

***Nostra Aetate: A Guide for Ongoing Dialogue***  
(A paper presented in Rome, 3 October 2015,  
at the request of the USG/UISG Commission for Interreligious Dialogue)

*Introduction*

What I want to do in this talk is to say something about the origins and content of the document *Nostra Aetate*, and then go on to present the work of the office set up to promote the new vision embodied in this document. Special attention will be given to the documents produced by this dicastery for dialogue.

*The origins of Nostra Aetate (NA)*

It is well known that NA was a surprise result of Vatican II<sup>1</sup>. It had not been foreseen in the preparatory work for the Council but was introduced into the agenda at the specific request of Pope John XXIII. The French Rabbi, Jules Isaac, who obtained a private audience with John XXIII, asked him for a statement on relations of the Church with Jews which would reverse the “teaching of contempt” current in the Church at the time. Pope John, who had direct experience of relations with Jews while Nuncio in Bulgaria and particularly in Turkey, readily accepted the request and he entrusted the drafting of a statement to Cardinal Augustine Bea whom he had appointed head of the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

News of this initiative somehow became public and aroused serious opposition, especially among the bishops of the Arab world. They feared that a positive statement about the Jews would be interpreted as an acceptance by the Holy See of the State of Israel, and that this would be detrimental to the position of Christians in the Middle East. The bishops suggested that if something must absolutely be said about Judaism, it should be balanced by a statement about Islam.

Then bishops from other parts of the world, from Asia and Africa in particular, objected to privileged attention being given to Islam. They pointed to the importance of Buddhism and Hinduism, and the African bishops called attention to what was then called Animism, the Traditional Religion of African peoples.

The outcome was that the final Declaration deals with the attitude of the Church to religions in general, with explicit mention being made of Hinduism and Buddhism, and with a fuller treatment of Islam and Judaism. If there is a lesson that we can learn from this, it is that the Holy Spirit uses obstacles to produce the desired result.

At the final vote on the document, on 28 October 1965, even though it received an overwhelming majority, there were still 88 Fathers of the Council who voted against it. A number of these were following the lead of Archbishop Lefebvre whose opposition was based on the idea of the

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the place to give the full story of the genesis of *Nostra Aetate*. A detailed study is being prepared by Thomas Stransky, of the Paulist Fathers, and it is hoped that it will be published early in 2016.

Church as a perfect society, the guardian of the Truth. This was understood to mean that there was no room for religious liberty, and that dialogue with other religions was seen as degrading for the Church. There is still a difficulty with the followers of Archbishop Lefebvre with regard to accepting NA, as also *Dignitatis humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Liberty.

### *An analysis of Nostra Aetate*

The first paragraph of NA, which was not part of the original draft of the statement on the Jews, presents a general reflection on humanity as a whole. It is said that “in this age of ours” (*nostra aetate*) human beings are coming closer together. While this is as true, perhaps even more so, fifty years later with greater facilities for travel and especially for communication, we may wonder, in view of the numerous conflicts in our world, whether “the bonds of friendship... are being strengthened.” The document reflects theologically on the unity of the human race, having in God a common origin and a common destiny. It also reflects sociologically on the existence of different religions to which people turn for answers “to the unsolved riddles of human existence”.

We can notice here a certain tension between unity and plurality. There is a theological vision of the unity of humanity, but an acceptance of the fact that people do not all walk along the same path. This will be echoed by John Paul II reflecting on the Day of Prayer for Peace, in Assisi, in 1986:

The very fact that we have come to Assisi from various quarters of the world is in itself a sign of the common path which humanity is called to tread. Either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others. We hope that this pilgrimage to Assisi has taught us anew to be aware of the common origin and common destiny of humanity. Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another toward the transcendent goal which he sets for us.<sup>2</sup>

From this first paragraph of NA it would seem to me that two conclusions can be drawn. The first is that the human being should be recognized as *homo religious*, a being with an innate religious drive which seeks expression in different ways. Secondly that the different religious traditions that exist in the world are to be taken seriously, since they have shaped the outlook of the followers of these religions.

Paragraph 2 starts with an allusion to what is often referred to now as Traditional Religion, or alternatively as Tribal or Ethnic Religions. It then describes briefly both Hinduism and Buddhism.

What I want to emphasize here is the care that has been taken in drafting these few sentences. One commentator on this paragraph has asserted that it is possible to discern the Sanskrit terms

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<sup>2</sup> Discourse to Representatives of the various Religions of the World at the conclusion of the Word Day of Prayer for Peace, Assisi, October 27, 1986, in Francesco GIOIA (ed.) *Interreligious Dialogue. The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)*, Boston, Pauline Books & Media, 2006 n°546.

underlying almost every word used to describe Hinduism<sup>3</sup>. The different approaches to the Divine, through philosophy and myth, asceticism and devotional practices, are succinctly mentioned. Similarly reference is made to different forms of Buddhism, Theravada, Mahayana or Vajrayana, though without using these technical terms.

