

B/12B

Interreligious Dialogue and Small Christian Communities

An Integral part of the Evangelising Mission of the Church

Introduction

In this session we would like to understand the place of Interreligious Dialogue in the evangelising mission of the Church and how it is distinct from Proclamation.

Dialogue and Proclamation, are two aspects of the one Evangelizing Mission of the Church. This Evangelising Mission has other aspects as well which we will touch on briefly. However, for our discussion today we will focus on Interreligious Dialogue as one of the important elements in the whole Evangelizing Mission of the Church.

A. The Evangelising Mission of the Church

- a. *Read the following paragraphs carefully.*
 - b. *Match each one to a circle in the diagram below.*
 - c. *Give more examples of each aspect of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church from your own parish or personal life as a Christian.*
1. *Many of the parishioners of Holy Family Parish are actively living out their faith. We see them in action in the following paragraphs:*
 - a. *Alan lives in a neighbourhood where he is only Christian. He does not speak about his faith but he is much loved as he spends many hours each week visiting the sick and just sitting with them bringing them much comfort.*
 - b. *Jessie gathers the poor children around her school and gives them extra tuition and a nourishing meal every week.*
 - c. *Ken is often seen in deep conversation with his Buddhist neighbour. They are good friends and share deeply about their beliefs.*
 - d. *Wei Ling belongs to a prayer group that meets weekly and intercedes for all the parishioners and world-wide needs in prayer and worship.*
 - e. *Kumar has been working for 5 years already with the migrant workers and their families. He provides support in different ways.*
 - f. *Sister Gerry visits all the families in the area and tells them about the love of God.*



2. Study of Church Documents (In groups of 4/5)

- a. Read in small groups the following paragraphs
- b. Put on newsprint two or three sentences to explain what you understand by the Phrase, “The Evangelising Mission of the Church” and why evangelization is central to our lives as Christians.
- c. Report to the whole group and put up your newsprint as a reference for later.

1. Saint John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter on Mission explained the following:

The evangelizing mission of the Church contains many elements and is very rich and varied. As we try to understand the importance of dialogue and the attitudes needed, it is important not to lose sight of all the other important aspects of the Church’s evangelizing mission.

“Every church, even one made up of recent converts, is missionary by its very nature, and is both evangelized and evangelizing. Faith must always be presented as a gift of God to be lived out in community (families, parishes, associations), and to be extended to others through witness in word and deed. The evangelizing activity of the Christian community, first in its own locality, and then elsewhere as part of the Church’s universal mission, is the clearest sign of a mature faith.

A radical conversion in thinking is required in order to become missionary, and this holds true both for individuals and entire communities. The Lord is always calling us to come out of ourselves and to share with others the goods we possess, starting with the most precious gift of all - our faith. The effectiveness of the Church's organizations, movements, parishes and apostolic works must be measured in the light of this missionary imperative. Only by becoming missionary will the Christian community be able to overcome its internal divisions and tensions, and rediscover its unity and its strength of faith.”(RM49)¹

2. The love of God gives the Church a mission

“God is love (1John4:8,16) This saving love of God has been revealed and communicated to mankind in Christ and is present and active throughout the world by means of the Holy Spirit. The Church is the living sign of that love... This mission, Christ’s own, is one of love because in him it finds its source, goal and way of proceeding (AG2). Each aspect and activity of the Church’s mission must therefore be imbued with the spirit of love if it is to be faithful to Christ... it is the duty of all, according to the example of Jesus, as expressed in the early Church and in the lives of Saints...” (DM9-12)²

3. Motivation for missionary evangelization

The FABC has also spoken about the motivation for missionary evangelization:

“Why indeed, should we evangelize?... a) We evangelize, first of all, from a deep sense of gratitude to God.... b) But, mission is also a mandate.... c) We evangelize also because we believe in the Lord Jesus.... d) We evangelize also because we have been incorporated by baptism into the Church, which is missionary by its very nature.... e) And finally, we evangelize because the Gospel is leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society.” (FABC V #3.2).³

B. Dialogue and Proclamation:

In groups of 4/5 read the text from a Church document given to you and do the following:

1. *Discuss what you understand about Dialogue and Proclamation.*
2. *What is the difference between Dialogue and Proclamation?*
3. *Report on question 2 using any medium – drama, a role play, a poster or a verbal explanation.*
4. *Summarise in the whole group the place of Dialogue and Proclamation in the Evangelizing Mission of the Church.*

Introduction

“The practise of dialogue raises problems in the minds of many. There are those who would seem to think, erroneously, that in the Church’s mission today dialogue should simply replace proclamation. At the other extreme some fail to see the value of interreligious dialogue.” (DP#4c)⁴

1. Proclamation

“Proclamation is the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realised by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church...” (DP#10)⁵

2. Christians and People of other Faiths

In 1994 the Secretariat for Non-Christians in Rome said the following: “The Second Vatican Council has marked a new landmark in the relations of the church with the followers of other religions. ...In a world of change (we recognise) the ideal of dialogue”.

