à tout malade sans prendre en considération son appartenance religieuse ou ethnique est un signe du souci de Dieu pour tous ces enfants. Ceci semble être un principe qui va de soi. Or, en RCA, il ne l’est plus. Combien de fois un
Centre de Santé n’a-t-il pas été attaqué sous prétexte de vengeance parce qu’on aurait soigné « l’ennemi » ?

Pour clôturer, il est important de revenir maintenant sur la question de la religion des ancêtres ou des croyances traditionnelles. Il semble que la crise actuelle en RCA a réveillé la foi ancienne. Dans cette cosmologie les forces surnaturelles occupent une place centrale. Des forces qui se laissent maîtriser et mettre au service du combat contre l’ennemi. Un groupe de rebelles se soumet à des rites particuliers pour se protéger contre les armes de l’ennemi, les jeunes se soumettent à la magie noire à l’aide des instruits, des « marabouts ». Ces actes encouragent parfois à la violence, raison pour laquelle l’Église s’y oppose. Comment entrer en dialogue avec des croyances, qui ne connaissent ni doctrine ni institutions ? – Il faut entrer en dialogue avec ceux, et notamment nos chrétiens, qui ont déjà dit « oui » à ces rites occultes. Il s’agit de leur montrer l’incompatibilité avec la foi chrétienne, il s’agit de les aider à sortir de cette logique qui produit, d’ailleurs, le cycle vicieux de violence et contre-violence. Il faut garder et respecter les valeurs des ancêtres, qui reconnaissent tout à fait la sacralité de la vie de chaque homme, mais il faut « évangéliser » les traditions qui sont nuisibles à la paix et à la fraternité entre les hommes.

**Des Propositions pour des Points de Réflexion au Chapitre Général 2020**

Dans un contexte d’instabilité totale il nous semble crucial de mener le dialogue interreligieux surtout au premier et deuxième niveau, c’est-à-dire au niveau du « dialogue de la vie » et « des œuvres ».

C’est pourquoi nous proposons de profiter des rencontres de nos mouvements et fraternités, surtout des jeunes, pour inviter les représentants des communautés musulmanes et pour ainsi mieux se connaître. De même, les grandes fêtes religieuses devraient être une occasion des visites mutuelles.

Pourrait-il y avoir une spécificité spiritaine en vue du dialogue interreligieux, et notamment du dialogue islamochrétien ? On se souvient de l’impulsion de notre premier fondateur, Claude-François Poullart des Places, à savoir l’accent qu’il met sur la formation, l’importance d’une éducation scolaire approfondie. Il a voulu donner les outils nécessaires aux futurs prêtres pour pouvoir affronter les défis brûlants de son époque. Aujourd’hui, il serait donc essentiel que, dans les établissements scolaires dont la congrégation a la charge, il y ait d’abord une éducation religieuse de fond sur la foi catholique, mais qu’il y ait, en deuxième étape, aussi la prise de connaissance de la foi de l’autre. Cette « prise-de-connaissance » pourra se transformer en estime de l’autre, vertu profondément chrétienne et indispensable pour un dialogue des religions qui porte des fruits. Donnons donc la place aux témoignages des croyants d’autres religions – pour mieux et plus profondément nous rendre compte de notre propre foi sans ériger des murs vis-à-vis de l’autre. Le but de cette éducation spiritaine serait de se laisser enrichir par l’autre et non pas de le considérer comme menace de notre propre foi.
François Libermann pourrait nous servir de maître spirituel par rapport à la question: « Quelle posture prendre au cœur du dialogue interreligieux ». Bien sûr qu’avant tout, il aimait voir les musulmans se convertir au christianisme, mais ce désir ne l’empêchait pourtant pas d’exprimer sa haute estime pour le roi musulman de Dakar, Eliman, ainsi que pour son neveu Soleiman et pour tous les chefs. Dans une lettre du 26 janvier 1848 qu’il lui adresse, nous trouvons une remarque assez frappante : « Vous n’êtes pas chrétiens [. . .] ; mais [. . .] vous connaissez Dieu ».2 Au fond, Libermann exprime une conviction qui allait à contre-courant de ce que l’Église enseignait à l’époque. Apparemment, pour lui, l’islam permet de découvrir Dieu, le Créateur et le Législateur, qui aide à discerner entre le bien et le mal. Sans être naïfs dans quelques circonstances apparentes, reconnaissons d’abord que l’islam n’est pas un mouvement militaro-politique, mais que les musulmans sont des croyants à la recherche de Dieu. Cette remarque aussi semble évidente, mais dans des situations difficiles et tendues, marquées par la violence, il nous semble important de rappeler cette vision fondamentale.

Il sera donc important que le Chapitre Général 2020 envoie un message fort à toute la famille Spiritaine de s’engager davantage dans le dialogue interreligieux.

2. N.D. X, 23. Dans nos archives, il y a deux versions de cette lettre; nous citons selon la plus courte, écrite par Libermann lui-même.
Un Survol Historique À Rebours Des Courants Islamiques Présents Au Cameroun


Je vous invite à faire ensemble un petit survol historique à rebours des différents courants islamiques présents au Cameroun, en regardant leurs origines, leurs racines et leurs caractéristiques. J’ai bien dit aussi un survol historique à rebours. Nous partons du présent vers le passé. Cela nous aidera à comprendre « qu’il y a peu de choses nouvelles sous le soleil ». Les mêmes courants nous reviennent avec de noms différents, de stratégies différentes, de moyens mis en œuvre différents, mais avec le même fond idéologique.

Commençons par le courant islamique qui menace une bonne partie de notre sous-région, ce courant « Jihadiste » violent qui se nomme depuis mars 2015, lors de son allégeance à l’État islamique, « État islamique au Maghreb » (ancien Boko Haram, même si son vrai nom était « Groupe sunnite pour la prédication et le jihad »). Je vous fais grâce des repères historiques de ce mouvement que vous connaissez tous, pour essayer de comprendre ses racines.

Souvent nous entendons dire que ce « jihadisme terroriste n’est pas l’islam » donc qu’il serait quelque chose d’extérieur à l’islam. Nous ne pouvons plus accepter un tel langage. Ce serait une manière trop facile pour nos frères musulmans d’éviter de s’interroger de manière critique sur leur propre pensée religieuse. L’ensemble des mouvements jihadistes (Al Qaïda, al Shabab, Aqmi, Boko haram, Daech) ne surgissent pas de rien. Ils ne sont pas seulement le ré-
résultat de réactions à de frustrations sociales. Le jihadisme contemporain a bel et bien ses racines intellectuelles et religieuses au cœur de l’islam contemporain. Ce n’est pas l’islam comme tel, mais sa double version, la première celle de l’islam puritain et rigoriste des salafistes que nous verrons ci-dessous et la seconde, celle de l’islam politique, dont les frères musulmans, fondés en Egypte en 1928 par Hasan al-Banna sont une des composantes, qui sont saisis par l’idée qu’un état musulman ferait revivre l’islam et le monde musulman. Ce sont ces deux versions de l’islam qui constituent les racines, le bouillon de culture de la pensée et de l’action jihadistes.

Préisons : ces deux grandes matrices ne prêchent pas dans leur ensemble le jihadisme, elles s’y opposent même dans leur ensemble. Seules des fractions minoritaires de ces mouvements iront vers le jihadisme. Mais ces deux courants alimentent le terreau des idées, des visions du monde, du cadrage de la pensée d’où naîtront les jihadistes.

La première racine des jihadismes se trouve dans les mouvements qui visent à revigorer l’islam par un piétisme rigoriste, par le respect des rites et des normes morales, en suivant à la lettre les préceptes fondateurs contenus dans les textes du Coran et de la Tradition du prophète. Ce sont les courants dits « Salafistes » donc les Saoudiens ont été les propagateurs attitrés (mais pas question de sanctions à leur égard, au contraire, ils sont courtisés et protégés par l’occident !!).

Le drame du monde musulman sunnite contemporain est que depuis 40 ans, ces deux courants de l’islam se sont répandus dans la culture savante et les croyants ordinaires. Elles ont saturé le monde musulman où les autres voix de l’islam sont devenues inaudibles.

Au nord-Cameroun, un changement profond s’est produit dans l’islam. Même si l’islam traditionnel et confrérique (surtout la Tijaniyya) reste important dans notre région, la montée en force de courants de réforme islamiste est évidente. Ces courants ont pris la direction et la représentativité de la communauté musulmane. Ce changement est surtout le fruit de l’influence des courants de réforme salafiste et de la Da’wa saoudienne et pakistanaise, fortement appuyés et financés par l’Arabie Saoudite et plus récemment par le Qatar. Le but de ces courants est de rénover, purifier et contrôler l’islam de notre région. Regardons de près ces deux courants.

**Wahhabisme et Salafisme**

Il est parfois d’usage de qualifier indistinctement salafisme et wahhabisme, alors que le salafisme est plutôt une méthode à différence du wahhabisme qui est une tendance dérivée de l’école hanbalite fondée par Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792). Laquelle à la suite d’un pacte conclu avec Muhammad Ibn Da’ud ont fondé l’Etat Saoudien en 1744. Le salafisme qui est une vision islamique qui cherche à revitaliser les pratiques des trois premières générations de l’islam. L’islam pur et authentique des premières générations, peut s’appliquer à toutes les écoles de droit, même si l’école hanbalite semble y prédisposer davantage. Dans notre région, l’existence de courants salafistes au sein de l’école Malikite sont prouvés dans le
passé et au présent. Le jihad lancé par Ousman Dan Fodio en 1804 avec la création du Califat de Sokoto (Nigéria) c’est bien l’œuvre de quelqu’un qui était de tradition Soufi et qui appartenait à la confrérie de la Qaddiriya. Notons que Boko Haram qui fait régulièrement référence à Ousman Dan Fodio et à sa tentative de réforme et purification islamique, occulte son origine soufie et de l’école Malikite.

Le salafisme prône :

- Le retour à l’islam des origines par l’imitation de la vie du Prophète, de ses compagnons et des deux générations suivantes ;
- Le respect aveugle de la sunna (tradition islamique, comprenant le Coran, les hadiths et la sira).

Il condamne :

- Toute interprétation théologique, en particulier par l’usage de la raison humaine, accusée d’éloigner le fidèle du message divin ;
- Toute piété populaire ou superstition, comme le culte des saints, jugé contraire à l’unicité de Dieu (tawhid) ;
- Toute influence occidentale, comme le mode de vie et la société de consommation, mais également la démocratie et la laïcité.

N’oublions pas aussi que l’islam Saoudien, wahhabite, dont les bases théologiques sont à chercher chez Ibn Hanbal (IXe siècle) et Ibn Taymiyya (XIIIe siècle), véhicule une vision de la religion dogmatique, littéraliste, formaliste, puritaine et rétrograde.

**Jama’at at-tabligh (Société pour la propagation de la Foi)**


Les premiers à effectuer ce voyage, des nordistes, ont établi à leur tour le centre national des Tablighs à Maroua, dans le quartier de Dougoy, à partir duquel le mouvement a commencé à s’étendre vers le reste du territoire.

Si la JIC (Jeunesse Islamique du Cameroun) et la CAMSU (Cameroon Muslim Students Union), chargés de la prédication en milieu scolaire et universitaire, disposent aujourd’hui d’antennes dans tout le pays, le mouvement Tabligh s’est spécialisé dans la mission itinérante.
Ils circulent à pied, en suivant le réseau des mosquées existantes, qui constituent pour eux à la fois des lieux d’hébergement, des tribunes de prédication et des lieux stratégiques à conquérir.

L’activité essentielle des Tablighs se structure autour du « Khuruj ». Le groupe qui « sort » entre dans la mosquée qu’il rencontre et s’y établit pour quelque temps. Avec l’autorisation de l’Imam ils y prêchent durant la journée et la soirée et y dorment la nuit. Ces sorties peuvent durer trois, dix, quarante jours ou quatre mois, selon les moyens financiers du groupe.

L’appel que le groupe Tabligh lance aux musulmans est non seulement de retrouver la voie du « vrai » islam et de s’y conformer dans la vie quotidienne, mais c’est aussi une invitation à s’engager tout de suite dans la da’wa. Les Tablighs ne se contentent pas seulement de passer dans les mosquées. Ils cherchent à les « convertir » et à étendre le réseau des « mosquées de da’wa ». Chacune d’elles est un « centre » (markaz). À l’échelle du quartier, la mosquée de da’wa est un foyer de réislamisation de la communauté locale. Les « frères » font un soir par semaine du porte-à-porte dans le quartier pour rappeler aux musulmans leur « engagement ». Le groupe Tabligh organise aussi des « sorties » vers les mosquées voisines non encore « touchées ». Et parfois des sorties plus lointaines.


Ce qui a préparé le changement de l’islam de notre région a été d’abord le rétablissement des liens avec le monde arabe fait par le président Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-1982). L’envoi d’étudiants chaque année plus nombreux principalement vers l’Arabie Saoudite, l’Egypte, le Niger, avec des bourses d’étude, ainsi que la réorganisation et l’aide au pèlerinage aux lieux saints de l’islam. Au retour de ces étudiants formés dans la péninsule arabe, il est incontestable que leur enseignement dans les écoles franco-abres et les madrasa qui ont connu une grande expansion à l’époque, est influencé par ce qu’ils ont appris en Arabie Saoudite. L’islam qu’ils ont véhiculé est de nature fondamentaliste, anti-confrérique, puritaine et hanbalite à bien des égards, bien que l’islam pratiqué dans la région soit Malikite.

Ensuite, le travail actif depuis 40 ans du courant salafiste et de la da’wa a porté des fruits : pratique religieuse grandissante et meilleure connaissance de la religion, construction de mosquées avec un équipement moderne de sonorisation, réorganisation de l’enseignement islamique à travers les madrasa et les instituts islamiques avec l’appui d’une vaste littérature et des moyens audiovisuels, contrôle des moyens de communication (radio, TV), développement des œuvres sociales, dont la création de l’hôpital privé islamique de Bamare à Maroua.

Enfin, lors de l’accession au pouvoir du Président Paul Biya, l’administration du nord tenue jusque-là quasi exclusivement par des musulmans devient de plus en plus laïque et tenue par des chrétiens. Les musulmans ont eu le sentiment de se voir déposséder de leur pouvoir. On assiste alors à un retour vers l’islam qui devient comme une sorte de compensation de ce recul sur le plan politique.
Avant, durant l’époque coloniale, à la suite des mouvements de résistance islamiques dressés contre la conquête (surtout par la confrérie Mahdiyya), l’administration coloniale s’était efforcée de soutenir un islam de type traditionnel, d’empêcher l’arabisation et de surveiller et isoler l’islam local des influences extérieures jugées pernicieuses.

Dans notre survol à rebours, nous arrivons au temps de la diffusion des « confréries », les « Tarîqa », ce qui, en arabe, signifie le « chemin ». Elles sont venues surtout du Nigéria voisin. Elles ont joué et jouent encore un rôle important dans l’Islamisation en profondeur du peuple et ont eu le mérite d’avoir mis à la portée de tous les pratiques spirituelles des grands courants mystiques de l’Islam. La « Tarîqa » est un simple chemin spirituel, assez large pour guider la vocation individuelle de la lettre de la shari’a vers la vie spirituelle authentique (haqîqa). Chemin spirituel rythmé par le dhikr (le souvenir, rappel de Dieu), le wird (litanies propres à chaque confrérie), les veillées nocturnes (tahajjud) et les jeûnes : des moyens de progresser dans la vie spirituelle et de se laisser « prendre » par Dieu. Toutes les confréries se rattachent à un fondateur qui a vécu une expérience spirituelle originale et dont on veut retrouver l’inspiration en imitant sa vie et sa doctrine. La Qadiriyya, la plus ancienne, est présente à Yola mais aussi à Garoua et Ngaoundéré. La Tijaniyya s’est répandue au califat de Sokoto (surtout avec al Hajj Umar) ainsi qu’à Garoua, Mindif, Maroua. La Mahdiyya ou mouvement Mahdiste a été apporté dans notre région par Moodibbo Hayatu (Hayât ibn Sa’ad) arrière-petit-fils de Ousman Dan Fodio. Regardons de plus près chacune d’elles,

**La Qadiriyya** : Fondée par Abd al-Qâdir al-Jilânî originaire de Bagdad (1077-1166). C’est la première confrérie musulmane arrivée en Afrique subsaharienne. L’histoire de Qadiriyya est liée avec la tribu nomade des « Kunta » dont un groupe a migré vers la zone du nord du fleuve Niger vers le XVIIe siècle. Le Saykh Ahmadou et Ousman Dan Fodio furent les principaux chefs fulbés qui ont propagé les normes de cette confrérie. Elle est entrée au Cameroun grâce au Jihad de Ousman Dan Fodio. Très conservatrice, tolérante, la Qadiriyya accepta l’ordre colonial et parfois servit les intérêts du colonisateur,


**La Mahdiyya** : Plus qu’une confrérie, le mouvement Mahdiste est une tendance mystique et eschatologique, une école de pensée fondée sur l’attente du messie (le mahdi). Selon leur doctrine, nous sommes entrés dans l’ère des tribulations (ce qui explique la colonisation, l’affaiblissement de l’islam, les conflits violents). Mais le Mahdi vient pour rétablir l’ordre et la justice et revitaliser la foi islamique. Ayant quitté Sokoto, Hayatu séjourna à Yola, puis à

Le mahdisme a constitué une résistance farouche à la domination coloniale (allemande et française) au point de devenir « un problème politique de première importance » pour les colons. A l’époque, il était le mouvement le plus important auprès des mallum et des moodibbe de notre région. Aujourd’hui il a pratiquement disparu.


Ce jihad de Ousman Dan Fodio a conféré à notre région ses structures d’organisation sociale et politique (les lamidats) et son souffle de réforme islamique, l’islam fournissant aux Fulbé une justification de leur domination politique et économique. Jihad violent qui a véhiculé domination, injustices, exploitation et mépris qui restent encore inscrits dans le subconscient de beaucoup de peuples de notre région.

Si nous continuons notre voyage à rebours nous arrivons au XVe et XVIe siècle pour voir
Il est important de prendre conscience du fait que cette classe de la société constitue l’armature de la religion. La disparition de la classe des ‘ulama’ entraîne souvent un retour à la religion ethnique (le cas fut vécu à Tombouctou lors de l’invasion Marocaine en 1591). Avant 1600, l’islam subsaharien est, pour l’essentiel, une pratique d’élite, acceptant le compromis avec les cultes ancestraux de ses fidèles. Malgré l’islamisation de plusieurs siècles, l’Afrique subsaharienne était restée elle-même: elle n’avait perdu ni ses langues, ni ses coutumes ni son genre de vie. Cependant, de loin en loin, le recours au Jihad montrait qu’une autre voie était ouverte. Al-Maghili, qui se fait le théoricien d’une rupture radicale entre ce qui est islamique et ce qui ne l’est pas, représente pour l’Afrique de l’Ouest l’un des signes avant-coureurs de ces mouvements de réforme militants qui marqueront les siècles suivants.

Nous pouvons finir ce petit survol à rebours en signalant que la première islamisation de l’Afrique sub-saharienne revient aux berbères ibadites qui au IXe siècle sont les premiers à constituer des réseaux commerciaux transsahariens. Mais par la suite l’islam sera quasi exclusivement sunnite-malikite avec la conquête Almoravide au XIe siècle. Mais cet islam, qui va pénétrer les empires du Takrur au Sénégal (1040), du Ghana (1076), du Gao et du Kanem (1067), restera au niveau des cours royales et des élites urbaines sans pénétrer le monde rural.