This paragraph contains one of the most important statements of the whole document: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions”. Proper weight needs to be given to the two terms used: ‘true’ and ‘holy’. They prevent us from saying that the different religions, in contrast to Christianity, are just a pack of lies and, in fact, satanic. Moreover it should be noted that these words do not apply to individuals only, on account of their ‘manner of life and conduct’, but also to elements of the religions as such, ‘precepts and doctrines’. So the followers of other religions can be holy, not in spite of the religion to which they belong, but precisely because of those elements of the religion that help them to attain to holiness.

Appreciation for the religions does not mean, however, that the Church is to cease preaching Jesus Christ. On the contrary the same paragraph continues by insisting that the Church “proclaim, and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (Jn 4:6)”. The uniqueness of salvation in Jesus Christ is maintained, as will be asserted strongly in 2000 by *Dominus Jesus*. It will be for theologians to grapple with the tension between the invitation to dialogue and the call to proclamation of the Gospel message.

That the need to announce Jesus Christ is not opposed to dialogue is confirmed by the conclusion of this paragraph, namely that Christians are “to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions... while witnessing to their own faith.” We can interpret this as meaning that Christians should not go into dialogue with people of other religions in a spirit of indifference, as if all religions are the same, yet at the same time they are not to attack other religions, but rather to appreciate the goodness that God has placed in them.

Paragraph 3 deals explicitly with Islam<sup>4</sup>. It starts by declaring that the Church has “a high regard for Muslims”, something which may have come as a surprise to many at the time of Vatican II as it may still surprise some today. What I want to emphasize again is the care taken in drafting this paragraph. The terms used in speaking of God, whom Muslims worship “together with us”, as *Lumen Gentium* 16 mentions, have been chosen to reflect Qur’anic tradition, and thus be easily translatable into Arabic. The term “personal”, originally suggested, was rejected as it is not part of Islamic vocabulary. It is said that God “has also spoken to men”. The manner of God’s revelation is not specified, with nothing being said about the Qur’an or about Muhammad as the Messenger of God. This could be considered an exercise of prudence, since any statement on this matter would have needed so many qualifications, and in the end would have been unsatisfactory

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. MASSON, SJ, “Valeurs religieuses de l’hindouisme » in A.M. HENRY (ed.), *Les Relations de l’Eglise avec les Religions Non-Chrétiennes*, Paris, Cerf, p.163.

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller discussion of NA 3 see R. CASPAR, “Islam according to Vatican II” in Michael L. FITZGERALD and R. CASPAR, *Signs of Dialogue. Christian Encounter with Muslims*, Zamboanga City, Silsilah Publications 1992, pp.233-245.

to Muslims. There is a reference to the faith of Abraham, but a suggested reference to Ishmael was eliminated since it could have aroused controversy.

The paragraph contains one negative statement, since it states that while Muslims accept Jesus as a prophet, they do not acknowledge him as God. In fact belief in the Incarnation is the major difference between Christianity and Islam, a difference upon which hangs all the rest. Respect for Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus, is mentioned and, at the request of the bishop of Izmir, in whose diocese lies the House of Mary in Ephesus, it was added that Muslims “at times devoutly invoke” Mary.

The concluding sentences of this paragraph, taking cognizance of a history of “quarrels and dissensions” between Christians and Muslims, exhorts all to forget the past and to strive to come to mutual understanding. It may in fact be difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to forget the past. What would be possible would be to re-read the past together in order to come to a better understanding of it, though to my knowledge little has been done so far along these lines. The appeal is not only for better understanding, but also for cooperation. It is suggested that Christians and Muslims “together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values.” The field is vast and can include such areas as the defence of life, of marriage and of the family, care for the environment, and work for nuclear disarmament. Certainly the role of Christians is not to combat other religions, to try to destroy them, but rather to appreciate the contribution they can make to society and to be ready to cooperate with the followers of these religions.

On paragraph 4 of NA, which deals with Judaism, I wish to say very little since relations with the Jews has always been the competence of what is now the Pontifical Council for the Promoting Christian Unity, and not that of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. I would merely like to repeat something I have said elsewhere, namely that there is an asymmetrical relationship of Christianity to the other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam. Christianity has its roots in Judaism, whereas Islam as a religion is a post-Christian reality. Islam, on the other hand, which sees itself as the original religion, can hardly be said to be rooted in Judaism and Christianity<sup>5</sup>.

I do wish to comment briefly, however, on paragraph 5 of NA since it seems to me that this paragraph is often neglected. From everything that has gone before it draws the conclusion that all discrimination is condemned and to be avoided. Foremost in the minds of the Fathers of Vatican II was the condemnation of anti-Semitism, but the vision was widened to include any discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, colour, condition in life or religion. All this is reproved by the Church “as foreign to the mind of Christ”. I think you will agree with me that this paragraph, unfortunately, is still relevant today.

### *A dicastery for dialogue*

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Michael L. FITZGERALD, “Revisiting *Nostra Aetate* after 50 Years” in Sharji George KOCHUTHARA, CMI, *Revisiting Vatican II 50 Years of Renewal*, Vol. I, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications 2014, p.434.

