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Quaderni del Centro Studi Asiatico

I *Quaderni del CSA* ospitano articoli e studi che riflettano su alcuni fenomeni religiosi, socio-economici, politici, culturali e missionari delle Regioni Saveriane presenti in Asia. Essi si propongono anche di far conoscere eventi o esperienze che possano arricchire ed essere di aiuto ad altri missionari coinvolti nelle stesse attività.

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Dialogue and *Missio Dei*

The Asian Xavierian Perspective — Taipei 12–15 febbraio 2019

PAULIN BATAIRWA KUBUYA

The area of mission (theoretical and practical) has been undergoing a major change since Vatican II. The evolution is calling for a rethinking and re-adaptation of the interpretation of mission enacted by many congregations committed to first proclamation of the Gospel to Non-Christians. Till Vatican II, missionary congregations have worked within a geographic and territorial understanding of mission. Mission occurred in territories where Jesus and the Gospel were not known and with people who had not heard, nor received His saving message. In the ideal situation, the fruit of an effective missionary activity would have been the reception of the message, culminating with conversion to Christianity and the creation of a new Christian community.

Interreligious dialogue is one of the new aspects of *Missio Dei*, which Vatican II has affirmed and exhorted Christians to engage in (NA no. 2). Interreligious dialogue, however, calls for a rethinking of the traditional praxis of mission. Through its Magisterium, the Church has been offering guidance on the implementation of this new sector of evangelization. Since 1974, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) has been fostering dialogue as the «Way of being Church» and «Doing mission» in Asia. As for the Xavierians, the *Ratio Missionis Xavieriana* (RMX) enlists Interreligious dialogue in the fields of Xavierian ways to mission. As an implementation of inventive spirit in creating methods of evangelization, as stipulated in the *Constitutions* (no. 4), Xavierian circumscriptions across Asia have taken steps towards making Interreligious dialogue a modality of a missionary engagement.

The articles appearing in this volume were contributed to enhance a contextualized reflection on Interreligious dialogue in the respective Xavierian circumscriptions in Asia. They deal with the contextual responses Xavierians—as individuals and communities—are giving to the awareness of the plural religious context in which they live their Xavierian missionary call. The articles were the raw material for the meeting hosted by the Chinese Delegation in Taipei on February 12–16, 2019. A deepened study of the sharing helped identify some common patterns across our missions. As stated in the final report,

they helped us achieve the threefold objectives assigned to the meeting. First, they raised awareness of the Interreligious dialogue activity happening in each circumscription; second, they brought about a reflection on the essence, foundation and implication of Interreligious dialogue as an integral aspect of the Xaverian mission; and lastly, they helped participants directly working in Interreligious dialogue to make concrete suggestions to promote further Interreligious dialogue engagement in each circumscription.

Interreligious dialogue is both an opportunity and a challenge, for it compels us to rethink mission beyond the traditional «Christian/pagan» epistemic framework, to acknowledge diverse motives as outlets for the human quests for ultimate meaning, and to attune to the infinite ways God's saving grace is active in human history. It requires confreres directly involved in this new missionary field to align with the vision of the Founder, calling them to cultivate «a broad vision, a rich and balanced personality capable of adaptation, and a cultural formation consistent with the demands of our mission» (*Constitutions* no. 4).



Xaverian Community and Interreligious Dialogue in Bangladesh

DOMENICO PIETANZA

After the Liberation War (1971), the help of Western countries to give food to the starving population, set up schools, hospitals and the administrative infrastructure of the country was followed by a process of gradual Islamization. During the Pakistani period, the Bangladeshi Muslims were accused of not being pure Muslims. The aim was to eliminate all different kinds of traditions, ways of doing, cultural feasts and religious praxis that came from a traditional Hindu background, and were not in line with the strict Wahabism of Saudi Arabia, preached by Maulana Abul Ala Moududi (1903–1979). All the religious groups of East Pakistan (the future Bangladesh) used, in the name of «One-society» theory, to participate in the feasts. Those Sufi, who came from the Middle East and had preached Islam for the first time in the thirteenth century, allowed the Muslim community to practice such traditions. I think Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists participating actively in the feasts created a good occasion to be together, to bind themselves in friendship.

But that was now no longer so. From the beginning, the Muslim community set itself apart and then started actual opposition, first only in words, but afterwards with bombings. The followers of Moududi, the founder of the political party Jamati-e-Islami, with the financial support of petrol-dollars, started preaching strict Islam. This political group is highly conservative, resembling the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. They seek to build a perfect Muslim society. They started to set up thousands and thousands of Koranic schools (madrasa), from the first grade to the highest degree, and many of their students many were subsequently sent to Saudi Arabia to study at Saudi universities. In all this activity, Saudi Arabia has a relevant role. In the madrasas, Koran reading and memorization, the preaching and sayings of the Prophet (Hadiths), Arabic and Urdu languages, Sharia and the personal laws are taught. Bengali language, maths, history of Bangladesh, geography, and accounting, however, are not taught. According to their teaching, Islam is the only true religion on earth, and everybody must follow it if they want to receive salvation in the afterlife. An anti-Western mentality prevails, emphasizing the dangers of freedom. The pornography and immorality (excess of nudity) that they say are wide-

spread in Western countries, along with what they describe as Christian polytheism, are condemned in their teachings. In this way, the Muslim community sets itself apart from the other religious communities, resulting in the loss of respect for the religion of others, and social harmony. Madrasa teachers create a culture of violence and hatred against non-Muslims in the minds of students. The poor who cannot afford to send their children to public schools or those who wish to give their children a strict formation in Islam send them to madrasas. These schools are free of charge, as they receive economic assistance. The madrasas are supported by the Gulf Muslim countries, Non-Government Organizations and those employed in the Middle East. The public schools receive a monthly fee from students, which does not cover all the expenses of the schools, but there is a government subsidy.

Another way for the Imams to take charge of the formation of the people is the Mid-day prayer and the prayer teaching imparted under a tent from the first hours of evening to midnight, with a loudspeaker system covering the area outside the prayer tent.

Day after day, the separation between the Muslim community and other religious groups becomes clearer, as do the oppression and injustices perpetrated by the majority group and afflicting the minority (Hindu, Buddhists, Natural religion groups and Christians). Injustices, favouritism in running the social, military and political administration creates unease and fear in minority groups. In Bengali language we call it «moulobism.» Moulobi are the maulana Islamic scholars. The minority groups, however, have as good relations as possible with other minorities. Legal oaths, both military and civil, are taken on the Koran, by Moslems and non-Moslems alike.

In this situation, apart from the extremely poor, Hindus with relatives in India send one of their children to study in India. At first, only one child in the family, then subsequently more children in the family followed this practice. Parents, after retiring from jobs in Bangladesh and receive all related social benefits, sell their property and leave for India. From time to time they return to visit friends. Their children in the meantime start to work or are finishing their studies. The Hindu community is looking forward to going to India. Most often, after a general election, local leaders of the party which is going into power illegally seize the property of Hindus (houses, land, shops), forcing them to leave and take shelter in India to save their lives. If exodus to India is salvation for Hindus; what about Christians one asks.

In Bangladesh, every religious group has its «Personal Law» concerned with family-related laws, marriage, divorce, hereditary property and adoption. These laws differ, depending on personal religion. There is, however, no restriction on interfaith marriage.

In this country, it is strictly forbidden for Muslims to change their religion. If Christian preachers are accused of converting people to Christianity they face trial. This law does not apply to tribal people residing in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, there is freedom of cult, but not of religion. In the 1972 Constitution there was mention of «secularism,» meaning everybody may profess his or her religion freely, and there was no other item mentioned. In 1988, in the constitution was changed to state that «Islam is the state religion» and the phrase «In the name of Allah the most compassionate and the merciful» was added. On 1 August 2013 Jamati-e-Islami was declared illegal by the Supreme Court.

Terrorism in Bangladesh

The Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1989) caused the local Muslim population to take up arms to force the Soviet army to return to Russia. During that time, the USA helped the Afghanistan freedom fighters, both economically and militarily. Bin Laden, incidentally, was one Muslim leader who received such benefits. The Afghanistan Muslims and those from neighbouring countries, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh went to help their Muslim brothers to defend Islam, fighting the infidel Soviet army. After the withdraw of the Soviet Army from Afghanistan, Bangladeshi Muslims returned to their own country, with knowledge and training in, making bombs, grenades and other explosives. In order to reach their targets, they set up underground groups, which during the years have taken different names, and enrolled as many young people as possible, to strengthen their groups. Explosives making materials are available in the Bangladeshi market. The madrasa students were good manpower for using the explosives. The maulana ideologically prepared and motivated them by saying it was necessary to protect Islam from the Western Christian imperialism that was destroying Islam and its values. If they were killed, they would go directly to Paradise. The bombs were not only used against Christians and Hindus, but also against different Muslim groups in the country, who were seen as destroying the unity of the Ummah, the Muslim community.

On 6 March 1999 in Jeshare, the terrorists carried out the first significant. They placed two bombs under the stage at a cultural program organized by the Bangladesh Marxist-Leninist movement, killing ten. On the occasion of the beginning of the New Bengali Year on 14 April 2001, a further two bombs under the stage, killed ten people. On 3 June of the same year in Baniarchor, a bomb exploded during Mass, killing yet another ten youths. The Muslim terrorists also kill Muslims atheists, atheist bloggers, Sufis, Bauls, Amodiyyah, Shiahs, foreigners believed not to be Muslims and Muslim leaders

who speak against terrorism. Their goal is to spread terror, insecurity, and murder those who do not support their ideology, in order to gain power by any means. Homosexuals and LGBTs people are murdered by terrorists or ordinary people and there are no subsequent trials. Nobody says anything.

After the murder of 22 (among whom 19 foreigners,) at Harley Artisan Bakery in Dhaka when the government was strongly criticized for not taking immediate steps against the terrorists, the Bangladesh government set up a Police Anti-terrorism Unit to tackle the problem. The police started raids in terrorist dens, killing them. Sometimes a husband and wife with small children were killed; sometimes entire families, parents and small children alike killed themselves so as not to fall into the hands of the police. And the fighting is ongoing.

The Catholic Church in Bangladesh

In this dark situation, the Church prefers to stay together in his own group. The Church does not believe in Interreligious dialogue and so it does not take part in any. It is not in their minds try to meet good and open people of different faiths working for the benefit of society and trying to do something together with them for the peace and happiness of society. Just to show they are doing something, the Bishops organize meetings with the people who in one way or another are connected with them or with church activities and send reports. There is no plan and they do not try to be present in the broader society. Their aim is to show to the Vatican and to donors that they are doing something. They do not consider whether what happens at the international level in the Church can be effected here in Bangladesh. Papal visits to Muslim countries are not covered by Bangladeshi newspapers.

The Catholic Church hierarchy and faithful live in permanent fear, which blocks them. «You cannot trust Muslims» they say. Once Bin Laden said the same thing about Muslims of the Sub-continent. Such statements have a strong impact on social relations. They are weak because people do not trust one another, and we have to work very hard to be sure that what somebody is saying is really true. This is another reason for being a part of the main stream of Bangladeshi society.

Until 20 years ago, every religious group had a sub-structure to run its own group. Government officials were not involved. Unless serious mistakes were made, they approved what the leaders of the group had decided. Quarrels in families and between husbands and wives, problems of inheritance of land and property, extra-marital relations

were settled in a friendly way within the group (Millet system). When the entities belonged to other groups, their leaders used to settle the problems together. This system, however, is no longer operational. The Supreme Court decided that all problems among citizens are to be solved by local political authorities, which have slight judicial power, or by judiciary power (courts, judges). In the Christian groups the priest was called to settle the problems, by asking the help of the group leaders. In this way, Muslims were not involved.

Xaverian Community in Bangladesh

Almost all Xaverians in Bangladesh work outside parishes, except Fr Valoti Lorenzo who is Parish Priest in a parish inhabited by outcastes, and Fr Giovanni Gargano residing in a sub-centre of Mymensingh diocese inhabited by tribal people. All others are involved directly with people of other faiths. Fr Sergio Targa is the Director of Training Centre but is involved in some informal schools in the Rishi area.

Fr Gabriele Spiga runs a Centre for disabled people in a remote village in an outcaste area. He started this activity in 1983. He lives with disabled people, takes care of them personally, something strange in Bangladeshi culture. He cures them, and takes them to hospitals for surgical operations if needs be. Fr. Spiga is helped by a Catholic family. He also organises I and II basic level classes for village children, as well as some higher level tuition. He keeps in touch with village people. It is a «strange life, that one» people say. At the beginning people thought that he went there to make conversions, but this suspicion does not exist anymore.

Fr Luigi Paggi runs ministry among the Munda (tribal population). In the 1981, he left the parish activity to create a new presence among the outcastes. When, in the parish, he understood that the people were not interested in religion; rather his Catholic people were interested in sending their children to school to improve their economic situation, in starting economic activities to live well and have a healthy life. He realized the importance of this stance and so he left the parish of Satkhira and in Chuknagor to start a centre for development among the Rishis. He studied the social and psychological aspects of this people and settled with them permanently. He subsequently set up a school for the classes I, II and III. He ensured that masters were proficient. Schoolmasters schools, outcastes themselves, were helped to become aware of their social and psychological problems. After class III children were sent to public schools. They were considerably more knowledgeable than the other children; attained good marks in exams, and managed to

show themselves as more proficient than pupils from other backgrounds (in public speaking and dance). Before, outcaste children were not given the room to sit together with the other children; they would sit on the floor and would be put down and scolded if they were late, or in dirty uniforms. Fr Luigi had regular meetings with masters, taking up the most sensitive issues with them. Local youths and college professors started dropping by for informal chats with the Father at the centre, but soon set up schedule meetings. Father collected books, Indian movies, and the history of their problems. Once his influence in the area was established, he would give classes at colleges, and Non-Government Organizations were set up by his followers. He began Bible and Catholicism lessons and before departing, he baptized approximately a dozen youths.

At the end, locals would say that Fr Luigi came from an outcaste family in Italy, was one of them, and for that reason he could live amongst them and knows many things about Bangladeshi outcastes. He stayed there for 20 years.

He moved to Isworipur, Munda land, in the extreme south of Bangladesh, 50 kilometres from the ocean. There is a group of Munda, not local tribes, who went there in the mid-1800s to fell trees for the British Raj. He started schooling for the local tribal children. In light of child-marriages, he opened a girls' boarding school and began teaching English in a local college. He ensures that all the children go to school and keeps in touch with the local youth. Fr John Fagan directs Khrisnagar Munda Centre, which is similar to Isworipur Centre. Fr John and Fr Luigi collaborate in the same activities and otherwise help each other in their ministry.

Fr Rocky Gomes and Fr Germano Antonio currently run the Chuknagog Centre. They continue the activity of Fr Paggi, taking care of the different schools in several local villages. They also run a tuition program in different villages, with monthly teachers' meetings. In these meetings, there is also time for organization and the development of deep awareness among the outcastes. Fr Germano has attached great importance to conversions to Christianity. There is a Church building, together with a building for tuition programmes. He established a three-year catechumenate program before baptism. There are some 50 Catholic families there.

Since 1995, Fr Riccardo Tobanelli has run a ministry among street children. At the beginning, he started in Khulna, giving the street children a shelter with meals, showers, and a night-time refuge. Previously, the children spent day-time streets begging on the streets, and nights in the centre. Two houses were built for them, one for girls and the other for boys. Little by little, Fr. Tobanelli started to send the children to school, and some of them achieved BA degrees. Afterwards, he moved to Dhaka (2006) to take care

of the children in industrial areas. With the help of the grown street children of Khulna, he started the same activity in different suburbs of Dhaka. He currently runs a house for approximately fifty street children at Noluakuri, 100 kilometres from Dhaka.