Que dire après ce survol rapide ? Nous voyons que les tentatives d’établir un état islamique fondé sur la shari’a, le désir d’un islam pur, le retour au rêve de l’islam de Médine et de la théocratie fondée par le prophète de l’islam revient d’une manière récurrente. La réinterprétation des modèles islamiques du passé, surtout le modèle de réforme sociale et islamique lancé par Ousman Dan Fodio, le souvenir de cet événement, l’influence des écrits de ses auteurs, la légende que les entoure, maintiennent en vie un modèle qui retrouve aujourd’hui une grande vigueur, dans le climat de crise qui traverse notre société : modèle d’un islam réformiste mais qui a toujours un problème avec la diversité, même à l’intérieur de l’islam. Pourtant l’islam classique avait admis 4 écoles de droit, 4 interprétations différentes de la loi divine.

Aujourd’hui, nous vivons un de ces temps de réforme islamique d’une rare violence. Toutes les coalitions, actions policières ou interventions armées pour lutter contre les mouvements jihadistes qui nous menacent et menacent notre monde seront vaines si les musulmans eux-mêmes ne mènent pas une « bataille des idées », un « combat théologique » s’écartant de l’islam politique et de l’islam salafiste, piétiste et rigoriste, qui sont le terroir de tous ces mouvements.

Il faut qu’ils osent réinterpréter leurs textes fondateurs (Coran et Sunna) et aussi l’histoire fondateur de l’islam. Il faudra des décennies de travail intellectuel pour renverser la domination de ces deux courants de pensée.

**Les initiatives récentes du dialogue islam-chrétien dans notre région**

Dans notre région la communauté musulmane n’a pas franchi la limite d’avoir un projet politique pour imposer une société islamique dans notre région. Ils se sont démarqués publiquement du groupe jihadiste Boko haram, ce qui fait que dans les deux dernières années eux
aussi ont subi de nombreuses violences de la part de Boko haram. C’est avec eux que nous portons cette souffrance.

C’est pour cette raison aussi que nos rencontres entre chrétiens et musulmans dans notre région n’ont fait qu’augmenter. Rencontres faites dans la sérénité et dans la franchise. Nous en donnons un aperçu ci-dessous :

**CRÉATION DE L’ACADIR (ASSOCIATION CAMEROUNAISE POUR LE DIALOGUE INTERRELIGIEUX)**


Apolitique et à but non lucratif, l’ACADIR a pour objectif d’être une plate-forme de dialogue entre les religions d’une part, entre les religions et l’État camerounais d’autre part, en vue de promouvoir la paix, la concorde et le progrès social au Cameroun. Elle se veut également un organe de consultation pour tout ce qui concerne les aspects religieux et éthiques de la Nation.

**Colloque interreligieux**


**Forum des jeunes**

Il a rassemblé 450 Jeunes (1/3 de musulmans et 2/3 de chrétiens de diverses confessions), le 07 août 2014, sur le thème « *Jeunes Musulmans et Chrétiens : Ensemble pour la paix et le développement.* »

**Prière interreligieuse de Maroua**

Elle a rassemblé environ 80 personnes, le 03 janvier 2015, autour des autorités religieuses catholiques, musulmanes, protestantes et orthodoxes de la région et en présence du représentant du gouverneur de l’Extrême-Nord.

**Week-ends de formation dans le Mayo-Sava** : Au cours de l’année 2014-2015 la zone Mayo-Sava a mis sur pied une série de 5 week-ends interreligieux animés, à Tokombéré, par des équipes composées de catholiques, protestants et
musulmans sur des thèmes d’intérêt général. Les quatre premiers week-ends ont rassemblé chacun une quarantaine de participants des différentes confessions.

**Mise en place de l’ACADIR Extrême-Nord :** L’Acadir (Association Camerounaise du Dialogue Interreligieux) qui existe au niveau national depuis le 15 Novembre 2006, et dont le but est d’être une plate-forme de rencontre et de dialogue entre les religions d’une part, entre les religions et l’état d’autre part, en vue de promouvoir la paix, le respect et le progrès social du Cameroun. L’ACADIR se présente par ailleurs comme un organe de consultation pour tout ce qui concerne les aspects religieux et éthiques de la vie nationale. Le 16 Février 2015 nous avons mis sur pied le bureau de notre antenne régionale de l’Extrême-Nord (ACADIREN).

**Mise en place de la Maison de la Rencontre :** Ce projet d’avoir un lieu permanent d’échange et de dialogue interreligieux à Maroua, qui date de quelques années, vient de se concrétiser. Une maison est louée dans un quartier de la ville qui abrite un centre de documentation islamochrétien comprenant les principaux ouvrages classiques de l’Islam, du Christianisme et du dialogue islamochrétien. Elle sera le siège de l’antenne régionale de l’Acadir et le lieu de toutes nos rencontres interreligieuses sans oublier les activités des jeunes.

**Mise en place de l’antenne de Yagoua** en Mars 2015 lors d’un colloque interreligieux.

**Colloque à Maroua en Juin 2015** pour l’élaboration de la « Charte » de l’ACADIREN (cf annexe).

**Colloque à Ngaoundéré** et choix du bureau de l’antenne régionale de l’ACADIR de l’Adamaoua le 20-07-2016.

**Forum interreligieux des Jeunes à Kaele** le 03 et 04 Août 2016 (150 jeunes).


**Forum interreligieux des Jeunes à Kousseri** (175 jeunes) le 04 et 05 Octobre 2016.

**Janvier 2017 : L’animation de 8 sessions de causeries – débats avec les jeunes** notamment dans les localités de Mozogo, Zamai, Tokombéré, Makalingai,
Koza, Sabongari, Mémé et Tindrémé. Ces causeries – débats nous ont permis de toucher environ :

- 56 autorités administratives et élus locaux.
- 147 leaders religieux et traditionnels.
- 2 154 jeunes dont 718 filles et 1 436 garçons.

Les thématiques à l’ordre du jour des causeries – débats étaient :

- La construction de la paix et de la cohésion sociale.
- L’enrôlement des jeunes dans les groupes armés et la prévention de la radicalisation.
- L’emploi jeune et l’auto emploi.

**Février 2017** : Une enquête de perception d’indices des conflits (inter-ethniques, interreligieux, agropastoraux, populations-forces de maintien de l’ordre, populations – élus locaux, personnes déplacées internes – populations hôtes) dans le département du Logone et Chari et dans le département du Mayo-Sava.

**Mars 2017** : Ouverture du Centre de Documentation Islamo-Chrétien à notre Maison de la Rencontre.


**Juillet 2017** : Atelier à Mokolo et installation bureau antenne départementale du Mayo Tsanaga.

**Août 2017** : Atelier de formation à Mora et installation de l’antenne départementale de Mayo Sava.

**Décembre 2017** : Atelier des femmes leaders des mouvements confessionnels sur la résolution des conflits.

**Janvier 2018** : Ateliers de formation pour les antennes départementales, 01

**Février 2018** : Colloque « regards croisés sur Dieu » et prière interreligieuse pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Cameroun.

pratiques familiales essentielles au Cameroun » Ces pratiques familiales sont : la PMI, l'accouchement dans un centre de santé, nourrir les enfants exclusivement au lait maternel pendant leurs 6 premiers mois, les vaccinations, dormir sous une moustiquaire, construire des latrines, les actes de naissances, vivre en famille, scolarité de tous les enfants garçons et filles. Trois ateliers et un travail ensemble, chrétiens et musulmans pour la sensibilisation de chaque quartier de ces communes a été fait.

**Quelques propositions au Conseil Général :**

1. Favoriser que des jeunes confrères qui sentent l'appel à la rencontre et le dialogue interreligieux, puisent suivre une formation adéquate et longue en vue de se préparer à cette dimension de notre mission spiritaine.
2. Que dans toutes les Provinces ou Régions de notre Congrégation oùChrétien et Musulman vivent ensemble, des confrères qui ont été formés soient affectés à cette rencontre et à ce dialogue.
3. De même en Asie où nous sommes présents, affecter des confrères à la rencontre et au dialogue avec les croyants des traditions religieuses y présents.
4. Ouvrir une autre communauté dans un pays arabo-musulman à déterminer (Égypte, Syrie, Irak, Liban?).

Juan Antonio Ayanz (Spiritain)
Maroua (Cameroun)

Annexe:

**CHARTE DE L'ACADIR DE L'EXTREME-NORD**

**Préambule**

Nous, Musulmans et Chrétiens ;

- Conformément aux dispositions statutaires de l'ACADIR ;
- Conscients de la nécessité d'instaurer un dialogue interreligieux, gage de la paix, de la cohésion sociale et du développement durable ;
- Conscients des défis de l’heure et des valeurs d’intégration ;
- Convaincus de notre volonté de construire ensemble une société juste et équitable ;

Constitués en Association dénommée ACADIR, Antenne Régionale de l’Extrême-nord ;
Adoptons à l’unanimité les résolutions suivantes :

**Chapitre I : DANS LA FIDÉLITÉ À NOTRE FOI ET LE REFUS DU SYNCRETISME**

*Musulmans et Chrétiens*

**Art 1** : Nous pensons qu’une connaissance solide de notre propre religion et la fidélité à notre propre foi sont les bases nécessaires à tout dialogue qui veut promouvoir l’acceptation de l’autre, la compréhension et le respect mutuel.

**Art 2** : Nous pensons qu’il est indispensable de promouvoir la cohabitation pacifique entre les religions, en sauvegardant la liberté d’exprimer sa foi sans contrainte et en refusant tout syncrétisme.

**Art 3** : Nous reconnaissons que nos différences n’impliquent aucunement une opposition de fait, mais sont plutôt, un atout dans un monde pluraliste.

**Art 4** : Nous nous accordons à promouvoir la sensibilisation sur l’instauration du dialogue interreligieux dans le milieu éducatif et dans la sphère publique.

**Art 5** : Nous jugeons nécessaire de continuer à promouvoir de façon commune les projets de développement économique, social et culturel que nous estimons être la base d’une cohésion sociale garantissant la paix et la sécurité.

**CHAPITRE II / EN DIALOGUE SINCÈRE ET RESPECTUEUX**

*Musulmans et Chrétiens*

**Art 6** : Nous pensons qu’un dialogue sincère et respectueux repose sur une acceptation mutuelle, sur un regard bienveillant posé en direction de la foi de l’autre dans le respect de notre origine divine commune.

**Art 7** : Nous refusons toute velléité de provocation à caractère polémique ou apologétique ainsi que toute forme d’instrumentalisation de la religion.

**Art 8** : Nous nous opposons à toute forme de préjugés sur les religions.

**Art 9** : Nous encourageons l’amour et l’amitié entre les personnes différentes au sein de notre propre communauté et au-delà.
Art 10 : Nous estimons qu’il faut multiplier les rencontres interreligieuses afin de renforcer la communication sur le bien-fondé de l’éthique, du civisme, la sensibilisation à la paix dans nos lieux de culte et dans la sphère familiale.

CHAPITRE III / POUR ABORDER ENSEMBLE LES DEFIS DE L’HEURE

Musulmans et Chrétiens

Art 11 : Nous relevons que les enjeux d’un vrai dialogue interreligieux sont liés à la paix, à la collaboration et à la cohésion sociale sur fond d’amour pour son prochain, de cohabitation pacifique, de connaissance approfondie de l’autre et de sa tradition religieuse.

Art 12 : Nous réitérons notre volonté de défendre l’intérêt commun dans l’unité et la concorde, car nous sommes convaincus que le dialogue contribue à l’amélioration des conditions de la vie sociale, en ce sens que l’ouverture à l’autre brise les chaînes qui nous paralysent et fait naître un lien d’appartenance commune, et partant, favorise la paix, l’équité et la justice sociale.

Art 13 : Nous relevons pour le déplorer que les défis auxquels nous sommes confrontés, sont ceux liés à la pauvreté, au chômage des jeunes, à la sous-scolarisation, à la marginalisation de la femme, aux menaces contre le mariage et la famille tels que Dieu les a institués et à la mal gouvernance.

Art 14 : Face à ces défis, nous en appelons à la conscience collective pour adopter des solutions privilégiant :

- La création d’entreprises ;
- L’encouragement à l’esprit d’entrepreneuriat ;
- La promotion de l’auto-emploi ;
- La mise en place des groupes de réflexion pour promouvoir la justice sociale et les valeurs de la famille.

Art 15 : Nous recommandons la promotion de l’enseignement des religions dans les milieux éducatifs et associatifs.

Fait à Maroua, le 05 Juin 2015
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The author of the universe, as revealed in our sacred scriptures created the world with incredible diversity of possibilities. Diversity has become a common heritage to be cherished, but unfortunately, it is neither appreciated nor cherished. Made so recognizably different in nature from one another, humans are destined to coexist within the same universe, with their diversity influencing positively or negatively, their interactions and relationships. The Spiritan missionary caught in this diversity, witnesses to the good news of the Kingdom, amongst people of diverse backgrounds.

In spite of the diversity, the world is fast becoming a global village. People are more closely connected today than ever. As one moves from one society to another, one observes an impressive display of difference at a scale never before recorded in history. However, there is an exaggerated attention and prominence given to what makes us different and not to what unites us, therefore making diversity a danger. A direct and natural result to the aforesaid is the sprouting of ghettos within the global village, with a divisive-exclusive mindset and language introduced in pronouns such as: “we-they” and “ours-theirs.” This divisive-exclusive mind-set, negatively influences interaction between peoples of diverse backgrounds, giving rise to the global village being assailed by unrest and violent conflicts. Nigeria is not immune from this obvious situation.
As a nation, Nigeria is multi-ethnic and multi-religious. It is beset by all forms of ills that have inflicted great damage on its citizens, impoverished millions, caused untold grief and suffering to many, deprived them of their human dignity, peace, security; in fact, without exaggeration, it is on the verge of depriving them of life itself. To cap it all, religion and factors such as ethnicity and politics, which could have been exploited as great opportunities for peace building, are being used as instruments of exploitation of the masses and as agents of disintegration, thereby destabilizing the nation.

Nigerian citizens are highly religious, apparently God-fearing people, but their ordinary daily encounters are often implicated in the concerns over tension, conflicts, and violence. As a result of mutual misunderstanding, some form of cold war is being fought between adherents of the different religions (Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion) that are practiced in the country. Due to the volatile nature of religion, it is being employed as an instrument of division and exploitation of the masses by politicians to serve their convenience. In such unpleasant and dangerous contexts, interreligious dialogue becomes imperative, as the most human, rational, and peaceful means of achieving peace and stability.

The Spiritan and Dialogue

In the context of dialogue for peace building, the Spiritan missionary on the sideline cannot just be an onlooker. He is destined to engage in dialogue by virtue of his vocation. In the light of the gospel, following in the footsteps of Jesus and in keeping with his charism and experience, he dialogues because he is called to be a sign of communion and an instrument of dialogue. He cannot remain insensitive and indifferent. He must roll up his sleeves and get involved. This is inevitable.

The States encapsulated within the North-West Spiritan provincial landscape span Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina States in the North and Kwara and Kogi States in the South. They are heterogenous in composition, characterized by distinctive historical backgrounds and mosaic of ethnic groups, cultures and religions. This diversity is wealth. This wealth, very unfortunately, is being exploited negatively for destruction and not for construction. In spite of the peculiar multi-ethnic and multi-faith nature of this population, the people live and struggle side by side, because they are faced with the same challenges of life in trying to build a united, peaceful, vibrant and indivisible society. This is the context in which the Spiritan missionary has to work. In spite of difficulties, he must endeavor, under the impetus of the Holy Spirit, to reach across the divide, so that the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of peace, love, truth, and justice may become a reality and flourish.

Although, not well versed in the theory and practice of dialogue, confreres live day by day in this context, cognizant of the difficulty and hardship involved, practicing dialogue implicitly. It is important to note that the background and context of the North-West Spiritan Province are, to some reasonable extent, similar to those of her North-East sister province. Different scenarios could be observed in the South (East and also West), but each is equally
faced with the challenges of dialogue. The story in this presentation seeks to convey our little practical experience in response to our commitment to Spiritan mission in this context of dialogue.

What is our Mission?

It is barely a year since we were saddled with the noble and onerous responsibility of a chaplaincy ministry at one of the Nigeria’s federal universities, the University of Ilorin, Kwara State. It is located within the North-West Province. This university gives a good mirror image of Nigeria’s religiously and ethnically polarized and divided society. Within the precinct of the university is a Catholic chapel, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Chaplaincy (STACC), with a presbytery for the chaplains. We are neighbors with a chaplaincy for other Christian denominations and a mosque.

In a nutshell, being at the helm of the stewardship of the Catholic family of the university, with a young vibrant Spiritan confrere to form a community (and at intervals, Spiritan seminarians in formation) our role is the continuation and improvement of the Spiritan Catholic identity and presence. The chaplaincy has been functional for more than thirty-three years. Our pastoral insertion is for the accompaniment of individual members and shared spiritual awareness, growth, and moral formation of the Catholic family.

Our activities include worship and liturgy in which we strive to maintain an environment of love, reverence, praise, and thanksgiving to God. We endeavor to encourage the development of a desirable ambiance, which indicates to all members of the STACC family, their Christian responsibility of service to others, within and beyond the university milieu. They achieve this through their availability at work, presence, and sharing in the different movements and faith groups of the chaplaincy. Academic and intellectual excellence is not underplayed. We endeavor to strike a balance.

Our Engagement in Dialogue

The University of Ilorin has an established body and structure for interreligious dialogue, the Unilorin Interreligious Council (UIC). Of this council, we are members. This council comprises the Dean of Students Affairs, representatives drawn from amongst the adherents of the different faiths and the religious leaders of the different faiths represent the student body. This structure (UIC) was set up by the university authority to facilitate contacts and encounters, in a relatively conducive atmosphere, for constructive collaboration.

The initiative of having an inter-religious council in the university is a noble one, and the university is a rich environment for engaging in meaningful interreligious dialogue with students from a plethora of religious, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This arrangement fits in well with the students’ preparation for the future, as principal players in their communities, nations, and in the world’s political events. They have the potential of engaging with
one another in a meaningful exchange, if properly guided and oriented. This ought to be in a way conducive to reaching or developing peaceful co-existence that challenges false images and ideas.

The Role of the Interreligious Council

The University of Ilorin Interreligious Council has the following responsibilities:

• forging harmonious and peaceful interreligious co-existence among adherents of different faiths within the university community;
• ensuring a very peaceful co-existence among them;
• fostering deep understanding of the different religious tenets to dissipate ignorance;
• encouraging mutual respect amongst the adherents for the practice of their tenets and modes of worship;
• ensuring that students do not engage in religious activities that will disturb the peace in the university or cause disaffection and distraction from the primary purpose and objective of their studentship in the university;
• ensuring that no individual or group carry out provocative activities to incite one group against another, thereby igniting skirmishes on campus;
• ensuring that all religious activities get approval and are carried out at approved designated venues;
• participating actively at “freshers” orientation programs to acquaint students with approved guidelines for religious activities on campus that are in conformity with acceptable religious doctrines and norms;
• advising the university administration on appropriate measures to maintain and sustain religious peace and harmony and nip in the bud any sign of religious crisis;
• organizing international symposia on interreligious dialogue, which facilitates the coming together of inter-religious councils of tertiary institutions, and liaising with national and international interfaith organizations.

Challenges

Interreligious dialogue is a positive way of breaking down the walls of division and building integrated and cohesive communities, but in itself, it is a challenging process. In the case of our university context, the existence of an interreligious council is an advantage to be made full use of, in order to derive its benefits. In spite of the structure in place, one could still truly observe and stumble upon obstacles and challenges. These obstacles and challenges display their ugly heads through utterances and attitudes, which discourage the efforts of the dialogue. Below are some of these obstacles:
• Stereotype, prejudice and bias - all begins here. These are beliefs by groups which engender adversarial attitudes towards people of other groups. These beliefs are fixed and are always present with us when we engage with others in dialogue. They may or not be founded on historical antecedents, unfortunately, they are widely accepted by people in their groups or communities. They are problematic, counter-productive, and pose the greatest challenge to the process of dialogue.

