

DIVERSITY FRIDAY

Bringing Cultures Together

The multiplicity of cultures is a fact

In the process of bringing cultures together for constructing peace, five areas are important to consider:

The decisive role of politics, with its legitimate authority, in such a manner that no religion substitutes it.

This problem is complex and recurrent, on the articulation of the religious, the social or civil society and of politics. The religious authorities make a great contribution when they accept to be neither instrumentalized by nor indifferent to politics, and doubtless their role is simply to remind one of ethics in politics, while themselves remaining examples and guarantors of these ethics. It is necessary to have a public space where all cultures and religions can meet one another.

The importance of the alliance of faith and reason.

The extreme importance of the inseparability of faith and reason in the struggle not only against violence, but above all for the construction of a culture of peace. Faith, as faith, has nothing to fear from reason (Not necessarily including rationalist and positivist distortions). No question is to be feared if the first to pose fundamental questions to humans is God Himself, in general in two forms: who do you say I am?, against all idolatry, and: what have you done to your brother?, against all violence. The challenge is to find the right position in the public space of theology. This is not easy, but neglecting this contribution will be a certain lack in the search for peace.

The importance of the search for truth.

Truth always unites. It is not in renouncing the truth that the meeting of religions and cultures is possible, but in engaging in it more deeply. Scepticism does not bring people together, no more than simple pragmatism. The two things only serve as an entrance to ideologies which next present themselves with so much more assurance. Renouncing truth and one's convictions does not elevate mankind, but delivers it to the calculation of profit, depriving it of greatness.

The importance of the other who is a wealth, a resource and not a problem.

Because one must also seek the positive in the other and that, in this respect, the other is also necessarily an aid in the pursuit of truth, nonetheless does not signify that the element of criticism can and must be lacking. It might be relatively easy for us to criticize the religions of others, but we must be as prepared to accept this also for ourselves, for our own religion.

The holy character of the duty of education and freedom of conscience, which are two essential factors of democracy.


'The decisive area', finally linked to the "need for the other" without whom no society can construct itself in peace: the recognitions of the sacred character of the duty of education and freedom of conscience (to be placed among the first foundations of a peaceful society, as where this freedom is not assured, one or other of the human rights will end up being weakened). Authentic education aims to make the whole man greater, to enlarge his view and his heart, in order that he does not impoverish himself in withdrawing into himself, and that he turn to God and to his brothers, to humanity.


which seems to justify ethical and anthropological agnosticism; yet, people's aspiration to a unity which can overcome dispersion is also a fact! As Monsignor Francesco Follo, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to UNESCO, during the World Philosophy Day Congress, Tehran, 22 November 2010, said:

"The practice of good relations with the other – is the only birthplace for the development of peace. It cannot be imposed from the exterior if it is not at the heart of the relation. Moreover, the dangerous notion of the 'clash of civilizations' must be refused and, should the case arise, talk of the 'clash of ignorance's' or, to use a positive notion: the 'dialogue of cultures' must be continued to have a 'civilization of love'."

Indeed, the problem is not necessarily that of cultural diversity - diversity is a fact, a given – but inter-culturality, which is to be constructed day by day. Cultural diversity is an effective wealth if it becomes "fertile and creative diversity". All cultures and all religions must recognize intercultural respect and also the principle of mutuality. A Berber proverb says: "God has diversified people's faces to permit peace". And in the Bible it is written: "Do unto others as you wish to be done unto yourself". This is the well-known Golden Rule, found in the Bible, but also in all other religions ... it is a transversal formula.

The Office of the Premier can content itself with individuals, while culture needs persons, and links between persons; and thus the links which form living communities: it is a fact that one must take into account the collectivities which create and enjoy culture, while speaking of creative subjects and cultural identities. The aim of each culture is the wellbeing (in its widest possible sense) of the human being, to be educated as a person who has obligations towards others, and not only rights. Indeed, the principal stake concerns education. Thus, education underlines the importance of the promotion and protection of cultural diversity. In this regard, the question of education must be considered – and promoted – in two distinct and complementary manners:

 Education regarding society, which renders a person capable of promoting cultural diversity, and thus an education for peace, for recognition, for respect to the point of welcoming others as a gift, wealth, and complementarity.

 Education in the sense of the right of the individual and the community to receive – or to give itself – an education according to its own cultural, linguistic and religious membership, and its own tradition. One cannot go towards the other if one does not leave one's own place, if one does not have the possibility of forming one's own cultural identity, according to one's own convictions and values. One must constantly educate to meet the freedom of the other, which enriches us because of what it is and the values which it carries and expresses.

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