Dr. Claudio Modonutti is medical officer at Dinajpur Catholic Hospital. There is an Italian Surgeon Project run by Fr Carlos Delgadillo. Since 1991 a group of surgeons come to Khulna to operate. There are different specialists (Maxillo facial, orthopaedic, paediatric, general medicine, urology and gynaecology). The activity starts at the beginning of October and finishes just before Easter. There is a break from just before Christmas until the 5th of January. On average, a thousand surgical operations are offered free of charge during the six-month programme. At the start-up generous financial help was granted by the Xaverians who collected sufficient funds for the necessary medicine and equipment. Doctors and nurses would provide money to buy the air tickets¹.

Khulna Interreligious Dialogue Center Activity

In 1983, Fr Sebastiano Tedesco, Parish Priest in Satkhira started a group of people of different faiths meeting together regularly to share about their own faith. The group included teachers, professors, and imams. The aim was to know the religion and the faith of others, to respect each other and create a friendly environment of peace and harmony in society. They would hold meetings in different parishes, to involve other people too.

In 1986, Xaverian missionaries started the Interreligious Centre in Khulna diocese to promote dialogue in a better way, with constant and regular meetings among the different religious groups in Khulna diocese. At that time, the religious political situation in Bangladesh was in favour of dialogue. Among the Muslim group, there were people ready to meet those of other religions, and to get to know the religion of the «other.» There were friendly relations and eagerness to know each other. In these meetings, the imam of the mosque who was very much the pride of the interreligious group used to bring with him people from his mosque to attend the meetings. But little by little the atmosphere changed. When our Centre started its activity, the most numerous group was that of the professors of St. Joseph's High School run by the Khulna diocese. Nowadays there are more or less sixty people belonging to Islam, Hindu and Christian religions from here in Khulna. They are professionals, bank managers, professors, NGO employees. We hold meetings every two months and the atmosphere is friendly. Two or three times a year, we

1. For more information on the activities run by the Xaverians in Bangladesh, see our webpage: <www.bangladesh.xaverians.org>.

select topical issues, and organize meetings for the public to discuss them. In the yearly plan of the Centre, every group has one religious festival that is a topic for the public meetings. We celebrate Harmony Day, and have an Annual Seminar, with the publishing of a magazine. Ian, an employee from the Centre, joins me to meet class IX and X students to speak about the necessity and importance of having friendly relations between the people of different religions in Bangladesh. We ask for two school periods. In one school run by the diocese we have three/four classes a year. The topic in question is not just related to Christianity, but to all the religions. The purpose of the classes is to help develop awareness. We follow the same procedure in the college in Khulna. I myself have no problem with this work in the Diocesan-run high schools. For other schools, we try to receive the cooperation of friends who contact the school principals. I am trying to foster this activity in other schools with Christian communities. For the Christmas festival, I ask some Catholics to prepare articles on this celebration for a local in Khulna and English newspaper in Dhaka. We have a webpage and a post on Facebook in the name of Interreligious Dialogue Center Khulna². A problem that I see is a certain fear among people not to be shown as adhering to a particular religion in public. We are also researching possible new venues to share our programmes.

Conclusion

In Bangladesh, interreligious activity is challenging. What we can do is to work with a few people on a small scale, hoping for something better in the future. We need considerable patience and endurance in our activity, not only for the interreligious activity but for our entire mission. In the past, it was somewhat easier due to the presence of a friendlier environment in the society thanks to the Sufis/Pirs activities in the country. Now the activity of Sufis does not exist anymore, as Jamati-i-Islami says that it is not pure Islam. The Bangladesh society, even at school teacher level, looks after money business, and so on. Everybody tries to earn as much as possible, not giving any importance to the formation of the young generations, or the values that make society strong and peaceful. Many people are not interested any more in religion. College students do not want to speak or listen to talk about religion. College and university students do not practise it. They consider it rubbish. Parents, very busy with their jobs, do not care about the proper formation and education of their children. They practice a practical atheism in which somebody says

2. See <www.irdialoguekhulna.org>.

that he is atheist. What to do is a big problem. Muslim leaders do not see the problem, they go on their own. A spreading diffusion of drugs and alcohol is very much present in the big cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong, and to some extent in Khulna. Middle and upper class children have all the facilities and money that Western youth have. Police are busy arresting those who sell drugs, but the problem remains. What strikes me is that very few speak about it.

Bangladesh in Statistics

Population 167,000,000; literacy percentage 64%; population density 1278 Km², poverty rate 24%; extreme poverty rate 13%. 40% of population live in urban areas.

Muslim percentage 90% (almost all of them are Sunni, and there are very few Shi-ite); Hindu percentage 8%; Buddhist percentage (Theravada) 0.60%; Christian percentage 0.40%; Natural Religion percentage 0.14%. There are also Sikh and Ahmadiyya. 5% are atheist.

Indonesia: Interreligious Dialogue in the Context of Religious Radicalism

RAYMUNDUS IVAN

Indonesia has hundreds of tribes, cultures and religions. This diversity is wealth for the Republic of Indonesia, but often creates unhealthy conflicts and disputes, especially among people of other faiths. One example of the problems facing Indonesia today is the existence of identity politics, where political actors use religious elements in their efforts to fulfill their interests. This politics of identity also leads to conflicts and disputes in the lower levels of society, especially between Muslims and non-Muslims. This paper will present a glimpse of the intolerance and radicalization that has developed in Indonesia lately, as well as interfaith dialogue activities in the Indonesian Xaverian community.

Intolerance and Radicalism

The terms «intolerance» and «radicalism» have a special meaning.¹ *Intolerance* usually refers to attitudes and actions in the name of religion aimed at opposing and obstructing or denying civil rights of citizens guaranteed by the constitution. Intolerance includes denial of non-Muslim rights and is seen as the most deplorable issue in terms of the rights of non-Muslims. Two examples that often occur in Indonesia are the refusal to allow the establishing of a house of worship and of the right to hold prayers at home. Meanwhile, *radicalism* refers to participation, even willingness to participate, in activities that have the potential to include violence in the name of religion. The radicalization that often occurs in Indonesia is carried out by hardline Islamic organizations such as FPI.²

Research shows that radical Islamic organizations such as FPI have efficient strategies and tactics.³ For example, when they wish to ban the Ahmadiyya community, they have precise tactics to attract many supporters from non-radical Islamic communities.

1. Muhammad Nurul Huda, *Intoleransi Kaum Muda di Tengah Kebangkitan Kelas Menengah Muslim di Perkotaan*, (Jakarta: Wahid Foundation, 2017), 5.

2. FPI (Front Pembela Islam) is a very well-known radical organization. FPI was founded in 1998 by Habib Muhammad Rizieq Syihab with his three friends who were extremists mubalig (extremis religious leaders).

3. Cf. Bdk. Hasani, Ismail dan Bonar Tigor Naipospos ed., *The Faces of Islam «Defenders»* (Jakarta: Pustaka Masyarakat Setara, 2010), 110.

Their tactic is to spread the claim that Ahmadiyah is highly dangerous for *aqeedah* (Islamic faith), so that many non-radical figures and organizations agree to ban Ahmadiyah and want to fight together with radical Islamic organizations. Not infrequently, they also use the term «Jihad» and verses in the Koran to support their opinions.

One of the cases that is still relevant today is the 212 demonstration that finally saw Basuki Tjahja Purnama, alias Ahok sent to prison. Ahok was accused of blasphemy because he quoted Surat Al-Maidah while making a speech during his visit at Pramuka Island Fish Auction Place, Panggang Island, Thousand Islands. On October 6, 2016, Ahok was reported to the police by a number of mass organizations, including FPI, on charges of blasphemy. Ahok's trial was accompanied by the insistence of thousands of Muslims who marched in front of Monas demanding Ahok be imprisoned immediately. Most of the demonstrators came from outside of Jakarta.

The hatred of Ahok spread by FPI had begun since his election as the Governor of DKI Jakarta. Habib Rizieq, chairperson of FPI, once wrote an article entitled «Ironic» on the FPI official website. In his article, he explained his resentment at the election of an infidel, Ahok, as the Governor of DKI Jakarta.⁴ FPI's reasons certainly cannot be justified, because a leader is considered to be capable of leading not because of his religion, but for his integrity and relevant expertise.

Involvement of Young People (Z Generation)

One of the things that troubles us the most is the increasing involvement of young people in activities of radicalism and intolerance. The National Counter Terrorism Agency has stated that some acts of terrorism in Indonesia were carried out by young people. Most of these terrorists range from 23–27 years old, and have insufficient religious understanding.⁵

In addition, the 2016 Wahid Foundation survey of Islamic Spiritual Organizations (Rohis) of State High Schools in Indonesia showed us quite astonishing data: «That 60% of respondents were willing to carry out a Jihad mission to countries affected by religious conflicts; with 68% of respondents willing to continue the mission in the future. 37% of respondents strongly agreed, 41% agreed with the idea that Islam must be combined into one Caliphate.»⁶

4. Syihab, Habib Muhammad Rizieq, «Ironis,» 2014 <<http://fpi.or.id/156-IRONIS.html> (diakses tanggal 28/11/14 pukul 14.48 WIB)>.

5. Read «Tren Pelaku Teror di Indonesia Berusia 23-27 tahun,» *Sindonews*, April 12, 2016. «Remaja 18-23 Tahun Rentan Jadi Sasaran Perekrutan Teroris,» *Kompas.com*, Augst 21, 2013.

6. Wahid Foundation dan Kementerian AgamaRI, «Survei Potensi Intoleransi dan Radikalisme di

Symptoms of an increase in the participation of young people in radical activities were first driven by the lack of awareness of true religious values. Many young people are still vulnerable to being brainwashed victims and recruited by terrorist networks. Therefore, religious education emphasizing the value of tolerance and interreligious activities is very much needed by young people to foster a spirit of brotherhood and pluralistic values within themselves.

There are two ways to spread intolerance and radicalism in young people, namely social media and recitation (*pengajian*). Millennials are known to be very close to social media content and very easily influenced by dominant issues spread on social media. In the recitation, there is also the danger of the spreading of intolerance and radicalism. Their parents rarely check what their children are taught at the recitation.

Modern life, which increasingly emphasizes individuality, also influences young people in their families. When parents are so busy working, young people lose warmth in their families and find groups that they enjoy on social media. It is dangerous if they join intolerant or radical groups.

Strategy for the Prevention of Intolerance and Radicalism in Indonesia

There are two ways that we can work together to fight intolerance and radicalism in Indonesia, namely through social media and interfaith dialogue. First, through social media we can fight the content created by radical groups by creating various contents that can be a field for us to sow seeds of pluralism, solidarity and peace between religions. Second, we can promote interfaith dialogue activities by involving various interfaith communities, especially young people and their parents.

With dialogue, each religious community is able to explore and share their spiritual wealth. This is what makes them finally able to respect each other and, more importantly, achieve peace. The dialogue to be carried out does not only consist of serious and theological discussions but could also be for relaxed dialogues, such as life dialogue, social dialogue and spiritual dialogue. Following this, we will present a glimpse of the Interreligious dialogue activities that have been carried out by Xaverian communities in Indonesia, especially in the Xaverian Scholasticate community in Jakarta

Kalangan Aktivis Kerohanian Islam (Rohis),» Mei 2016. Survei ini melibatkan 1626 responden aktivis rohis di SMA/SMK Negeri di seluruh Indonesia.

The Religious Missionary Formation and Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia

VITUS RUBIANTO AND RAYMUNDUS IVAN

The Community of Scholasticate Philosophy at Wisma Xaverian (Jakarta) now consists of 20 students (mostly from Manggarai, 3 from Timor, 2 from Java, 1 from Batak, 1 from Bali and one from Nias) with 3 formators (Indonesian, Italian, and Spanish). All students are already professed (6 at level IV, 5 at level III, 6 at level II, and 3 at level I).⁷

Brief History of the Community

34 Years of the Scholasticate

The Formation House at Jl. Cempaka Putih Raya 42, was officially opened by the Mgr. Leo Sukoto, Archbishop of Jakarta, on July 1, 1985, with the first 10 novices. Fr Silvano Laurenzi, first Novice Master, and his assistant, Fr Angelo Cappannini, had become the pioneers in the long process of formative history of the Xaverian missionaries of Indonesia. One year later, five novices made their first profession in the Xaverian family and began a scholasticate-period, studying Philosophy and Theology at Driyarkara School of Philosophy, together with other seminarians of the Archdiocese of Jakarta, Jesuits, Franciscans, Salesians, and CICM students.

Transition of the Position of the Rector

Fr Angelo Cappannini became the first rector of the Scholasticate, and Fr Laurenzi remained Novice Master in the Formation house. In 1987, Fr Giovanni Ferrari was present as formator, enriching the formation team with his fatherly attitude and wisdom. Since 1990, the novitiate has been separated from the scholasticate-philosophy compound: this change responded to the demands of scholasticate-philosophy and made it a more dynamic community.

7. This article is a reelaboration of the brief presentation on the Xaverian Community of Philosophy at Jakarta, already published in Missionari Saveriani, *Atti del Convegno Continentale dei formatori in Asia, Jakarta 3-9 Marzo 2016*, Roma 2016, pp. 182–88.

The means and selection of formation-methods that were gradually systematized in the integrated curriculum from year to year were the fruit of the perseverance of Fr Giovanni Ferrari as Rector, assisted by Fr Angelo Cappanini as Vice-rector. Then, in 1997, Fr Angelo Geremia came to continue the formative duty accompanied respectively by Fr Nico Macina, Fr Robledo Sanchez, Fr Vitus Rubianto, and Fr Matteo Rebecchi. Fr Geremia was much appreciated for his fatherly attitude and in 2002 the Community Project of Life was systematized, becoming the primary means of formation in fostering community life at the scholasticate. Fr Geremia fulfilled the role of the rector for 10 years until his death in 2007. Fr Fernando Abis was the rector of the scholasticate until he was elected provincial in 2008, and was replaced by Fr Matteo Rebecchi. After seven years, the baton was passed to Fr Vitus Rubianto, who was accompanied by Fr Alphonsus Widhiwiryawan as vice-rector for just one year. In 2016 Fr Alphonsus was appointed vocation promotor and animator at Yogyakarta. Finally, in October 2018, Fr Rafael Bardon Sedano came to replace him as the Socius-formator at our Scholasticate house.

Religious Formation

In the period of scholasticate-philosophy, the students try to live and grow in the values of spiritual life and charism that they have practiced during their novitiate-year, by applying them to their studies and apostolic tasks. Study becomes the main activity and the essential component for their personal formation. Studies of philosophy and human sciences allow them to look at the life-situation critically and equip themselves with a certain sensitivity and adequate methods, in order to embody the message of the gospel in various cultural and human contexts. The Curriculum of Philosophy in STF Driyarkara is concluded in four years in accordance with the curriculum of undergraduate education (namely Strata 1) recognized by the government (with 144–160 credits); it includes a number of introductory courses in theology as a preparation for the pastoral year for those who prepare for the priesthood, something very common in Indonesia. The curriculum of the Xaverian Scholasticate no longer includes the Pastoral/Missionary Orientation Year (or TOM). From 2017, for some reason, we have been required to implement a new curriculum whereby the former lengthy period of philosophical formation has been reduced to just three years. After three years of temporary profession, the students will be sent abroad to join one of the intercultural communities of Xaverian International Theology.

Apart from lectures at STF Driyarkara, a weekly class-meeting is held to discuss certain topics according to the focus demanded by each class/level: for level I, our major concern is to develop ethics and values of personal virtue, introductory studies, prayer

life, use of money, and community rules; for level II, consecrated life and affective dimensions, priestly spirituality and specific themes such as sexuality and paedophilia; for level III, the incarnation of evangelical values, the inculturation of the charism and *Ratio Missionis Xaverianae*, and also the spirituality of missionary departure for preparation for international theology. Papal documents (ie. *Evangelii Gaudium*) and letters from the General Direction are being used in one class meeting. The principles of *Ratio Formationis* are particularly emphasized in the vocation-discernment: the spirit of openness and willingness to be guided (*docibilitas*) in a spirit of brotherhood, an adequate level of academic proficiency, and the ability of dialogue in accepting the diversity of cultures and religions.