• Dialogue is a fruitless venture: There is a strong feeling sometimes expressed by participants that dialogue is a fruitless venture. They maintain that it is impossible to engage in interreligious dialogue, due to the differences in tenets and world-views. This sentiment is engendered when “dialogue” reaches a cul-de-sac, and there is no way out. This disposition to dialogue could result in an attitude of indifference, not displaying interest in the endeavor. Also, some persons derogatorily refer to the whole process as a “delusion,” thus “interfaith delusion not dialogue.” They believe that dialogue is irrational and is based on impressions held despite being contradicted by reality or rational argument.

• Resistance and exclusion: This is a tendency not manifestly hostile or unfriendly, of impeding and excluding the influence—positive or negative—of others; subtly but decisively reinforcing the distinction of “them” from “us. Negatively put, the attitude smacks of self-love to the exclusion of others. Certainly, this attitude does not resonate with Christian charity.

The curiosity I developed in the Arabic language as an autodidact took me into the domain of Islamic studies and dialogue. I wanted to have a taste of a new foreign language for a change. I wanted to discover another culture and others through language. I did not have any intention of engaging in some form of established formal dialogue. This, in itself, to so many was strange and is still seen as strange. To this adventure of mine, a friend commented: “You like dabbling into things with reckless abandon.” I replied: “Yes.” And we laughed. Some find it incredibly shocking that a priest pronounces Arabic words and uses Arabic expressions. With this outlook, we assign a language to a religion or we assign a religion to a language. We do exactly the same with outfits such as the hijab, and so on. The ordinary understanding is that Arabic is synonymous with Islam, and thereby hangs a tale. Consequent on this understanding, the expectation and common response is expressed in an attitude of “let sleeping dogs lie.”

Here are some of the challenges I encountered:

• Manifest mutual suspicion. Equally observed of participants during forums and encounters is an attitude or sense of reciprocal suspicion. Participants engaged in dialogue watch each other with cautious distrust. In this situation, planning and executing of joint activities or projects become difficult. Common mutual decisions are not easily reached, and if ever decisions are reached, they are not easily implemented.
• **Fear of proselytism.** This fear is engendered by the mutual conception of dialogue as a proselytizing tool; a strategy to make converts of our members. In view of this conception of dialogue, meetings and encounters are avoided or kept at a minimum, just to maintain the status quo - religious co-existence or tolerance. Unfortunately, merely co-existing with others without meeting or interacting cannot help in peace-building. And the absence of conflict does not necessarily mean the existence of peace.

• **Misunderstanding the purpose of interreligious dialogue.** Due to the fact that the concepts, purpose, and objectives are not well defined, one could look at inter-faith dialogue as nothing but a finger-wagging or blame-game forum, in which the adherents of a given faith blame another for something bad or unfortunate, rather than working together for solutions. When the purpose of dialogue is well defined, the obstacles and challenges are better managed.

• **Obstinacy.** This is the unyielding determination to keep to one’s opinion and course of action, regardless of others. This poses a great challenge to dialogue. This is intimately and firmly linked to an excessive single-minded zeal for dominance. Sincere encounter could help in relaxing this disposition.

• **Presumption and attempt at interpretation of others’ teachings.** This tendency poses a great challenge to dialogue. In our context, sometimes members come with shocking interpretations of elements of their faith given by adherents of a different faith. These interpretations always come as provocations, not questions seeking answers or explanations.

• **Listening.** This poses a great challenge to dialogue. We honor invitations to meetings, just to assure others of our physical presence, but remain deliberately and intentionally absent-minded. Often participants find it difficult to listen to others. If we don’t listen to others, how can we understand them? During forums, we prefer keeping ourselves busy chatting with our electronic media than listening to others.

• **The ambition to harmonize our teachings or instructions with that of others.** In our venture we bump into certain instructions and teachings, which we find completely different from ours and, therefore, unacceptable. These are not often resolvable issues of difference. These may not even be beliefs easy to harmonize. For instance, Christians faced with the challenge of accepting Mohammed as a prophet, and Muslims, that of accepting Jesus as the son of God or God himself. On a more practical level, there is the question of marriage between Christians and Muslims. While it is allowed for a Muslim male to look for life partners from all quarters, it is disallowed for the Muslim female counterpart to look for or accept partners from all quarters.

• **Lastly, mutual ignorance.** Mutual ignorance of each others’ ways and lives gives rise to mistrust and misunderstanding between participants in dialogue. To accomplish peace, there is need for mutual knowledge of others’ way of being and doing, in order to strengthen and promote mutual understanding. Faced with the challenge of ignorance, dialogue should help adherents in deepening their knowledge and
understanding of their own faith and that of others. This would greatly help in dissipating ignorance.

**Our Approach**

We are in contact daily with peoples of other faiths. We experience the difficulty of living together and the difficulty of interaction. This is normal, just as contact with others is inevitable and normal. So what do we do? Where do we go from here?

Certainly, the doors for healthy dialogue are open to all faiths, but due to fear and suspicion, all are scared stiff of venturing in. We endeavor in our mission to promote and encourage the openness of our students and members to others for a harmonious life together, going beyond mere tolerance of the other. To enter into dialogue, in whatever form, is to be willing to focus on understanding, appreciating and respecting difference. Also, it is our will and effort to acknowledge the rights of the other to exist and to be. In addition, we endeavor to avoid taking decisions that affect all or the other alone, without consulting all concerned. This is to share, to witness to life and the power of Christ Jesus. We witness by living out our faith.

Our Spiritan commitment to being available “where the church finds it difficult to find workers,” reminds us of interreligious dialogue as an important dimension of our apostolic ministry. We are sent “to all peoples, in spite of difficulties.” In accord with the church’s commitment, the Lord calls us to do everything possible to promote dialogue for peace-building.

**Conclusion**

Dialogue with people of other faiths is an integral and indispensable part of our missionary identity and efforts at all levels. The need for dialogue in peace building is not an illusion, it is real. For fruitful dialogue, we ought to cultivate and have an attitude of attentive listening and genuine sharing. In fact, observing a respectful presence, is in itself, witnessing. As we interact with others, we are challenged to retain our own identity and values and at the same time we are inspired to promote unity in the diversity of our contexts.

With respect to future missionary engagement, it would be very helpful to give adequate and formal training and orientation to those embarking on mission and those in formation. With a better understanding of other cultures and religions, their tenets, views, and practices one could navigate and manage dialogue better.

Finally, from our ministry, we have come to discover and we affirm that in dialogue we need and ought to consider the following:

- every human person is created in the image of God and loved by him;
- human dignity ought to be promoted and respected;
- religious and cultural diversity ought to be cherished and preserved;
• mutual knowledge ought to be exploited to improve on relationships;
• sharing of experience and the search for what is common among us is to be encouraged and supported;
• interactions and encounters should be stimulated by love;
• the need to highlight the spirit of service and solidarity for the common good;
• recognize that dialogue, like our mission, is a gift from God to be accepted, appreciated, and cherished.

Dialogue based on the foregoing precepts will go a long way to disperse everything that has the tendency to divide us; it will forge the much desired unity, peace, stability, and consensus for a vibrant and prosperous human society.
On the Path of Interreligious Dialogue: Meeting the Mandjak People of Guinea-Bissau

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Introduction

A few years after Guinea-Bissau gained Independence (1973), Bishop Settimio Ferrazzetta, the first bishop, called the Spiritans to proclaim the Gospel in the heart of the Mandjak country. The missionaries in Dakar immediately responded to his appeal. However, they were unsure how to approach this people of immigrants jostling at the doors of the church. In fact, the Mandjak population, who were part of the former Province of Portuguese Guinea remained, and still remain to this day, strongly attached to their traditions. The migratory phenomenon, which has accelerated since the 1950s, has not affected this fidelity.

First Contact with the Mandjak World

In Pikine, the great suburb of Dakar where I spent my first nine years of priestly ministry, 80% of our parishioners were Mandjak, but we spoke French and sometimes Wolof. Only one confrere in the whole of Senegal spoke their language: Fr. Gustave Bienvenu, who, as early as
1970, had had the good idea to found a Mandjak Community in Dakar, gathering couples, young students, artisans, and even an elderly grand-mother. He lived there among them with a missionary Sister and a trainee seminarian. In Pikine, we often called upon him for the adult catechumenate. He helped us to unravel complicated cases of polygamy and some compromising contracts linked to their traditional religion. We trusted him entirely, but nevertheless had some misgivings because we could not speak the vernacular ourselves and could not verify the justice of his position, which at the time (1975) seemed rather daring. It must be said that the theology of inculturation was then only in its infancy, with the publication of *Evangelii nuntiandi*.

It was by working with Father Bienvenu in training Mandjak catechists that my taste for inter-religious dialogue began to awaken. Until then, it was above all the link between the proclamation of the Gospel and development that interested me, as well as the missionary dimension of personal and community life. Father Bienvenu had set up, in a corner of his chapel, a small traditional altar on which he poured libations, before or after Mass, in his capacity as *nauyäk kato* (head of the family) in charge of maintaining the link with the ancestors. I no longer know which entity the stake stuck in the earth represented (a saint or some other deceased ancestor?), but it represented the transposition of a traditional cult into the church, the *pëcap des balugum*, a cult I was often invited to attend when I joined the Spiritan Team in Guinea-Bissau at Christmas 1985.

My predecessors had chosen to settle in Bajob, a tiny village lost in the bush, because they had been told that it was particularly representative of the traditional Mandjak universe. Some Christians, baptized in Senegal or The Gambia, favored their establishment; and it was from this base that they quickly spread to the surrounding area with about fifteen villages. When I arrived, six years after the founding, I had the joy of finding Christian communities in embryo more or less everywhere, with recognizable signs: chapels, schools built of mud bricks, water points, wells, orchards of cashew-trees, grafted mango trees, market gardening, etc. But, in my opinion, the founders’ most important decision had been to adopt Father Bienvenu’s missionary vision. They had taken a year-long course with him to become familiar with the Mandjak culture. The study of their vernacular had been a priority as was participation in all the manifestations of their traditional culture a daily concern; obviously, to the extent that the doors were held open.

How could I have had the slightest reticence in setting my foot in their footsteps to share in a dialogue they had started so well?

**Immersion in a People**

I stayed for twenty-three years in Bajob; I only said ‘goodbye’ in June 2018. My missionary experience in the “Mandjak country” took place in two stages of the same duration, broken by ten years in Ziguinchor, southern Senegal. Learning the language was obviously the best means of entry. To understand what the other person is saying, one must enroll at his school
and use his means of communication. My teachers were the villagers themselves. However, I am also grateful to Pierre Buis, a confrere on the previous team, with whom I shared my first three years, because he obliged me to set the Wolof language aside. I had learned it in Dakar and many people in the village understood it because of their seasonal transmigration. I am also grateful to him for having drawn my attention to the limited expression of Portuguese Crioulo, a Portuguese patois, which may nevertheless be regarded as the first national language of Guinea-Bissau, but which nonetheless remains a dialect, doubtless useful for trading with other ethnic groups, but unable to convey what a Mandjak really feels in the depths of himself and of expressing his relationship with the invisible world.

I think it took me three years to learn to speak Mandyako pretty well, to master the syntax and increase my vocabulary, so that I could understand what the people were saying and start to express some ideas that made sense to my interlocutors. But it did not take me three years to realize that to communicate with a people from a totally different culture is something quite other than words and phrases formulated according to the rules. One must also be able to penetrate the invisible world through sign language: symbols, rites and myths.

While I was learning the language, it was not too hard to adapt to what sociologists call acculturation, in all the areas accessible to a foreigner trying to understand a people’s ways and life. People welcomed one with open arms: habitat, food, crafts, agricultural work, barter and trade, political organization, etc. The founders of the mission had preceded me on this path with great assurance. Could I have doubted for a moment the validity of the choice they had made upon their arrival?

**The Beginning of a Dialogue of Life**

This decisive immersion in the Mandjak culture naturally led me to “dialogue” with Traditional Religion. Indeed, it is difficult to separate inter-religious dialogue from inter-cultural dialogue, at least in the tiny corner of Africa that welcomed me. One can say that the traditional religion encompasses, envelops or irrigates every Mandjak activity, their thought and words, from birth to death: their social and political organization, work, arts and crafts, medicine . . . This is why it is impossible, in the process of the inculturation of the Gospel message, to separate the traditional values, which would in theory be compatible with our faith, from the rest which appertain to the “animist/pagan” religious sphere, as for example, the role of the innumerable intermediary spirits in Mandjak spirituality.

As soon as I arrived in Bajob, I was confronted with this dilemma: when one suspects that things are ambiguous to say the least and that there is a high risk of regression/back-sliding or even syncretism, should one desert the other? Alternatively, should one dare to meet the other at the risk of compromising oneself in the eyes of some of one’s co-religionists?

That year was the “Year of the Initiation.” The future initiates were to enter the sacred grove around 20 March, and stay there for three months, without ever being able to return to the village. Having learned that 80% of the candidates for initiation were Christian, I sought to
enter the wood, with the idea of being able to organize celebrations of the Word of God, and even Mass, at least on Easter Day. The “old Christians” tried to oppose this project, claiming that a priest had no place in the sacred wood. But their arguments were not convincing. I objected:

- Say instead that this is no place for a White!
- No! This is no place for a priest!
- In this case, it is no place for a Christian either! Because a priest is nothing, if not a Christian ordained to serve his Christian brethren wherever they are! If Christians can enter the wood, the priest must go there too. Otherwise, everyone stays outside!

Thus, just three months after my arrival, I was at the very heart of the problem posed by the evangelization of the Mandjaks: should a Mandjak renounce his customs to become a Christian? Why did the ‘old Christians’ who are all going there not want to meet me there? What, in the sacred wood, was contrary to faith in the Risen Christ? What type of spirit presides over all this?

No! I was not going to wait until the next *Initiation* (twenty-two years!) to understand... I entered the wood, the very first week, helped by some young Christians who were already initiated and with the complicity of old “pagans”... What happened next? Having promised on my honor never to reveal what I saw and heard in the sacred wood, I will not now reveal any secrets. But I do not think I betray my word by saying what I felt in my mind and missionary heart when the “old” requested me to pray for the initiates in a sanctuary that had nothing to do with the village chapel. After a brief moment of vertigo, the word of Jesus, telling the disciples not to worry about what they would say when in an embarrassing situation, struck me like a flash. And I spoke words that I have never regretted because I was certain that the Holy Spirit was with me and that *Dabomanin*, the spirit of the wood, was neither an adversary nor a competitor of Christ the Savior. One could advance in dialogue without complexes. The door was open on the side of the traditional religion, it only depended on me to advance on the path of encounter.

Having definitively rejected the temptation to proselytize, dismissed an after-thought to make converts in the strict sense of change of religion, I gained mutual trust, it seemed to me that all the conditions were fulfilled for lucid and serene dialogue. That *Nasienbatsi*, the one God, Creator of heaven and earth, whose name is daily on everyone’s lips, is not honored or worshiped in the way that a Christian, a Jew or a Muslim thinks that he should be does not mean that the Mandjak people worship false gods. And I do not see why the sacrifice of animals, big or small, offered every day in the sacred wood or on the domestic altars to intermediate spirits, would offend the Christ whom they do not know or know so little. Even if I know that Christ shed his blood, once and for all, for the salvation of all mankind. The First Letter to the Corinthians has often enlightened me in my day-to-day relationship with the believers of the traditional religion: apart from the danger of
scandalizing the weak, one can peacefully take this path, as St. Paul himself did. I shall give some examples.

**Ancestor Worship**

I shall begin with the simplest example, the one that usually poses the least difficulty, even to the most scrupulous of missionaries: ancestor worship. Father Bienvenu had already opened the road in his community in Dakar-Médina. The founders of the mission in Bajob had followed suit without hesitation by taking part in the traditional libations whenever they had the opportunity. In the Mandjak culture, it is by means of planting sacred stakes (*icap*) in the ground a few meters from the family home, that one can maintain communion with those who have joined the world of the ancestors (*balugum*). At each event, happy or unhappy, the head of the family (*nauyäk kato*) consults, by means of these perceptible *pëcap*, those who have become invisible, accompanying his prayers with libations, offerings or sacrifices, according to a well-established ritual. These family ceremonies take place throughout the year, according to need. But at the approach of the rainy season, an occasion called *kakao* brings the members of each family together, at the same time, around their respective ancestors, to implore their intercession in favor of those “who still support the weight of the day.” To ask them for health, food, drink, clothing, work, rain, money, schooling for the children, education of the new generations, agreement between the members of the family . . .

The cult of the ancestors is not about to disappear in the Mandjak world. On the contrary, it is what, to a large extent, maintains the cohesion and harmonious development of each family, despite the well-known mobility of this people. The missionaries in Bajob did not hesitate to transpose these rites into the basic communities, planting the *icap* of their patron saints at the entrance to the chapels and honoring them, on the patronal feast days, with original liturgies that integrate the Feast of the Patron Saint and the ancient Rogation Rite in a symbolic language immediately perceptible to Mandjak Christians.

**Who, in Reality, are the intermediary Spirits?**

It is much less simple for many Christians, priests and lay people, to enter dialogue with the traditional religion when it comes to participating in the traditional cults addressed to other invisible beings, such as the animist bodies called *gëkai* in the Mandyako dialect. The missionaries to South America, during the time of the Spanish and Portuguese Patronates/Protectorates, as well as those to Africa in the nineteenth century, indiscriminately relegated these intermediary spirits to the category of devils.

In Guinea-Bissau, the foreign missionaries who only use the *Crioulo* idiom to proclaim the Gospel have only one word to indicate all the spiritual entities distinct from the Ancestors, the word *iran*, which always conveys a pejorative sense. An *iran* is an intrinsically evil spirit; one must renounce it. When I was in Dakar, at every adult Baptism, I heard this refrain
taken up by the neophytes in chorus: “Mam baaja, uno batismu-inji, ma wëtan gëcai . . .” (“I swear, on the day of my Baptism, to give up the gëcai”). Thus, it was clear that the gëcai were all compared to what are called devils or demons in the Christian religion. One was not far from the tabula rasa of the missionaries to America in the sixteenth century, at the antipodes of the opening Matteo Ricci and his companions inaugurated in the Far East at the same period!

The problem is that, once one has left the Mandjak country, most of the baptized in Dakar return quickly, and without qualms, to the traditional cult celebrated on the altars of the gëcai in the family domain, the sacred wood or any other place reserved for these rites. The name of God is always pronounced, but the sacrifices themselves are all offered to the gëcai, constantly implored to solve personal or communal problems concerning the living and the dead. To ignore this cult, snubbing it, while continuing to proclaim the Gospel, is, in my opinion, condemning oneself to marginalize the Christians or, what is no better, to create people perpetually torn between the demands of the traditional religion, inseparable from their culture of origin, and those of the Christian religion into which they have entered through Baptism. Indeed, to fight this cult on the pretext that it is evil, not to say diabolical, is to decide that no dialogue is possible because the encounter begins and continues to be marked by this tenacious prejudice: the gëcai are demons!

**Judge the Tree by its Fruit (Matt 7:15 ff., 6:43)**

Luckily, there is a third way: that of the Gospel of Jesus telling us that a tree is recognizable by its fruit. The path I chose to take on my arrival in Mandjak territory was to discern the spirits case by case. Never to generalize, but to live each meeting as it developed. On this path, I believe I met true devils whom I expelled, as one ought, with the power of the Spirit of Jesus (Mark 16:17). But, more often than not, I only met real-life imps with whom I tried to dialogue in order to understand the reason for their deviant or malicious behavior.

As for going to the sacred places of the Mandjak, all inhabited by the gëcai, I may say that I simply followed my instinct: I never tried to force a door that was closed, but neither did I refuse to go where I was allowed . . . Once in, I strove to discern the spirits in the light of the Holy Spirit and with the help of some Mandjak Christians who were constantly involved in this inter-religious dialogue. For example, if one needs to pour three liters of palm wine and slaughter a tiny chicken on the altar of the traditional witchdoctor so that his ucai may allow him to treat a patient with a snake bite, or suffering from some other disease, thanks to the herbs of which he has the secret, by what right can one dismiss as “devilish” such a benevolent spirit? Health and peace are eloquent signs that enable one to discern what type of spirit one is dealing with.

