

## INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND WORLD PEACE

WALTER KASPER

1. The encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI *Deus caritas est* (2005) does not mention the interreligious dialogue in a direct and explicit way. Only in paragraph 27 do we find an implicit allusion to this issue. Here the Pope speaks about 'today's complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy' and adds that in this situation the guidelines of the Church's social doctrine 'need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live'.

This affirmation corresponds to what is taught in the Declaration *Nosstra aetate* of the Second Vatican Council 'On the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions'. The Council urges its members 'to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions' in order 'to acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture' (*NAe* 2).

Interreligious dialogue means therefore not only *theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values, but as the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1991) states, dialogue exists also as '*dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations', as '*dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people', and as '*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' (n. 42).

Without doubt peace is the first among the preoccupations and desires of all people, and it is at the same time in one way or another an ideal, a goal and a hope of all religions and therefore the primary goal towards

which interreligious dialogue strives. According to Jewish and Christian understanding peace (*shalom*) is God's fundamental promise and blessing; at the end of the times God will gather all nations in a realm of universal peace. In a similar way for Muslims surrender (*islam*) to God implies peace (*salam*). Hindus and Buddhists seek to reach peace by mediation and regard non-violence as an ideal.

2. Nevertheless, interreligious relations have been in the past and unfortunately are often still today characterized by violence and religiously motivated conflicts and wars. Today particularly the exclusive claims of monotheistic religions are often blamed for violence and even for terrorism. Justifiably, it has been said: 'There cannot be peace among nations without peace among religions' (H. Küng).

Still today in order to reach this aim we have to overcome many obstacles. On the one hand, there is insufficient grounding in one's own faith; on the other, there is insufficient knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of other religions, leading to a lack of appreciation for their significance and even at times to misrepresentation. As well, there are socio-political factors and burdens of the past; – wrong understanding of the meaning of terms such as conversion, baptism, dialogue, etc.; – self-sufficiency, lack of openness leading to defensive or aggressive attitudes; – lack of conviction with regard to the value of interreligious dialogue, which some may see as a task reserved to specialists, and others as a sign of weakness or even a betrayal of the faith; – suspicion about the other's motives in dialogue; – a polemical spirit when expressing religious convictions; – intolerance, which is often aggravated by association with political, economic, racial and ethnic factors; – a lack of reciprocity in dialogue which can lead to frustration; – certain features of the present religious climate, e.g., growing materialism, religious indifference, and the multiplication of religious sects which creates confusion and raises new problems (cf. *Dialogue and Proclamation*, n. 52).

Although through dialogue we confront and struggle in order to overcome these obstacles, we should not be naïve. In this world truth will be always in conflict with the powers of untruth, and truth can be attained only in a struggle with untruth; in a similar way peace built on justice must conquer and overcome injustice, hatred and violence. Thus Jesus did not at all promise us a harmonious future of an always peaceful dialogue. Nevertheless he taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount not to retaliate (*Mt* 5:21ff; 38ff) but 'to speak and to do truth in love' (*Eph* 4:15).

In this sense the Second Vatican Council in its 'Declaration on Religious Liberty' *Dignitatis humanae* stressed that the search for truth, the obliga-

tion to embrace truth and to give witness of truth can never be realized by violence. It proclaimed 'that these obligations bind in man's conscience. Truth can impose itself on the mind only in virtue of its own truth, which wins over the mind with both gentleness and power' (*DH* 1). Along this line Pope Benedict in his Regensburg lecture highlighted that Christian faith is bonded not with violence but with reason.

3. Often the question arises as to how interreligious dialogue and missionary proclamation relate. This question is too complex for me to discuss in this context in a sufficient and satisfactory way. The above-mentioned document on *Dialogue and Proclamation* gives many valuable hints for an answer.

The encyclical *Deus caritas est* deepens the question by deepening the concept of dialogue, which surpasses mere information and is witness and expression of self-giving and self-communicating love. For this reason the Pope is very clear when he states that dialogue as the expression of love does not mean what nowadays is considered to be proselytism. 'Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other end'. Then the Pope goes on with the following marvellous words: 'Those who practise charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak... It is the responsibility of the Church's charitable organizations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity – as well as their words, their silence, their example – they may be credible witnesses to Christ' (n. 31c).

Love, which does not substitute but encourages, inspires and surpasses justice (cf. *Deus caritas est*, 28b), is also the power which promotes peace. In this sense peace presupposes dialogue and dialogue is the only possible alternative to a 'clash of civilisations' (S.P. Huntington). What we want is not a clash of civilisations but a dialogue of civilisations and religions as the way to and instrument of peace.

4. With regard to Muslims the Second Vatican Council pleaded 'to forget the past' and urged 'that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding'. The Council added: 'For the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values' (*NAe* 3). I guess that on this issue both Their Beatitudes here present, who live and work in a Muslim context, will be able to speak more extensively.

As President of the *Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews* in what follows I would like to be more explicit with regard to the Jew-

ish-Christian dialogue. In this regard, after a difficult and complex history, the fourth chapter of *Nostra aetate* signifies a remarkable shift, a shift not only in practical attitudes, especially in the condemnation of every form of anti-Semitism, but also a shift in some traditional principles, among which especially the axiom that there is right only for truth but not for error. The Council shifted from this abstract position to a more concrete and personalistic one, which fully corresponds to genuine Thomism. The new but traditionally founded principle affirms that truth is primarily in the subject. Consequently, the Council's position was that even the subject who errs has rights and deserves not only tolerance but respect. The respect for Jews, which the Council called for, is therefore first of all a human rights question.

But the relations with Jews go much deeper. The Council reminds us that Christians and Jews belong to the same stock of Abraham and that by God's fidelity the covenant with the Jewish people has never been withdrawn. According to Saint Paul the wild olive branch of the Church of the Gentiles has been grafted into the good olive tree of Judaism, from which it is sustained and nourished (cf. *Rom* 11:17-24). Thus the relations between Jews and Christians are unique and without parallel with respect to other non-Christian religions. 'The Church believes that Christ who is our peace has through his cross reconciled Jews and Gentile and made them one in himself' (*Eph* 2:14-16).

While the post-conciliar Jewish-Christian dialogue has certainly not always been easy, on the basis of these revolutionary affirmations it has become increasingly more fruitful. Since then, the dialogue has shifted from an historical perspective and from merely theological reflections to modern challenges and concerns and to our common duties with regard to our shared future and the future of all mankind. We have become more and more aware of God's promise to Abraham, our common father in faith, that he will be a blessing for all nations. Christians and Jews see therefore their common obligation to work together for justice and peace.

Our international meeting in Buenos Aires in July 2004 was on the theme: 'Justice and Charity'. At that time, we initiated a common program for needy children. At our last meeting in Cape Town in November 2006 we planned a program against the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa. In 2002 we began a very fruitful dialogue between the Holy See and the Chief Rabbinate in Jerusalem. At present we are reflecting whether, in which way and to what degree we could widen our dialogue to a so-called 'trialogue' which involves also Muslims. So, to work for shalom/peace is for us not a void and empty theory but a concrete obligation for the good of all mankind.