Community Project of Life

The main focus in the study and apostolate is formulated at the beginning of the school year in the Community Project of Life (CPL). The Community goes on a three-day outing to evaluate and plan the year, and is divided into 4 groups, examining different aspects of life (spirituality, community, academic, and apostolate). Each group has its task, to make an evaluation of the (formative) journey of the past year and prepare an orientation-draft of activities for the next year. The CPL provides not only the schedule of community life, but also the activities related to specific dimensions of life needing improvement in the coming year.

Difficulties and Main Challenges in Formation

The main difficulty in the work of formation is presumably understanding the culture and background of the students from faraway villages. The economic and cultural gaps of their regions of origin often make it difficult for the formators to recognize the true motivations of their vocations. For example, the seniority and status of priests that are highly regarded in a particular culture hamper the formators in determining if a seminarian is really obedient and submissive, or merely acts out of fear because «you like it.»

At a personal level, Indonesian formators should understand the culture of our own students more easily than overseas formators can, but in reality we cannot avoid the emergence of a variety of defense mechanisms that come from the clash of different cultures. Presumably Indonesian formators still struggle to understand the cultures of origin of the candidates. Professional and academic preparation, for example by studying the psychology of culture as effected by Fr Yakobus, is presumably something new, and a breakthrough that is on track. By recognizing this, the lack of vision for the future of the

province on the formation of the formator itself, is actually a challenge. How should we think about the continuity of formation with formators who are almost entirely learning to be formators from their direct experience in the field alone?

Viewing the results in the formation itself so far, the elements that are generally supportive of the students in staying is the Xaverian family atmosphere. Those from eastern Indonesia often come from a tough (strict) family background: «A stick and whip» is the way that has been commonly experienced in their childhood education. Therefore, when they find the typical warmth in the community, in general, they are all interested in the ideals of «building the world into one family.» Sometimes it becomes difficult to show a student that his vocation is not here, because he has already become comfortable in our family atmosphere.

An excessive show of family spirit can obscure the ideal of real missionary life. Therefore, when faced with the challenges of language and adapting to a new culture that demand self-reliance, students cannot stand it and give up easily because the new community atmosphere is not in accordance with their expected ideals of a scholasticate. Also, often the desire to be able to study abroad and achieve a certain level of international experience, as others before them have done, becomes one of the factors that make a person stay in the congregation until he eventually finds out that it is not his vocation. Once their dishonesty is perceived, they easily leave the congregation.

Therefore, the urgent need to be considered in order to update the strategies of the Xaverian formation, both at the regional as well as the congregational level, is a continuity of formation at every stage, from the initial stage to international theology. One common challenge that must absolutely be addressed is how to know a candidate's motivations for his vocation from the very beginning, so that he can be helped to face his own decision honestly and maturely. The inculturation of our charism in formation can also be the result of the trust and willingness of the formators in accepting the reality of a candidate who though imperfect, but has a willingness to be guided and directed to the ideal of a true missionary.

Developing Apostolic Life in the Spirit of Dialogue

Basic Principles of the Interreligious Dialogue

The Xaverian Community Interfaith Dialogue Programme is evaluated and developed annually in the Community Project of Life (CPL). These interfaith dialogue activities

are part of the apostolic dimension in the *CPL*, overseen by a special team consisting of students in charge of dialogue and formator/rector.

The Dialogue Programme planned in the annual *CPL* is based on the basic principles of the Apostolic dimension taken from various sources of our Xaverian documents, such as the *Constitutions*, *RMX* and General Chapter XVI, n. 69. These basic principles consist of three points:

a) First, our union has a single and exclusive purpose, which is to proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom to non-Christians (*Constitutions* n. 2). Thus, Xaverian education aims to shape us to become disciples of Christ, Missionaries, to be sent to non-Christians as apostles of God's Kingdom (*Constitutions* n. 53).

b) Second, our charisma encourages us to work, as our founder did, so that local churches are aware of the missionary responsibility for non-Christians (*Constitutions* n. 15). We realize that the main actors of the most effective mission are not individuals but the community (cf. *RMX* n. 19), and the task of preaching is carried out according to the priorities of the situation we are facing (cf. *RMX* n. 7).

c) Third, our missionary presence and activity in the world must be balanced with the immediate and actual needs of the first missionary animation and the effective availability of each person (*General Chapter* XVI n. 69)

The Apostolic Activities in the Community Project of Life

Alongside their philosophical studies, students are involved in various activities of apostolate in order to deepen their Xaverian missionary vocation. The apostolic activity takes place every weekend according to the division of tasks and areas. Following the directions and suggestions of the Regional Chapter IX in 1997, social work and interfaith dialogue are given priority in the choice of apostolic work. Some students teach catechumenate in parishes and a large university in Jakarta, some work in social works of charity, together with the volunteers of Daughters of Zion, some religious Sisters from the local congregation, and the Community of St. Egidio at the slum-area in Jakarta. Others organize their visit and make friends with the centers of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Jakarta. Still others teach religion-instruction in four public high schools.

The first stage in pondering mission to non-Christians is the encounter and dialogue with them. Interreligious dialogue is held in our house by inviting a religious figure as a speaker who explores one theme. We also invite friends of all faiths who are enthusiasts of dialogue. Alternating with the discussion activity, we visit other cultural and religious groups (the Islamic boarding school). Moreover, live-in experiences in places such as fac-

tories are held once a year and are concluded with an evaluation at the end of the year. Missionary Animation needs to be cultivated by students since their early age with the publication of magazines and websites as means of evangelization, and also mission appeals at schools and parishes in Jakarta.

Forms of Religious Dialogue

Religious dialogue can be briefly grouped into four forms, namely: dialogue of life, dialogue of social work, theological dialogue, and spiritual dialogue. The forms of dialogue can also be distinguished according to area covered, material scope, quality and direction. Moreover, each participant in the dialogue shows a different attitude. One who takes part in dialogue through social work, for example, does not have to understand dialogue at the theological level. Similarly, participants in theological dialogue are not necessarily willing to enter into dialogue on a spiritual level that discusses various forms of esoteric dimensions of each religion.

However, what needs to be considered is not the differences in levels of dialogue, but how dialogue at each level continues to achieve mutual understanding and respect. With this mutual understanding and respect, we hope that all religious people can work together in various aspects of life.

Dialogue of Life

The simplest form of meeting and interfaith dialogue is a dialogue of life. At this level, different religions meet and interact in community activities in their normal daily lives. Also at this level, the value of cooperation is increasingly fostered and religious values of love, care and solidarity are actualized.

The Xaverian Scholasticate Community of Jakarta mainly attempts to foster in its members a dialogue of life. One of the efforts is to encourage each member of the community to actively participate in *gotong royong* at the basic level of the community in the quarter area. For a long time our community has been known for this, and for its significant contribution in creating a family atmosphere within this quarter. Some of the things we routinely do are taking part in cleaning the environment of this basic community every month, holding *halal bihalal* (people gathering) on the Indonesian Day of Independence at our football square every year, participating in distributing basic necessities and gathering at the *Eid al-Fitr* feast for the end of *ramadhan*.

We have also compiled a program to visit other religious communities every two months, and invite other religious communities to visit our community. This activity

usually consists of playing football and having dinner together. It is intended to establish friendship and is a means to strengthen the brotherhood among the interfaith-communities.

Someone who is willing to follow and be engaged in this dialogue of life has a positive paradigm in looking at others. In contrast to those who hold an exclusive view that emphasizes the interests of their own groups, most of our neighbours and friends have an open attitude and care for the poor, the outcasts and those who need help. Dialogue at this level of everyday life is a great chance for social dialogue that leads to more programmed interfaith cooperation.

Social Work Dialogue

Through social work dialogue, religious groups can sit down together to discuss various problems such as poverty, environmental hygiene, drug abuse prevention, and issues of identity politics, and try to find solutions together. From the first level, the students are assigned to several places of social work. In some places or institutions of social work, the seminarians collaborate with people from different groups, ethnicities, and religions. As already mentioned, for example, we collaborated with the community of St. Egidio in social work and peace movements, such as peaceful prayers attended by several types of religious leaders. The students also serve several places of social work run by Catholic Sisters and other religious communities. Through this collaboration, social workers can exchange their religious experience and the value of solidarity entailed in the religion they profess.

Theological Dialogue

The most important aspect of this dialogue is the attitude of sharing and listening to the richness of religious experience from each religion. Of course, this dialogue is not intended as a venue for debates to argue with each other, because what is sought is not about who is right, but the richness of religious experience, including history, traditions, and spiritual values in each religious and cultural tradition. In addition, this dialogue also does not intend to relativize the truth of the theological subjects believed by the religious community itself. Rather, this dialogue aims to develop an open attitude and willingness to learn that all religions are called together to seek goodness and ultimate truth.

In the Community Project of Life, we have scheduled theological dialogue every two months. The themes that we raise usually revolve around the problems faced by every religion and society. The institutions that often collaborate with us in this theological dialogue are as follows: the International Conference for Religions and Peace, the Wa-

hid Institute, and the Ma'arif Institute. In order to maintain the collaboration and seek information about dialogue, we have prepared a team tasked with visiting each of the institutions on a regular basis.

Spiritual Dialogue

This dialogue is a continuation of theological dialogue that emphasizes spiritual or mystical aspects of religious experience. This approach to spiritual experience goes beyond the doctrines and traditions of each religion. Usually the dialogue is held by mystics who indeed live a deep spiritual life or at least are aware of spiritual/mystical aspects of their religion.

The aims of Interreligious Dialogue

Tolerance for Dialogue

The Interreligious Harmony or Tolerance Project in Indonesia is run by the government and religious leaders. On the one hand, this project is a tool needed by the Indonesian government to maintain stability and support national development. On the other hand, the project of disseminating ideas of inclusive pluralism is the doctrinal demand of each religion. The essence of the doctrine of each religion is nothing but keeping harmony together; in Islam it is called *rahmatan lil-'alamin* (a mercy to all creation).

In the context of Xaverian education, the students are taught to have a spirit of tolerance towards people of other religions, especially Islam. Most students come from areas with a strong Catholic culture. Many of them still hold onto a firm principle of exclusivism and find it difficult to establish relations with those of other faiths. With this inter-faith dialogue activity, the students are invited to appreciate the spirit of the *Constitutions* n.13: «We try to understand and accept our brothers and sisters who are not Christians with their religious values. With a dialogue of life and faith that is both brotherly and quality, we try to develop the general values of the Kingdom of God.»

Keeping in mind cases of terrorism that have occurred in the world and especially those in Indonesia, the Interreligious dialogue and fruitful relationship between religions and cultures must be fostered. With this dialogue, it is expected that each religious follower will be able to know and live up to his or her responsibilities in creating peace. When dialogue has taken place, the religious community is expected to establish cooperation in order to solve the problems faced by society in their environment today.

Dialogue and Cooperation

A collaboration seems impossible without dialogue. Similarly, dialogue should lead to cooperation. Dialogue that does not end in cooperation seems like a dialogue performed half-heartedly. In Indonesia, many centers of dialogue and religious institutions have promoted collaborative actions involving various religious groups. These activities are usually attended by Indonesian popular figures on dialogue such as Mrs. Musdah Mulia, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Yenny Wahid, Chandra Setiawan, etc. This collaborative activity could be more productive if directed at issues that become interreligious concerns. As formators at the time, the late Fr Francesco Marini and Fr Matteo Rebecchi, now formator in the Xaverian International Theology at Manila, introduced a fruitful collaboration and networking connection with friends from other faiths and cultures. We continue to build on their legacy as a never-ending task to be taken seriously.

Interreligious Dialogue in the Philippines

MATTEO REBECCHI AND EMANUELE BORELLI

In the past, the Delegation of the Philippines had some Interreligious dialogue activities. Students of the Theologate used to attend courses held in the Silsilah Centre in Zamboanga, Mindanao, during summer vacations. Students were also involved in the Peace Makers Circle, an Interreligious group coordinated by a professor of the Ateneo de Manila. Fr Barchiesi was also personally involved in Interreligious activities. He specialized in Buddhism and was actively present in the commission of Dialogue of the Diocese of Manila. He subsequently focused more on a personal relationship with a Buddhist monk. Fr Rocco Viviano was teaching Interreligious dialogue in the Loyola School of Theology and was personally involved in Interfaith.

Nevertheless, recently, Delegation members have been less involved in Interfaith activities than in the past. Interreligious dialogue happened only sporadically, such as on a visit to a temple or a mosque.

With the formulation of the new Community Project of Life in July 2018, the Community of the Theologate has introduced a new programme in Interreligious dialogue. Two students, together with Fr Matteo, are in charge of exploring new possibilities for interlacing relationships with non-Christian groups and becoming involved in interfaith organizations such as the Peace Maker Circle (lately, it seems to be experiencing some revitalization after a period of stagnation), Sacred Springs in Loyola School of Theology (which does not seem to be very much alive at the moment) and Ateneo Interreligious dialogue (a monthly meeting of Ateneo's fellow students and professionals of different faiths). Last month, two brothers brought some material help (second-hand clothes given by the members of the Theologate) to support the victims of a fire that burned down hundreds of houses belonging to Muslim families in Quiapo. This was also the chance to set up a connection with the Manila Muslim-Christian Community (MMCC) and the branch of Silsilah, also in Manila.

Besides engaging in interfaith activities outside the community, the Theology Community has already planned to host at least 4 Interreligious dialogue meetings in our Conforti House, two of which have already taken place. The meetings are held on Saturday mornings. After the presentation of the speaker (non-Christian) a question-answer

session follows. The meeting ends with lunch together. These meetings are organized by the community of the Theologate and have been so far attended also by the community of the Novitiate-Postulancy, the community of Philosophy, our confreres from the parish of Marikina and Saint Francis Xavier in Maligaya, and also by some guests (three communities of sisters, Jesuit students, and parishioners from the nearby Xaverian parish). The last meeting was attended by 65 people. The first two speakers were Muslims. They presented the History of Islam in the Philippines and the situation of Mindanao from the Muslim Perspective. The relationship with Islam is prioritized, as Islam represents the second religion in the Philippines and also because of the conflictual relationship among Muslims and Christians in the Country.

The Interreligious dialogue program of the community of the Theologate has been welcomed enthusiastically by the brothers, and we hope we can carry on in the same spirit. It seems also that these meetings represent the chance to grow in experiencing the beauty of our charism *ad gentes*, through a real, and not only theoretical, encounter with non-Christians. These meetings are also the chance to experience apostolate together, preparing, coordinating and evaluating them as community. Moreover, they are also becoming a good opportunity of missionary animation for all guests, a sort of little school of mission. Some fruits from these meetings are already visible. On the way back after the last Interreligious dialogue gathering in Conforti, the speaker, Maudi Ajijul Maadil said to our brothers: «Since my youth, I have been familiar with Christian organizations, but it is the first time I have met Christians who have welcomed me and been willing to listen to me, a Muslim. I'm really very happy.»

In conclusion, we can say that the involvement of the Delegation in Interreligious dialogue has a story from the past and some small experiences which are going on at present. In the future, we do hope to be able to set up a broader net of relationships with different non-Christian communities and Interreligious groups, both in Manila and elsewhere.

Interreligious Dialogue

A Xaverian Way to Mission in Taiwan

PAULIN BATAIRWA KABUYA

The findings of a research project on religion and public life conducted by the Pew Research Center, a Washington-based non-partisan think tank, asserted that Taiwan has the second-highest religious diversity in the world. The survey covered believers of major religious traditions and folk religions in 232 countries around the world. Taiwan scored 8.2 on a 10-point religious diversity index, that is, 0.8 behind Singapore which ranked first. The report further specifies that «nearly half of Taiwan's population are folk religion followers (44.2 percent), followed by Buddhists (21.3 percent), other religious adherents (16.2 percent), unaffiliated believers (12.7 percent) and Christians (5.5 percent).»¹ Taiwan's religious world is indeed very diversified. But how did this occur?