On this journey of encounter with the traditional religion, I had the good fortune to benefit from the valuable help of two exceptional experts, a biblical scholar and an anthropologist. The first was none other than my colleague Pierre Buis of whom I spoke earlier. As an expert
in the Old Testament, he really enlightened me on the place of angels and demons in the Bible, reminding me that they had only entered it rather late, during the Babylonian Exile; and that even in Holy Scripture it is often difficult to recognize whether one is dealing with benevolent or evil spirits. As for the anthropologist, Maria Teixeira, she stressed the same ambiguity in the world of the gécai, by drawing an almost exhaustive picture of the “main actors of the invisible.” She wrote:

God sent powers to the earth, the ngécat. Some of them are good and work together for good, while others are bad, most of whose actions are oriented to evil. A priori, it is impossible to distinguish a good ucay from a bad one: ‘In order to know, one must approach him to know him better. It is the same as for men,’ say the officiants. The beneficial or malevolent orientation of an ucay partly depends on the person addressing it. Powers and humans are closely linked in action. Almost all domestic powers are neutral, ambivalent, and able to perform good and evil at the same time. Men are like the powers who serve them, with ambivalent attitudes.¹

If this is so, one can see how inter-religious dialogue can take place from day to day. Once the practices directly related to the evil spirits have been set aside or eliminated, an immense field of investigation opens up before whoever really wants to dialogue with the believers of the traditional religion, as well as with the numerous Mandjak Christians who belong to both trends. For the latter one could even say, that the dialogue which takes place within their person is a kind of “intra-religious dialogue,” to use a particularly felicitous expression used by Paul Coulon. He wrote: “Today the real dialogue in Christian communities is basically an intra-religious dialogue: every African Christian has to confront within, his/her Christian faith and traditional heritage—as does every community within itself.”²

**Speaking of Faith in another Language**

To return to my own experience, I should like to add that, if immersion in the traditional Mandjak world, without a priori, enabled me to understand this people’s relationship with God and with all visible and invisible beings better, if empathy prevented me from “demonizing” all that seemed mysterious or frightening to a visitor with limited time, the dialogue of life, day by day, also taught me to express my faith in a language that was a little more comprehensible to this people. I worked through catechesis and the liturgy, playing my part in the patient work of inculcating the Gospel. But I am well aware that despite speaking the other’s language correctly, the encounter with God, the All Other, will always remain a deep mystery for each one of us. In the end, only the Holy Spirit, who precedes and accompanies us in every dialogue, can render the dialogue fruitful. It is he who will guide us, the disciples of Christ and the followers of the traditional religion, “into the whole truth” (John 16:13).
Endnotes


Dialogue interreligieux en Mauritanie


Contexte : La Mauritanie


Le pays a une superficie de 1 030 000 km2 et peuplé entre 3 à 4 millions d’habitants. Ancienne colonie française, la Mauritanie est indépendante le 28 novembre 1960. L’Islam est une religion d’État, car les mauritaniens sont musulmans à 100 %. Le pays est composé de deux grands ensembles communautaires : Les Arabo-berbères (Maures Blancs et Noirs anciens esclaves), et les Négro-africains (Peuls – Soninkés et Wolofs, d’ascendance africaine).

Pour ce qui est de la communauté chrétienne en Mauritanie, elle est typiquement étrangère, composée de fonctionnaires internationaux, d’ambassades, de migrants et des refugiés en transit, souvent avec le rêve de gagner l’Europe qu’ils considèrent comme l’Eldorado.

L’Église Catholique est présente dans plusieurs villes du pays, notamment à Nouakchott la Capitale où se trouve la cathédrale Saint Joseph et un évêché – à Atar – Kaédi – Rosso et
Nouadhibou d’où je viens. Ces Eglises dont le catéchisme est orienté seulement envers les étrangers de confession chrétienne. Parallèlement à ce rôle, la Mission Catholique en Mauritanie exécute un volet social, éducatif, et caritatif très important au profit des mauritaniens. À titre d’exemple, la Mission Catholique de Nouadhibou, qui a fêtée récemment son jubilé de 60 ans, a à son sein :

- Un Jardin d’Enfants dont les monitrices sont toutes les mauritaniennes ;
- Une Bibliothèque ;
- Un Centre de Formation en langues (Français – Anglais et Espagnole) ;
- Un Centre de Formation en Informatique, maintenance et comptabilité-gestion ;
- Des ateliers de cuisine et pâtisserie ;
- Point d’accueil et écoute des migrants et personnes vulnérables ;
- Assistance aux Familles les plus démunies etc.

La Communauté chrétienne en tant que telle, vit en parfaite symbiose avec ses voisins musulmans de Mauritanie et entretient de très bonnes relations avec la société mauritanienne, qui dans sa majorité reste tolérante, accueillante, discrète et très curieuse. C’est dans ce contexte, qu’il faut situer les contours du dialogue interreligieux en Mauritanie, avec l’ambition de créer les bases de sa fondation dans le respect de l’autre et l’ancrage confessionnel de chaque communauté, sans prosélytisme.

**Dialogue Interreligieux en Mauritanie**

Dialogue interreligieux ! Voilà un sujet d’actualité passionnant et parfois passionné, qui s’inscrit dans le registre du rapprochement interconfessionnel, parfois conflictuel, à cause du rejet de l’autre et surtout dû par manque d’échange et l’absence de communication.
Pour revenir sur le dialogue interreligieux en Mauritanie, à ce sujet il faut dire que le dialogue interreligieux officiel et reconnu entre les différentes religions il n’y en a pas en Mauritanie. Nous préférons parler plutôt de la cohabitation interreligieuse, pour la simple raison, que dans ce pays selon la constitution, la seule religion reconnue pour les citoyens est l’Islam. Cela ne signifie pas l’absence d’une dynamique qui s’oriente vers le vivre ensemble dans le respect mutuel de personnes appartenant à des religions différentes. Il y a eu des sessions sur l’Islam en 2016 et 2017 à Nouakchott durant lesquelles le sujet a été abordé avec beaucoup de réserve mais « cela est vu comme une réflexion purement chrétienne sur l’Islam et non comme un dialogue où les deux religions (l’islam et le christianisme) se prononcent. Par contre, le groupe de réflexion « islamо-chrétienn » qui est à la cathédrale de Nouakchott a organisé des rencontres où des intervenants chrétiens et musulmans ont été invités pour parler des thèmes comme : « vivre ensemble et se comprendre au-delà de nos différences religieuses et culturelles ».

Donc, à priori, on peut dire, pour ce qui est de la Mauritanie, les relations entre chrétiens et musulmans sont d’ordre amical et individuel dans l’espace et le temps selon les circonstances et les motivations de cette amitié.

Ce qui revient à dire, dans ce type de relations, on ne parle pas souvent de la religion, ni moins de pratiques confessionnelles, mais on peut parler de l’Islam et non du christianisme. Certes l’action sociale et humanitaire des œuvres chrétiennes destinées aux couches défavorisées mauritaniennes, font pignons sur rue, et sans entrave de l’État mauritanien.

Au-delà de cette action sociale, on peut aussi noter le volet éducatif du secteur préscolaire, avec les jardins d’enfants de la Mission Catholique à Nouakchott et à Nouadhibou où les chrétiens et les musulmans travaillent ensemble, et qui ont vu passer plusieurs générations d’enfants mauritaniens. A titre d’exemple dans l’histoire du Jardin d’Enfants de la Mission Catholique de Nouadhibou, nous avons eu deux ministres et plusieurs cadres mauritaniens, qui ont fait leurs premiers pas dans cet établissement préscolaire au sein de la Mission Catholique de Nouadhibou.

Je le disais un peu plus haut, nous assurons un volet formation en langues et en informatique, avec une bibliothèque comme centre de documentation d’appui et de recherche aux élèves, étudiants et enseignants de la ville.

En toute humilité, avec notre modeste expérience comme missionnaire spiritain en terre mauritanienne, j’ai le sentiment que le peuple mauritanien, musulman dans sa totalité, est une société discrète, curieuse, accueillante, et tolérante dans sa majorité.

Dans sa pratique d’un Islam modéré et tolérant, la Mauritanie n’échappe pas au courant mondial de la vague islamiste, qui reste confiné dans certaines zones du pays. Pour notre part, en tant que chrétiens, nous ne sentons aucun rejet des mauritaniens, ni menaces, du moins jusqu’à ce jour.

Ce qui dénote l’intérêt de nos assises, pour s’inspirer de l’expérience et de la dynamique mondiale du dialogue interreligieux, afin de l’adapter au paysage mauritanien, sans prosélytisme, ni exhibitionnisme, nous essayerons de dialoguer avec nos amis de confession musulmane, pour échanger dans la tolérance et dans l’idéale sociale du vivre ensemble.
C’est pourquoi, nous sommes venues pour suivre avec intérêt et une attention toute particulière, les assises de Zanzibar, sur le sujet du dialogue interreligieux. Avec l’espoir de profiter de la longue expérience de mes collègues venus d’horizons divers, nous serons heureux de ramener des leçons instructives, pour en faire un outil de travail dans le cadre du dialogue interreligieux en Mauritanie.

La dernière actualité, nous donne une lueur d’espoir dans cette direction, car le Vatican et la Mauritanie viennent de concrétiser leurs relations diplomatiques, à travers la présentation récente, des lettres de créances de son Excellence Michel Banach, en sa qualité de nonce apostolique, représentant le Saint-Siège (Vatican) auprès de la Mauritanie, le 23 octobre 2018.

Pour ma part en tant que responsable de l’Eglise catholique à Nouadhibou, ainsi que la grande famille de la Mission Catholique en Mauritanie, nous ne ménagerons aucun, pour tendre la main à nos amis musulmans, espérant ainsi de jeter les bases d’une dynamique de dialogue interreligieux, dans un esprit de tolérance, de fraternité, et d’amitié.

Compte tenu de tous ces facteurs, j’ose espérer que le dialogue interreligieux, doit être un levier du vivre ensemble dans un monde de paix et prospérité.

Comme l’a souligné le Nonce durant son séjour à Nouakchott :

J’ai été surpris par l’hospitalité, l’amitié et l’ouverture, ainsi que l’accueil, que j’ai perçu chez le peuple mauritanien. Surtout qu’aujourd’hui, nous sommes dans un monde où il y a beaucoup de conflits et de tensions, une situation sensible. Mais le seul moyen d’éviter ces problèmes, c’est le dialogue. Nous sommes venus avec une volonté pour entrer dans un véritable dialogue entre les religions, en collaboration avec le peuple et le gouvernement mauritanien. Cette rencontre revêt un cachet particulier, qui vise à renforcer les relations entre les deux Etats. C’est un envol qui contribuera à la paix et à la stabilité dans le monde, et consolidera le dialogue Islamo-Chrétien en Mauritanie, une société pleine d’incertitudes, mais aussi d’espoir.

En terminant sur cette note d’espoir, je souhaite plein succès aux assises de Zanzibar, tout heureux de rencontrer ce panel de sommités et de collègues venus des quatre coins du monde, pour enclencher cette dynamique de paix dans le monde, à travers le dialogue interreligieux.

Je vous remercie.
Le Dialogue interreligieux à Maurice


Quelle est votre Expérience de Dialogue interreligieux dans votre Circonscription/pays : conflictuelle, collaboratrice, ou indifférente ?

**Quelle est l’opinion générale sur le dialogue interreligieux ?**

Depuis plus d’un demi-siècle, la question du dialogue interreligieux était présente dans l’Église à Maurice, et cela sous des formes très diverses. La création du Centre d’Accueil Interreligieux de Pont-Praslin s’inscrit dans cette histoire. Jusque dans les années 80, l’activité interreligieuse était pensée et pratiquée à partir de la réalité paroissiale. Cela ne manquait pas d’intérêt, mais cela comportait d’énormes « limites », car un travail pastoral prenant ne permettait pas de donner beaucoup de temps pour se dépayser vraiment dans le monde des « autres ». De plus, dans bien des cas, cela suscitait la méfiance des paroissiens qui ne comprenaient pas que les prêtres puissent s’occuper « des autres » !

Par-delà les malentendus, il a fallu affronter certains non-dits ! Beaucoup s’imaginent que nous voulons mettre à plat le service dans les paroisses. Tel n’est certainement pas notre point de vue. La plupart de nos confrères s’inscrivent dans la ligne vénérable de notre histoire à Maurice, où, peu à peu, nous avons forgé la figure de l’église à partir de nos paroisses. Ne pourrions-nous pas innover ? Maintenant nous avons à montrer un visage d’Église à partir d’activités extra-paroissiales. A partir des années 80, le nombre des Spiritains, à Maurice, allait en décroissant et nous avons commencé à avoir du mal à trouver de la relève sur place.
Collaborez-vous (vous ou vos confrères de circonscription) avec les autres instituts religieux missionnaires dans le dialogue interreligieux ?

Le Centre de dialogue interreligieux de Pont-Praslin s’inscrit dans la mission spiritaine à Maurice et se veut en honorer un des aspects importants : le dialogue interreligieux. Une collaboration plus ferme est exigée pour que cette dimension spiritaine soit visible et permette au groupe spiritain de s’impliquer dans cette affaire. Tout dépend de l’ouverture d’esprit des confrères ou de leur bonne volonté, à défaut de compréhension. L’articulation entre les activités de Pont-Praslin et la manière dont nos frères Spiritains voient ces activités fait toute la différence. Nous avons encore des efforts à faire en ce qu’il s’agit de la collaboration avec d’autres congrégations religieuses.

L’Église locale (le diocèse) est-elle engagée dans le dialogue interreligieux ? Comment ?

L’Église locale a un prêtre qui représente l’Église catholique dans le Conseil des Religions. Il travaille en collaboration avec les autres chefs religieux des autres religions présentes à Maurice, notamment les hindous, les musulmans, les bouddhistes et les bahais.

Travaillez-vous avec le gouvernement ou avec des organisations non-gouvernementales dans la résolution des conflits et la mise en pratique des initiatives de consolidation de la paix émanant du dialogue interreligieux ?

Des conférences sont organisées. En situation de tension dans l’île, le Comité des Sages issu de ce Conseil prend la parole et appelle au calme, par le biais des médias.

Avez-vous été personnellement enrichi par le ministère du dialogue interreligieux ? En puisant dans notre spiritualité spiritaine, pensez-vous que le dialogue interreligieux est une forme de spiritualité missionnaire spiritaine ?

Oui. Le contact avec des personnes d’autres religions m’a enrichi humainement et spirituellement. Cela m’a aidé à être moi-même comme chrétien, et à apprendre à écouter l’autre se dire comme il est, avec sa culture, et sa religion.

Oui, le dialogue interreligieux est une forme de spiritualité missionnaire spiritaine. Mais dépasse en même temps le cadre spiritain. C’est une spiritualité à part entière.


toutes nos peurs. Nous cheminerons l’un et l’autre si nous acceptons de nous placer sous cette vérité plus haute, la vérité qui est ni mienne, ni tienne, mais de Dieu.

Le dialogue c’est être soi tout simplement, en gardant raison et tradition, sans suspendre son intelligence et sa foi.

Partant de votre Expérience, quels sont les Défis au Dialogue interreligieux dans votre Contexte ?

Le principal défi est de sortir de l’espace paroissial, ou au moins, à ne pas se laisser haper par la spirale administrative et sacramentalisante des paroisses. Une petite équipe de Spiritains a proposé à Maurice, un changement de stratégie, sans se couper totalement de la réalité paroissiale. C’est pourquoi elle a choisi le site de Pont-Praslin, une petite paroisse immergée dans le monde hindou et musulman. Très rapidement les confrères ont noué des liens intéressants avec les « autrement croyants » et ont progressé dans la connaissance de ces mondes notamment par l’apprentissage de la langue hindi, cousine de l’ourdou, la langue parlée par les musulmans.

Étiez-vous préparé à ce ministère spécifique ? Si non, quel genre de préparation voudriez-vous recommander aux confrères qui travailleront dans des contextes de dialogue interreligieux ?

Oui, je me suis préparé en prenant des cours sur le sujet du dialogue interreligieux avant de me lancer. Il faut bien connaître les 4 formes du dialogue : Le dialogue de vie, le dialogue de l'action, le dialogue théologique et le dialogue de l'expérience religieuse. Ces quatre formes de dialogue ne sont pas en lien par hasard, mais elles sont en rapport avec le progrès humain.

Dialogue pour la mission ad gentes. (Ceux qui partaient au loin)

Recevez-vous du soutien et de la compréhension de la part de vos confrères, de votre circonscription, de l’Église locale, et des gens avec lesquels vous vivez ? De quel genre de soutien s’agit-il ?

Il y avait beaucoup d’incompréhension et de méfiance. Quelques personnes nous encourageaient cependant, mais ils étaient peu nombreux.

Dans le ministère de dialogue interreligieux, comment étiez-vous en mesure de dépasser les premiers défis et ceux qui sont survenus après ?

Cela a pris du temps. Au bout d’un certain temps d’immersion, les confrères se sont rendus compte que, si cette démarche était enrichissante du point de vue personnel, il fallait la toucher proprement missionnaire et ecclésiale. Si donc un vrai mouvement missionnaire voulait prendre corps, il fallait absolument que des croyants chrétiens se jetent dans l’aventure et partagent cette volonté d’aller vers les autres. Cet « aller vers les autres » se comprend, à Maurice, comme la volonté de vivre ensemble et pas convertir les autres et les faire entrer dans notre Église.

Existe-il des questions et des événements spécifiques qui empêchent la promotion d’une meilleure collaboration interreligieuse parmi les gens dans votre milieu ?
Oui. Aux yeux des autres, l’Église est vue comme la chose « créole » et du coup, pour beaucoup, devenir chrétien équivaudrait à devenir « créole » ! Cet « aller vers les autres » se présente plutôt comme la volonté d’entrer en dialogue avec les autres de manière à pouvoir bâtir un avenir commun avec nos différences ethniques et religieuses. Cette tâche s’avère vitale dans un pays où le moindre des problèmes prend un tour ethnico-religieux et où la « religion » est appelée à la rescousse pour « protéger » la montagne de chaque groupe ethnique.

**Les conditions spirituelles pour le dialogue.** Le dialogue exige équilibre, convictions, et ouverture à la vérité. La vérité n’est pas ce qui donne raison, mais elle est ce qui nous juge. On dit que les chrétiens ne sont pas meilleurs que les autres. Oui. On énonce une parole comme vraie, et tout le monde voit qu’on est incapable de la vivre. Le sacrement, c’est comme la Parole de Dieu, elle nous juge. Il s’agit de vivre ce qu’on célèbre, de devenir ce qu’on célèbre. Or les gens cherchent à avoir raison.

*Partant de votre expérience, comment peut-on dépasser ces défis et créer une ambiance positive pour le ministère au sein des contextes de dialogue interreligieux ?*

Le dialogue interreligieux cherche la paix dans le monde. Que les personnes impliquées aient le désir de travailler pour construire la paix entre les personnes.

**Veuillez identifier certaines Questions qui, de votre Point de Vue, devraient être examinées au cours du Chapitre Général en Pologne, en 2020**

**L’ŒCUMÉNISME CHERCHE À CE QU’IL Y AIT UNE EGLISE**

L’objectif du dialogue interreligieux n’est pas de faire une religion minimale acceptable par tous, c’est le vivre ensemble. Comment rechercher les fondements d’un vivre ensemble qui permette de tenir, d’être les uns devant les autres, avec les valeurs de la sécularité ?

Les missionnaires partaient avec passion rejoindre ce qui est vécu par l’autre. Comment garder vivante cette même passion aujourd’hui ?

*Que faites-vous de créatif et qui pourrait être encouragé dans votre ou dans d’autres circonscriptions ?*  
Nous créons des cercles de relations interreligieuses - Imams, maulanas, pandits, swamis, Brahma, Kumaris, etc.