Even before the final vote had been taken on NA, Pope Paul VI decided to set up an office within the Vatican for interreligious dialogue. He announced this publicly on Pentecost Sunday, 1964. So came into being what was first termed the Secretariat for Non-Christians, later to become the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.<sup>6</sup> As announced by Paul VI, Cardinal Paolo Marella, former diplomatic representative of the Holy See in Japan, was made the first president of this office. He called to work with him as Secretary Fr Pierre Humbertclaude, a Marianist, who had been a missionary also in Japan. One of the first persons to join the staff was Fr Joseph Cuoq, M.Afr. For two years he had been in charge of a desk for Christian-Muslim relations within the Congregation for Oriental Churches. Once the Secretariat for Non-Christians (SNC) was set up, he was immediately transferred there.

Under Cardinal Marella (1964-1973) the Secretariat got slowly under way. It first took up the task of spreading the vision of Vatican II, showing to Catholics that in relating respectfully to followers of other religions they were not being untrue to their Christian faith. For this purpose a modest journal was created, at first simply called *Bulletin*, but later renamed *Pro Dialogo*. In one of the first issues, Msgr Piero Rossano, who was later to become the Secretary, published an article in Latin about the teaching of Vatican II on relations with people of other religions.<sup>7</sup> Another initiative was the production of small booklets providing guidelines for dialogue with the followers of different religions, with Buddhists, with Hindus, with Muslims. The last-mentioned *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, first published in 1970, was republished in 1981 in a revised and augmented edition.<sup>8</sup> There was also a booklet entitled *Meeting the African Religions*. This aroused criticism on the part of some missionaries who said: “We have been doing all we can to stamp out these religions, and here comes the Vatican saying that we have to promote them.” Of course there is an exaggeration here: showing respect and upholding values is not the same as promoting a religion. In any case, undaunted by this opposition, the Secretariat established two new desks, one for Asian Religions and the other for Traditional Religions, particularly in Africa. The work of promoting dialogue continued in collaboration with the local hierarchies throughout the world.

The 1970s were years of striking initiatives in dialogue, particularly between Christians and Muslims. The World Council of Churches (WCC) organised an international meeting in Broumana, Lebanon, in 1972, which I had the privilege of attending on behalf of the SNC. This

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<sup>6</sup> For this announcement see Francesco GIOIA (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, n°194. On the first years of this office see Michael L. FITZGERALD, “The Secretariat for Non-Christians is Ten Years Old” in *Islamochristiana* 1(1975) pp.87-94; Michael L. FITZGERALD, “Twenty-five Years of Dialogue: the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue”, in *Islamochristiana* 15(1989) pp.109-120. For a brief account of the succeeding years, see Miguel Angel AYUSO GUIXOT, “50 Years in the Service of Interreligious Dialogue”, in *Pro Dialogo* 145(2014/1) pp.23-32. For a more complete history see the chapter, “Une brève histoire du Conseil pontifical pour le Dialogue interreligieux” in Maurice BORRMANS, *Dialoguer avec les Musulmans. Une cause perdue ou une cause à gagner ?*, Paris, Pierre Téqui éditeur 2011, pp.157-182.

<sup>7</sup> Piero ROSSANO, “*Quid de non Christianis Oecumenicum Concilium docuerit*”, in *Bulletin Secretariatus pro Non Christianis* 1(1964) pp.15-22.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Borrmans, *Orientations pour un dialogue entre chrétiens et musulmans*, Paris, Cerf, 1981 (English translation by R. Marston Speight, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, Marwah, New York, Paulist Press 1990.

was followed by regional meetings in Africa and Asia. In the years following there were congresses in Cordoba, Tunis, and Tripoli, Libya. The SNC, now under the leadership of Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli (1973-1980), took an active part in these meetings, and also established relations with Al-Azhar in Egypt, and different Muslim groups in Indonesia and Iran, and even received a delegation from Saudi Arabia.

In October 1974 Pope Paul VI established within the Secretariat for Christian Unity the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism and, in a parallel way, the Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. Since relations with the Jews was a special task, different from ecumenical relations, it made sense to entrust this work to a semi-independent commission. Within the SNC the situation was different. Christian-Muslim relations formed a large part of its ordinary concerns, so the existence of a distinct commission seemed less appropriate. Eventually the Commission was transformed into a think-tank on Christian-Muslim relations. It has produced some useful reflections, for example *Religious Liberty. A Theme for Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (2006).

The short presidency of Mgr Jean Jadot (1980-1984), who had previously occupied the post of Apostolic Nuncio in Bangkok and subsequently in the United States, and the much longer presidency of Cardinal Francis Arinze (1984-2002), offered a time for theological reflection on the foundations and practice of dialogue. It also brought in a new concern, that of the impact of New Religious Movements. An inter-dicasterial committee produced a provisional report on this question in 1986<sup>9</sup>. This led to the appointment within the PCID of a desk-officer for New Religious Movements.

### *Dialogue and Mission*

I would now like to present some of the documents published during this period. Twenty years after it had been set up, the Secretariat produced its first official document: *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (1984).<sup>10</sup> *Dialogue and Mission*, to give it its short title, is a truly inspirational document, which I heartily recommend you to revisit.