This diversity is rather recent and can be schematically dealt with in four moments: Prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries in the seventeenth century, in the aftermath of the capture by Zheng Chenggong, during the Japanese occupation, the KMT era and its development.

Till the sixteenth century, animism and shamanism constituted the only forms of religiosities known and practiced by the dwellers of the Island. The first marks of another religion occurred at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when first, Spanish Catholic missionaries (1623) soon followed by Dutch Protestants (1626) brought Christianity to the Island. Those first missionary efforts were displaced by Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga)—a Chinese Ming loyalist who captured Taiwan from the Dutch in 1661. Seen from a religious perspective, Zheng's victory was more than political or military. It channelled the popular religious culture of South-East China on the Island. Chinese migrants, mostly from Fujian and Guangdong, brought their local cults, ancestral shrines and kinship gods. Legends of prominent deities such as Goddess Mazu, Guanggong, and Wang Ye (Royal Lords) were incorporated in the story of the conquest and made part of the daily life of the settlement. Zheng Chenggong, for instance attributed his victory in ousting the Dutch to the divine assistance of Goddess Mazu (Maternal Ancestor). Similarly, the epic

1. Stacy Hsu, «Taiwan has second-highest religious diversity in the world, US report says,» *Taipei Times*, <<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2014/04/18/2003588325>>.

of Shi Lang's men defeating the descendants of Koxinga signaled a shift of that divine allegiance and willingness to have Taiwan under the control of the Qing.

Beside popular religions, other forms of religiosity that emerged in Taiwan during the nineteenth century included the sects of *lingji*, *Jincheng*, *xiantiandao*. However, the most prominent phenomenon was that of the *zhaijiao*, a kind of popular Buddhism whose practitioners were dedicated to meditation and observed celibacy and vegetarianism. Moreover, during that century, Christianity was reintroduced again to Taiwan (Catholicism in 1859 and Presbyterianism in 1865).

During the Japanese rule (1895–1945), new denominations and types of religions came to enrich the religious cartography of Taiwan. Those of Christian inspiration included the expansion of the mission of True Jesus Church 真耶穌教會 whose mission was established in Taiwan in 1926.² In the same year, a group of Taiwanese youths converted to the Holiness Church 聖教會 in Japan, and returned to establish a branch in Taiwan 台灣聖教會. Other religions included Japanese Buddhism and Shintoism, which in a sudden change from the lenient policy regarding religious activities, were imposed as state religions from 1937–1945.

The retreat of the KMT to Taiwan drew along all kinds of religious groups and people who joined the existing religious diversity of the Island. Christianity became more diversified with the arrival of more denominations. As for Buddhism, it was a great moment of creativity: this was the time of most founders of the prominent and flourishing Buddhist monasteries in Taiwan. They came to Taiwan bare-handed, having nothing else except their ideal. After adapting to the new context, they strove to pass it on and instill it in the hearts of their followers, who subsequently took it to other countries overseas. As for believers of new religious movements (such as Yi Kuan Dao, Tian Di Jiao, Tian De Jiao, Xuan Yuan Jiao, etc), they were present but not officially recognized. Hence, till 1987, the lifting of Martial Law, they operated underground, or under the disguise of an authorised religion, which in most cases was Daoism.

To the present, the majority of the indigenous tribes converted to Christianity (Catholicism and Presbyterianism) struggle to keep up with the remnant of their ancestral religions. The largest majority of Taiwanese adhere to popular religions, with revered deities of mostly Chinese origin. Christians are highly denominational and represent a small minority (estimated at six percent of the 23 million of Taiwanese). Muslims are even a smaller minority, although enriched by the number of migrant workers from Islamic

2. «The History of the True Jesus Church» at <<http://www.tjc.org/church/history.shtml>>.

countries. Buddhism has developed at a fast pace on the island and gained a missionary dynamism bringing the humanistic Taiwanese to the four corners of the World. As for new religious movements, the lifting of the restrictions imposed on them during Martial Law (1987) has made some of them gain an unprecedented growth and a missionary dynamism as well. Yi Guan Dao for instance, has expanded to 82 countries, but mostly among Chinese speaking communities. Meanwhile, other groups such as the Moonies and Tian Di Zheng Jiao, are redefining their local identities vis-à-vis their Korean and Japanese origins.

Given the diverse forms of religiosity existing in Taiwan, an intriguing question is regarding the types of relation existing among them. Do they interact? Which are the factors and venues prompting their interactions? What can be said regarding the quality of their interrelations?

For Taiwanese, religious diversity is not a novelty but a well-established fact. First of all, this can be seen in the various temples scattered along the city streets and in the mountains. Then, at home, people are exposed to broadcasts from several religious channels. Moreover, family members might practice different forms of religiosity; thus, religion cannot be seen as a common denominator uniting family members. It is noteworthy though, that all these different religious expressions exist in a rather harmonious way.

Religious leaders and representatives involved in interreligious encounters are proud of the mutual acceptance and respect existing among themselves. They often speak of the peaceful co-existence of different religions as one of the three «miracles» of Taiwan.³ In this reference, the stress is on the variety of religious expressions, their mutual acceptance and mostly on the absence of open religious conflicts in Taiwan.

Where Religious Alterities Meet and Interact

Besides the friendship existing among religious leaders and the informal dialogue on different layers of society, Interreligious dialogue in Taiwan is mostly fostered through membership of registered interreligious organizations subject to a common government policy whose rationale tolerates rather than promotes religion. In Taiwan, the earliest regulations on religion were established by the Japanese to monitor and control religious activities in 1928. Then, despite the changes of administration, the policy and attitude towards religion, drawing inspiration from Confucianism and the hostile view of religion

3. The other two refer to the economic surge and industrialization starting from the 70s and the implementation of democracy starting from the 90s.

by the May Fourth Movement, have remained largely unchanged.

Today, the State continues to exercise a subtle control over religion. First of all, religions must register under the Office of Religious Affairs, a Department of the Ministry of the Interior; the same Office oversees the activities of interreligious organizations and can thus exercise an indirect control over religions. These interreligious organizations work as a form of certification for religions or religious groups whose identity is still unsettled; besides, the government seeks their advice or cooperation whenever suspicions or misunderstandings regarding particular religious groups arise.

A further way in which the State uses interreligious organizations is in the field of diplomacy. In the context of incongruent claims of sovereignty across the straits, Taiwanese authorities show the international community the religious freedom and diversity of religious expressions in Taiwan in contrast with China's diplomatic war. Because of these socio-political expectations, the agendas of interreligious organizations appear less devoted to theological and religious concerns. Nonetheless, religious leaders are aware of their potential influence and use it as a force majeure. Salient examples have been invitations to controversial figures such as the Dalai Lama, or opposition to established policy by calling a referendum reversing the legislation redefining marriage and family in accordance to the demands of the LGBT.

The Taiwanese Catholic Church and Religious Dialogue

Though marginal, Interreligious dialogue is not a novelty for the Catholic Church in Taiwan. It has been a side-line commitment of Church leaders contributing in the long run to the culture of religious dialogue fostered on the Island. I am referring to emblematic figures such as Cardinal Paul Yu (于斌 Yu Pin / Yu Bin), the French Jesuit priest, Fr Albert Poulet-Mathis 馬天賜, Cardinal Paul Shan (單國璽 Shan Kuo-his / Shan Guoxi), and others. The history of Catholic engagement in dialogue stems from their enterprise, which unfortunately has been little documented.⁴

4. I have elsewhere deplored the lack of complete documentation on the commitment of Catholic key figures in the field of dialogue in Taiwan. Convinced that these could contribute to a better understanding of Interreligious dialogue in Taiwan, I have dedicated part of my research, investigating their lives and contribution to interreligious culture in Taiwan. For details, see P. Batairwa Kubuya, «Paul Yu Pin and the Challenge of Faith Identity in Religious and Denominational Dialogue», *Fu Jen International Religious Studies* 2013, 7/1: 63–5; P. Batairwa Kubuya, «Albert Poulet–Mathis, SJ: Pioneering in Religious Dialogue» *Ching Feng*, 2015, 14: 33–9. Furthermore, there is an article on L. Kuang entitled «Ronghe yu Huitong: Arch. Stanislas Luo Kuang et la médiation Est-Ouest» under publication in the *Theologicum of ICP* (Institut Catholique de Paris).

Cardinal Paul Yu Pin was a founding member of the China Religious Believers' Amity, an interfaith organization founded in Chongqing in 1943 to help victims of the Sino-Japanese war. Resuscitated in Taiwan in the fifties, it served as a voice advocating religious freedom and the renaissance of Chinese religious culture. Cardinal Paul Yu Pin used it to promote his contextual answer to the cultural revolution, namely, the *Ji Tian Jing Zu*, («Worship Heaven, Venerate Ancestors»). His successor, Archbishop Luo Kuang, fostered Interreligious dialogue by providing a theological explanation of the *Ji Tian Jing Zu*, enlisting it as a particular philosophy of Fu Jen Catholic University. Likewise, he also projected and fostered the opening of a department of religious studies in the same university. Effectively initiated in 1988, the institution now serves as a platform for academic research on the major religions of Taiwan in Fu Jen University. His course on Buddhist Philosophy exemplified the respect and objectivity expected from any venture with regards to interreligious studies.

Cardinal Paul Shan is remembered for his outreach testimony beyond religious boundaries and the outstanding witness of friendship with Buddhist Masters, mostly Venerable Master Sheng Yen of Dharma Drum and Venerable Master Xing Yun, Founder of Fo Guang Shan. Fr Albert Poulet-Mathis, in recognition of a life dedicated to other religions, friendships shared with other religious leaders, is appropriately called the Father of Interreligious dialogue. In 1994 he was the founding father of the Taiwan Conference of Religions for Peace, *TCRP*, a cluster of the diverse religions in Taiwan. Following the footsteps of these forefathers, the Catholic Church continues to engage other religions in dialogue.

The complex engagement of the local Church in Interreligious dialogue was a compelling response to the invitation of the Universal Church after Vatican II.⁵ The Bishops' Conference enlisted the commission for Interreligious dialogue among its task forces. In its ambitious project it defined three areas of activities: It must serve as a channel between the local and the universal church (*PCID* and *FABC*). It must also stand as a bridge reaching out to other religions. In the meantime, it must keep the Church alert to the new endeavor to live Interreligious dialogue as a way of mission.

Though not always equipped with consequential means, the commission has been striving to cover those three areas. Taiwan has emerged as a reliable partner and a launch-

5. «The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men,» NA no. 2.

ing ground for the types of dialogue of both the *FABC* and the *PCID*. Back in 1974, the *FABC* summit which defined the threefold dialogue as the way of doing mission in Asia, was held in Taipei. In 1978, Fr Albert Poulet-Mathis was appointed the first executive secretary of the *FABC* OEIA, and operated his office from Taiwan. Moreover, Taiwan became the launching ground for dialogic projects of the *PCID*. The first of a series of Buddhist Christian Dialogues was held in Fo Guang Shan Monastery on July 31–August 4, 1995. In 2016, *PCID* was soliciting the local Church for another venture: Dialogue with Daoism. In fact, the first Christian-Daoist Dialogue was held the same year, on October 15–16, 2016 in Bao An Temple. The following year, *PCID* requested the assistance of the Church in Taiwan to hold the Sixth Buddhist-Christian Dialogue. The colloquium was held in Fulong-Lingjiu Monastery, on November 11–16, 2017. At the concluding ceremony in the Museum of the World Religions, Cardinal Louis Tauran, Prefect of the *PCID*, granted our confrere Fr Franco Sottocornola a diploma of recognition for his dedication to Interreligious dialogue. In the sidelines of that event, the *PCID* expressed another imminent need: an encounter between consecrated women as a context enabling them to share their spiritual experiences and modalities of adapting their consecration to the world. The event was held in Fo Guang Shan on October 13–17, 2018; the venture has expanded existing experiences of inter-monastic dialogue. It was referred to as the «First International Buddhist and Christian Nuns in Dialogue.» The concretization of requests of this kind compels the local Church to engage directly with other religions. On these occasions, the local office of Interreligious dialogue acts at the same time as an extension of and a middle man between *PCID* and local religions.

The frequent visits of the *PCID* have created many opportunities to interact with local religious leaders and stimulated their interest in the Catholic Church. These developments have required the personal involvement of the bishops; in fact, Interreligious dialogue is now on the agenda of their bi-annual meeting and a priority to be discussed *ad limina* during their visit.

In recent years, the local Church has made an effort to work at the grassroots level by identifying possible collaborators and establishing diocesan commissions for Interreligious dialogue. Members of these commissions meet twice a year. The meetings develop as workshops on topics related to dialogue, study of guideline documents, assessment and planning of activities. The consolation thus far is that there is at least a representative for each of the seven dioceses, and most of those involved now relate to each other as friends. But outside that small group, the greatest challenge in this field remains a general acceptance of the rightful place and necessity of Interreligious dialogue within the Church. The

Catholic population is declining at a fast pace: it is faced with a steady aging problem, coupled with a lack of effective strategies to attract young blood into the flock. Consequently, for most Catholics, a proactive, direct evangelization would rather be the solution to the present crisis. Dialogue remains the marginal activity of a few. Working under the umbrella of the Bishops' Conference and their respective dioceses, diocesan commissions for Interreligious dialogue channel the spirit of dialogue at local levels. Through shared invitation to and participation in each other's activities, they create friendship across religions. Just as we are happy to host representatives of other religions in our dialogues, so we participate in activities and initiatives taken by other interreligious organizations. The commissions for Interreligious dialogue, besides collaborating with the *TCRP*, also cooperate with other associations such as the Chinese Buddhist Association, Daoist Associations, Yi Guang Dao,⁶ the Asian Forum for Religious Freedom.⁷

The only way to reach and speak to the majority of Catholics is to publicize reports of initiatives taken at diocesan and national levels in Catholic journals. There are some permanent and crucial challenges that local initiatives of dialogue must address: dialogue and mission, dialogue and proclamation, dialogue and conversion. Being a religious minority (less than 2% of the estimated 23 million Taiwanese), promoters of Interreligious dialogue must always be ready to explain how priorities are set within that relationship. Moreover, they have to find partners with whom to reflect on dilemmas emanating from that problematic relationship. Lastly, there is a crying need for handing Interreligious dialogue to the grassroots. This presupposes an approach to dialogue from the perspective of the laity, which is continuously exposed to and soaked in a non-Christian environment. What matters to them, as far as interreligious interactions are concerned? Which dilemmas do they face? How do they articulate those problems? Which expertise can help foster their dialoguing capabilities?

China Delegation and Interreligious Dialogue

The cultural orientation of the confreres paved the road to the acceptance of Interreligious dialogue as a modality of missionary endeavour in the Delegation. Confreres approached religious plurality with educability. There were confreres conducting research

6. Yi Guang Dao is a new religious movement of Chinese Confucian inspiration. It was originally subdivided in 18 different branches which now engage other religions in dialogue under one umbrella.

7. Asian Forum for Religious Freedom (亞太宗教自由論壇) was founded by Former Vice-President, Lu Xiu lian, and held its first meeting on February 16–21, 2016.

in the field of religion. Alessandro Dell'Orto's research and field work was on Tu Ding Gong, the most popular deity, guardian of the land. Confreres visited temples and monasteries, some even had an immersion experience in Buddhist monastic life. Those collaborating with people and groups promoting Interreligious dialogue, such as the Focolare, had occasions to meet and interact with other religions. Prior to defining religious dialogue as a type of missionary presence, the interest of confreres towards other religions was undeniable.