Nous faisons de nouvelles équipes, en prenant en compte les défaillances des anciennes structures, dues en particulier à des rivalités entre personnes. Il faut vraiment pouvoir s’appuyer sur des gens de confiance et qui manifestent une véritable disponibilité et une volonté de travailler en équipe.

Nous assurons la formation à l’interreligieux (la programmation de sessions, etc.). Il faudra veiller à former spécialement quelques laïcs tant au plan biblique, théologique que spirituel, afin qu’ils puissent un jour prendre en charge avec nous cette mission.
Nous collaborons avec les autres “missions” spiritaines, mais aussi avec différentes instances ecclésiales.
Nous accueillons humblement les remarques de nos confrères, même si, parfois, elles nous paraissent hors de propos.
Nous recommandons de décentraliser les sessions de formations. En ce qui concerne les sessions, dans un premier temps, nous faisons des sessions résidentielles, même si cela réduit le nombre des participants.

Qu’est ce qui devrait distinguer l’approche spiritaine au dialogue interreligieux à celle des autres congrégations religieuses impliquées dans le même ministère ?
L’accueil des autrement croyants qui sont en situation périphérique.
Passer beaucoup de temps avec une présence, et un service. Puis, on parlera, et on annoncera la Bonne Nouvelle, le kérygme, la catéchèse.

En puisant dans votre expérience pratique, que proposeriez-vous pour promouvoir le dialogue interreligieux dans la congrégation dans un avenir plus proche ?
Développer une culture du dialogue interreligieux dans la Congrégation.
Spiritans and Interreligious Dialogue in Pakistan

Fr. Jose Harivola Randrianjanakolona, C.S.Sp., is from Madagascar province and was ordained on 16 August 2015. He did his philosophy and made his novitiate in Mauritius where he encountered many members of the Hindu religion. Jose did his theology in Kenya from 2010 to 2015 and since 1 August 2016 has been living and working in Pakistan where he experiences Christians living alongside Muslims. In other words, a time to put into practice what he has learned, heard, and dreamed to do.

Introduction

To be Spiritan in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan means encountering Muslims on a daily basis. This is a condition sine qua non of our stay there. As far as Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) is concerned, my experiences say that in some cases, with some people, IRD is both conflictual and collaborative. It is conflictual, because some Muslims see Christians and other minorities as “kafir,” unbelievers, as people worthy of less consideration. Because of this, dialogue does not have its proper place. In this case, it brings conflict for both. An example of this is when I went to a shop; as soon as a man in that shop knew that I was a Christian from another country, he said the following sentence: “Apna kaam karo phir jao,” which means “finish your business and go. This is an Islamic country.” On the other hand, IRD is also collaborative, because there are Muslims who welcome Christians as one of themselves apart from religious differences. In this case, Muslims and Christians help each other in their activities, work, religious celebrations, etc. As we continue in our presentation, we will see more examples of these realities.

In my opinion, people pay little attention or know little about IRD. However, they are forced to do so by the fact that they live with each other. Some Christians or Hindus have no choice other than to accept the decisions of the Muslim majority. Dialogue is so much limited, if present at all. Any gesture, word, behavior can be a source of conflict. There are many sensitive expressions or behaviors that minorities should avoid, so as to maintain peace with the
majority. An example of this: a father in a Muslim family wanted his son to marry the daughter of his Christian neighbor. The father of this girl did not accept that this would happen. So the Muslim threw a burnt Quran into his compound and then called out that this man was doing something wrong. The enraged crowd came and attacked this man. This was a blasphemy case. He suffered prison. But now we are in the process of proving his innocence. A Muslim advocate is working with us and the diocese. Pray that he will be released, like Asia Bibi.

Being a Spiritan in Pakistan, it appears to be impossible to work alone. There is much collaboration among religious of different congregations. As far as IRD is concerned, there are some activities we do with other religious congregations. An example of this is the environment protection program which is an activity of JPIC in appearance, but it is a place of IRD also. A Columban priest initiated this program. It is already launched in the parish where we Spiritans are working. Muslims, Christians, and Hindus are invited and involved in this program. We share our views, our activities, food, and prayers as well.

At diocesan level, there is a special commission called the “National Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism” (NCIDE). It was established in 1985 by Pakistan’s Catholic Bishops. They realized that there was a great need for peace and harmony because of the increasing incidents against Christians. They have introduced joint celebrations of the religious festivals, such as Eid for Muslims, Christmas and Easter for Christians, and Diwali and Holi for Hindus. This helps people of different religions to understand and appreciate each other’s spirituality.

As far as my experience goes, there is not much work going on with government or non-governmental organizations in conflict resolution and peace building in which we are involved.

IRD in the Pakistani context is a delicate and sensitive mission. A good understanding of other religions is a must. Personally, my encounter with good Muslims helps me to deepen my faith and change my view of Islam. This mission makes me patient, vigilant and aware of the situation in which minorities are living. It also gives the chance to become a true witness of Christ.

As we have seen above, Pakistani Christians, who are sometimes marginalized and persecuted, need people like us Spiritans who have IRD as a mission priority. I am deeply convinced that IRD fulfills the criteria of Spiritan missionary spirituality. We can help minorities to make this dialogue possible. It is so because this is the life of the church itself. Fr. Channan, who is the chair of the Dominican Peace Center in Lahore, said in one of his interviews that “Without dialogue, there is no future for the church in Pakistan.” Beusmans added that “dialogue helps in bridging the gap which clearly exists between the religions and the perceptions of their believers.”

What are the Challenges for IRD in Pakistan?

MISUNDERSTANDING AND WRONG CONCEPTION OF IRD
IRD has been misunderstood by both Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. Dialogue should be viewed as an end not as a means. If it is viewed as a means, then it is a method of winning
members to Christianity, to Islam, or to Hinduism. If it is viewed as an end, then it is a way of building relationships between people of different religions. On this note, IRD aims at sharing basic needs such as peace, education, equal rights, freedom, economic and political stability, etc. This is the real purpose of IRD which is sometimes misunderstood.

**UNWILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN IRD**

It remains a challenge if one of the two parties in the dialogue is not willing to do it. If this is so, the big task is how to convince them to accept and participate in dialogue.

**RELIGIOUS FANATICISM AND RIGIDITY OF LAWS**

There are people who use religion to oppress others. They cannot see the suffering of others. They are driven by some biblical or Quranic passages which are read out of context. For example, in Surah 1 of the Quran, 190: “Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you.” And, in the Bible, “Do not look on such a man (false witness) with pity. Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot” (Deuteronomy 19:21). This gives rise to misunderstanding and hinders the relationship between people.

Sometimes, laws become a barrier to dialogue because it is better to fulfil the laws than to respect truth, justice, and human rights. As an example of this, note the blasphemy laws in Pakistan, from which many Christians, Hindus, and Muslims have been suffering and have lost their lives. We have the recent case of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman, mother of five children. She was accused unjustly in 2009 and was imprisoned and sentenced to death in 2010. She suffered in the prison. The high court of Pakistan released her unconditionally due to insufficient evidence. Up to now, some Muslims want her execution to take place. In this case, dialogue does not have its place at all.

At this point, allow me to reveal a trick which I played with the generalate. It is a secret which I reveal now. When I was writing to the generalate for my mission appointment, I wrote one page and a half on Pakistan which is the place I wished to be and I prepared myself for this ministry for a long time. For my other two choices, I just wrote half a page. I did that to show my interest in going to Pakistan. Then, at my ordination in Madagascar, the people were saying “wawwwwww!” when the provincial announced that Jose is being sent by the congregation to be in Pakistan.

Personally, before I became a Spiritan, it was my wish to work in Asia, especially in Pakistan. I was not aware of what was awaiting me. I prepared myself and my family as well. My essay, at the end of my theological studies focused on “the Spiritan mission towards the oppressed Christians in Muslim countries: case study of Pakistan.” Through this essay, I gathered information about IRD and a few paragraphs dealt with it. I was not even sure that the generalate would send me to Pakistan. However, I had great hope for a positive answer. Therefore, my first recommendation is for students to put much preparation into the ministry for which they are passionate. This does not mean that we do not consider other areas of ministry. In addition, we need to be patient when reaching the place where IRD is part of the mission.
I think and believe that the real place from where we find support is our community, that is, from the confreres with whom we are working. Their example, experience, and knowledge make us ready to work more and feel at home. The local people can also show us in detail how to work through a challenge. They know the mentality of their co-citizens. To overcome challenges, one has to put aside all prejudices, be ready to learn, and be patient. We also have to trust in God's providence.

By the fact that I have just completed my first two years in Pakistan, there is a lot to learn, to discover, and to be understood. Every day I find new things to learn. I finished my language classes. Little by little I am getting used to the Spiritan mission in Pakistan. All the challenges, which I mentioned above, result from my observation. I am yet to experience them as time goes by. One area where we can promote a positive interreligious collaboration is by having multiple common projects and common celebrations. These activities are much more practical than theoretical.

The Four Levels of Dialogue

The four levels of dialogue which we see from the Bagamoyo Chapter (dialogue of everyday life, dialogue of collaboration in common projects, spiritual dialogue and theological dialogue) are all life-giving experiences. What I encourage other circumscriptions to do is to identify some areas and projects to which personnel go in line with IRD and focus more on it. It is true that we are limited financially, infrastructurally, and in personnel. However, focusing on a few projects is better than having too many projects that are not worked out well.

I would think that our Spiritan approach to IRD differs from other congregations in our identification with the very poor and oppressed people in our society. As an example of this, take the mobile clinic which the group of Pakistan operates. Marwari women and children are the main target of this project. These categories of people suffer more than any other. They are from the low caste of the society. They are economically poor and many did not go to school at all. Their daily activities are mainly farming and keeping animals. They have to work in the field alongside men. In addition to this, they have to fetch water, firewood, cooking food, cutting grass for livestock and taking care of men and children (washing clothes, cleaning the house, etc.). They are vulnerable, and weak physically. Therefore, we Spiritans try to help them by giving them some medicine at a very low cost. What has IRD to with such a project? Marwari people have the same work, in the same condition, whether they are Muslim, Hindu, or Christian. Therefore, we do not discriminate. As long as they are Marwari people, we do help them.

Dialogue with Hindus

We also dialogue with Hinduism especially the Marwari Bhil people who are of Hindu Origin. Michael from Ireland was so much involved in this beside the health ministry. He used to at-
tend important Hindu feasts like “*Divali*”, the celebration of the victory of Light over darkness, and “*Holi*,” the festival of colors. He would sing *bhajans* (songs) and play instruments. He visited all who welcomed him whether Hindu or Christian. John Baptist from Uganda personally meets many Hindus through the health program, although he has not reached the level of discussing stuff with them. Anyhow, they love listening to “stories” of Jesus healing people, but are slow at changing their religion which is not in any case our first goal.

It should also be noted that tension exists between the Marwari Bhil who converted to Christianity, and other Hindu people who think missionaries want to snatch followers from the Hindu religion. All the unfortunate situations that befall the Marwari Christians are attributed to the mistake they made to convert to Christianity. Those who take the step to become Christians are persecuted, not only by the Muslim majority, but also by their own Hindu relatives from whom they made the leap to become Christian.

**My Suggestions for the Promotion of IRD in the next Five Years**

- A permanent communication among confreres involved especially in the IRD context. This helps us to exchange ideas, experiences, and approaches to deal with challenges. This can have a form of a *review, blog, magazine or/and audiovisual recording*.
- Reinforce the general coordinator of IRD who can make regular visits to the houses of formation at every level, or countries where IRD seems to be much more difficult. Encourage formators to orient students to IRD as a mission priority of the congregation. This can provide fulltime missionaries who are ready to dedicate their lives and times to the IRD mission.
Introduction

India is the cradle of five major religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Bahai) and a habitat of almost all the faith traditions in the world. The cultural history of the sub-continent is, by and large, a remarkable record of peaceful cohabitation of different religious groups. However, dialogue among the different faith traditions is a relatively new experience which has become a visible religious practice in the recent few decades. Moreover, it will not be an exaggeration to say that inter-faith dialogue became prevalent and popular thanks to the initiatives of the Catholic Church after Vatican II.

We Spiritans are immersed in this context of the Indian reality since 2011. We cannot say that we are totally engaged in the interreligious dialogue, but through the dialogue of life we share this reality. Our apostolate connects us with people from different religions. Whether in hospital ministry, in the ministry of the mentally retarded children in special schools, ministry with the elderly people with handicaps, we are deeply connected to the multiple aspects of the Indian cultures and traditions. It is through the encounter of the other that we engage ourselves in a dialogue of life. We live in a milieu whereby we are in connection with Muslims and Hindus and people from other faiths. We share their griefs and we do our best to have a fraternal attitude towards them. Our presence in this milieu is itself a sign that we are eager to live among people from different backgrounds and religions. Let us not forget that in India the caste system constitutes a barrier in the society and it also interferes in every religion.
Areas of Reception

THEOLOGICAL RECEPTION

The positive attitude of the Council towards other faiths enhanced Indian theologians and pioneers of dialogue to elaborate a theology of dialogue proper to their contexts. In 1989, the Catholic Bishops Conference of India Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism brought out the ‘Guidelines for Inter-religious Dialogue,’ a unique text that explains the raison d’être and dynamism of dialogue ministry. According to this document, “dialogue is both an attitude and an activity of committed followers of various religions who agree to meet and accept one another and work together for common ideals in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. They do not meet in a superficial manner, leaving aside their religious convictions. Rather they reach out for each other from the very core of their respective faiths, for they are confident that not only what they have in common, but also those things in which they differ, can provide a motive for coming together.”

The Commission also elaborates the attitudes for genuine dialogue. They are:

- Prayer
- Commitment to faith
- Willingness to change
- Truthfulness
- Honesty
- Humility
- Spirit of forgiveness
- Knowledge of the other
- Sense of justice.

The dangers to be avoided in the mission of dialogue are:

- Unwillingness to accept the other as different
- Attitude of suspicion
- Desire to score a point over the other
- Syncretism
- Indifferentism.

The theology of dialogue developed in India can be traced also from the statements of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Annual Meetings of the Indian Theological Association. These meetings define dialogue as a mode of being and a way of life. It is a sharing and a process of mutual enrichment. Like all realities dialogue also contains a paradox: commitment to
one’s own ideals and acceptance of others. Genuine dialogue implies that the partners respect one another and learn from one another. Hence there can be no dialogue without accepting the equality of partners. No religion can exist in isolation; nay more, a religion that is not open to the other becomes irreligious. In a pluralistic society to be religious is to be inter-religious.

INCULTURATION
The process of inculturation got momentum immediately after the Vatican Council. The liturgy began to be celebrated in the vernacular languages. In many places, churches and chapels were constructed in Indian style. Indian music, bhajans, and dance were introduced into liturgy. Oil lamps replaced candles and arati took the place of the thurible in worship. Priests, religious, and seminarians became interested in studying Indian spirituality and yoga. Christian ashrams sprang up in different corners of the country. But these days, a sort of frozenness has stalled indigenization, partly due to the disciplinary guidelines from different ecclesial corners.

RECEPTION VIA PRAXIS
The supporters of dialogue began ashrams and centers in various parts of the country to promote interaction among the believers of religions. The main activities of such centers are the following.

- Monthly meeting
- Seminars
- Experience sharing
- Celebration of festivals
- Common pilgrimage.

CO-OPERATION IN THE SOCIAL FIELD
Common activities by members of different religions are a form of interreligious dialogue. Certain dialogue units undertake public services in view of nation building. Some others take up a wide range of issues pertaining to human rights and freedom of the backward people in the country. The activists of dialogue engage also in exorcizing the demons of casteism, regionalism, and communalism. Through these sorts of action-oriented programs, people come to know about the liberative drive of religions and look to religions to solve the issues of life.

LIVE-TOGETHER SESSIONS
The live-in programs are those in which members of different religions come together for some days of staying together. They are arranged in quiet and beautiful places. During these days the participants meditate, sing, eat, and conduct sat-sang as one community. Dialogue goes to the deepest level when the members live together in proximity for days through prayer, contemplation, cooking and eating, discussion and cultural activities.
Evaluation of the Reception

A majority of the bishops in India attest to the positive and open attitude of the Vatican Council towards other religions. Since pluralism has become an irreversible fact of today’s culture, they recognize in public other religions as ways of salvation to their respective believers. This position is closer to the theology of salvific grace, a position held by Karl Rahner. But when the ecclesial authorities speak within the board of Christians, they may be content with the theology of accomplishment, i.e., all religions are natural religions and Christianity is the supernatural religion.

Coming to the laity, they are not very much worried about the dogmatic formulations regarding dialogue. What matters to them is the praxis of dialogue. The relation of Christians towards other believers in India depends on various factors. Among them we will mention only two here.

a) The antiquity, numerical strength, and economic status of Christians in a region. For example, where Christians are numerically weak, they go for healthy relationship with others, while in areas where Christians have considerable strength, they are reluctant to accept cultural integration. Since they can stand on their own legs, they will not be ready to make any sacrifice for the sake of dialogue.

b) Christian involvement in dialogue may vary also according to the forms of dialogue. Laity feel at ease with the “dialogue of life” and the “dialogue of action,” if the Hindus in the region are not averse to such initiatives. But they are not very much disposed to the dialogue of prayer. Joining other believers in worship seems to be disastrous for their faith, because reverence shown to Hindu deities is equal to idolatry for them.

Problems and Challenges

- Dialogue considered as a waste of time.
- Fear of the Catholics.
- The idea of superiority.
- Inculturation seen as a way to convert people.

Concluding Remarks

Problems are many for those on the path of dialogue. But we cannot abandon this mission, for it is one of the essential constituents of evangelization today. In this concluding part, I would like to make two suggestions, which may strengthen the mission of dialogue.

a) The basic requirement for the success of interreligious initiatives of the church is to have Catholics with genuine spirituality. Spirituality is the only uniting factor in the world. Anything
without God creates division. Wealth, power, and fame are making people more self-centered and competitive. The mission of dialogue will flourish only with the increase of faithful interested in the spiritual quest. People with a spiritual outlook will never question the usefulness of dialogue. The Jesuit, George Gispert Sauch, once asked, “What profit do I obtain from the experience of dialogue?” He answered that the main fruit was that we are enabled to love believers of other faiths more deeply. We know them precisely in the way that they are different from us. The mystery of dialogue is that in accepting and affirming difference we come closer to people. Our experiences of dialogue lead us to the very mystery of God.

b) Another necessary element for the betterment of the dialogue ministry is that Christians recognize the identity of other faiths. If Christians perceive themselves as superior to other ways of salvation, it will endanger the spirit of interreligious fellowship. Accepting in others only that which is Christian and rejecting the rest, is equal to denying their alterity. The participants have to constantly purify the motives behind dialogue initiatives. Christians must recognize in other revelations some irreducible elements which are unknown to Christianity. This does not mean that those who engage in dialogue cannot take up a definite stand regarding their own faith. Commitment to one’s own faith is not an obstacle to dialogue, if the person is ready to award the same right to others. What endangers dialogue is the triumphant attitude saying, “ours is the only true religion and others are false.”

Any religion without dialogue has the potential danger of alienation. Alienation breeds non-communication, and non-communication leads to communalism. In dialogue, partners are called to be at the service of God who transcends all religions. Pope John Paul II understood dialogue as a sign of the hope that religions of the world were becoming more aware of their shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family. As Missionary of Africa, Bernard Ugeux, put it, “to turn towards the believer of another religion with respect to learn how to understand him and to discover the values that make him live, is to reproduce concretely the attitude that Jesus Christ always sought to promote in his encounter with people.”

Proposals for the Congregation

- include the dialogue perspective with other religion in the formation process;
- send our seminarians to a pluralistic context for missionary experience;
- encourage Spiritans to work hand in hand with partners from other religions in the social field.

Molenbeek

Molenbeek-Saint-Jean est l’une des 19 communes de la ville de Bruxelles qui compte plus ou moins 100,000 habitants. Elle est devenue, à raison ou à tort, le symbole de toutes les peurs qui habitent notre société occidentale. Pour entrer dans la réalité de Molenbeek, il faut d’abord regarder et essayer de comprendre, sans immédiatement juger.