One of the most important statements in this short document is found in n°13 which says that mission is "a single but complex and articulated reality". Interreligious dialogue is then mentioned as one of the elements of this mission which are given in this order: the simple presence and witness of the Christian life; the service of mankind and all forms of activity for social development; liturgical life and prayer and contemplation; dialogue in which Christians meet the followers of other religious traditions; announcement and catechesis in which the good news of the Gospel is proclaimed. The inclusion of dialogue within this list is significant, since it means that interreligious dialogue cannot be treated as a luxury, an optional extra, the concern of a few people with strange

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<sup>9</sup> Extracts from this report "The Phenomenon of Sects or New Religious Movements" can be found in Francesco GIOIA, *Interreligious Dialogue* n° 852-853.

<sup>10</sup> For the full text see Francesco Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, nos. 808-851. The document will be referred to as DM.

ideas. As Pope Paul VI had emphasized in *Ecclesiam Suam*, the Church cannot but be in relation with all people, with those who believe in Jesus Christ as well as those who do not. It cannot say that the latter are none of its concern, nor can its only mode of relation be to try to bring them into the Catholic faith. It must strive to meet the followers of other religious traditions "in order to walk together towards truth and to work together in projects of common concern" (DM 13).

One implication of this statement is that interreligious dialogue has its own validity and does not need to be justified by reference to another element in the Church's mission. To express this more clearly, such dialogue is not a form of pre-evangelization, a mere preparation for the proclamation of the Gospel; it is part of the evangelizing mission of the Church. This will become apparent if we compare dialogue with another element of the Church's mission, service or *diakonia*. This *diakonia*, however much it may meet with suspicion from the part of the followers of other religious traditions, is an essential part of the Church's activity and cannot be renounced. Yet the hungry are not fed and the sick tended in order that they may become Christians; such care is simply an expression of love and compassion, especially for those who are suffering and in need. Similarly dialogue, though it too may meet with suspicion, does not have any hidden motivation but is an expression of respect for the right to religious liberty, which is one of the most fundamental rights of the human person.

A further consequence of this teaching is that there can be vocations within the Church for the ministry of interreligious dialogue. Just as all the faithful have the duty to pray but some are called in a special way to a life of prayer and contemplation, and just as all Christians must show charity but some are called to dedicate their whole lives to particular works of mercy, so also all members of the Church should have an attitude of dialogue towards other believers but some may be called to make this dialogue the central part of their activity. What is important is to see the whole as well as the parts, to preserve unity in the bonds of the Spirit, as St Paul says, so that all these various activities, including dialogue, are seen as an expression of the vitality of the Body of Christ.

In what to my mind is a very interesting passage DM offers the Trinity as a model for dialogue. "In the mystery of the Trinity revelation helps us to perceive a life of communion and exchange" (DM 22).

In the Father we contemplate a love which precedes everything, and which is not limited by space or time. In other words, the gifts of God are to be discovered in all peoples at all periods of history. We can remember the Ignatian principle of "Finding God in all things". It is the duty of the Church to discover, to bring to light and to help to mature the riches that God has hidden in creation and in history. There is an "exchange of gifts" to be pursued in interreligious dialogue just as in ecumenism.

God the Son, the Word made flesh, is the one who enlightens every human being. He is the Redeemer who is present with his grace in every human encounter, in order to free us from egoism and to help us to love one another as He has loved us. As John Paul II has written, echoing the teaching of Vatican II, Christ is in some way united with every single person (*Redemptor Hominis* 14). This means that every person, to whatever religion they belong, is to be treated with respect.

Finally the Spirit is that force of life, of development and continuous renewal which is at work in the depths of individual consciences, accompanying them in the progress towards the Truth. This Spirit works outside

the visible boundaries of the Mystical Body of Christ. The Spirit anticipates and accompanies the Church as it goes on its way. So the Church is impelled to discern the signs of the Spirit's presence, to follow wherever the Spirit leads, and to serve the Spirit as a humble cooperator (DM 24).