3. Interreligious dialogue as part of the Church’s Evangelizing Mission

The Asian Bishops together with Pope John Paul II have expressed it as follows: “Contact, dialogue and cooperation with the followers of other religions is a task which the Second Vatican Council bequeathed to the whole Church as a duty and a challenge.... From the Christian point of view, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission, an expression of the mission ‘ad gentes’.” (EA 31)⁶

C. What is Interreligious Dialogue?

Let us now ask ourselves the question: What is Interreligious Dialogue?

Read the following texts in buzz groups and discuss the questions below:

1. “All positive constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment in obedience to truth and respect for freedom” (DP#9).
2. There are four commonly accepted forms of interreligious dialogue. These are summarised in the 1991 joint document of the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Dialogue and Proclamation(DP#42):
 - 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.

Questions for discussion:

1. ***What is meant by Interreligious Dialogue?***
2. ***Why would these forms of dialogue be useful or important? Which form of dialogue are you familiar with – explain?***
3. ***If you have engaged in the Dialogue of Life or Common Action, share some stories and examples.***

D. Why Interreligious Dialogue?

1. *Each small group of 3 or 4 persons to read two paragraphs.*
2. *Explain it to each in the small group.*
3. *Report on what you have understood from your two paragraphs: in a poster, role play, poem or any other way. (20 minutes)*

Pope Saint John Paul II gives us six points in his document "Redemptoris Missio". These are the six theological foundations as follows:

1. *We are all one human family*
The Common origin and single destiny of the human race in God. (In RM this is often referred to as the "Mystery of Unity" of the human race in paragraphs 3, 7, 11 and 28.)
2. *We are going together towards God and his great love*
It means that we are on a common journey and we all seek the fullness of life and truth. This makes it necessary for us to search and explore together the truth about God.
3. *We are convinced that Jesus wants to save all peoples everywhere.*
"Universal Salvation in Jesus Christ". We believe that all peoples are loved and saved by Jesus Christ. No one is excluded from his saving love and will. Since we believe this we have a duty to seek the face of Christ in our sisters and brothers of other faiths and participate in the saving work of Christ.
4. *God's Holy Spirit is present and working beyond the Church.*
"Active presence of the Holy Spirit". The Holy Spirit blows where she wills and works beyond the boundaries of the Church. We need to follow the leading of the Spirit to reach out to all no matter of what race, religion or culture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
5. *The Reign of God can be found beyond Church boundaries.*
"Universality of the Reign of God". The Kingdom of God can be found wherever there is love and where truth is defended. Our hope in dialogue is to make God all in all for all peoples.
6. *There are truths to be found in every religion and we can learn from them.*
"In Interreligious Dialogue the Church seeks to discover 'the seeds of the Word' that are found in the persons and religious traditions of human kind". The Church is "stimulated both to discover and acknowledge signs of Christ's presence and in the working of the Spirit as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of revelation which she has received for the good of all". (RM#56)

In addition to the six points above, in 2014, Pope Francis had this to say about IRD while speaking to the President of Turkey

IRD can bring about peace and harmony:

“Mr President, interreligious and intercultural dialogue can make an important contribution to attaining this lofty and urgent goal(*of peace and sustainable development*), so that there will be an end to all forms of fundamentalism and terrorism which gravely demean the dignity of every man and woman and exploit religion.

Fanaticism and fundamentalism, as well as irrational fears which foster misunderstanding and discrimination, need to be countered by the solidarity of all believers. This solidarity must rest on the following pillars: respect for human life and for religious freedom, that is the freedom to worship and to live according to the moral teachings of one’s religion; commitment to ensuring what each person requires for a dignified life; and care for the natural environment.”⁷

E. SCCs and Interreligious Dialogue

SCCs are a good and practical place to enter into interreligious dialogue. People of different faith and culture living in the same neighbourhood can come to appreciate the good in religious and cultural practices. They can celebrate certain cultural or religious festivals together and plan activities which are helpful to both.

Some of the possible interreligious activities which could be undertaken at the SCC level are:

- Celebrating Festivals together
- Trying to understand religious convictions and practices of each religion.
- Planning service activities together
- Working together to remove prejudices and misunderstandings about each other
- Fighting against corruption, injustice, human trafficking, etc.