Molenbeek-Saint-Jean est une commune qui est sans cesse dans l’accueil. A l’époque c’était des personnes qui venaient de Flandre et de Wallonie pour chercher du travail au long du canal. Cette habitude s’est perpétuée au long des âges. Molenbeek connaît plus ou moins huit mille déménagements par an ce qui est évidemment énorme. C’est surtout Molenbeek historique qui donne un accès plus facile pour un logement où les familles souvent se retrouvent pour un temps limité pour aller plus loin quand elles ont trouvé leur repère dans la ville ou dans le pays. Molenbeek est à la croisée des chemins au quotidien, elle fait face à de nombreux défis de par cette vocation. Molenbeek-Saint-Jean a 135 nationalités et avec un mélange très multiculturel.
Quand il y a une guerre dans un pays, on voit arriver dans les mois qui suivent des populations d’origine étrangères en Belgique.

Molenbeek couvre un territoire très large et c’est surtout le Molenbeek historique qui a une majorité de personnes d’origine étrangères. Mais dans la population globale de Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, les personnes d’origine étrangères ne sont pas majoritaires. 7% de la population sont d’origine marocaine (qui en ont la nationalité). C’est un peu une vue de l’esprit que de dire que cette communauté est hyper majoritaire. Ceci étant, c’est vrai que dans les quartiers défavorisés, il y a des rues qui sont à grosse majorité marocaine.

La communauté (musulmane) maghrébine est importante dans le bas de Molenbeek. C’est une histoire liée au regroupement familial, puisqu’on a fait appel à cette population pour venir travailler et puis il y a eu le regroupement familial qui s’est effectué. Il y a la question aujourd’hui de la problématique de la coupure avec ses origines dans le sens ou il y a pas mal de jeunes qui se marient avec des personnes originaires du pays. Ce qui veut dire que la communauté continue à grossir. Le souci se trouve plus dans la diversité que dans la communauté elle-même à mes yeux.

**Les Problèmes à Molenbeek-Saint-Jean**


Deuxième commune la plus pauvre de Belgique, les sources de financement sont trop éloignées de Molenbeek et les gens en charge ne comprennent pas bien la réalité locale. Dans une réalité complexe, linguistique et politique (7 parlements différents avec des compétences différentes décident du financement ou non de différents projets). Pour gagner des voix, les politiciens préfèrent plutôt prôner le nettoyage de Molenbeek que de chercher à trouver des solutions concrètes au problème des habitants. A la fois rigides et dans l’incertitude quant à l’avenir, ils ne sont plus capables de trouver un financement pérenne.

**Intensification du Dialogue et du vivre ensemble**

Le 13 novembre 2015, après les attentats de Paris, la foudre nous est tombée sur la tête. Nous avons immédiatement dû répondre à des questions, nous mettre ensemble pour comprendre pourquoi ces jeunes ont commis ces atrocités. Quand nous commencions à éclaircir les mé-
cánismes ayant conduit à cette folie, les attentats de Bruxelles nous ont touchés en mars. Cette violence nous a vraiment poignardés dans le dos.

La stigmatisation, la peur et la méfiance qui ont suivi ont brisé trois décennies de dialogue et d’échange. Ils ont eu un double effet sur les habitants de Molenbeek-Saint-Jean et les responsables de communautés (Catholique, Musulmane, juive, Politique, Laïc) : cela nous a obligés à nous remettre en question. Les communautés, le politique, l’associatif ont dû se rapprocher. Un impératif s’est imposé à nous : faire notre possible pour que cela n’arrive plus. Il était indispensable de sensibiliser nos communautés, de comprendre comment et pourquoi ces jeunes, que nous avons vus grandir, nous ont échappé et sont devenus les proies faciles de réseaux criminels.

Avant les attentats, la commune avait lancé un groupe de réflexion inter-convictionnel, sur lequel elle s’est appuyée depuis pour renforcer le dialogue, et ça marche. À plusieurs reprises, nous avons organisé des rassemblements interconfessionnels à l’occasion des grandes fêtes religieuses : Noël, la Pâque juive, la rupture du jeûne du Ramadan. Il y a donc des hommes et des femmes de bonne volonté prêts à travailler ensemble. Du travail amorcé dès avant le 13 novembre 2015, était ressortie la nécessité d’aller à la rencontre de l’autre, des autres communautés. Des événements ont été organisés, notamment un repas de Noël pour tout Molenbeek, à la mosquée. 400 personnes de toutes convictions étaient présentes ainsi qu’une chorale musulmane et une chorale de la paroisse Saint Jean Baptiste. Noël a été présenté comme la fête de la rencontre.

Il y a également eu une fête de la rupture de jeûne du Ramadan à l’église St Jean-Baptiste de Molenbeek au mois de juin 2016. Il y avait près de 600 personnes, dont 500 musulmans (12 Imam) et 100 chrétiens. Une chorale catholique et une chorale musulmane.

Même si on sait que ça pose des difficultés l’organisation d’une rupture de jeûne du Ramadan. C’est ça qui est intéressant. Cette rupture de jeûne dans l’église Saint Jean Baptiste n’a pas été facile à organisé. On croit que c’est facile à organisé un évènement interculturel et interreligieux dans une église. En fait ça ne l’est pas, parce que cela vient réveiller des peurs chez chacun d’entre nous. Et donc quand on organise la rupture du jeûne dans l’église, tout le monde se sent un peu menacé. On se dit est-ce que les musulmans ne vont pas du coup envahir nos églises, comme nous sommes en minorité? Il peut y avoir cette impression d’invasion et de crainte, pour les musulmans ils se disent quoi ! Organiser une rupture du jeûne dans une église mais il y a des statues, des croix, qu’est-ce que c’est que ça. Quand on voit que de part et d’autres ce n’est jamais facile et ce qui est important. Ça montre que ces moments là sont nécessaires. Si c’était facile pour tout le monde, ça voudrait dire que plus personnes n’a peur de l’autre en fait, et donc chaque fois on doit rassurer des gens. Quand ça se passe la grande majorité des gens sont contents.

L’avenir

A Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, nous sommes déjà dans l’anticipation. En concertation avec la commune, le directeur de l’une des mosquées et moi (Aurélien) allons dans les écoles, les associations,
pour expliquer que ce qui nous unit, notre commune humanité, est plus important que ce qui nous divise. Chacun dans son domaine doit toucher le maximum de jeunes pour les préserver de la radicalisation mais aussi des autres fléaux que sont la délinquance, la drogue etc. Les politiques doivent aussi s’impliquer.

**Des Critiques**

On n’en fait jamais trop pour le vivre ensemble. La méfiance n’a jamais été aussi grande. Il y a des problèmes de violence qui font que tout le monde à peur d’être touché un jour.

La journée de la Rupture du jeûne du Ramadan dans l’église a été la pire de mes journée. J’ai reçu de nombreux coup de fil des politiciens, de certains chrétiens, des menaces. En fait, toutes ces personnes ont essayé de me dissuader de ne pas le faire dans mon église. Finalement j’ai tenu bon. Le lendemain, j’ai reçu des menaces de mort.

On a souvent peur des gens qu’on ne connait pas mais on a d’autant plus peur si on ne sait pas soi-même qui on est. Je pense que pour les chrétiens, c’est important de pouvoir grandir dans cette foi, mieux connaître l’origine de sa religion, d’approfondir les évangiles, de pouvoir partager sur l’évangile. C’est là ou est pour moi l’enjeu principale, c’est de soutenir les chrétiens dans leur foi et de trouver des lieux où les chrétiens peuvent se nourrir. C’est vrai que nous sommes minoritaires ; mais je crois que ce n’est pas tellement d’être minoritaire qui est difficile, c’est plutôt de dire que les chrétiens soient de vrais chrétiens.

**Conditions pour un Dialogue vrai**

J’en suis arrivé à me dire que le premier pas que nous devons peut-être faire c’est aller au-delà de la religion. C’est-à-dire que si nous allons les uns vers les autres avec notre religion c’est important. Mais ça concerne quelques membres un peu « d’élite » qui sont des gens religieux, qui connaissent leur foi, qui n’ont pas peur d’aller vers l’autre et qu’il respecte l’autre dans sa foi. Un dialogue interreligieux vrai, je pense, n’est possible que si vraiment chacun saisit qui il est et ce qu’il porte ; alors on peut être tolérant parce qu’on n’a pas peur que l’autre vous envahisse, ou que l’autre vienne vous convertir ou que l’autre cherche je ne sais à vous envahir.
Etant donné le quotidien dans les rues de Molenbeek, je pense qu’il y a un désir d’un certain islam, l’islam salafistes qui est plutôt un islam d’Arabie saoudite qui est venu s’installer à Molenbeek, qui au fait n’est pas du tout l’islam des marocains. Etant donné qu’il y a eu des dérives je pense que c’est important qu’on puisse d’abord se rencontrer sur des socles de valeurs profondément humaines qui sont pour chacun essentielles.

Je pense que le dialogue interreligieux est très important. Que le dialogue intercommunautaire est très important et qu’un dialogue interhumain est aussi très important et ça demande beaucoup du temps. Je pense qu’il faut plus ou moins dix ans dans un quartier pour connaitre un peu le quartier, pour s’y intégrer et pour savoir un peu qui sont les voisins. C’est un travail de longue haleine.

Le vivre ensemble passe par des services mutuels, par une écoute mutuelle, par des partages de joies et de partages de peines mutuelles et sa se fait par des petits pas. Ce n’est pas qu’une affaire des intellectuels, non, c’est une affaire de rencontre quotidienne. Il faut qu’ils y aient des rencontres inter-convictionnelles dans un respect mutuel. Il faut qu’ils y aient des rencontres interculturelles pour apprendre à mieux se connaître, et il faut surtout un vivre ensemble au quotidien ou on laisse tomber les clichés parce que au-delà des vêtements, au-delà de la religion, les gens cherchent un mieux être ; que les enfants aient à manger, que les enfants aient une éducation et qu’ils trouvent du travail et un logement plus ou moins décent.

**Mes rêves**

Ce qui est dit de Molenbeek et ce qui s’y vit n’est pas la même chose. Molenbeek est une richesse étonnante au niveau association, au niveau soutien et au niveau de la créativité culturelle sans nom. « Tout est là » pour travailler à un mieux vivre ensemble. C’est vrai qu’il y a eu des ratés, c’est vrai qu’il y a des poches qui ont été contaminées par des attitudes mortifères, par du non-sens, et la propagation d’une soi-disant religion.

Mon premier rêve pour Molenbeek-Saint-Jean est que chacun ait l’esprit de citoyenneté, accepte que l’autre soit différent, comprenne que le dialogue est possible après la rencontre.

Mon deuxième rêve serait qu’il y ait un dialogue vrai ou les communautés se respectent. Que des responsables religieux se parlent, se rencontrent et tissent des lieux humains forts entre eux. C’est très important pour les fidèles

Mon rêve serait qu’une parole puisse se dire sur les disfonctionnements qui existent dans la commune de Molenbeek. Je pense qu’il y a eu des responsabilités d’un certain islam qui ne se veut pas ouvert aux autres. Je pense qu’on est venu chercher à Molenbeek les gens fragilisés pour leur donner une espèce de sens à la vie qui n’allait pas. Il y a un danger que les communautés se distancient non pas à cause de ce qui se vit à Molenbeek mais à cause de ce qui est dit sur Molenbeek.

Il y a du travail à faire dans le vivre ensemble : certainement, la communauté musulmane doit se poser les questions et je pense, une parole beaucoup plus libre doit pouvoir se dire sur une manière de vivre. Et nous chrétiens on doit continuer à approfondir notre foi, à chercher
à vivre de manière fraternelle et à rendre confiance aux uns et aux autres là où nous sommes par notre attention, par notre écoute, par un service mutuel par une fraternité renouvelée.

Un vrai vivre ensemble commence d’abord par la construction des liens et des relations saines et bonnes pour tous.
Holistic Interreligious Dialogue in Mindanao, Philippines: Sowing the Seeds of lasting Peace in the Mountains of Iligan

An Interview with Mike Baños (Northern Mindanao independent news writer)

Fr. Adam Bago, C.S.Sp., is a member of the Tanzanian province and studied in Arusha and Nairobi. He was appointed to the Philippines where he worked for twelve years in Digkilaan-Iligan City, Mindanao. He completed both a Masters and doctoral degree in education at Xavier University, Cagayan de Oro, Philippines. He has authored The Power of Filipino Smile. Fr. Adam lectures in education at Saint Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) since September 2017. He is on the staff of Stella Maris Mtwara University College in South Eastern Tanzania, a constituent college of SAUT.

The message of peace is not about a negotiated settlement but rather the conviction that unity brought about by the spirit can harmonize every diversity. It overcomes every conflict by creating a new and promising synthesis (EG, no. 230).

Many of us would find it extremely difficult to see God in the midst of a catastrophic disaster, but for many residents in the upland barangays of Iligan City, it was the deadly flash floods spawned by Tropical Storm Sendong (International Name: Washi) which sparked the confluence of uncommon events that are even now coming together to plant the seeds of a lasting and sustainable peace in the area.

Perched atop a hill around half a kilometer from Digkilaan Centro, Our Lady of Fatima Parish (OLFP) is the largest parish in terms of geographical area in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Iligan. Formally established in August 1998, the parish has been under the pastoral care of the international community of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (C.S.Sp.), better known as the Spiritans.

Mainly responsible for the barangays of Digkilaan, Mainit, and Rogongon, OLFP also services more remote upland communities in Dulag, Kalilangan, and Panorogangan. Together, the six villages make up seventy-five percent of Iligan City’s total land area of 81,337 hectares.
but only six percent of its population (339,268 est. 2014). Most (eighty-five percent) of the people in the area are Catholic/Christian, including many among the indigenous Higaonon communities, while the rest are Muslim Maranao.

Although it is only seventeen kilometers from downtown Iligan City, the parish church in Digkilaan and its outstations might as well be on another planet. Mountainous and sparsely populated, the parish’s expanded pastoral area has been sorely lacking in basic public services. The upland villages have no roads, no schools or teachers, no health centers or health personnel, and no agriculture extension workers. Although transmission lines of the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP) track through the area, there is scarcely any electricity available for the use of the residents, and potable water is primarily sourced from springs or brooks.

A Priest’s Vision to turn around a desperate Situation

“There are 42 outstations, which makes it a challenging responsibility for a priest who pays regular visits to all these outstations,” notes Rev. Fr. Adam Joseph Bago, C.S.Sp., a Tanzanian, who has just completed his second tour of duty as parish priest in Digkilaan. “Out of forty outstations, only nine (9) could be reached by motor vehicles. The rest could be ‘comfortably’ reached by many hours of rugged trekking!”

By then 45 years young, Fr. Adam originally wanted to be a journalist, but entered the priesthood after he was profoundly affected by how missionary priests unselfishly devoted their lives to serving people in Tanzania, especially a Spiritan priest who worked in his home parish. His grandfather was a Muslim and his parents are devoted Catholics. Although he was the only biological child in his family, Fr. Adam eventually joined the Spiritans also known “Holy Ghost Fathers.”

Fr. Adam was first assigned to OLFP in 2006. Not too long after being appointed chaplain of the Mercy Hospital in downtown Iligan in 2008, he was re-assigned to Digkilaan to replace the second of two parish priests who got sick on duty. His return to the parish opened a pretty remarkable chapter in the history of the people in the area.

When he first arrived in Digkilaan, Fr. Adam was aghast to find an unprecedented level of illiteracy among the populace, regardless of their ethnic origin or religion. When he said mass, he was often the only one reading the Missal for its entire duration, because there was no one else who knew how to read. He read the first reading, psalm, the second reading, the gospel, preaching, and made some announcements at the end too.

When he went around, Fr. Adam was similarly dismayed to find that residents had little or no knowledge of health and nutrition, hygiene and sanitation. Malnourished children, with distended bellies and atrophied limbs, wandering around naked and barefoot was a common sight. Residents were barely scraping a living from subsistence farming since it was too expensive to bring produce to the markets.

Violence was common—with some twenty deaths a year in the area the norm. This was
exacerbated by mutual distrust among the parish’s various peoples and religions: Christians were taught to distrust Muslims and Lumads who also held similar notions across all age ranges. In some places, kids were taught how to kill and how to kidnap someone.

There’s an apocryphal tale making the round of the media cafés all over Mindanao about a priest asking Muslim children at school what they wanted most to be when they grew up. He was wondering why so few of them wanted to be professionals, like lawyers, doctors, or teachers. When he asked them what they wanted to be, most of them replied they wanted to be rebels, so they could kill soldiers whom their parents said were evil. Many of us always thought this was a tall tale, but Fr. Adam assures us it is true—he was in fact the priest in the tale.

“Despite more than ten years of preaching the Good News in the area, we have been witnessing a lot of unending conflicts,” Fr. Adam noted. “These conflicts exist between families, individuals, Christians against Muslims, Muslims against Lumad, Muslims against Muslims, Christians against Christians.” Claiming the area as part of the Bangsa Moro ancestral domain, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has staged sporadic attacks on civilians there. Sitio Gabonan in Rogongon, for instance, remains a ghost town till now despite the fertility of the soil in the area. “Whenever conflict erupts, Our Lady of Fatima Parish becomes the major evacuation center,” Fr. Adam said. “This situation has generated so much hopelessness among our people who survive on less than US$1 a day, with no education and future to look forward to.”

Making a Difference (MAD)

Faced with this situation, Fr. Adam decided to get MAD, the acronym for his program “Making a Difference.” Fr. Adam goes beyond looking after the spiritual life of his constituents, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. MAD also includes education, livelihood skills, feeding, peace education, health care, alternative education (Andragogy), indigenous education and culture, and practical inter-religious dialogue.

One of the lynchpins of MAD is, Sports for Peace, a program where each team is composed of an equal number of Christians, Muslims and Lumad. So far, the parish has been able to organize forty-two teams (2 football teams, 30 basketball teams, and 10 volleyball teams). Other sports, like badminton, table tennis, and other competitions, such as dance and singing contests, beauty contests, and religious contests (read the Bible, Quran, etc.) are also encouraged.

“When Manny Pacquiao fights, all the young people come to the parish: Muslims, Christians and Lumad. They all identify themselves as Filipinos, and the sport becomes a unifying power for all people in the area,” Fr. Adam noted. “They love sports so much; seeing the importance of sports in the lives of our young people that may serve as a unifying matter, we started a sports competition amongst the parishes.” He was delighted with the results and for the first time ever in the history of the area, residents would see children of all
three peoples mixing together not only during games, but also socializing with each other during fiestas or other social occasions.

“Since the start of this program in the parish, we have not heard of any major conflict,” Fr. Adam said. “We now witness Christian, Lumad, and Muslim children playing together, singing together and studying together. When they’re together in the playing field, they do not think of fighting and hatred, indeed it is sport for peace,” Fr. Adam said.

**Sendong and Pablo add to the Misery**

Then, the night before the Christmas season started on 16 December 2011, flash floods spawned by the torrential rains of Tropical Storm Sendong rampaged through the area and forever changed how things were in these forgotten backwoods of Iligan. “When Tropical Storm Sendong struck us in 2011, some 1,300 evacuees took shelter in the Parish. When Typhoon Pablo hit the area in 2012, the number of evacuees rose to 2,420. During typhoons, the evacuees swarm the parish church, since this remains the only safe place in this area,” Fr. Adam said. “The church will be hard put to accommodate any more evacuees should another typhoon hit the area because of its limited size.”

The late Rt. Rev. Bishop Elenito Galido, D.D., bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Iligan, worked closely with Fr. Adam to bring relief goods to the victims in the aftermath of Sendong. “The first wave of assistance came from the Archdiocese of Manila, the National Social Action Center and the various archdioceses and dioceses of the Roman Catholic hierarchy all over the country, who immediately responded to our call for help with some (Phillipine peso’s) PhP 20-30 million (PhP 52 to 1 US Dollar) worth of relief goods,” Bishop Galido recalls. “We distributed food, medicine, kitchen utensils, blankets, mats, clothes, rice, water, and other basic necessities to the victims, including Digkilaan Parish.”