One of the merits of *Dialogue and Mission* is to broaden the concept of dialogue. When dialogue is mentioned many people think immediately of theological discussions. They are often wary because they realize that in the past such discussions have often turned to polemics. DM, taking a lead from the Asian bishops, distinguishes four different forms of dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of deeds, dialogue of discourse, dialogue of religious experience (DM 28-35). It might have been better to speak of "relations" with other believers, and to have kept the term dialogue for formal exchanges, yet the line taken by this document can certainly be justified. "Dialogue of life" does not mean simply living side by side, but indicates a readiness to enter into friendly conversation with one's neighbours in order to live in harmony and peace. "Dialogue of deeds", "collaboration with others for goals of a humanitarian, social, economic, or political nature which are directed toward the liberation and advancement of mankind" (DM 31) cannot come about without exchange on goals and means; we could say that there can be no cooperation without consultation. The dialogue of discourse, exchanges at the level of experts on matters concerning religion or also on problems faced by humanity, can help to prepare the way for cooperation. The "dialogue of religious experience" is a sharing at a deeper level on what is most precious to each religion. In this regard it may be remembered that words are not the only means of communication. Silence can also create communion, particularly that silence which allows the action of the Holy Spirit to be perceived. For the Spirit, as has been said, "acts in the depth of people's consciences and accompanies them on the secret path of hearts towards the truth (cf. GS 22)" (DM 24). This last form of dialogue has been given considerable encouragement by the Day of Prayer for Peace, celebrated in Assisi in October 1986 on the initiative of Pope John Paul II. It has also been taken up by religious of the monastic tradition, particularly of the Benedictine family, who have developed Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique/Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIMMID)<sup>11</sup>. While prudence is required, so that the twin dangers of syncretism and indifferentism may be avoided, courage is also needed. Sharing the riches of religious traditions allows differences to be seen in a new light. In such a climate these differences, often quite fundamental, need not prevent dialogue. They can be "referred back in humility and confidence to God who 'is greater than our heart' (1 John 3:20)" (35).

### *The Contribution of Religious*

I would like to pick out one final passage from this document where it speaks about "the many examples that could be drawn from the history of Christian mission" (DM 17). Reference is made to St Francis of Assisi and his *regola non bollata* in which he encouraged his followers to go "among Muslims" in a peaceful way. There is also mention of Charles de Foucauld "who carried out mission in a humble and silent attitude of union with God, in communion with the poor, and in universal brotherhood." (*ibid.*).

I would like to expand on this paragraph by referring to other religious who have contributed to interreligious dialogue<sup>12</sup>. The example springs to mind of some pioneers in the task of establishing

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on DIMMID see the online bulletin that it publishes *Dilatato Corde*.

<sup>12</sup> For a fuller development of this point see Michael L. FITZGERALD, "Religious Congregations and their Contribution to Interreligious Dialogue" in *Centro Pro Unione semi-annual Bulletin* N. 77 Spring 2010, pp.3-8.



positive and constructive relations with people of other religions, such as the two Jesuits, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656), in China and India respectively. Their missionary methods had perhaps more to do with inculturation than with dialogue, yet in their adaptation to the milieu in which they operated, whether of mandarins or of Brahmins, they showed great respect for the religious sensitivities of the people to whom they were relating. We could also remember the Jesuits who, during the same period, engaged in dialogue with Muslim scholars at the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1605).

In a later century, Charles Lavigerie (1825-1892), the founder of the missionary society to which I belong, the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), proposed a patient and painstaking approach to the Muslim milieu with which he was familiar as Archbishop of Algiers. He emphasized the need to influence society as a whole, overcoming hostility through attention to culture, and through a witness of disinterested love and service. He encouraged dialogue on themes common to Christians and Muslims: the greatness of God, the relationship of creature to Creator, the need for human beings to repent and receive forgiveness. In his writings he took up the ideas of Pope Gregory VII in his letter to the Muslim ruler al-Nasir, to which *Nostra Aetate* refers. Lavigerie was in no hurry to have Muslims baptised, but “wanted every conversion to be tested through one or two years of ‘spiritual’ formation (the ‘Postulate’) to make sure that the prospective convert was really under the influence of the Spirit and determined to go ahead.”<sup>13</sup>

In the dialogue with Hindus we should remember Henri Le Saux (1910-1973), a Benedictine monk of the abbey of Kergonan, in Brittany, who together with Jules Monchanin (1895-1957), not a religious but a priest of the diocese of Lyon, founded the ashram Shantivanam, engaging in a profound dialogue with Hindu spirituality. Their work was continued by another Benedictine, Bede Griffiths (1906-1993). Another monk, influential in encouraging dialogue, in his case with Buddhists, was the prolific writer Thomas Merton (1915-1968).<sup>14</sup>

If we think of institutions rather than of individuals, mention could be made of the Institut de Belles Lettres Arabes (IBLA) founded by the Missionaries of Africa in Tunis in 1926 in order to facilitate a continuous cultural dialogue. A similar institute was created in Cairo by the Dominicans. Originally planned as an extension of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, but with a vocation to pay special attention to Islamic culture, the Institut Dominicain d’Etudes Orientales (IDEO) was established as a separate entity in March 1953. The first director was Fr Georges Chehata Anawati, O.P. (1905-1994) who deserves the title “pioneer” in his own right, but also for his collaboration with another scholar of Islam, Louis Gardet (Frère André of the Petits Frères de Jésus) (1904-1986)<sup>15</sup>.

These pioneers and these institutions prepared the way for NA, but there were also many religious engaged in the drafting of the conciliar declaration. Mention has already been made of the Jesuit Cardinal Augustine Bea, head of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, who had the duty of

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Jean-Marie GAUDEUL, *Encounters and Clashes. Islam and Christianity in History*, Vol. I A Survey, Rome, Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica, 2000, p.315.