In 2005, following a communal discernment of the Delegation and with the support of Fr Luigi Menegazzo, then Vicar of the Congregation, I was oriented towards Interreligious dialogue as modality of my missionary commitment in Taiwan. For the practicalities, Fr Luigi consulted Fr Louis Gendron, then Jesuit Provincial, and Fr Albert Poulet-Mathis. Both men suggested that I acquire further academic qualification prior to the task. It was hence decided that I enrol in the PH. D. program in the Department of religious studies in September 2006. Upon completion of these studies, in 2010, I was appointed Executive secretary of the commissions for Interreligious dialogue and that of Ecumenism of the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference. Meanwhile, I was granted tenure in the Department of Religious Studies at Fu Jen University, with the task of coordinating courses related to Interreligious dialogue and Ecumenism. Since then, I have been walking on these two paths. While the school setting requires more theoretical work, the Bishops' conference provides practical ground. I have sought opportunities to connect theory and practice by letting those two paths intermingle. Due to its academic nature, Fu Jen actualizes Interreligious dialogue through courses, seminars, conferences, symposia and publication. Its dialogue is predominantly theoretical. The commission of the Bishops' Conference, instead is submerged in concrete expressions of dialogue. Intermingling the two paths enables a mutual enrichment and a reciprocal subsidiarity. I could not have a greater dream than an increase of cooperation between the two institutions and a sharing in existing resources and concerns.

As I deepen my commitment in the field, I am reminded of two admonitions of Fr Luigi. First, he spoke of a preparation in view of a qualified service to the local Church and to the Congregation as well. If I were to be evaluated in this regard, I would expect a good score from the local Church and perhaps some reprimand from the Congregation. Second, he warned against the danger of isolation and self-enclosure. Interreligious dialogue can become a danger, when and wherever, instead of bridging and enhancing collaboration among Xaverians, it creates instead islands out of confreres. This warning keeps haunting me. I often ponder: how profitable has my work been to the community

and how has it enhanced the Xavierian Charism? What would be the outlook of this report if it had been written by another member of our delegation? I am very grateful for the support of the community. Though in silence, I felt surrounded by attention and care whenever I returned home to a welcoming community. In union of mind and spirit, I felt their company wherever I moved.

Considerations for the New Field within the Xavierian Charism

What are some of the lessons I've learned in my immersion in Interreligious dialogue that might be worthwhile sharing with the Congregation?

First of all, a predominant feeling which has accompanied me these years has been the sense of living an existence at the «borderlines» of diverse religious alterities. I would not speak of a «frontier situation» because of the invasive connotation inherent to that symbolism. The term «borderlines» of Interreligious dialogue implies the distinctiveness of the different religions encountered. In fact, they are different, and though they might be willing to cooperate, their inner differences will always persist.

Seen from the perspectives of traditional Catholic practices, Interreligious dialogue is a borderline activity. It reaches out to those beyond the Church with a clear intention of respecting their otherness. In other words, the primary goal in these encounters is not to assimilate or convert them to our mental frame. The novelty is the outcome of the openness of Vatican II, which has paved the path to Interreligious dialogue.⁸ That novelty however has also been a challenge to traditional Church praxes which, to be accommodated, required a resetting of the mental frames of the Church self-understanding, its appraisal of other religions, and the relationship the Church ought to nurture with them. The debates on the relationship between mission, proclamation, and conversion that dominated the Christian theologies of religion were necessary to offer a better perspective to Interreligious dialogue.⁹ Where and when the mental resetting has not taken place, engagement

8. On May 19, 1964, Paul VI instituted the Secretariat for Non-Christians—today PCID, with «the task of turning its wholesome attention to those who are without Christian religion... especially in these times when numerous relationships are being developed between men (*sic*) of every race, language and religion,» Paul VI, *Progreddiente Concilio*, Apostolic Letter, (May 19, 1964).

9. Although Vatican II opened a new door for the Catholic Church to our relationship with other faiths, it did not yet go as far as to say that Interreligious dialogue is part of the evangelizing mission of the Church. This came through the Pontificate of John Paul II through three subsequent documents: *Dialogue and Mission* (1984), the mission encyclical *Mission of the Redeemer* (1990), and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991). These teachings reflect the growing awareness of the centrality of interfaith dialogue in the very mission of the church. For Pope John Paul II, dialogue is fundamental for the Church, based on the very life of the Triune God, as well as on respect and love for every human person: «As far as the local churches are

in Interreligious dialogue can be a dangerous enterprise that exposes the practitioner to a permanent ecclesial estrangement.

For Xaverians, Interreligious dialogue is among the latest comers. With the exception of a few pathfinders who have ventured into the field, for the rest, it is still a green field to be explored. In fact, the first normative text speaking of Interreligious dialogue as a modality of living the Xaverian charism was the *RMX* (nos. 62–68): a positive development embracing the trend of the universal Church. Nonetheless, more concrete explanations need to be given on how such a commitment can implement a charism whose «sole and exclusive purpose» is to «proclaim the Good News of Kingdom of God to non-Christians.»¹⁰ The observation made above on Vatican II (*NA*) is also valid for the congregation. Involvement in Interreligious dialogue widens the perspective from which mission is viewed. Confreres working in Interreligious dialogue are certainly aware of the intricate relationship between Interreligious dialogue and mission. For the last forty years, proponents of theories of dialogue have been striving to evolve from mild apologetics to authentic dialogue. Their achievement thus far is the rediscovery of an alterity with a distinct identity, without which there is no dialogue. In dialogue, the Catholic/Christian identity agrees to encounter other religious identities. It is not a mere reflection on oneself or a projection of what the other religions are supposed to be, how they should be acting.

With Interreligious dialogue in mind, any theology of mission which does not take other religions into account is defective. Inclusion of Interreligious dialogue in the modalities of living the charism challenges/purifies existing presuppositions as it widens the expectations held regarding mission. Interreligious dialogue is bringing innovation and changes of perspectives in almost all aspects of missionary life. In the biblical field, scriptural reasoning is an interpretative approach developed with the awareness of the existence of other religions. Scriptural reasoning implies a mutual hosting and a reading that considers the rays of truth of other religions.¹¹ Imagine for instance the pleasure and challenge of reading the book of Job with a Buddhist and Hindu companion or *Jn* 14:6 with Jewish and Islamic awareness.

In the field of theology, the quest for responses to religious plurality has trended

concerned, they must commit themselves in this direction, helping all the faithful to respect and to esteem the values, traditions, and convictions of other believers.»

10. *Constitutions*, n. 2.

11. See M. Mayaert, «Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue» in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*. C. Cornille, ed. (Johnson Wiley & Sons, Ltd. 2013), 64–86; F. X. Clooney and K. von Staush. eds., *How to Do Comparative Theology. Comparative Theology: Thinking Across Traditions* (Fordham University Press, 2018).

various theories impacting the field of mission. Besides exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, the three traditional Christian attitudes in dialogue, today, there are trends speaking of dual or multiple religious identities, of hyphenated religious identities, of being-Christian interreligiously, etc.¹² Mission today cannot be thought of without taking all these developments into account. Interreligious dialogue is calling for a catharsis in the praxis of mission and for the Xaverian family, formation and awareness building are the loci in which that catharsis has to take place.

12. C. Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Orbis Books, 2002); G. Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards an Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging* (Peter Lang, 2011); P. C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Orbis Books, 2004).

Il dialogo interreligioso in Giappone

FRANCO SOTTOCORNOLA

La mappa delle religioni in Giappone comprende soprattutto la tradizione religiosa locale, ossia lo Shintoismo; il Buddhismo giunto nell'arcipelago nel secolo V–VI, ma diventata una religione popolare e «giapponese» solo nel XIII secolo; il Cristianesimo arrivato con San Francesco Saverio nel XVI secolo e un numero notevole di «nuove religioni» che sono nate più recentemente, la più antica di esse, Tenrikyō, nella prima metà del secolo XIX.

Lo Shintoismo e il Buddhismo, le tradizioni religiose di gran lunga le più antiche e diffuse in Giappone, hanno avuto una storia alterna di rapporti vicendevoli, ma in fine hanno trovato una forma di «coesistenza pacifica». Le cosiddette «nuove religioni» sono a volte più escludiviste nel loro rapporto con le altre ma, in generale, in Giappone, la religione oggi è una questione di scelta personale. Prevale di fatto un atteggiamento molto superficiale verso la religione, con la possibilità di frequentare ambienti religiosi diversi anche contemporaneamente. Sono molte le famiglie che hanno sia l'altare buddhista (per i defunti) sia quello shintoista. Ma la religione non è generalmente sentita come un impegno morale, o come una «fede» a cui aderire. È sentita come un insieme di elementi culturali, ricorrenze festive o riti compiuti a scelta secondo le stagioni (come la visita di un tempio, soprattutto un tempio shintoista, a capodanno) o le circostanze (funerale, richiedo di solito ad un tempio buddhista). Recentemente si è diffusa la «moda» (per fortuna ora in fase di passare) di chiedere il matrimonio alle chiese cristiane...

In questo contesto il «dialogo interreligioso» dovrebbe apparire scontato e normale. Ma il dialogo interreligioso esige una convinzione profonda della propria religione e una sensibilità notevole verso il problema religioso come tale, incluso l'interesse verso le altre tradizioni religiose. Ma, come accennato sopra, la religiosità del giapponese comune è molto superficiale, non comporta di solito un senso di «appartenenza», e nemmeno una conoscenza di contenuti. Per cui essendo rara una vera e propria «appartenenza» religiosa, consapevole e impegnata, è anche assente un interesse e tanto meno un impegno di «dialogo» con le altre religioni. I giovani soprattutto sono generalmente estranei ad un discorso o ad un interesse religioso.

Il dialogo interreligioso, in senso proprio, ha cominciato a farsi strada solo recen-

temente, in modo particolare su iniziativa della Chiesa Cattolica, a partire dal Concilio Vaticano II. Il più antico gruppo di dialogo interreligioso credo sia l'associazione *Zenki kondan kai* («Associazione di incontro amichevole tra Buddhisti Zen e Cristiani») iniziata più di cinquant'anni fa da un Quacchero americano, che riunisce una cinquantina di persone soprattutto buddhisti e cristiani (sia cattolici che protestanti) con un incontro annuale di tre giorni a fine agosto.

Le iniziative di dialogo interreligioso sono andate poi moltiplicandosi. Un contributo importante è stato dato dalla nascita nel 1970 del *WCRP* da parte di Nikkyō Niwano, fondatore della *Risshō kōsei kai* (立正佼成会), una organizzazione laica Buddhista diventata praticamente una «nuova religione» e tradizionalmente aperta al dialogo interreligioso.

Attualmente l'evento più significativo di dialogo interreligioso è l'incontro di preghiera per la pace che si tiene sul Monte Hiei, per iniziativa della direzione centrale del Buddhismo Tendai, ogni anno il 4 agosto, iniziativa nata come continuazione dell'incontro di Assisi del 1986, al quale il capo di questa corrente buddhista aveva partecipato.

Importante è stato anche l'impatto esercitato su molti giapponesi dalla partecipazione alle riunioni internazionali interreligiose organizzate dalla Comunità di sant'Egidio ogni anno in diverse città europee.

Un'altra iniziativa importante è senza dubbio lo scambio inter-monastico soprattutto tra monaci della corrente Zen e monaci Cattolici iniziato negli anni '70 e tuttora in corso, ad intervalli di alcuni anni, che porta gruppi di una tradizione religiosa ad sperimentare la vita monastica dell'altra tradizione.

Sono ormai numerose le iniziative di dialogo interreligioso che sorgono qua e là specialmente tra Buddhisti e Cattolici, o anche con la partecipazione di varie tradizioni religiose, ma ci sono anche settori meno sensibili o piuttosto restii al d.i-r, sia in campo Buddhista sia tra i Protestanti. Interessante è in questo contesto è la nascita di una iniziativa di dialogo interreligioso con convegni annuali molto partecipati, che a partire dal 2010, si tengono a Ōsaka, ad opera del tempio Myōkenkaku-ji, della corrente buddhista Nichiren, un ambiente buddhista piuttosto riluttante al dialogo¹.

1. Per una visione sintetica sul dialogo tra buddhisti e cristiani in Giappone cfr. P. Schmidt-Lrukkel, ed., *Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia*, EOS-Editions of Sankt Ottilien (Germany) 2017, M. Repp, «Buddhist-Christian Relations in Japan: An Overview», pp. 209–42; M. De Giorgi, «Buddhist-Christian Relations in Japan: A Christian Perspective», pp. 243–62; Y. Nishi, K. Fujita, «Buddhist-Christian Relations in Japan: a Buddhist Perspective», pp. 263–92.

La Chiesa cattolica in Giappone

Subito dopo in Concilio Vaticano II e in conseguenza di esso, si creò in seno alla Conferenza Episcopale Giapponese una commissione per il dialogo, legata molto—di fatto—alla persona del suo Presidente, l'allora Vescovo di Kyōto, Mons. Tanaka, e alla sua partecipazione alle iniziative annuali della Comunità di sant'Egidio. Questa commissione fu sciolta verso la fine del secolo scorso, e sostituita dal servizio di due Vescovi come referenti: uno per i contatti a livello nazionale e l'altro per i rapporti internazionali, specialmente con il Vaticano. Le circostanze, specialmente la celebrazione a Roma di un importante convegno interreligioso alla vigilia del Grande Anno Santo del 2000, ma forse anche la fondazione della Associazione *Kakehashi* per collaborazione nel campo del dialogo interreligioso tra Istituti Religiosi e Missionari (a cui si accennerà più avanti), spinsero la CEG a ricostituire una Sotto-commissione per il dialogo riorganizzandola e potenziandola.

In un primo sessennio (2003–2009), questa sotto-commissione (nella quale furono attivi soprattutto tre membri di Shinmeizan: P. Sonoda, Maria De Giorgi e P. Franco Sottocornola) si dedicò prevalentemente a due iniziative:

a) La pubblicazione di una raccolta selezionata di documenti della Chiesa Cattolica sul dialogo interreligioso, con vari commenti, e

b) La preparazione e pubblicazione di un direttorio per la pratica del dialogo interreligioso, rivolto ai fedeli della Chiesa Cattolica, compilato anche con la consultazione di shintoisti, buddhisti e musulmani, che è stato tradotto anche in inglese e portoghese.

In seguito, questa Sottocommissione della Conferenza Episcopale per il dialogo interreligioso prese l'iniziativa di organizzare, ogni anno in una città diversa, una tavola rotonda o «simposio» interreligioso, ossia con la partecipazione di conferenzieri di varie tradizioni religiose, su tematiche di interesse comune, come l'invecchiamento della popolazione, i giovani, la religione e i nuovi mezzi di comunicazione, le religioni e la pace ecc.

La Chiesa Cattolica in Giappone è poi sempre presente nei maggiori eventi celebrati con la partecipazione delle varie religioni come l'accennato incontro del Monte Hiei il 4 agosto, o le solenni commemorazione del bombardamento atomico di Hiroshima e Nagasaki, rispettivamente il 6 e 9 agosto di ogni anno.

A livello diocesano ci sono poi diverse iniziative locali, con notevole diversità tra diocesi e diocesi.

Un centro importante per lo studio delle religioni giapponesi e anche per notevoli iniziative di dialogo a livello accademico è l'Istituto di Religioni e Cultura di Nanzan, gestito dai Missionari del Verbo Divino.

I Saveriani

Il pioniere del dialogo interreligioso in Giappone è stato certamente il Padre Lino Bellini. Dopo aver studiato Buddhismo alla Ōtani University (Università del Buddhismo della Terra Pura, Higashi Honganji Ha) a Kyōto, fu richiesto di tenere corsi in quella stessa Università, e anche nell'istituto di formazione di futuri monaci, cosa che fece per trent'anni, a partire dagli anni '70. Questa posizione gli consentì di entrare in rapporto di amicizia con vari esponenti di altre religioni, specialmente Buddhisti. Per questo fu richiesto dal Vescovo di Kyōto, Mons. Tanaka, allora Presidente della Commissione per il dialogo della Conferenza Episcopale Giapponese, di assisterlo nella sua attività, specialmente per i rapporti con l'estero, come, per esempio, la sua partecipazione annuale agli incontri organizzati in Europa dalla Comunità di sant'Egidio.