Digkilaan Parish Church—more of a chapel, really—and Fr. Adam’s house nearby became a virtual evacuation center since flood victims were unable to return, if at all, to their houses, many of which were damaged beyond repair, with surrounding areas piled high with mud and debris. After a month, however, health and hygiene concerns made it clear that relocation sites for those who lost their homes had to be established elsewhere.

Unfortunately, if government was absent before Sendong happened, it was similarly missing in its aftermath. As usual, the people in the parish had to fend for themselves, and the parish was there to lend them a hand.

“The government people said Panoroganan was too far away and dangerous for them to transport the construction materials for our houses, but that did not stop Fr. Adam from bringing them up here by himself” (this is one of the rebels’ centers), said Najha Sumagayan (one of Fr. Adam’s ten volunteer “instruction managers”) who teaches children and adults alike in the far-off predominantly Muslim barangay before the typhoons hit. “The materials had to be first transported to Rogongon, then had to be brought on horseback to Panoroganan. Each three hours trip costs six hundred pesos per horse.” Besides helping them build over
forty houses for residents who lost their houses to Sendong, Fr. Adam helped the community rebuild their mosques and madrasah. Najiha summed up the sense of gratitude among local Muslims: “Hindi kami makapaniwala na ang isang Katoliko ang nakatulong sa amin. Para siyang hulog ng langit” (We cannot believe that the one who helped us is a Catholic. He is like heaven sent).

In total, the parish facilitated construction of over three hundred and fifty shelters in the six barangays, four mosques, two chapels, one hundred ninety toilets, four classrooms for preschool, two chapels, two alternative learning classrooms and two madrasah. Some seventy five percent of the beneficiaries are non-Catholic. Despite these efforts, some forty-five families located in the area still live in makeshift tents, almost three years after they were displaced by Sendong. Pailig Development Foundation, Inc., a nongovernment organization is also extending help to the people in hinterland of Iligan.

“Pailig is doing peace-building by facilitating traditional means of conflict transformation in cases of rido (a Maranao term for revenge, clan feud), natural resource management and sustainable agriculture, community-based cultural reinvigoration program, community development planning, and disaster preparedness capability,” Bobby Quijano, Pailig managing director, explained. “The outcome and impact are quite encouraging. However, we are still very far from the desired result.

Najiha said Pailig provides them with seeds, tilapia fish fry for some fishponds, and technical assistance in dealing with pests like rats and insects. Despite the combined assistance, food remains scarce. “Our food supply is insufficient, and if we have no harvest, we just eat camote and maize,” Najiha said. “We also do not have coconuts in our area.” There are no livestock to speak of in the barangay. To address malnutrition among children in the highlands, Fr. Adam is teaching mothers how to prepare meals with sufficient nutrients, using what is locally available. “I teach them to mix camote (sweet potato) and maize with coconut milk,” he said. “Coconut milk has fats and proteins so even if they have no meat or livestock, they would still be able to get a balanced diet with their indigenous crops.”

**Birth of a breakthrough Project**

The floods of Sendong and Pablo spurred Fr. Adam to undertake a groundbreaking project with seed funds from the Diocese of Iligan. Inspired by gains from the Sports for Peace program, Fr. Adam drew up plans for a multipurpose gymnasium, which can double as an evacuation center for residents of all tribes and creeds during times of conflict and calamities.

Directories Philippines Corporation (DPC), which markets Yellow Pages online and offline products across the country, made it possible to expand the concept to include an adjacent structure with two classrooms, designed according to Department of Education (DepEd) specifications. DPC is providing PhP1 million through Children’s Hour Philippines (CHP) for the classrooms. The firm raised the funds in response to CHP’s calls for donations, following Sendong in 2011 and Pablo in 2012. Some 248 employees donated some 1,800 hours’
worth of their salaries, which were matched by DPC, resulting in the million peso donation to CHP.

DPC originally meant to invest their funds in replacing two classrooms in Digkilaan Central School (DCS) destroyed by Sendong. The company’s CHP contribution was later redirected to classroom-building in an elevated part of the barangay which was flood-free. Hence, the classrooms were included with OLFP’s multi-purpose gym project. “When you put a classroom in Digkilaan, it is for Digkilaan alone,” Fr. Adam said. “But when you put it in the parish, it belongs to all the villages. Anyone who wants to come to study here is welcome.”

The two “satellite classrooms” will cater initially to DCS feeder classes, explained Dr. Ann Timogan, DCS Elementary School Principal. Run by instructional managers (IMs)—qualified public school teachers who serve as volunteers without salaries—the classes focus on getting very young or highly marginalized children ready for elementary school.

Geenette Garcia, CHP Executive Director, expressed delight that companies like DPC are investing in child-oriented initiatives in neglected communities. She noted that, because of the global media focus on victims of Typhoon Yolanda in 2013, CHP donors have channeled an inordinately large share of the funds to communities affected by the super-typhoon.

“Many disadvantaged communities elsewhere are equally in urgent need of assistance,” she noted.

Fr. Adam explained the thinking behind the multi-purpose gym project: “All people in the area will benefit. Many young lives will be transformed. Through playing together, peace and understanding will be nurtured for the entire people of Mindanao. Through sports and education, the young people and children of Rogongon, Mainit, Kalilangan, Panorogangan, and Digkilaan will be creating a ground for inter religious co-existence,” Fr. Adam said.

By increasing interaction between the three tribes and creeds in the area, activities built around the multi-purpose gym would serve as a catalyst in promoting interfaith dialogues. These would enhance relationships, among Christians, Muslims, and Lumad, making the multi-purpose gym a refuge for all during times of conflict and calamities in the area.

Through Sports for Peace and other competitions, the talents of young people would be recognized and promoted and friendships among them encouraged. Through education and livelihood trainings of the mothers by the IMs, health, nutrition and hygiene of the remotest communities would be improved, along with their quality of life. As their income and health improve, the parish work of promoting the moral, religious and human values would naturally follow.

Engineer Samuel Golez, 49, the contractor who hails from Surigao City, but who now alternates between Iligan City and Maranding, Lanao del Norte, said that he was inspired by the compassion of Fr. Adam and his IM’s: “I volunteered to build the multi-purpose building for the parish after no other contractor would accept the contract to build it with the PhP500,000 (seed money) provided by the Iligan Diocese.” Around PhP 800,000 is still being solicited from donors to roof the gym and riprap the surroundings.

DPC also wants to give the public—particularly individual and institutional donors—an
opportunity to invest in the classrooms (and the future of the upland communities’ children) through affordable donation packages. “Our Yellow Pages business is built on the concept of empowerment,” explained Arturo “Bingle” Diago, DPC Executive Vice President. “We empower consumers with information to enable them to make better choices in the marketplace. On the other end, we empower small and medium enterprises to cost-effectively reach their customers. By bringing buyers and sellers together in this manner, we are able to help boost economic development at the grassroots. In like manner, through our partnership with Children’s Hour and Our Lady of Fatima Parish, we would like to help empower disadvantaged communities over the long term. And it would be doubly gratifying to have DPC’s other stakeholders by our side in this endeavor.”

The two new classrooms will replace the smaller facility, currently being used both as a pre-school and livelihood training center. When the preschool children move to the new classrooms, the old structure would be used for Alternative Learning System (ALS) classes. A DepEd umbrella program catering to out-of-school youth (OSY), ALS promotes the OSY formal basic education until they have finished high school. The new classrooms will also serve a dual purpose. Every morning, the classrooms will be used for pre-school classes; in the afternoon and evening hours, they can be used by out of school youth and adults for e-learning and distance learning.

There is also a crying need for a high school in the barangay since the nearest one is a good four hours’ hike away at Bgy. Rogongon. When it rains it means the students either cannot go there or can’t come home. Beside the high school, a footbridge swept away by Sendong still has to be replaced.

Ultimately, Fr. Adam dreams of someday opening a college in Digkilaan, affiliated with Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the only American Spiritan University of higher education.

**Volunteers and Partners help uplift entire Community**

Rodelia D. Tahod, ALS Officer-in-charge/Division Coordinator for DepEd in Iligan City, said that Fr. Adam first sought assistance in helping his catechists get basic education so they could assist him in his parish work in 2009. “But he did not stop there,” she said. “He wanted the entire community to get better—to the point that we turned over the DepEd (Department of Education) program to him. We are now his partner.” She said the following DepEd procured programs for Digkilaan were turned over under Fr. Adam’s supervision: basic, OSY for elementary level, IP for Higaonon tribe, e-learning, technical assistance and volunteers for parish work. So far, one hundred and thirty people have been trained since 2013, and the parish expects to train another 300 by the end of 2014.

Fr. Adam has been soliciting old computers for the e-learning modules that Ms. Tahod said will be accessible online. “So even if we’re downtown, we can contact students and teachers who are in the hills like Digkilaan,” she said. “If you didn’t finish your elementary education,
you can take ALS, and if you pass the exams, you can proceed to high school (HS),” Ms. Tahod explained. “Those who did not finish HS can enroll in ALS and take the exams afterwards. If you pass, you can proceed to college. The latter ALS program is covered by a Memorandum of Agreement with the Commission on Higher Education.”

In addition to ALS, the Parish IM’s also train mothers of the pre-school children in livelihood skills like dressmaking and rubber slipper making, using donated equipment and raw materials. “This gives the mothers an added incentive to bring their children to class every day,” Fr. Adam said. Instructors from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) initially trained the IMs and some skilled mothers, who are now passing on the skills to others.

Fr. Adam’s two stalwarts for his education program are Mary Jane A. Capadiso and Jovy Siarza. Both are education graduates and Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) exam listers. Yet, as IMs in the upland schools, they have continued serving as volunteers without salaries, receiving instead token honoraria from ALS and rice and other produce from the Parish. Besides doubling as the Parish Secretary, Mary Jane is also the ALS trainer for the mothers of their pre-school students who have organized themselves into the Asosasyon sa Madasigon ug Malahutayon Kababaye-an (AMMK) Digkilaan, translated Association of enthusiastic and preserving Women, with similar groups organized in the parish’s other outposts.

“We were trained by a teacher from TESDA upon the request of Fr. Adam when he observed how children in the remote barangays often went barefoot and without clothes,” Mary Jane said. With textiles and two sewing machines donated by ABS-CBN Sagip Kapamilya, we taught the mothers of our pre-school pupils how to sew dresses. All profits are shared among the mothers with a bigger share going to the one who did the most.” The venture has also produced graduation togas, which are regularly rented by graduating students of DCS.

Some twenty women attended the training conducted by the TESDA instructor, but so far only ten have been actively involved in dressmaking. ABS-CBN Sagip Kapamilya subsequently donated an additional eight sewing machines, which Fr. Adam has dispatched to the parish’s various outposts where they are similarly being utilized to train women in dressmaking.

“Fr. Adam gave us PhP 3,000.00 seed money for the slipper making livelihood project,” said Jovy. “We used it to buy materials and some cutters from Cagayan de Oro.” The slippers are sold in various outposts of the parish by the women who make them, and also during fiestas or other social events. “People are blessed by Fr. Adam’s passion for education,” Ms. Tahod noted. “I was amazed he donated four mosques for Muslims in Panoroganan and in Kalilangan, he has very strong links with his partners who are convinced he can sustain his programs. He has a passion to help people help themselves, regardless of race or religion.”

The parish has some ten IM’s and forty-five catechists; all are volunteers who have been serving the remote barangays of the parish since 2008. Five of the ten IM’s are college graduates of education courses and have served without salaries for the last three years, although the ALS instructors, like Mary Anne and Jovy, have started receiving a monthly honorarium of PhP 2,500 since 2013. Asked why they have volunteered and persevered under such trying
conditions, Mary Jane said she is inspired by the compassion of Fr. Adam who is a foreigner, yet has no qualms about going into areas where even the military and police don’t dare to venture. To Juvy, it’s simply “love of the Church and time for God.”

Not all volunteer IM’s are Catholic or Christian. In the predominantly Muslim barangay of Panorogangan, Najiha has been a volunteer teacher since 2013. She still works without a salary and makes do with the occasional sack of rice or other commodities the parish has been able to give her from time to time. An Education graduate of Iligan Medical Center College, she teaches her 30 plus students reading, writing, and arithmetic. She also teaches them reading and writing in the Arabic alphabet, reading the Quran and arithmetic using Arabic numbers under the Madrasah curriculum.

On top of that, Najiha also teaches the community’s illiterate adults reading, writing, and arithmetic using the phonetic Marungko approach under the parish’s Andragogy Alternative Education. Instead of starting with the traditional order of the alphabet, Marungko starts with m, s, a, i, so on and so forth. Thus the alphabet is “pronounced,” rather than read: i.e., the alphabet “m” would be pronounced as “mmm”.

The story of the volunteer serving the parish’s school farthest from Iligan is typical of the dedication and sacrifice of the IMs who endure extreme hardships out of compassion for the children in the mountains. Charlotte Mae S. Alinsub is a resident of Barangay Dansolihon, Cagayan de Oro’s furthest barangay about twenty-one kms. from the city proper. A B.S. Education graduate of Golden Heritage Polytechnic State College in Cagayan de Oro, she and her younger sister, Mary Claire, volunteered to teach the children of Binasan Elementary School upon the request of Veronica Suarez, a coordinator of the Binasan Tribal Council (better known among her fellow Higaonons as Bae Katiguman), who is her neighbor in Dansolihon.

An indigenous people, Higaonons, are predominant in Northern Mindanao particularly in the Province of Bukidnon, adjacent to Cagayan de Oro. They refer to themselves as Dumaan (old) or Tumandek (originally from this place), but prefer to be called Tagabukid (from the mountains), to distinguish themselves from another indigenous community called Dumagat (from the sea). The lowlanders call them nitibo. They speak their own language, called bi-nukid, and prefer to reside in the mountains (Ruiz, 1996). The tribe’s seven thousand hectares ancestral domain in Sitio Binasan, Barangay Rogongon in Iligan City, is the farthest and highest point in Iligan City. Its population of ethnic Higaonons is listed at about two thousand, but only about two hundred live in the actual area due to its inaccessibility.

Fr. Adam had been visiting this village since 2006 when all the villagers were living below the poverty line. A mining company operated there when gold was discovered that year, but, since only two percent of the villagers were literate, they failed to benefit from the gold rush and remained poor. Ironically, Binasan is easier reached via Cagayan de Oro through jeepney ride of three hours to Bgy Tumpagon, thence a three hours ride aboard a motorcycle (called habal-habal by the locals) with a staggering fare of PhP 1,000, one-way plus one hour hiking. To reach it from Iligan City, one takes a two-hour ride to travel forty-five kms. to Sta. Cruz,
Bgy. Rogongon and then trek the remaining forty-five kms. for the next four to six hours. With no existing roads—only foot trails—leading to the area, it is no wonder that not even the barangay chairman visits Binasan. To get to the school in Rogongon, a child from Binasan would need to walk ten hours a day. Not surprisingly, only two of the hundred youths living there knew how to read and write—and only because they had relatives in Cagayan de Oro City.

From Monday to Friday, Charlotte and her sister taught approximately sixty students in primary grades of the school in Binasan, while residing in a makeshift dorm provided by the council. When the weather is good, they go home to Dansolihon for the weekend, coming back on Monday along the same route. The school building was built some time ago by a mining company as part of its outreach program. Since the mining firm ceased operations, the amakan (woven bamboo) walls of the school building have deteriorated and it is badly in need of rehabilitation and repair. “Because we had no salary, we had to look for jobs as substitute teachers in Cagayan de Oro and when we had saved enough, we went back to Binasan to continue our teaching there,” Charlotte recounts. Taking up the cudgels for his ‘adopted’ parishioners, Fr. Adam wrote letters to various government agencies to open a DepEd accredited school. In response, Randolph B. Tortola, the DepEd Superintendent in Iligan dispatched District Supervisor Ernesto G. Perez to make an ocular inspection of Binasan last January. On the strength of Mr. Perez’s endorsement, the Iligan City Schools Division accredited Binasan Elementary School. Charlotte was hired as an elementary school teacher, along with two other teachers to be stationed there.

**Sustaining a Model for Peace-building**

Back at the parish center in Digkilaan, other signs of progress are taking shape. With the near-construction of the new classrooms, followed by the multi-purpose gym, the initiatives to promote peace, health, education, and livelihood over the past five years are destined to multiply. This is aligned with the call of the Catholic Bishops and Educators on Peace-building in Mindanao, issued 10 April 2014 in Davao City, to strengthen the role of the Catholic Church in the promotion of lasting peace within “a Reconciled Diversity.” Through its various institutions, the church is enjoined to use its positive influence in creating more avenues for peace-building, especially at grassroots level.

Our Lady of Fatima Parish seems to have developed a working model that other church institutions can emulate. Fr. Adam, later on assigned as parish priest to the Resurrection of the Lord Filipino-Chinese Parish at Del Carmen (near the Iligan City Water Office), effective 1 July 2014, has laid a solid foundation with which to sustain the MAD program and the multi-purpose gym project he had started. First, there is the band of stouthearted OLFP volunteers—led by Mary Jane, Juvy, Najiha and Charlotte—who work tirelessly on the strength of their faith and compassion and their commitment to their community. Then, there is the growing network of institutions, like the Diocese of Iligan, DepEd, TESDA, Digkilaan Central School, Directories Philippines Corporation, Children’s Hour and ABS-
CBN Sagip Kapamilya, which have placed long-term bets on this promising multi-faceted community peace initiative. Fr. Adam himself remained DepEd’s partner in promoting literacy in the rural areas of Iligan.

Most of all, there are the “parishioners” themselves—be they Catholic, Muslim, or Higaonon, young or old—who have begun to develop a true sense of community and empowerment. Whoever the parish priest may be, he has this vital resource to build on. To be sure, the diverse stakeholders in the OLFP initiatives have their work cut out for them. Life will never be easy in the remote barangays of Iligan City. But Fr. Adam is unfazed: “With the support of generous people who share one vision, we can move mountains.”

This is Asia, but what happened in Asia can take place in Tanzania and other places to uplift lives of the poorest of the poor through different programs including sports. This program was so successful also due to the support of the Spiritans in Taiwan who supported the evacuees during the time of Typhoon but especially the superior of the Philippine group Rev. Fr Illah Agbene, C.S.Sp., who was so supportive. Indeed, he is a loving superior, God-fearing man, and God empowered person. His leadership encourages confreres to live the Spiritan life.

*So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.”* (Luke 17:10)

**Abbreviation**

I. Main Characteristics of the Spiritan Ministry of Interreligious Dialogue

As Spiritan missionaries, we believe that Interreligious Dialogue (IRD)—or whatever terminology might be used to refer to the encounter with the peoples of other faiths—is a constitutive part of our mission in the Church (SRL 13.1; 15.3; 16.3). From the rich experiences of our confreres engaged in this field emerge values and attitudes we consider as the main characteristics of the Spiritan IRD ministry. These are:

1. The primacy and dignity of the human person: Above anything else, we see the others as human beings created in the image of God. They are our brothers and sisters. In the footsteps of Jesus-Christ, we recognize the intrinsic value of the life of others, especially the poor and the weak (SRL 4).

2. Spirituality: Our ministry of IRD is rooted in our spirituality, which emphasizes finding one’s strength in God, apostolic service, contemplation in action, and docility to the Holy Spirit. At the same time, our spirituality is challenged and deepened through dialogue with others and adds to our understanding of theology.

3. Service for all: We are missionaries for everyone, not just for Catholics. We are at the service of all “those whose needs are the greatest”, and “the oppressed” (SRL 4).

4. Courage: We have the courage to undertake new challenges and to counter pre-established thinking in our own religious and/or ecclesial family.