Conclusion

In this session we looked at:

1. The Evangelising Mission of the Church and how dialogue is an integral part of that Mission.
2. The four forms of dialogue and how we can engage in interreligious dialogue.
3. Why Interreligious dialogue is important as we see from its theological foundations.
4. How SCCs can engage in interreligious activities.

Let us reflect together

What can we do as a Small Christian Community to strengthen our relations with the people of different faiths in our neighbourhood?

What can we do to teach ourselves to be more skilled at dialogue? What would help us enter into interreligious dialogue?

Pray and sing to close the session.

¹RM 49RedemptorisMissio (RM) - On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate, Pope John Paul II, Pub 1990, Vatican Press. Rome.

² The attitude of the church towards the followers of other religions - Reflections and orientations on **dialogue and mission**, (DM) Secretariat pro non Christians, Vatican city, Pentecost 1984 paragraphs 9-12

³FABC Plenary Assembly 5, Bandung, Indonesia 1990. Para 3.2

⁴ Ibid #4c

ENDNOTES:

5 Dialogue and Proclamation (DP) – Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Pub 1991 Vatican City by Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

6 Ecclesia in Asia (EA), post-synodal
Apostolic exhortation, Pope John Paul II

On Jesus Christ the saviour And his mission of love and service In Asia:

1999, Vatican City, Rome. Para 31 (full text follows) "...Contact, dialogue and cooperation with the followers of other religions is a task which the Second Vatican Council bequeathed to the whole Church as a duty and a challenge. ... From the Christian point of view, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission, an expression of the mission *ad gentes*. (RM55) Christians bring to interreligious dialogue the firm belief that the fullness of salvation comes from Christ alone and that the Church community to which they belong is the *ordinary means* of salvation.¹⁵⁴ Here I repeat what I wrote to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: "Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without failing Jesus Christ who is 'the way and the truth and the life'... The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people".

In the process of dialogue, as I have already written in my Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, "there must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings". Only those with a mature and convinced Christian faith are qualified to engage in genuine interreligious dialogue. "Only Christians who are deeply immersed in the mystery of Christ and who are happy in their faith community can without undue risk and with hope of positive fruit engage in interreligious dialogue". It is therefore important for the Church in Asia to provide suitable models of interreligious dialogue—evangelization in dialogue and dialogue for evangelization—and suitable training for those involved.

Having stressed the need in interreligious dialogue for firm faith in Christ, the Synod Fathers went on to speak of the need for *a dialogue of life and heart*. The followers of Christ must have the gentle and humble heart of their Master, never proud, never condescending, as they meet their partners in dialogue (cf. *Mt* 11:29). "Interreligious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences. For all this, love of others is indispensable. This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment".

⁷ Pope Francis to President of Turkey, November 2014.

Resources on IRD

1. The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions, reflections and orientations on Dialogue and Mission. (DM) 1984, Vatican City
2. Dialogue and Proclamation (DP) – Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Pub 1991 Vatican City by Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.
3. Pope John Paul II, Ecclesia in Asia (EA), post-synodal Apostolic exhortation, On Jesus Christ the saviour And his mission of love and service In Asia.
4. FABC Plenary Assembly 5, Final Statement 1990, Bandung, Indonesia.
5. FABC Office of Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs (OEIA), a glimpse at dialogue in Asia 30th anniversary first bishops' institute for interreligious affairs (BIRA), 2010. FABC Paper 130
6. Kroeger, James MM, Dialogue – Interpretive Key for the Life of the church in Asia, 2010, FABC Paper 131.
7. Cajilit, Vincente & University Santo Tomas, Center for Contextualised Ethics with Michel, Thomas, Module Making for Dialogue with Islam, FABC Papers 114.
8. Chia, Edmund, Interreligious Dialogue in pursuit of Fullness of Life in Asia, FABC 7th Plenary Assembly, 2000, FABC Papers 92k.
9. Kramer & Vellguth, Mission and Dialogue – approaches to a communicative understanding of mission. 2012, Herder, Germany

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10. Kroeger, James - "An 'Asian' Dialogue Decalogue. Principles of Interreligious Dialogue from Asia's Bishops".paper delivered at the Theological Forum on "Theological Views on Religions and Cultures" July 21-23, 2011 at the Loyola School of Theology, Manila, Philippines.
 11. International Theological Commission. Christianity and the World Religions, 1997.
 12. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World, 2011.
 13. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Dialogue in Truth and Charity: Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue. CittàdelVaticano: LibreriaeditriceVaticana, 2014.

Websites:

Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID):

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/index.htm

<http://www.pcinterreligious.org/>

Columban Interreligious Dialogue:

<http://columbanird.org/>

Jesuit Interreligious Dialogue and Relations:

<http://groups.creighton.edu/sdialogue/>

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