Anche il P. Luigi Menegazzo, che aveva studiato a Roma le religioni come parte della sua specializzazione in Missionologia, nella sua prima destinazione come parroco alla missione di Nichinan (Miyazaki), nel 1983, fu anche espressamente richiesto dall'allora Regionale, di dedicarsi anche al dialogo interreligioso. Cosa che P. Menegazzo fece soprattutto con la creazione di un piccolo gruppo di studio sullo Shintō, al quale partecipavano anche dei *kannushi*, o ministri del culto Shintō.

Un fatto importante fu nel 1982, la fondazione da parte del P. Franco Sottocornola, allora Regionale, insieme ai Missionari del Pime, della «Associazione *Kakehashi*» che riunisce Istituti Missionari e Ordini o Congregazioni Religiose interessate a collaborare nel loro impegno per il dialogo interreligioso in Giappone. Questa associazione, dapprima limitata ai Missionari Saveriani, PIME e Missionarie di Maria, rivolta specialmente ai nuovi arrivati come parte della loro introduzione all'attività missionaria in Giappone, si ampliò nel 2001 con l'apertura ad altri Istituti e Congregazioni, attualmente più di una decina. Ne sono membri i Superiori Maggiori dei rispettivi Istituti o Congregazioni e/o un loro delegato, che si riuniscono due volte all'anno, per condividere informazioni e progetti, o anche per esperienze comuni di dialogo interreligioso. Tra le sue attività, possiamo ricordare, per esempio, l'invito rivolto nel 2013 a Mons. Ghaleb Bader, allora Arcivescovo di Algeri, per un tour di conferenze in Giappone sull'Islam e le caratteristiche del dialogo islamo-cristiano; e, nel 2015, l'invito rivolto a Mons. Felix Machado, attualmente Vescovo di Vasai in India e Presidente della Commissione per il dialogo interreligioso della *FABC*, per molti anni Sottosegretario del *PCDI*, a tenere ugualmente una serie di conferenze in varie parti del Giappone, sul dialogo interreligioso in Asia e il ruolo in esso del Giappone.

Per quanto riguarda il dialogo interreligioso e i Saveriani in Giappone, basti comunque ricordare che lo stesso *Statuto della Regione*, all'articolo 7, elenca il dialogo in-

terreligioso tra le finalità specifiche della nostra presenza e attività missionaria in questo Paese, tema ripreso e ribadito in varie occasioni dalle nostre Assemblee e dai nostri Capitoli Regionali: «Facciamo nostra la scelta della Chiesa in Asia che propone il dialogo come una necessità ed una esigenza imprescindibile della evangelizzazione. L'impegno nel dialogo interreligioso, che non dispensa dall'annuncio della lieta notizia di Gesù Cristo ma ad esso conduce, oggi più che mai costituisce una priorità della missione *ad gentes*, ed è una modalità specifica della missione saveriana».

Shinmeizan

Natura del Centro di dialogo interreligioso Shinmeizan

La fondazione di Shinmeizan è certamente la più conosciuta e impegnativa iniziativa di dialogo interreligioso da parte della Regione Saveriana del Giappone.

Dapprima, al momento della sua fondazione, nel 1987, questo «Centro di Preghiera e Dialogo Interreligioso» (noto all'inizio come *Seimeizan*) fu opera di Padre Franco Sottocornola, a ciò destinato dall'allora Superiore Regionale P. Pier Giorgio Manni, e nacque inizialmente come «ramo cattolico del tempio buddhista Seimeizan-Schweitzer» di Tamana (Kumamoto). Nel 2003, ad opera specialmente dell'allora Superiore Regionale P. Paco Marin, il Centro è diventato opera Saveriana, indicando con il cambio parziale del nome (da *Seimeizan* a *Shinmeizan*) la continuità e discontinuità con la sua condizione precedente. Caratteristica di Shinmeizan è la sua congiunzione di:

a) *Centro di preghiera* che si ispira alla spiritualità tradizionale del Giappone (la natura come contesto di esperienza religiosa, cara allo Shintō; il silenzio, caratteristico del Buddhismo Zen; la cerimonia del tè, culmine dell'arte e della stessa cultura Giapponese) in un tentativo di inculturazione della spiritualità cristiana, e di

b) *Centro di dialogo interreligioso*, dove l'attività dei suoi membri è totalmente rivolta all'incontro e alla creazione di rapporti di amicizia con le principali tradizioni religiose del Giappone.

Riconoscimento e apprezzamento ecclesiale

Shinmeizan è stato ufficialmente riconosciuto dal Vescovo della diocesi di Fukuoka, nella quale il Centro si trova, come presenza e opera della Regione Saveriana del Giappone, specificatamente come «Casa di Preghiera e Centro di dialogo interreligioso», il 5 novembre 2005.

Questo Centro è l'unico del suo genere in Giappone. Come tale è stato apprezzato

dall'Episcopato giapponese che ha scelto tre dei suoi membri come membri della ricostituita sottocommissione per il dialogo interreligioso (oltre al P. Franco Sottocornola, la Sorella Saveriana Maria De Giorgi, che fa parte del Centro fin dalla sua fondazione² e il Padre Pietro Sonoda Yoshiaki, OFMConv. Il P. Franco e Maria De Giorgi sono tuttora Consultori della Sottocommissione).

P. Franco è stato anche incaricato dal Vescovo di Fukuoka, nella cui diocesi, il Centro si trova, del dialogo interreligioso nella diocesi e ricopre tale incarico da ormai più di trent'anni. La principale iniziativa di dialogo interreligioso in diocesi di Fukuoka è stata quella di fare avere ogni anno a tutti i Parroci della Diocesi il messaggio del *PCDI* rivolto ai Buddhisti per la festa della nascita del Buddha che in Giappone si celebra l'8 aprile, e in occasione del Capodanno, la più importante festa giapponese, in occasione della quale quasi due terzi della intera popolazione si reca in visita ad un tempio, specialmente ad un tempio Shintō, il messaggio che il *PCDI* indirizza ai fedeli di questa tradizione religiosa.

Altro segno di apprezzamento del Centro e della sua attività è stato ed è tuttora senza dubbio la nomina di P. Franco a Consultore del *PCDI* dal 1995 a tuttora, e la nomina del P. Pietro Sonoda allo stesso incarico per i quinquenni dal 2005 al 2015.

Shinmeizan, accoglie persone o gruppi per brevi o anche lunghi periodi di esperienza sia di preghiera che del dialogo interreligioso. In questi 31 anni, hanno visitato il Centro decine di migliaia di persone, da più di quaranta Paesi diversi. Tra le principali attività del centro vanno ricordate specialmente le seguenti.

La fondazione del «Gruppo di dialogo interreligioso di Kumamoto»

Nel 1991, insieme al Ven. Furukawa, Capo del Tempio Seimeizan-Schwitzer (dove P. Franco visse per un anno prima della fondazione di Shinmeizan) con un incontro pubblico tenutosi nella chiesa cattolica di Tetori, a Kumamoto, si è dato vita a questo gruppo di persone interessate al dialogo interreligioso. Dopo ben quattro anni di formazione di quanti avevano aderito a questo gruppo (una quarantina di persone), con incontri bimestrali, si è iniziata una attività che comporta quattro incontri annuali in occasione dei quali, dopo la necessaria preparazione delle parti interessate, si visitano templi buddhisti o shintoisti, o Centri di altre Religioni, per un incontro di alcune ore, scopo del quale è la mutua conoscenza, la costruzione di rapporti di amicizia, la diffusione dell'ideale del dialogo interreligioso. Altre volte, la visita a centri religiosi viene sostituita da incontri dedicati alla formazione dei membri del gruppo.

2. La vicenda della fondazione di Shinmeizan è stata raccontata da M. De Giorgi in *Seimeizan. Frammento di un dialogo tra Cristiani e Buddhisti* (Bologna: EMI, 1989).

La partecipazione a associazioni e gruppi di scambi interreligiosi

Tra le varie attività dei membri di Shinmeizan ha un posto particolare la partecipazione ad iniziative o incontri di dialogo interreligioso varie sia a livello nazionale che internazionale. Tra queste particolarmente impegnativa la partecipazione ogni anno, su invito, agli incontri internazionali «Uomini e Religioni» organizzati dalla Comunità di sant'Egidio in Europa. Vi partecipa regolarmente la Sorella Maria De Giorgi, Vice Direttrice del centro e incaricata in modo particolare dei rapporti con l'estero. Qualche volta vi ha partecipato anche P. Franco. Di solito viene richiesto anche un intervento alle varie tavole rotonde (*panels*) che costituiscono uno degli aspetti più caratteristici di questi incontri. P. Franco e Maria partecipano regolarmente alle riunioni del gruppo di scambi interreligiosi buddhisti-cristiani che si tengono ogni due mesi presso la cattedrale cattolica di Fukuoka. P. Franco ha partecipato per molti anni anche alle riunioni annuali della associazione interreligiosa *Zenki kondankai*, cui si è accennato sopra.

L'organizzazione di convegni teologici internazionali

Una delle iniziative più impegnative di Shinmeizan nel campo del dialogo interreligioso è stata senza dubbio l'organizzazione di convegni di teologi cattolici, di diverse tendenze, sul dialogo interreligioso. La prima si è tenuta, nel 2003, con il sostegno anche finanziario della Regione del Giappone, a Izumisano (Ōsaka) sede della Regione Saveriana del Giappone. La seconda, nel 2004, a Padang presso la Domus Saveriana dell'Indonesia, La terza l'anno successivo, a Bangalore (India), e l'ultima, nel 2007, a Tagaitai, nelle Filippine³.

I «pellegrinaggi» di riconciliazione in Cina

La collaborazione con il capo del Tempio Seimeizan-Schweitzer, il Ven. Tairyu Furukawa, merita una menzione tutta speciale nella storia di Shinmeizan. Tra i vari momenti di questa collaborazione importanti sono state senz'altro le due «missioni di dialogo» svolte nel 1989 e nel 1994 in Italia. La prima volta, per un mese, visitando Roma, Assisi, Parma, Milano, Bergamo con iniziative varie di incontri e conferenze sul dialogo interreligioso tenute insieme dal Ven. Furukawa e da P. Franco; la seconda, durata ben quaranta giorni, con l'esposizione di opere di calligrafia di Furukawa e conferenze quasi quotidiane ancora sul dialogo tra le culture e le religioni tenute in cinque città italiane: Milano, Cremona, Sabbioneta (MN), Brescia (San Cristo), Bergamo.

Ma ancora più importanti le «missioni di riconciliazione» in Cina con la partecipa-

3. Per una breve cronaca di questi convegni cfr. F. Sottocornola, «Meetings of Catholic Theologians, called by Shinmeizan (Japan) 2003–2007», in *Quaderni del Centro Studi Asiatico*, Izumisano (Japan), 2007/4: 153–66.

zione di Buddhisti guidati dal Ven. Furukawa e di Cristiani guidati da P. Franco. Questi «pellegrinaggi», iniziati nel 1987, resi possibili dalla guida e dal patrocinio della Croce Rosa Cinese, erano una testimonianza dell'impegno delle religioni, in dialogo di fattiva collaborazione, a servizio della pace e della riconciliazione tra i popoli. Per vari anni, ogni anno, ci siamo recati ai punti più significativi della occupazione giapponese della Cina nel 1937: al Ponte Marco Polo vicino a Pechino dove ebbe inizio l'invasione della Repubblica Cinese da parte dell'esercito nipponico, e poi a Nanchino dove ebbe luogo il più tragico massacro, compiendo in entrambi i luoghi riti buddhisti e cristiani di suffragio per le vittime e di implorazione della pace.

Come frutto ultimo di questa iniziativa, P. Franco si impegnò nella costruzione di un centro per bambini disabili a Fangshan, vicino a Pechino, con una serie di attività iniziate nel 1989 e continuate fino al 2005, coinvolgendo la collaborazione preziosa anche dei confratelli della Delegazione Saveriana di Taiwan, specialmente di P. Martino Roia.

Attività accademica di Maria De Giorgi

Sarebbero molte le altre attività di Shinmeizan da descrivere⁴. Ma tra di esse merita speciale menzione l'attività accademica di Maria De Giorgi, Vice Direttrice di Shinmeizan.

Dopo gli studi di missiologia e teologia presso la Pontificia Università Gregoriana, terminati con il dottorato in teologia con una tesi su fede e grazia nel Buddhismo della Terra Pura di Shinran e nel Cristianesimo, Maria è stata richiesta dalla stessa Università di tenere corsi sul dialogo interreligioso, e specialmente sul dialogo tra buddhisti e cristiani, sia nel Centro Studi Interreligiosi, che nella Facoltà di missiologia. Questa attività, iniziata nel 2006, continua ormai da quattordici anni e impegna Maria da febbraio a giugno ogni anno. Questa sua attività accademica ha dato occasione a tanti inviti per conferenze sui temi della sua specializzazione, sia in Italia, che in Giappone, e anche in altri Paesi, per esempio in Germania. A questa attività accademica «orale» si è poi aggiunta quella «scritta» che copre una notevole gamma di argomenti in numerose pubblicazioni⁵.

Rocco Viviano

Il più recente sviluppo della Regione del Giappone nel settore del dialogo interreligioso si è avuto con l'arrivo del P. Rocco Viviano. Dopo una precedente importante esperienza di

4. Una breve storia dei primi venticinque anni di Shinmeizan è stata raccontata nel volumetto illustrato pubblicato in italiano e in giapponese in occasione del 25° di fondazione.

5. Una bibliografia parziale degli scritti di Franco Sottocornola e Maria De Giorgi su tematiche attinenti al dialogo interreligioso in «Bibliografia», <www.shinmeizan.org>.

prassi e insegnamento nel campo del dialogo interreligioso nelle Filippine, e un dottorato in teologia conseguito al Heythrop College di Londra con una tesi sul pensiero di Josef Ratzinger-Benedetto XVI sul dialogo interreligioso, P. Rocco ha arricchito della sua presenza la Regione del Giappone. Dopo un anno a Shinmeizan (2015–2016), è stato richiesto dalla Direzione Regionale SX della fondazione di un centro di dialogo interreligioso presso la Casa Regionale di Izumisano (Ōsaka).

L'Arcivescovo di Ōsaka lo ha subito nominato responsabile del dialogo interreligioso e dell'ecumenismo nell'arcidiocesi, ed è stato nominato anche membro della sottocommissione episcopale per il dialogo interreligioso. Molto significativo anche il suo incarico di animatore del dialogo interreligioso per la Comunità Saveriana della zona del Kansai. (Ma di queste e altre attività scriverà più in dettaglio lui stesso.)

Riflessioni personali

Fin qui, molto sommariamente, la descrizione della situazione del dialogo interreligioso in Giappone e particolarmente nella Regione Saveriana di questo Paese, con qualche maggiore dettaglio per quanto riguarda Shinmeizan. Credo che questa relazione, più che sulle attività svolte, o su progetti per il futuro, debba occuparsi delle loro motivazioni profonde, della «teologia» che li sottende, della spiritualità che li anima. Ed è a questo tema che vorrei dedicare la parte conclusiva di questa mia breve relazione.

Quando nel 1978 venni in Giappone, cercai nelle indicazioni della Chiesa locale, le modalità e le finalità specifiche del mio apostolato in questo Paese, all'interno delle grandi e decisive finalità della missione della Chiesa nel mondo, legata al mandato di Gesù: «Andate e insegnate e battezzate tutti i popoli...» (Mt 28,19), e alle finalità più precise e particolari che le *Costituzioni* (nn. 1–2, 7–16) prescrivono per noi Saveriani. Non trovai indicazioni in proposito da parte dell'Episcopato Giapponese. Ma trovai preziose indicazioni da parte della *FABC*. Proprio in quell'anno, 1978, a Barrackpore, Calcutta, India, si era tenuta la seconda assemblea generale della *FABC*. In essa si riprendeva il tema della tripla priorità della missione della Chiesa in Asia, già chiaramente decisa nella precedente assemblea generale tenutasi a Taipei nel 1974: il dialogo con le culture, il dialogo con le religioni, il dialogo con i poveri dell'Asia. E si auspicava che per promuovere efficacemente la missione cristiana in questo Continente si fondassero «case o centri di preghiera» (probabilmente gli estensori del testo avevano in mente gli *ashram* dell'India) per mostrare più chiaramente il volto «religioso» della Chiesa in Asia, un Continente dalle antiche e ricche tradizioni «religiose!».