<sup>14</sup> For brief notes on Monchanin and Merton see Michael L. FITZGERALD and John BORELLI, *Interfaith Dialogue. A Catholic View*, Maryknoll NY, Orbis Books 2006, pp.232-237.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jean-Jacques PERENNES, *Georges Anawati (1905-1994). Un chrétien égyptien devant le mystère de l’Islam*, Paris, Cerf 2008 ; Maurice BORRMANS, *Louis Gardet (1904-1986). Philosophe chrétien des cultures et témoin du dialogue islamo-chrétien*, Paris, Cerf 2010.

piloting the document through the Vatican Council. One of his first permanent collaborators, who was actually given the Jewish portfolio, was Thomas Stransky, an American Paulist Father. He was assisted by other religious: Gregory Baum OSA, George Tavard AA and Leo Rudloff OSB. As the document expanded other religious were called on to provide their expertise. For the paragraph on Islam we find George Anawati OP, Robert Caspar M.Afr., Joseph Cuoq, M.Afr., Jean Corbon (a priest of the Greek Catholic Church in the Lebanon, but a former M.Afr.), with John Long SJ as the coordinator. With regard to Traditional Religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, the team brought together included two Jesuits, Josef Neuner and Josef Pfister, a Dominican, Yves Congar, Thomas Stransky, the Paulist, and Msgr Charles Moeller, a diocesan priest working in the Secretariat for Christian Unity. Without any doubt, the contribution of religious to the composition of *Nostra Aetate* was enormous.<sup>16</sup>

To complete this religious roll-call I would like to recall the names of the religious who have worked or are working in the SNC/PCID. There was Pierre Humbertclaude, Marianist, as the first Secretary, to be followed later by Marcello Zago, OMI, my own self from the Missionaries of Africa, and currently Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, of the Comboni Missionaries. A Japanese Salesian, John Bosco Masayuki Shirieda, served for many years as Under-Secretary. On the Islam desk there has been a Syrian Salvatorian, François Abou Mokh, a Brother of the Christian Schools from Egypt, Edouard Martin Sabanegh, and Thomas Michel S.J. who served first on the Asian desk. At the Asian desk presently is Markus Solo S.V.D. The Africa desk was for a time run by Giuseppe Butturini, of the Comboni Missionaries. Religious women have been few, in fact only two: Sr Teresa Seouw, Canossian, and currently Sr Judith Zobelein, Franciscan Sister of the Eucharist.

### *Dialogue and Proclamation*

Perhaps it was thought that *Dialogue and Mission* had said everything that needed to be said about the importance of dialogue, but almost immediately questions arose: what is the exact relationship between interreligious dialogue and the preaching of the Gospel? Is dialogue the new form of mission, rendering the proclamation of the Gospel message superfluous? These questions, which reflected perhaps some exaggerations on the part of those who were engaging enthusiastically in interreligious dialogue, or more exactly betrayed growing fears of relativism, could not be ignored. Consequently a further document was produced by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, in conjunction with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. The joint authorship is significant, giving the document extra weight. *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991)<sup>17</sup> was published soon after *Redemptoris Missio*, the missionary encyclical of John Paul II.

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<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to John Borelli for supplying the details in this paragraph.

<sup>17</sup> For the text see Francesco Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue. The Official Teaching*, nos. 925-1013. The document will be referred to as DP. For a commentary on DP in relation to *Redemptoris Missio* see Jacques DUPUIS, "A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation", in William R.BURROWS (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue*, Marynoll NY, Orbis Books 1993, pp.119-158. For commentaries on both DM and DP, as well as on Vatican documents and other relevant material, see Denis C. ISIZOH (ed.), *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue*, Rome and Lagos, Ceedee Publications 2002.

*Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP) is a more ponderous document than DM. It carefully defines the terms it is going to use: evangelization, dialogue, proclamation. Conversion, religious traditions (DP 8-12). It states clearly that it is not covering relations with Jews which require special treatment, not taking into account dialogue with the followers of “new religious movements” which requires special discernment. Treating first of interreligious dialogue, it spells out the teaching of Vatican II and of the magisterium in the years since the Council. It points to the positive values of other religious traditions but it also remarks prudently: “To say that other religious traditions include elements of grace does not imply that everything in them is the result of grace. For sin has been at work in the world, and so religious traditions, notwithstanding their positive values, reflect the limitations of the human spirit, sometimes inclined to choose evil” (DP 31). Turning to proclamation, it insists on its urgency, yet it calls attention to the manner in which proclamation is to be carried out. It concludes that “the Church’s proclamation must be both progressive and patient, keeping pace with those who hear the message, respecting their freedom and even their ‘slowness to believe’ (*Evangelii nuntiandi* 79)” (DP 69). The final section offers a reflection on both these elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission taken together. I wish to quote in full the first paragraph:

Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: true interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel spirit of dialogue. The two activities remain distinct but, as experience shows, one and the same local Church, one and the same person, can be diversely engaged in both (DP 77).

Despite what I would call its Chalcedonian type language, this reflection is useful.

