

(English translation)

Aachen (Germany), November 13, 1998

Jesus Forsaken and Mary as Key points to Interreligious Dialogue (Part II)

...

However, there is an aspect of our Movement's spirituality which, more than any other, is the key for understanding at its roots, the meaning and results of its interreligious dialogue: It is Jesus crucified, meditated, loved, contemplated above all in his cry of abandonment: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Indeed, Jesus made himself empty in that moment, he lost everything: his life, his mother, his disciples; he lost everything, even the feeling that he was united to God; and he did this in order to make himself one with us, to understand us, to pay for us. We must look at him.

Moreover, this suffering of Jesus, which brought him to utter self-annihilation, holds a very special fascination especially for the faithful of other religions. They too want to be empty, to lose, to be detached, and they find themselves close to Christianity if we present a Christianity that loves in this way.

Moreover, Jesus crucified and the world religions is a topic of great interest today. It has been affirmed by Waldenfels: "Today all religions cross paths with one another, each one with its own history, in front of the cross of Christ."⁽¹⁾

Of course, all this does not exclude the fact that there must be theological discussion on many fundamental questions, but loving in this way facilitates dialogue too, because people feel understood, because we understand them, because we save all that is beautiful in them, the "seeds of the Word."

Now, the experience of Christian-Buddhist dialogue lived by the Movement so far, both with personalities of the academic world and with the ordinary faithful, is confirmed by the opinion of an eminent scholar of religions, Terrin. He said: "Buddhism needs to be understood within a profound religious experience; it needs a 'mystical glance', for the truth it bears to be recognized"⁽²⁾

A few more words, something new perhaps in many environments, on another element which greatly facilitates our unity - and people don't believe this - with the other religions. It's Mary. Maybe it's because Jesus redeemed everyone; maybe it's because Mary is the Mother of all. In any case, she is very important in interreligious dialogue, very important.

It is the role of the Mother of God, Mary, who offers the foundation and proper soil so that those "seeds of the Word" may bud forth. In fact, she was the first custodian who welcomed within herself the Seed of the Word, par excellence.

Also the Protestant Catechism affirms that "Mary is not only Catholic, but also Evangelical."³ The other religions too feel very attracted to Mary. For example, the Jews say: Mary is Jewish, indeed, a Jewish mother, and her Jewish roots are highlighted today by Jewish scholars.

This might sound strange at first for those who don't know it, but Mary is very present in the Qur'an. Her name is mentioned 34 times. Mohammed counts her as one of the great people chosen by God and as a model of sanctity that should always be imitated.

Therefore, in some way, Mary is also Muslim for the Muslims, who consider her as a model of faith, religiosity and discretion, for her virginity, her prodigious maternity, and her highest dignity.

This with regard to the religions of the Sacred Book: Christianity, Judaism, Islam.

1 H. Waldenfels, *Gesù Crocifisso e le grandi religioni*, Naples, 1987, p. 60.

2 A.N. Terrin, *La ricerca di Dio nelle religioni*, Bologna 1980, p. 218.

3 *Evangelischer Erwachsenen-Katechismus*, Gütersloh, 1989, p. 416.

But it is touching also to see how Buddhism is drawing near to Mary as the one who represents humanity. As the scholar, Don Mitchell, says. “Mary is that emptiness, that boundless womb full of the greatest compassion for every living being.”⁴

Why is Mary like this? Why is she loved by everyone? Because she made herself nothing. Her greatness lies in her “kenosis”, in her becoming nothing. Although she was a super-elected person, she emptied herself and became a positive emptiness of love through her total and unconditional acceptance of the will of God.

Like Mary, we too should be infinitely aware of our nothingness so that God may dwell within us. In other words, we are nothing, really nothing, we must tell ourselves this. We are great if there is Jesus in us. Or in the words of Bishop Klaus Hemmerle: “The Holy Spirit is given by God without measure (cf. Jn. 3:34); thus, to be received, he requires measureless, infinite emptiness.”

Perhaps we can find the secret and true meaning of interreligious dialogue here: in this acceptance and emptiness of love which our brothers and sisters of other faiths must find in us Christians in order to discover the Love of God, who through us, loves them immensely.

Therefore, we too, the Focolare Movement, is working with the Church so that the religious pluralism of humanity will lose more and more of that negative content - emphasized by all the extremist movements - that negative content that foments divisions and wars, and acquire, in the conscience of millions of men and women, the sense of a challenge: that of recomposing the unity of the human family, because in some way the Holy Spirit is present and active in all religions, in some way, not only in the individual members, but also within each religious tradition.

John Paul II described the wonderful event of Assisi as the “marvelous manifestation of the unity that links us beyond all differences and divisions.”⁵

Let us fill our hearts then with true love. With it, we can hope for all things: unity among the faithful of other religions and brotherhood lived by all humanity. ...

4 Cf. D. W. Mitchell, *Kenosis e nulla assoluto*, Città Nuova, 1993, pp. 282 seg.

5 Assisi: *Giornata Mondiale di Preghiera per la Pace*, Tip. Pol. Vaticana 1987, p. 149.