Grazie a queste autorevoli indicazioni io avevo trovato i miei criteri di scelta! Con il Superiore Regionale del tempo, p. Pier Giorgio Manni. Mi recai dall'arcivescovo di Ōsaka, Mons. Yasuda e gli rivolsi due domande: innanzitutto, una casa di preghiera e che fosse anche centro di dialogo interreligioso, sarebbe stata una forma di impegno missionario adatto al Giappone? e, ancora, una casa di preghiera e centri di dialogo interreligioso del genere sarebbe stata possibile o opportuna nella sua arcidiocesi? L'Arcivescovo, senza alcuna esitazione, mi rispose: «Quanto alla prima domanda, sì! Certamente! Quanto alla seconda... aspetti che senta anche il parere dei miei consultori diocesani». Dopo una settimana l'Arcivescovo mi chiamò al telefono e mi disse: «Ho la risposta anche alla seconda domanda». «Eccellenza, vengo subito da lei!». Recatomi dall'Arcivescovo, questi, non solo mi disse che vedeva opportuna la fondazione di questo Centro nella sua diocesi, ma mi mostrò anche subito una carta topografica in cui erano segnati in rosso cinque luoghi: cinque terreni della diocesi fra i quali il Vescovo mi chiedeva di scegliere quello che preferivo. Me lo avrebbe donato perché vi costruissi il Centro, come opera diocesana! In seguito però incontrai il Ven. Furukawa che, insieme al Prof. Honda (cattolico molto vitalmente impegnato nel dialogo con il buddhismo) mi invitarono ad unirmi a loro per avviare insieme con loro l'opera... Consultatomi con il mio Superiore Regionale, P. Pier Giorgio Manni e con il P. Okumura, uomo di grande esperienza di dialogo interreligioso che era stato fin dall'inizio mio consigliere in questo cammino, decisi di rinunciare al terreno e alla proposta dell'Arcivescovo per dare vita al progetto a Tamana, nel Kyūshū, insieme con il Ven. Furukawa e il Prof. Honda.

Questa è stata l'occasione e questo fu il criterio di scelta concreto per il mio impegno nel campo del dialogo interreligioso

Ma vorrei insistere maggiormente su un altro elemento o aspetto di questa scelta, oltre alle indicazioni della Chiesa Locale, e al «discernimento» fatto insieme ai Superiori e a persone qualificate. Mi riferisco a quella che è la motivazione di fondo e definitiva di qualsiasi nostra scelta nel campo dell'apostolato. Mi riferisco al mandato di Gesù e alle nostre *Costituzioni*, a cui sopra ho accennato.

Io credo che il dialogo interreligioso possa avere vari approcci, possa essere visto da vari punti di vista, ma che io, come Saveriano, lo debba cercare e praticare dal punto di vista del Vangelo di Gesù e delle mie *Costituzioni*.

Per me l'imperativo di san Paolo: «Guai a me se non predico il vangelo!» (1Cor 9,16) è assolutamente prioritario e determinante. Io non posso non annunciare Cristo e il suo Vangelo e, secondo il pensiero e la norma datami da San Guido Maria Conforti, a questo devono tendere tutte le mie energie, tutte le mie iniziative, tutta la mia attività (*Rego-*

la fondamentale, 3). Ebbene, io ho trovato nel dialogo interreligioso una ottima e, direi, ideale situazione per rendere testimonianza della mia fede, per annunciare il Vangelo. Il dialogo comporta, infatti, strutturalmente, sia l'ascolto dell'altro, sia la comunicazione all'altro della propria visione di fede. Naturalmente, occorre che ciò sia fatto nel rispetto, nell'apprezzamento, nella simpatia, nell'ascolto, con umiltà, con dolcezza, ma anche con chiarezza e con gioia. La gioia di condividere un dono, un dono che ho ricevuto e che di sua natura va condiviso.

Credo che, come gli episcopati dell'Asia si sono espressi nelle loro ripetute dichiarazioni in merito, effettivamente il dialogo con i seguaci delle diverse tradizioni religiose sia la via maestra per l'annuncio del Vangelo, specialmente in Asia. E spesso esso è l'unica via per raggiungere i fedeli ad esse appartenenti, e specialmente i loro maestri, le loro guide. E anche ad essi siamo debitori dell'annuncio della Bella Notizia, che è «per tutto il popolo» (Lc 1,10)⁶.

6. Cfr. Giovanni Paolo II, Enciclica *Redemptoris missio*, nn. 11, 55.

Interreligious Dialogue Ministry in Kansai (Osaka)

ROCCO VIVIANO

The aim of this presentation is to describe a new Interreligious dialogue project recently undertaken by the Xaverian Region of Japan. While doing so, I would also like to share some ideas from my personal experience of Interreligious dialogue, which I have pursued as a Xaverian missionary over several years. As I look back, I realize that Interreligious dialogue has somehow gradually made its way into my life as a specific way of being a Xaverian missionary, almost as a vocation within a vocation. The first signs of this vocation within a vocation appeared during my formation years in Parma. Further indications pointing me in the direction of the encounter with followers of other faiths have since been abundant: during my first years in the United Kingdom (2000–2003), through my first mission in the Philippines (2004–2009), the period of doctoral studies back in London (2009–2013), and continuing right up to the present. In the somewhat unexplored field of interfaith relations, it gives me peace of mind to know that the journey has been one in communion with the Congregation, confirmed by the assignment I have received from my Superiors. I am convinced that for a Xaverian missionary, the condition of possibility for a true and lasting engagement in Interreligious dialogue is to work in communion with our missionary family. I have been blessed in this sense, and I wish to share the blessings with all the confreres who might have an interest in this specific form of mission.

Background

In April 2017 the Regional Superior of Japan appointed me as full-time Interreligious Dialogue Coordinator for the Kansai District, thereby inaugurating a new missionary avenue within the work of the Region.

Actually, the appointment happened in part as a consequence of an unexpected change in the Regional plan regarding Interreligious dialogue ministry. However, it has been providential, in that it has led to remarkable new missionary possibilities. The encouraging hand of Providence soon manifested itself through two requests addressed to the Regional Superior, one from the Archbishop of Ōsaka in May 2017, and one from the

bishop in charge of the Bishops' Conference of Japan Interreligious Dialogue Subcommittee in March 2018 respectively. They both asked for our help with regard to Interreligious dialogue, and in this sense, this new ministry has developed from the outset in response to the needs of the local Church.

Guidelines had to be created and I was asked to prepare a proposal to be submitted to the Regional Council and presented at the 2017 Regional Chapter, where it met with an enthusiastic and encouraging response from the confreres.

At present, my Interreligious dialogue ministry takes place on three interconnected levels: a) work on behalf of the Xaverian Region of Japan; b) work on behalf of the Catholic Church of Japan; c) pursuit of intellectual-academic activity.

Xaverian Coordinator for Interreligious Dialogue in Kansai

My work as Xaverian Interreligious coordinator in the Kansai area has two dimensions: one internal, i.e. aimed at the Xaverian Community, and one external, towards followers of other religions. Each dimension has its specific objectives and means.

The Internal Dimension

Objectives

a) In addressing the Xaverian community, the aim of the Interreligious dialogue coordinator is twofold: first, to promote an interest in Interreligious dialogue on the part of Xaverian confreres (which in Italian we call «animazione») and, second, to offer formation for Interreligious dialogue. The more concrete objectives can be summarised as creating opportunities for the Confreres:

- a) to experience Interreligious dialogue directly;
- b) to reflect on the importance and role of Interreligious dialogue within the Church's mission, by becoming acquainted with ecclesial magisterium and practice;
- c) to deepen their knowledge of the religions in Japan, which continue to influence the culture and the mindset of the Japanese, including the Catholics we serve.
- d) to acquire and refine the attitudes, virtues and skills required when engaging in Interreligious dialogue, which incidentally are desirable for every other aspect of our mission as well.

Methodology and Means

Considering our specific circumstances, the above can be pursued through various means and initiatives, particularly the following:

- a) Interreligious hospitality: This means welcoming followers of other faiths as friends at the Xaverian Regional House, where I live, inviting them to participate, especially in the prayer and at meals. I try as much as possible to facilitate the encounter of these interreligious partners with our Xaverian community.
- b) Ongoing formation: At least once a year, the Kansai District monthly meeting is dedicated to an interreligious experience.
- c) Lectures on Interreligious dialogue and other religions, delivered by both Christians and followers of other religions.
- d) Visits to followers of other faiths in their respective places of worship.
- e) Possible cooperation of the Interreligious Dialogue Coordinator with the confreres working in other sectors: for example, parishes and schools.
- f) Participation of the Confreres in the interreligious initiatives organized by the Ōsaka Archdiocese Interreligious Dialogue Commission.

External-Missionary Dimension

In line with the Church's teaching on Interreligious dialogue, the purpose of the external dimension of the Xaverian Interreligious Dialogue Ministry is to establish relationships of friendship and mutual trust with followers of other religions, as the basis for an authentic exchange of our respective religious and spiritual richness, growing together, each in our own faiths. For us, this means not only the possibility of discovering the work of God in others' lives but also of proclaiming Christ by sharing our own Christian faith with them.

Short-term Objectives

The main objectives for the first two years are twofold: The first is to study and explore the territory, to identify the various religious organizations present in our area, and the interfaith initiatives that might already exist, with a view to possible participation. The second aim is the creation of a network of Interreligious dialogue partners, with a view to some form of regular interaction, and possibly cooperation.

Membership in Interreligious Associations and Initiatives

架け橋 *Kakehashi*: The *Kakehashi* is an association of the Superiors of Missionary Societies, Missionary and Religious Orders, for the promotion of Interreligious dialogue. Our Regional Superior appointed me as his delegate to this association. I was recently asked to coordinate the Seminars of Formation in Interreligious dialogue for Japanese Catholics sponsored by the *Kakehashi*, which were previously organised by Fr Sottocornola. The next seminar will take place in April 2019 at the Xaverian Regional House;

国際宗教同志会 *International Interreligious Fellowship*: I was recently invited to give the lecture on the Catholic Church and Interreligious dialogue at the annual general assembly of this association (5 February). Subsequently, the President invited me to be part of the committee organising their next event. This might be a new opening. To my understanding, there are currently no other Christian members.

諸宗教交流会 *Interreligious Exchange Group*: I started attending the meetings of this group in 2016–2017, when I was assigned to work at Shinmeizan. When reassigned to work in Ōsaka, I received the Regional Superior's permission to continue, and I have since done so, although this requires flying to Fukuoka, and often returning the same day. This informal gathering of different believers is a great opportunity to speak about the Christian faith in an atmosphere of friendly dialogue. Meetings take place once every two months, and each time a topic is presented by one of the members and followed by discussion. For example, I gave my first presentation, in January 2018, on Prayer in the Christian Tradition.

禅とキリスト教懇談会 *Zen and Christian Fellowship Association*: During my year of ministry at Shinmeizan (2016–2017), on Fr Sottocornola's recommendation, I participated as an observer for the first time in 2016. I was invited to do so again in 2017 and 2018. This year I may apply to become a permanent member. This will make it possible to introduce other Confreres to the Association in the future.

Formation Programme for Foreign Missionaries and Religious

For several years, the Xaverian Missionaries in Japan have been offering an important service to the mission in Japan by organizing courses and seminars for foreign missionaries, especially those recently arrived, to introduce them to the culture and religions of Japan.

In the past, these were organised separately by two confreres: Fr Sottocornola offered an Introduction to Japanese Culture and Religions, while Fr Tiziano Tosolini held seminars on Shintō, Buddhism and Confucianism.

In 2017 the Regional Superior asked me to take over Fr Tiziano's initiative and, in 2018, Fr Franco's as well. They were integrated into a single programme, now called Introduction to Japanese Culture, Society and Religions.

The programme is now open to foreign members of all religious orders, not just strictly missionaries, both those who are encountering Japan for the first time, and also those who have already been here for quite some time and feel the need to understand more.

The programme is presently composed of 5 modules, each featuring lectures delivered by experts, both Japanese and non-Japanese, including Xaverians, as well as direct experiences. The modules are:

- a) Introduction to Japanese Culture and Society (held in August 2018): The programme has been revised to give ample space to contemporary culture and aspects of society, while the religious elements have been omitted as they are covered by the other modules.
- b) Introduction to Buddhism (held in January 2018)
- c) Introduction to Shintō (held in January 2019)
- d) Introduction to Confucianism (to be held in January 2020 or 2021)
- e) Introduction to the Japanese New-New Religions: This is entirely new (to be held possibly in 2020)

So far, I have been able to organise the first three seminars, and the number of participants has been quite significant.

Coordinator for the Xaverian District of Kansai

The Xaverian Region of Japan is organized in two districts: Kansai and Kyūshū, each with a confrere serving as District Coordinator. In March 2018 I was appointed as the Kansai District Xaverian Coordinator, with two major responsibilities: the ongoing formation programme; maintaining a personal relationship with confreres residing in the Kansai region, keeping track of their situation, possible difficulties and needs, so that they may receive the necessary assistance from the Region. This has been advantageous in terms of giving Interreligious dialogue some space in our ongoing formation programme.

Interreligious Dialogue Ministry on Behalf of the Church Ōsaka Archdiocese Interreligious Dialogue Commission

Just a few weeks after transferring to the Regional House in April 2017, I received a call from the Archbishop of Ōsaka, Cardinal Maeda Manyo, informing me of his intention

to promote Interreligious dialogue in the archdiocese through a newly established committee for that purpose, and asking me to be its director. The request was considered and approved by the Regional Superior, and I received the appointment on 1 June, 2017.

The new Archdiocesan Commission for Interreligious Dialogue resulted from the transformation of a previously existing group acting as ecumenical office for the archdiocese. For this reason, when I was appointed, the role of Director of the Interreligious Dialogue Commission also included the responsibility of Diocesan Officer for Ecumenism. While the Interreligious dialogue activity was just starting, as far as ecumenism is concerned, I chose continuity as a priority, aiming at keeping the ongoing projects, while developing new initiatives in keeping with the Bishops' Conference Sub-committee for Ecumenism. However, in order to avoid confusion between these two distinct ministries, and to work more effectively, I organized the Commission into two subcommittees. Later, the Archbishop separated them into two independent commissions, and I was appointed as director of both.

The Interreligious Dialogue Commission

The new Interreligious Dialogue Commission was formed through the appointment of three members, all of them Japanese: Fr Soh Nagasaki, Religious Missionary Priest (Clarétian), Sr Nobuko Murai (Religious of the Assumption), and Ms Kumiko Ikeda, a lay consecrated lady (Secular Institute of St Mary), all with remarkable personal experience of interfaith dialogue. Fr Nagasaki and Sr Murai both come from Buddhist families, and Ms Ikeda had extensive contact with followers of other religions when working at Shinmeizan for over four years until 2016.

The Statute: Objectives and Methodology

From the beginning, I believed that the Commission should operate on a solid theological and pastoral foundation, which needed to be constructed. We needed to clarify the place of the Commission within the pastoral organization of the archdiocese, its pastoral objectives, and its methodology.

For this reason, we decided to postpone the organization of events and concentrate on drafting the statutes of the commission, in order to have precise guidelines for our future work, and also to ensure continuity in the future. Therefore, from June 2017 to March 2018 we studied the Church guidelines on Interreligious dialogue in the light of the interreligious contexts of Japan and produced a draft of the statute, which was eventually approved by the Archbishop on 19 April 2018.