5. Openness: Accepting the difference of the other, we go out to meet them where they are.

6. Availability: We are ready to respond to new challenges (SRL 25).

7. Listening: We take time to listen to the other with the curiosity to know better the local realities, the culture, the language, and the faith of the people (SRL 16.2; 30.1).
I. Caractéristiques Principales du Ministère Spiritain de Dialogue Interreligieux

Comme missionnaires spiritains, nous croyons que le Dialogue Interreligieux - ou toute autre terminologie se rapportant à la rencontre avec les personnes d’autres religions - est une partie constitutive de notre mission dans l’Église (RVS 13.1 ; 15.3 ; 16.3). De la riche expérience de nos confrères engagés dans ce domaine émergent des valeurs et des attitudes que nous considérons comme des caractéristiques principales du ministère spiritain de dialogue interreligieux. Les voici :

1. **La primauté et la dignité de la personne humaine** : Par-dessus tout, nous voyons les autres comme des êtres humains créés à l’image de Dieu. Ce sont nos frères et sœurs. A la suite de Jésus-Christ, nous reconnaissons la valeur intrinsèque de la vie des autres, en particulier des pauvres et des faibles (RVS 4).

2. **La spiritualité** : Notre ministère de dialogue interreligieux est enraciné dans notre spiritualité, qui met l’accent sur le fait de puiser sa force en Dieu, sur le service apostolique, la contemplation dans l’action et la docilité à l’Esprit Saint. En même temps, notre spiritualité est remise en question et approfondie par le dialogue avec les autres et contribue à notre compréhension de la théologie.

3. **Le service de tous** : Nous sommes missionnaires pour tous, pas seulement pour les catholiques. Nous sommes au service de tous « ceux dont les besoins sont les plus grands » et « les opprimés » (RVS 4).

4. **Le courage** : Nous avons le courage de relever de nouveaux défis et de contrer la pensée préétablie dans notre propre famille religieuse et/ou ecclésiale.
8. **Solidarity:** In good times and in times of violence, we stay with the people and remain loyal to them (SRL 16.2; 30.1). We show sympathy with them in all simplicity.

9. **Perseverance:** We do not give up and are tenacious.

## II. Proposals for the General Chapter of 2020

### I. INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND FORMATION

#### 1.1 Initial Formation

1. The General Council and superiors of circumscriptions shall ensure that in all houses of formation there are courses and seminars on the knowledge of other religions, the theology of religious pluralism, and interreligious dialogue given by people with concrete experiences of dialogue with other faith traditions. The curricula proposed to the students shall be reviewed every three years.

2. The sharing of experiences of confreres working in interreligious dialogue contexts shall be encouraged and systematized in houses of formation. Formators and students are also encouraged to make use of contemporary means of telecommunication (e.g. videoconferencing) to enable interaction with confreres on the field.

3. Group activities for dialogue shall be proposed in the pastoral insertion of students in initial formation.

4. The General Council shall ensure that the directives of the Guide for Spiritan Formation are followed by circumscriptions, especially the emphasis that the Pastoral Missionary Experience (stage) be done in a location culturally different from the culture of the student (SRL 136.1). Circumscriptions shall help students re-read their experience of stage theologically (SRL 136.4).

5. Formators and teachers in formation houses shall encourage and help theology students conducting their final thesis in the area of IRD to interact with confreres working in contexts of dialogue with followers of other faith traditions.

6. Formation communities shall identify opportunities of IRD in their neighbourhood (SRL 30) and invite representatives of other religious traditions to share their experiences with them.

#### 1.2 Ongoing and Specialized Formation

7. Before joining a context requiring dialogue with other religions, newly appointed confreres shall follow a short course on the concerned religions in appropriate centres specialized in IRD (for instance, IFIC of Bamako, Mali, and DAR COMBONI of Cairo, Egypt). The confreres need to be prepared for the pastoral situation in which they are going to work.

8. Circumscriptions shall provide an ongoing formation on IRD and Peacebuilding to
5. **L’ouverture** : Acceptant la différence de l’autre, nous sortons à sa rencontre là où il se trouve.

6. **La disponibilité** : Nous sommes prêts à répondre à de nouveaux défis (RVS 25).

7. **L’écoute** : Nous prenons le temps d’écouter l’autre avec la volonté de mieux connaître les réalités locales, la culture, la langue et la foi des gens (RVS 16.2 ; 30.1).

8. **La solidarité** : Dans les bons moments comme dans les moments de violence, nous sommes avec les gens et leur restons fidèles (RVS 16.2 ; 30.1). Nous leur manifestons notre sympathie en toute simplicité.

9. **Persévérance** : Nous n’abandonnons pas et nous sommes tenaces.

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**II. Propositions pour le Chapitre General de 2020**

**I. DIALOGUE INTERRELIGIEUX ET FORMATION**

**1.1 Formation initiale**

1. Le Conseil général et les supérieurs de circonscriptions veilleront à ce que dans toutes les maisons de formation il y ait des cours et des séminaires sur la connaissance des religions, la théologie du pluralisme religieux et le dialogue interreligieux, donnés par des personnes ayant une expérience concrète du dialogue avec d’autres traditions religieuses. Les programmes d’études proposés aux étudiants seront révisés tous les trois ans.

2. Le partage d’expérience des confrères travaillant dans des contextes de dialogue interreligieux sera encouragé et systématisé dans les maisons de formation. Les formateurs et les étudiants seront également encouragés à utiliser les moyens modernes de télécommunication (par exemple la vidéoconférence) pour permettre une interaction avec des confrères sur le terrain.

3. Des activités de groupe pour le dialogue seront proposées dans le cadre de l’insertion pastorale des étudiants en formation initiale.

4. Le Conseil Général veillera à ce que les directives du guide pour la formation spiritaine soient suivies par les circonscriptions, en insistant particulièrement sur le fait que l’expérience pastorale missionnaire (stage) doit se faire dans un lieu culturellement différent de la culture de l’étudiant (RVS 136.1). Les circonscriptions doivent aider les étudiants à relire leur expérience de stage d’un point de vue théologique (RVS 136.4).

5. Les formateurs et les enseignants des maisons de formation doivent encourager et aider les étudiants en théologie réalisant leur mémoire de fin d’études dans le domaine du dialogue interreligieux à interagir avec les confrères qui travaillent dans ce même contexte.

6. Les communautés de formation doivent identifier les opportunités de dialogue interreligieux dans leur voisinage (RVS 30) et inviter des représentants d’autres traditions religieuses à partager leurs expériences avec eux.
all their members, not just to those going to work in contexts of IRD. Spiritan institutions of higher learning, where they exist, shall be used to offer this type of formation.

9. Spiritan confreres need a solid formation on the Biblical foundation of interreligious dialogue. They also need to know what the sacred texts of other faith traditions offer as resources for interreligious dialogue. As much as possible, experts from various faith traditions shall be called upon for the training of confreres.

10. Spiritans who are already passionate about the subject of IRD shall be encouraged and receive the necessary support from the Congregation. We shall identify confreres who can do research in this area and look for scholarship for them.

11. Specialized training on Judaism, African Traditional Religions, Indigenous Religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Chinese and Arabic Islamic studies must be planned with a specific project in mind, so that the trained confrere return to their mission area to invest in the field of interreligious dialogue for a long term. Each union of circumscription shall have at least one confrere well trained in IRD, who could help as a resource person and a facilitator in this field. To ensure there are always enough confreres available for this task, the General Council shall create a special fund to provide scholarship for the specialization of Spiritan confreres in IRD studies.

12. The Congregation shall consider establishing a new Spiritan community in another Arab-Islamic country. Given the importance of the Arab language learning and the prominent role of Al Azhar University in the Muslim world, Egypt is to be given a special attention.

13. A fruitful IRD ministry requires the participation of all members of the local ecclesial community. We need to use all available resources to train parishioners, personnel in church institutions, and community leaders systematically with an organized programme. We shall identify those of them who are particularly interested in IRD and gather them in small groups for this ministry. We also encourage confreres to promote dialogue with others in their preaching and during other spiritual events (retreats, recollections, pilgrimages, etc.).

2. IRD IN THE LIFE OF OUR CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS

14. Confreres engaged in interreligious dialogue carry out the Mission entrusted to our Congregation. Therefore, they need to be recognized, to be genuinely supported and encouraged by their circumscriptions.

15. The superiors of circumscriptions shall make their members aware of the direction the Congregation is taking as far as IRD is concerned. Interreligious Dialogue should be part of the strategic mission plan of each circumscription.

16. Confreres who take part in IRD meetings organized by the Congregation should give a report of such meetings to the members of their circumscription. We encourage the sharing of experience at the community and at the circumscription levels (chapters, general assembly, etc.), in order to set the priority and measure the adequate means to
1.2 Formation continue et spécialisée


8. Les circonscriptions fourniront une formation continue sur le dialogue interreligieux et la consolidation de la paix à tous leurs membres, pas seulement à ceux qui vont travailler dans ces contextes. Les institutions spiritaines d’enseignement supérieur, lorsqu’elles existent, seront utilisées pour offrir ce type de formation.

9. Les confrères spiritains ont besoin d’une solide formation sur les fondements bibliques du dialogue interreligieux. Ils ont aussi besoin de savoir ce que les textes sacrés des autres traditions religieuses offrent comme ressources pour le dialogue. Dans la mesure du possible, il sera fait appel à des experts de différentes traditions religieuses pour la formation des confrères.

10. Les spiritains déjà passionnés par le dialogue interreligieux devront être encouragés et recevoir le soutien nécessaire de la part de la Congrégation. Nous devrions identifier des confrères qui peuvent faire de la recherche dans ce domaine et leur obtenir des bourses d’études.

11. Les formations spécialisées sur le judaïsme, les religions traditionnelles africaines, les religions indigènes, le bouddhisme, l’hindouisme, les études islamiques et arabes, les études chinoises, doivent être planifiées avec un projet spécifique en tête, afin que les confrères formés retournent dans leur zone de mission pour s’investir sur le long terme dans le domaine du dialogue interreligieux. Chaque union de circonscription aura au moins un confrère bien formé au dialogue interreligieux, qui pourra aider en tant que personne-ressource et facilitateur. Pour s’assurer qu’il y a toujours assez de confrères disponibles pour cette tâche, le Conseil Général créera un fonds spécial qui fournira une bourse pour la spécialisation des confrères dans ce type d’études.

12. La Congrégation envisagera d’établir une nouvelle communauté spiritaine dans un autre pays arabo-musulman. Compte tenu de l’importance de l’apprentissage de la langue arabe et du rôle prépondérant de l’Université Al Azhar dans le monde musulman, une attention particulière devra être accordée à l’Égypte.

13. Un ministère de dialogue interreligieux fructueux exige la participation de tous les membres de la communauté ecclésiale locale. Nous devons utiliser toutes les ressources disponibles pour former les paroissiens, le personnel des institutions ecclésiales et les responsables de communautés de manière systématique avec un programme organisé. Nous identifierons ceux d’entre eux qui sont particulièrement intéressés par le dialogue interreligieux et les réunirons en petits groupes pour ce ministère. Nous encourageons
put on it. Lay Spiritan Associates should also be involved in the reflection about IRD at the circumscription level.

17. In order to highlight and promote IRD for our mission today, a committee for interreligious dialogue shall be created in each Spiritan circumscription. Each circumscription shall have an IRD Coordinator and, wherever possible, there shall be at least one IRD centre or office in each Union of Circumscriptions.

18. For the sustainability of IRD ministry, the Congregation shall make a proposal for research funding to donors who are ready to assist. This proposal should set a baseline on how well we know IRD and apply devices as well as show progress on what we are doing.

3. IRD MINISTRY IN THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE

3.1 Ministering in times of violence

19. Many confreres are living in contexts of religious related conflicts and violence. As Spiritans, we are called to become the advocates of the population which suffers, is terrorized and even persecuted (SRL 14). At the same time, with regard to armed groups, we must remain impartial and non-violent. We respect the principle of non-violence to avoid the trap of revenge. For the sake of the victims, we seek for justice as the way to true and lasting peace.

20. We shall study the root causes of religious related troubles (SRL 14.1) and with other partners and institutions work to repair the situation by providing integral human development (education, housing, health care, etc.) for all community members regardless of their religious affiliation.

3.2 Care for Affected Confreres

21. We acknowledge that so many of our confreres who are working or have worked in places marked by violent conflicts are going through trauma and post-traumatic crises. They need the help of the entire Congregation. The General Council in consultation with the circumscriptions shall identify people who are affected by such psychological issues. The leadership shall work with resource persons who can accompany confreres in situations of conflict and religious tensions and organize for them counselling on the ground and during home leave.

22. Opportunity should be given to confreres who are psychologically affected by violence in their mission area to spend enough time on vacation in order to relax and rebalance. There must be sufficient and regular time of renewal for these confreres.

23. We encourage confreres not to isolate themselves but speak with other members of the community and circumscription, and have a common approach to discernment.

A good community living and support (SRL 34; 39.2) as well as cooperation with
aussi les confrères à promouvoir le dialogue avec les autres dans leur prédication et lors d’autres événements spiritains (retraites, récollections, pèlerinages, etc.).

2. LE DIALOGUE INTERRELIGIEUX DANS LA VIE DE NOS CIRCONSCRIPTIONS


16. Les confrères qui participent aux réunions sur le dialogue interreligieux organisées par la Congrégation doivent en rendre compte aux membres de leur circonscription. Nous encourageons le partage d’expériences au niveau de la communauté et de la circonscription (chapitres, assemblée générale, etc.), afin de fixer la priorité et de mesurer les moyens adéquats à y consacrer. Les laïcs associés spiritains doivent également être impliqués dans la réflexion sur le dialogue interreligieux au niveau de la circonscription.

17. Afin de mettre en valeur et de promouvoir le dialogue interreligieux pour notre mission d’aujourd’hui, un comité pour le dialogue interreligieux sera créé dans chaque circonscription spiritaine. Chaque circonscription aura un coordinateur dans ce domaine et, dans la mesure du possible, il y aura au moins un centre ou bureau de dialogue interreligieux dans chaque union de circonscriptions.

18. Pour la pérennité du ministère de dialogue interreligieux, la Congrégation lancera un appel aux dons pour financer la recherche dans ce domaine. Cette proposition permettra d’établir une base de référence sur notre connaissance du dialogue, d’appliquer des dispositifs, ainsi que de visualiser les progrès réalisés.

3. LE MINISTÈRE DE DIALOGUE INTERRELIGIEUX DANS DES CONTEXTES DE VIOLENCE

3.1 Travailler dans des contextes de violence

19. Beaucoup de confrères vivent dans des contextes de conflits et de violence liés à la religion. En tant que Spiritains, nous sommes appelés à devenir les défenseurs de ceux qui souffrent, qui sont terrorisés et même persécutés (RVS 14). En même temps, nous devons rester impartiaux et non-violents face aux groupes armés. Nous respectons le principe de non-violence pour éviter le piège de la vengeance. Dans l’intérêt des victimes, nous recherchons la justice en tant que voie vers une paix véritable et durable.

20. Nous étudierons les causes profondes des troubles liés à la religion (RVS 14.1) et, avec d’autres partenaires et institutions, nous nous efforcerons de remédier à la situation en assurant le développement humain intégral (éducation, logement, soins de santé,
the local Church and other congregations shall help confreres in the recovery process.

24. The leadership of the Congregation (General Council and superiors of circumscriptions) shall help Spiritan confreres and communities in places marked by violent conflicts to discern whether to stay there or move into another area.

4. NETWORKING AND MAKING USE OF DIGITAL RESOURCES

25. All existing IRD centres where our confreres are working should be identified and develop a network. We particularly encourage a networking between the centres of Mauritius and Northern Cameroon.

26. Given the distinctive character of our presence in Mauritania, Algeria, and Pakistan, there shall be a single coordination of the Spiritan mission in these countries.

27. Interreligious Dialogue ministry requires advocacy for human rights, especially the rights of all religious minorities and the freedom of worship (SRL 12). Confreres working in IRD contexts need to attend sessions or courses on human rights and promote them in collaboration international organizations (e.g. VIVAT International) and other missionary or religious institutes.

28. Following the successful experience of the Spiritan Forum on Interreligious Dialogue Zanzibar 2018, we recommend that every four years the General Council organize a meeting for confreres working in contexts of IRD ministry.

29. Keeping in mind the “exercise of prudence and an informed discretion” in the way to use the media (SRL 45; cf. Can. 666), we shall make use of the vast opportunities of the digital space (blogs, websites, social media, emails, etc.) to share our experiences so as to better minister in IRD contexts. In particular, we need to have a social media group for all confreres living and working in situations of interreligious dialogue as a platform for mutual knowledge, sharing information, experiences and relevant documentation.

30. The General Council shall set up in the three languages of our Congregation (English, French and Portuguese) a Database for Spiritan ministry of Interreligious Dialogue, which will be freely accessed by all confreres.
etc.) pour tous les membres de la communauté, quelle que soit leur appartenance religieuse.

3.2 L’attention portée aux confrères


22. L’occasion devrait être donnée aux confrères psychologiquement affectés par la violence dans leur zone de mission de passer suffisamment de temps en vacances pour se détendre et se rééquilibrer. Un temps de ressourcement suffisant et régulier doit être prévu pour ces confrères.

23. Nous encourageons les confrères à ne pas s’isoler mais à parler avec les autres membres de la communauté et de la circonscription, et à avoir une approche commune du discernement.

Une bonne vie communautaire et un bon soutien (RVS 34 ; 39.2) ainsi qu’une coopération avec l’Église locale et les autres congrégations aideront les confrères dans le processus de rétablissement.

24. Les supérieurs de la Congrégation (Conseil Général et supérieurs de circonscriptions) aideront les confrères et les communautés spiritaines dans les lieux marqués par des conflits violents à discerner s’ils doivent y rester ou s’installer dans une autre région.

4. MISE EN RÉSEAU ET USAGE DES RESSOURCES NUMÉRIQUES

25. Tous les centres de dialogue interreligieux existants où travaillent nos confrères doivent être identifiés et se développer en réseau. Nous encourageons particulièrement la création de réseaux entre les centres de l’île Maurice et du nord du Cameroun.

26. Étant donné le caractère particulier de notre présence en Mauritanie, en Algérie et au Pakistan, il y aura une coordination unique de la mission spiritaine dans ces pays.

27. Le ministère de dialogue interreligieux exige la défense des droits de l’homme, en particulier des droits de toutes les minorités religieuses et de la liberté de culte (RVS 12). Les confrères travaillant dans le cadre du dialogue interreligieux doivent assister à des sessions ou des cours sur les droits de l’homme et les promouvoir dans des organisations internationales collaboratrices (par exemple VIVAT International) et d’autres instituts missionnaires ou religieux.

2018, nous recommandons que tous les quatre ans, le Conseil Général organise une rencontre pour les confrères travaillant dans ce genre de contexte.

29. En gardant à l’esprit « l’exercice de la prudence et de la discrétion éclairée » dans la manière d’utiliser les médias (RVS 45 ; cf. Can. 666), nous utiliserons les vastes opportunités de l’espace numérique (blogs, sites web, médias sociaux, emails, etc.) pour partager nos expériences afin de mieux servir dans les contextes de dialogue interreligieux. En particulier, nous avons besoin d’un groupe de médias sociaux pour tous les confrères vivant et travaillant dans des situations de dialogue interreligieux, comme plate-forme de connaissance mutuelle, de partage d’informations, d’expériences et de documentation pertinente.

30. Le Conseil général constituera dans les trois langues de notre Congrégation (anglais, français et portugais) une base de données pour le ministère spiritain de dialogue interreligieux, qui sera librement accessible à tous les confrères.
Spiritan Interreligious Dialogue Forum
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Forum Spiritain de Dialogue Interreligieux

Spiritan Horizons / Horizons spiritains
A Journal of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit /
Une revue da la Congrégation du Saint Esprit
ISSUE 15, SPRING 2020 / NUMÉRO 15, PRINTEMPS 2020