A feature of this document is its realism. It recognizes the difficulties facing both the proclamation of the Gospel message and interreligious dialogue. For instance, there is mention of socio-political factors. These could include majority-minority relations. It is difficult to engage in dialogue if being in a minority situation leads to the adoption of a defensive attitude. Such a difficulty can only be overcome by ensuring freedom and respect for each person’s rights. There is also mention of the burdens of the past. For relations with Muslims, these would include the Crusades and colonialism, which still have the capacity for rankling Muslims, but also the practice of slavery which has aroused negative feelings towards Islam, especially among many peoples of Africa. Another obstacle mentioned is suspicion about the other’s motives in dialogue. Lack of reciprocity can also inhibit dialogue. Nevertheless *Dialogue and Proclamation* states: “despite the difficulties, the Church’s commitment to dialogue remains firm and irreversible” (DP 54), and that “to proclaim the name of Jesus and to invite people to become his disciples in the Church is a sacred and major duty which the Church cannot neglect” (DP 76).

In its conclusion, DP restates the aim of the document which is “to provide some basic clarifications”. Recognizing that it remains at a general level, it calls for special attention to be given to relations with the followers of each religion<sup>18</sup>.

#### *A Document never published*

The PCID intended to produce another document, this time on “The Spirituality of Dialogue”. It never saw the light of day, yet a fair amount of work had been done in preparation for its publication. First of all, in November 1995, the PCID held a plenary assembly on the theme “The Dialogue of Spirituality and the Spirituality of Dialogue”. Ample time was given for a presentation of the idea of holiness in different religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Traditional Religions of Africa and Christianity. Then came a reflection on the dialogue of religious experience. Finally Jean Vanier was invited to share some thoughts on elements for a Christian spirituality of Interreligious Dialogue<sup>19</sup>. Subsequently, in October 1998, in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the PCID held another plenary assembly discussing the topic “Called to the Conversion of the Heart (*metanoia*) – Towards the Year 2000”. Previous to this some studies had been published on conversion/purification as seen in different religions<sup>20</sup>. These were complemented by two talks, one on the call to a conversion of heart, and the other on the spirituality of dialogue. This plenary resulted in a decision to prepare a document on the spirituality of dialogue and Cardinal Arinze, the President of the PCID, was requested to write to the episcopal conferences of the world announcing this intention. In this letter he suggested the following points for the future document: God is both love and communion; God communicates with human beings; we are called to convert to God; Christian identity; proclamation and dialogue; the need to understand other believers; faith, hope and charity; prayer and sacrifice. He then asked for comments and suggestions.<sup>21</sup> On this basis a draft document was prepared and this was also sent to the episcopal conferences for comment. A further draft was then discussed in detail during another plenary assembly in November 2001.

According to the regulations of the Roman Curia, laid down in the Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, any document of the Holy See which touches on doctrine has to receive the approval of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The proposed document on the spirituality of dialogue was thus submitted and examined, but never received the necessary approval. The reasons for this refusal are not clear, but I would like to suggest the following. The drafters of the document had opted to take DM and DP as read, and thus did not wish to summarize their teaching. It may have been felt that the proposed document could prove misleading for those who came to it without a sufficient background knowledge.

In any case, all the elements of a spirituality for dialogue can be found in the preparatory papers that have been referred to here.

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<sup>18</sup> I have attempted to apply the teaching of DP to Christian-Muslim relations; cf. “‘Dialogue and Proclamation’ A reading in the Perspective of Christian-Muslim Relations” in Daniel KENDAL and Gerald O’COLLINS (eds.) *In Many and Diverse Ways. In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books 2003, pp.181-193.

<sup>19</sup> All these presentations are found in *Pro Dialogo* 92(1996/2).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Pro Dialogo* 97(1998/1).

<sup>21</sup> Cardinal Arinze’s letter, together with the text of the two talks mentioned, can be found in *Pro Dialogo* 101(1999/2).

### *Dialogue in Truth and Charity*

The PCID did produce a third official document in 2014, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its institution by Pope Paul VI<sup>22</sup>. It actually is the result of the tenth plenary assembly of the PCID held in June 2008. The first chapter on “The Church and Interreligious Dialogue” is a summary of the official teaching of the Church on this subject. Chapter 2 treats of the “Dynamics of Interreligious Dialogue”. It discusses the vocation to promote dialogue, formation in dialogue, and aspects and praxes (sic) of dialogue. Like Chapter 1, this chapter also is made up of a catena of quotations from Church documents. Chapter 3 looks at “Specific Fields of Interreligious Relations”. Here are to be found short reflections on defending human dignity and promoting the exercise of human rights, establishing bonds of trust and friendship among religious leaders, educating the youth for interreligious cooperation, interreligious cooperation in healthcare services, ministry to persons in interreligious marriages, and prayer and symbolic gestures.

The reflections in this Chapter are to some extent new, though it may be felt that they do not go far enough. As in the first two chapters the references given are to magisterial documents only. For instance, with regard to interreligious marriages reference is made to the *Code of Canon Law* and to the *Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches*. On prayer the reference is to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Yet the last two topics mentioned formed the subject of joint studies undertaken by the PCID and the corresponding office of the World Council of Churches. No reference is made to these studies, presumably because the ensuing joint publications are not considered to be the official teaching of the Catholic Church. This brings me to the final section of this paper, precisely on the collaboration with the World Council of Churches.

