

MARY AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

With Vatican II's "Declaration on the relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*" (NA) [link to: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html of October 28, 1965 the Catholic Church has initiated her move toward other faiths by means of interreligious dialogue. The keyword 'dialogue' is important in this context since it applies to all cultures as well as faith traditions and respects the need for Inculturation. Moreover, NA explains that true dialogue "regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people (NA, 2). The effect of these encounters become increasingly apparent and is manifested by authentic esteem for the values and convictions in each religion. We can also observe a genuine exploration of common values as well as solicitude for the betterment of living conditions on earth.

To foster the work of dialogue, Pope Paul VI set up the Secretariat for Non-Christians in 1964, recently renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In 1991, to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of NA, the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue promulgated the document *Dialogue and Proclamation—Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html]

It highlights four forms of interreligious dialogue without claiming to establish any order of priority among them:

- a) 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.
- b) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
- c) 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.
- d) 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.

Pertinent documents for an in depth study on interreligious dialogue are:

1. Paul VI: Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* of August 6, 1964.
2. Paul VI: Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* of December 8, 1975. See especially
 - # 20 – Evangelization of cultures starts with the human person
 - # 40 – Means of Evangelization changes according to circumstances
 - # 48 – Importance of popular religion
 - # 53 – Non-Christian religions echo humanity's search for God.
3. John Paul II: Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* of March 4, 1979; RH 4 continues Paul VI's thought of the "dialogue of salvation."
4. John Paul II: Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendi* of October 16, 1979 highlights
 - Popular devotion/religion (#53) and
 - Inculturation (#53)
5. International Theological Commission: *Faith and Culture* of 1988
6. John Paul II: Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* of December 30, 1988 see especially # 35
7. John Paul II: Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* of December 7, 1990 (RM is one of the most important documents regarding Inculturation; see in particular # 52-57).

8. Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue: *Dialog and Proclamation* of 1991
42, 4 speaks of the dialogue of life, of work, of theological exchange and of religious experience. Such a dialogue needs to render importance to culture; to reading the signs of the time; to interior discernment of the human condition and conviction; to the need for solid foundational theological reflection.
9. Congregation for the Evangelization of People: *Guide for Catechists in Missionary Territory - Missionary Work is a Long, Global and Gradual Process* of 1993.
10. John Paul II: Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* of November 10, 1994, see especially # 52.
11. John Paul II: Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of March 25, 1996; # 102 states that consecrated persons should engage in interreligious dialogue.
12. International Theological Commission: *Christianity and Religions* of 1997.
13. Congregation for the Clergy: *General Directory for Catechesis* published in 1997.
14. Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith: *Dominus Jesus* of 2000.
15. Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith: Notification on the book *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997) by Father Jacques Dupuis S.J.--2001.
16. Walter Kasper in 2003 regarding the present situation and future of the ecumenical movement.
17. Press conference for the presentation of the Conference organized on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Decree on Ecumenism (November 10, 2004) (In Italian)

The Role of Mary in Inter-religious Dialogue

The person and mission of Mary may serve as a bridge towards other religions. One of Mary's major credits is her humanizing influence. Mary is a pre-institutional person and represents a psychological archetype of maternity and protection that is universal. Due to the exiguity of information provided about her person, Mary becomes a flexible and adaptable figure reflecting many cultures. This fact allows for interpretation about her person and the contribution she can make to cultures.

In this context Mary can be considered a model for dialogue. Her attention given to the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation and her discerning response rendered in freedom and reflection allowed for a true exchange. Her commitment in the service of the Lord is exemplary as well: at the Visitation she portrays the attitudes of sharing and altruism, needed in dialogue; while at Cana she acts in the service of the truth. Her sensitivity to earthly realities such as justice and peace, leads to transformation (Magnificat). Her fidelity in duration and longing at Pentecost bring about communion, integration and complementarity.

Mary's person also draws attention to critical non-negotiable issues within interreligious dialogue

1. In and through Mary we see the unique and definitive character of the Incarnation (historical dimension to the Incarnation and therefore to redemption).
2. Mary's being and mission stresses the character of Revelation and therefore its trans-cultural dimension (God decides and works through Mary).
3. Christianity is a religion based on mediation. This means that the human cooperation is indispensable.
4. In and through Mary we have freedom to a personal response, or receptivity and personal commitment (personal expression of Mary is our pattern of how we relate to God).
5. In and through Mary the Mystery of God is manifested as Mystery and Revelation of Love (creation being a work of Love!).
6. Mary warrants the integrative character of Christianity, i.e. the unity between the divine and human; the universality of the Christian message is given to all genders, nations and ages.

The person of Mary can be used both as a model for ascending and descending religions.

1. The Marian Profile for an ascending religion (highlighting human movement towards God):
 - a. Openness (ontological openness is existential and essential).
 - b. Her personal existence is entirely based on God and religious values.
 - c. Mary serves as model for all who searching and long for a personal relationship with God in love

- c. Mary serves as model for all who searching and long for a personal relationship with God in love.
 - d. Her receptivity at the Annunciation allowed for the transformation of the world into a resemblance with God through her gift of self.
 - e. Through the gift of self she reached her personal destiny.
2. The Marian Profile for a descending religion (highlighting God's movement towards the human being):
Mary is
- a. Icon of God's love
 - b. Tabernacle of God's Mystery
 - c. Eschatological Icon of our personal fulfillment, accomplishment
 - d. Eschatological Icon of the Church's realization.

The role of Mary in the Inter-religious Dialogue with Judaism:

The historical figure of Mary is present in some of the world's religions; in others there are traits of spirituality which we identify as Marian. Judaism contributes to a better understanding of Mary, daughter of Israel and Jewish woman.

The role of Mary in the Inter-religious Dialogue with Islam:

Islam was born in a geographic, cultural and historical context where Judaism and Christianity already existed. Mary is mentioned thirty-four times in the Qu'ran, the only woman mentioned by name, and Islam pays Mary the highest compliment, stating that she is a person of faith and of submission to God, a model to be imitated by all Muslims. In some parts of the Middle East, Muslims--particularly women--visit Marian shrines (for example, Ephesus) to seek her intercession. In this context Mary could potentially offer bridges between the two creeds.

[In Chapter 4, Verse 171, the Koran presents Jesus, the son of Mary, as the Messiah, as God's messenger; Jesus is seen as a word of God which he cast into Mary, and a spirit from him, who is nevertheless, in God's sight like Adam, a creature--according to Chapter 3, Verse 59.

At one point the Koran says God asked Jesus, "Did you tell people to take you and your mother as two gods?"--a question that Jesus answered in Chapter 5, Verse 116, saying, "It is not given me to say what is untrue." Clearly, in the Islamic view, both Jesus and Mary are human beings. The Koran regularly follows the mention of Jesus, the Messiah, with the epithet "son of Mary," as if explicitly to deny the Christian belief that Jesus is the "Son of God."]

African Religions:

The most honorable and respectful way to address a woman is to say to her, "mother." This fact provides a bridge to Mary, our heavenly Mother.

– Father Johann G. Roten, S.M.

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