### *The ecumenical dimension of interreligious dialogue*

The relationship between ecumenism and interreligious dialogue is fairly evident. On the one hand, the scandal of the divisions among Christians is an obstacle to the witness of Christians in a multi-religious world, and conversely, as the *Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* notes, “interreligious relations are to be considered an important part of ecumenical cooperation”.<sup>23</sup> Very early on in its existence the SNC entered into contact with the corresponding body of the WCC. Sharing concerns, through attendance at each office’s reflection meetings, led eventually to an annual joint meeting of the staff of the two bodies, the PCID and the Office on Inter-Religious Relations (OIRR). This in turn led to common projects, some of which I would like to mention.

A desire to contribute towards peace in the Middle East led to a collaborative effort of the PCID and the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with Jews together with the Office on Interreligious Relations of the WCC and the General Secretariat of the Lutheran World Federation. This took the form of two meetings of Jews, Christians and Muslims, the first held in Glion, Switzerland, in May 1993, and the second in Thessaloniki, Greece, in 1996. Although

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<sup>22</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue in Truth and Charity. Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2014, 58p; also in *Pro Dialogo* 145(2014/1) pp.50-74.

<sup>23</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, Vatican City 1993, n°210.

these meetings were held in Europe, the majority of the participants came from Israel and Palestine<sup>24</sup>.

The increase in the number of marriages between Christians and people belonging to other religions led to a common document of the PCID and the OIRR<sup>25</sup>. Another topic which held the attention of both offices was that of interreligious prayer. The project was carried out in three stages. First a survey within local churches and different traditions on the practice of interreligious prayer. This was followed by a consultation bringing together some people experienced in this domain who produced a common statement. Finally a small group of theologians representing different Churches and coming from different parts of the world met to examine the theological foundations for interreligious prayer; they also produced a concluding statement. A selection of papers and both the above-mentioned statements are included in a joint publication of *Pro Dialogo* and the WCC's *Current Dialogue*.<sup>26</sup>

How to give Christian witness in a multi-religious world also retained the attention of the PCID and OIRR and led them to reach out to the World Evangelical Alliance. Together these bodies were able to produce a formal agreement on the essence of Christian mission: "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct"<sup>27</sup>. It is worth quoting the preamble to the document:

Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings. Aware of the tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and the varied interpretations of Christian witness, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and, at the invitation of the WCC, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), met during a period of 5 years to reflect and produce this document to serve as a set of recommendations for conduct on Christian witness around the world. The document does not intend to be a theological statement on mission but to address practical issues associated with Christian witness in a multi-religious world.

Since these three bodies, the Roman Catholic Church (through the PCID), the WCC and the WEA, have a combined membership of around 2 billion and represent nearly 90% of the world's Christians, this document can truly be seen as a major achievement. It deserves to be better known and especially to be put into practice.

### *Conclusion*

What can be concluded from all that has been said? First, I think, that NA has been a blessing and that it has had a definite impact on the life of the Church, enabling it to fulfil its mission as

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<sup>24</sup> Hans UCKO (ed.), *The Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem for Jews, Christians and Muslims*, Geneva, World Council of Churches 1994, 81p.

<sup>25</sup> "Reflections on Interreligious Marriage. A Joint Study Document" in *Pro Dialogo* 96(1997/3) pp.324-339, also in French, pp.340-356.

<sup>26</sup> *Pro Dialogo* 98(1998).

<sup>27</sup> *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES (FABC), Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) June 2011, 8p.

described in *Lumen Gentium*: “The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all human beings” (LG 1). Secondly that the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has provided good guidance for relations with people of other religions. Its official documents are not many (this is perhaps a good thing), but its other publications, including the journal *Pro Dialogo*, provide a wealth of material that can stimulate reflection and orientate action.

It is nevertheless necessary to add a further observation. Interreligious dialogue is not the monopoly of the Holy See. The real dialogue between Christians and people of other religions is carried out at the local level. The real task of the PCID is to assist and support these local efforts. So to trace the growth of interreligious dialogue since the promulgation of NA one would have to look at the role of national and regional commissions, the activities of different associations, and, of course, the role of religious congregations and institutes of consecrated life. But this would require a completely different paper from the one that was requested of me.

Texts of the Vatican documents referred to:

Nostra Aetate (1965)

[www.vatican.va/.../documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.ht](http://www.vatican.va/.../documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.ht).

The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission (1984).

[www.cimer.org.au/documents/DialogueandMission1984.pdf](http://www.cimer.org.au/documents/DialogueandMission1984.pdf)

Dialogue and Proclamation (1991)

[www.vatican.va/.../documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-...](http://www.vatican.va/.../documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-...)

Dialogue in Truth and Charity (2014)

[www.pcinterreligious.org/dialogue-in-truth-and-charity\\_204.htm](http://www.pcinterreligious.org/dialogue-in-truth-and-charity_204.htm)