Objective and Goals

According to the statute, the Commission «exists in order to assist the Archbishop in his pastoral responsibility with regard to interreligious matters» (no. 3). Its concrete goals are:

a) To promote respect, mutual understanding, and collaboration between Catholics and followers of others religious traditions within the Archdiocese of Ōsaka.

b) To create opportunities for the clergy, the religious and all the faithful of the Archdiocese to learn and deepen the Catholic understanding and style of Interreligious dialogue.

c) To encourage their desire to deepen their knowledge of the religions that are present in the territory of our Archdiocese.

d) To support the clergy as they provide guidance to their Catholic faithful, so that they may be comfortable within their own faith, while at the same time maintaining friendly, respectful and constructive relationships with followers of other religions. This is especially important for those in interreligious marriages, and in families where mixed religious beliefs coexist.

e) To provide opportunities for the formation of specially dedicated ministers for Interreligious dialogue within the parishes of the Archdiocese. (no. 4)

The Statute also defines the methodology (nos 5–9), structure and membership (10–16) and the Activities of the Commission (17–1)

Activities in 2018–2019

The statute distinguishes between the activities of the Commission (no. 17) and the pastoral activities organized by the Commission (no. 18). These are divided into two groups: Study and formation, and Encounter-experience, respectively.

At the beginning of the 2018–2019 pastoral year, which in Japan runs from April to March, a leaflet containing information about the Commission and the calendar of activities for the coming year was distributed to all parishes and religious communities in the Archdiocese, and also to ecumenical partners. This is a brief summary of this year's events. These were open to all Catholic faithful and were therefore held in Japanese.

5 May 2018—Visit to the Headquarters of the Jodo Buddhist denomination on the occasion of *Hana matsuri* (celebration of the Buddha's birthday). Around sixty people attended, both Catholic and Buddhist. The event included the Buddhist ritual commemorating the Buddha; a moment of prayer in the Catholic tradition; the delivery of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue's message to Buddhists for *Hana matsuri*, on

behalf of the Archbishop; a lecture on the meaning of celebrating the Buddha's birthday for Buddhists, followed by discussion and conversation.

1 June 2018—Lecture on «The Catholic Teaching on Interreligious Dialogue: Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent developments,» delivered by myself.

23 June 2018—Interfaith Walk and Prayer for Peace. The Commission and a group of 30 people, mainly Catholic faithful, some protestants and two Buddhists went on a sort of pilgrimage, with stops at six places of worship of various religions: Catholic Church, Synagogue, Mosque, Shintō Shrine, Buddhist Temple (Jōdo Shinshu), and the temple of *Risshō kōsei kai* (a Japanese New Religion). At each station, the hosts offered a prayer for peace according to their tradition, gave a short explanation, followed by time for friendly conversation.

10 October 2018—Visit to the Amijimabun church of *Tenrikyō* (Japanese New Religion) in Ōsaka, which included an explanation of *Tenrikyō*, time for conversation and participation in the regular evening prayer service.

16 November 2018—Lecture on the Japanese New Religions, by Fr Ogasawara (theology teacher at the Tokyo Catholic seminary).

1 December 2018—Interreligious Symposium on the theme «Family and Religion.» The topic was addressed by three speakers from the Catholic, Buddhist and Shintō tradition, respectively.

26 January 2019—Visit to Ikuta Shintō Shrine in Kobe, on the occasion of the *New Year* celebrations. The event included a short Shintō ritual performed by the *Kannushi* to pray for the Catholic Archdiocese of Ōsaka; a moment of prayer according to the Catholic tradition; the delivery of the *PCID* message to Shintō Believers for the New Year, on behalf of the Archbishop, a lecture on the meaning of the structure and elements of the Shintō shrine, and conversation time.

8 February—Lecture on «The Natural Environment of Japan and the Gods of Shintō» by a Shintō priest.

Each activity is advertised through posters sent to each parish, religious community, ecumenical and interfaith partners, on the Archdiocese' webpage, and also on the Facebook page of the Commission.

Various parish priests and religious men and women have been participating in these activities. In February 2019, we also were invited to present the work of the Commission in a parish, and similar opportunities might follow. These are possibly small signs that awareness of Interreligious dialogue might be slowly growing among the clergy

and faithful of the diocese. We regularly publish accounts of our activities in the Archdiocesan Bulletin.

Bishops' Conference Sub-committee for Interreligious Dialogue

In March 2018, the Regional Superior received a request from Bishop Miyahara, asking for his permission to appoint me as a member for the Interreligious dialogue sub-commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, of which he is in charge. The request was accepted as a further opportunity for the Xaverian Missionaries to put our expertise to the service of the local Church.

Ōsaka Archdiocese Commission for Ecumenism

As director of the Commission for Ecumenism, I have had several opportunities to promote Interreligious dialogue among other Christian denominations present in the territory of the Archdiocese.

Ōsaka Christian Federation

As representative of the Bishop, I am a board member of the Ōsaka Christian Federation, which coordinates cooperation among twenty-nine different Churches and communities in the region. This offers further possibilities with regard to Interreligious dialogue. For example, in November 2018 I was asked to speak about Catholic engagement in Interreligious dialogue at the annual public lecture sponsored by the Federation.

Intellectual Ministry

Academic Activities

I am convinced that fruitful pastoral and missionary activity depends on strong theological foundations. Therefore, ongoing research and study are crucial, even if my activities have increased exponentially, leaving me little time and freedom of mind for theological reflection. Although the first two aspects of my ministry allow me only a limited amount of time for this, I have been able to pursue it, mainly in response to requests rather than as a personal initiative, through academic publications and lectures. I was able to accept a few requests to write for publication, in academic journals including *The Downside Review*, and *Sacra Doctrina*, of which I am a research committee member. I am now preparing the publication of a doctoral thesis in book form. I was also able to give a few lectures

to various audiences: Catholics, Protestants, and people of other faiths. I was also invited to teach at Sofia University, but was unable to accept due to time-constraints.

Networking with Academic Institutions

This is a very important aspect both for intellectual and pastoral work. Besides keeping in touch with Heythrop College, University of London, I am an active member of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists, where in July 2017 I was elected as Secretary General.

In Japan, I was able to establish informal connections with various academic institutions. At present, there have been opportunities to cooperate with faculty members of the following universities: Sofia University (Jesuit, Tōkyō); Ōtani University (Buddhist, Kyōto); Ryūkoku University (Buddhist, Kyōto); Nanzan University (Divine Word, Nagoya, through Fr Tosolini's connection to the University); Dōshisha University (Protestant, Kyōto); Kyōto University of Foreign Studies; Ritsumeikan University (Kyōto); International Christian University, Tōkyō.

Guiding Principles and Methodology

In terms of aims, in all aspects of the Interreligious dialogue ministry, I try to make building and deepening interpersonal relationships a priority. This is for me the way of living out the commandment of love towards people who are on a different path of faith. I am working to establish friendships, through visits and frequent communication. I have consulted with these dialogue partners when organising archdiocesan Interreligious dialogue activities and also formation courses.

This requires time, energy, travel, adaptation to the others' paces, circumstances, situation and personality. It often requires travelling long distances just for a short conversation, or accepting requests when it is not very convenient («going the extra mile»). Personal visits take a substantial amount of time, which is often not easy to find. However, these are very important, and I do my best in the hope that through my visit, they may somehow experience an encounter with the Church and God.

The Japanese language is still a great difficulty. Except for two or three people who can speak some English, all my interaction is in Japanese. I do my best and constantly ask for their help to find the best way to express myself in their language, which is also a way of strengthening mutual trust. No matter how demanding they may be, personal relationships are the most rewarding aspect of my ministry. People understand small ges-

tures of attention and love, in various forms. The Japanese seem to be especially sensitive even to almost imperceptible signs of attention, just as they are also easily hurt and quick to withdraw when they perceive indifference or when they have doubts about the sincerity of the other's intentions. However, I have experienced that when they can trust you they are faithful and trustworthy.

Through these relationships, I am constantly experiencing the work of the Spirit in them and also in myself, as I am offered so many opportunities to speak about my faith and explain Christianity, as a response to a request from these friends who journey on different religious and spiritual paths.

Another of my priorities is to try as much as possible not to create just personal relationships, but to share and extend them to others as well, especially to the Xaverian community. I try to function as a bridge at various levels, and I have already had many opportunities to facilitate the encounter and promote friendship between Catholics and followers of other faiths, between Protestants and followers of other faiths (Church-other religions followers), between Xaverian Confreres and followers of other faiths, and also between followers of different faiths among themselves.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church teaches unambiguously that Interreligious dialogue is, albeit according to the circumstances and possibilities of each, a duty of all its members (NA no. 2). This conviction underlies my work.

For this reason, rather than creating a «collection of interreligious events,» I believe it is important to educate our Catholic faithful by promoting a spirituality of Interreligious dialogue. When Interreligious dialogue is supported by a solid spirituality it becomes, first, a contemplative experience, in the sense that through it, the Christian may learn to recognise the work of God in the life of the other, to rejoice for it and learn from it. Second, Interreligious dialogue becomes quite naturally an opportunity for evangelization, for proclaiming one's genuine Christian faith to non-Christians who are willing to listen.

The context of the mission in Japan offers abundant possibilities in this sense. It is admittedly very demanding and presents significant difficulties, however it is also extremely rewarding. In these two years, as in my past journey, I have constantly experienced God present and at work in every encounter with followers of other religions. This motivates me for the journey ahead, and to help others experience the same abundance of grace.

Experiences of Dialogue in Thailand

ALESSIO CRIPPA

As Xaverian Missionaries, we are involved in the first proclamation of the Gospel in Bangkok in the Khlong Toey district, the biggest slum area, where a lot of people are living, probably more than 100,000. As in the whole country, almost 95% of them are Buddhist and all our time is spent among them. The Bishop of Bangkok has given us accommodation in a building on the fringe of the slum. It is located in the area of a Buddhist temple, just in front of the compound wall of the premises, where we go every day at least to park the car, if not for any other reason. The windows of our rooms open directly onto the temple, and so we always know what ceremonies are going on there. Besides, most of the children welcomed in the temple routinely come to our premises to attend English classes, and some monks are relatives of the sick we visit every day. We spend our time trying to accompany the lives of the people in the slum area, especially the sick and groups of children and teenagers we frequently gather many times to organize activities and provide them with some human formation. All of them are Buddhist.

All these elements give us the possibility to have a daily experience of dialogue with the Buddhists. With them we try to scatter seeds of goodness, of hope and solidarity in the midst of daily problems the slum-dwellers face. We are completely immersed in Buddhism (which, for many people is actually more like syncretism), due to the fact that in every «house» we visit, even the poorest, there is always a place for the statue of the Buddha, just next to the image of the King, and often surrounded by images of various divinities (mostly the Hindu and the Chinese variety) spirits and idols, all of them with a little altar for offerings. It is the complex background that is quite common in the Thai Buddhism, especially among the lower classes of society.

Buddhism in Present-Day Thailand

In order to better understand this background, I report here a simple description of the Buddhist context in which we are inserted, bearing in mind that Thai Buddhism is largely of the Theravada school.

Looking back on our history, we see clearly the close relationship between Buddhism and the Thai nation. The Thai nation settled firmly in present-day Thailand 700 years ago. Also, seven centuries ago it adopted the present form of Buddhism... Buddhism has had a deep influence in Thai arts, traditions, learning and the character of the people. It has modelled their way of thinking and behaviour. In short, it has become an integral part of Thai life.... Other forms of animistic and Brahmanic beliefs can also be seen mingled with popular Buddhist practices... The influences of Buddhism can be seen in all aspects of Thai life and culture. In the home, Buddha images of various sizes are kept on small altar-tables for worship. While travelling, Thais wear small Buddha images around their necks as objects of veneration and recollection or as amulets for adornment and protection... Through traditional ordination, still observed today, they are bound to the Order by ties of experience or close relationship with the monks who are their former sons, relatives or friends... Devout Buddhists may give food offerings regularly in the morning, send money contributions to their neighbourhood monasteries ... There are also Buddhist discussions or sermons on the radio, and Buddhist programmes on television. Popular Buddhism is sometimes very different from the Buddhism of the intellectuals. For a large part, of the people, the religion may mean keeping some basic moral rules, observance of rituals and participation in religious ceremonies and worship... Although the rules are very strict, the monkhood is not separated from the lay world because the monasteries are always open to anyone who wishes to retire there, either permanently or temporarily. In Thailand it is even a custom for every young man to stay for a time, long or short, in the monastery and acquire a religious training... This tradition is a factor which leads to the stability of Thai Buddhism and the continuing increase in monks and monasteries. Thailand's area of 200,000 square miles is thus dotted with 28,196 Buddhist monasteries where 339,648 monks and novices live... It is usually the villagers themselves who build the monastery for their own community. They feel themselves belonging to the monastery and the monastery belonging to their community. There are two kinds of monasteries: the royal and the community or private ones. The royal monasteries now number 186, while the number of community monasteries amounts to 28,010. By denomination, all monasteries fall under two groups, namely, Mahānikāya monasteries, numbering 26,694, and Dhammayut monasteries, numbering 1,502... Buddhism in Thailand reached the modern period under the warm support of the King and the people, without any interruption of colonial persecution or suppression¹.

Experiences of Dialogue in Bangkok Slum Areas

This context gives us the opportunity to have simple experiences of dialogue every day. We are trying to assume the attitudes that are necessary for a meaningful Interreligious dialogue with the Buddhists in our daily life and in the way we present ourselves as missionaries. Also, in stressing Christian values, we try to find parallels in Buddhist doctrine. Dialogue, of course, requires a sense of deep respect for each person and for all religious traditions. That is something fundamental and essential in our staying here, prompted by

1. P. A. Payutto–Phra Brahmagunabhorn, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2012), 13–26. Payutto, Thai Buddhist monk, has been appointed to the Sangha Supreme Council during the year 2016.

the great tolerance that the Buddhist teachings promote. As Catholic missionaries, we are well respected, and that is something which stimulates us to adjust our own personalities to the environment surrounding us, by smoothing those aspects of our characters which are not appropriate for this context. Being people capable of dialogue depends on our own personality, after all.

I would like, now, to underline some particular experiences in which the dimension of the dialogue with Buddhism has been more stressed and has required from us a change of mind, praxis and behavior.

Funerals

Since the beginning we have decided to take care of the sick in a special way, visiting them frequently in the slums and trying to be at their side in moments of suffering and pain. Since relationships with them develop into real friendship quite easily—due to the fact that the sick are often alone, sometimes abandoned, and have the desire to open their hearts to someone they can rely on—we feel the desire to accompany them in their journey through suffering and to accompany their families until their passing away.

As a concrete sign of communion, we go to pray at the Buddhist temple in the evenings preceding the cremation of the body (usually three days, but it depends on how much the family can afford, since the temple fee is high... sometimes the bodies of the poorest are cremated almost immediately). We also attend the cremation. We sit at the back with the relatives, but often receive the invitation from the relatives to move forward to the first bench, just in front of the group of monks who are going to lead the three-stage prayer. We usually enter the temple wearing the white «alba,» that here in Thailand is well-known as the uniform of Catholic priests: the people we know appreciate this for many reasons, among them the fact that we have nothing to hide but we attend the prayer as we are (I have read in some books that the real dialogue starts the moment we are happy to be what we are, without hiding our identity). Before the Buddhist prayer, we normally ask the family if they would like us to say a Christian prayer in front of the coffin, gathering with our young Thai Catholics next to the image of the deceased. On the last day, we take a picture of the deceased and assure the relatives of our Christian prayers. We explain to them that we keep a book always open in our Chapel. In the book, there are the pictures of all the slum-dwellers we used to visit and have already passed away. Sometimes during these moments of prayer, the relationship with family members becomes more confidential: some of them come to talk about their belief in the spirits,

someone else asks us not to abandon the family now that the sick person has passed away. Every time we go to talk with the newly-ordained monks (usually they are nephews of the deceased—they are ordained from early in the morning until the end of the cremation rite in order to let the dead receive the «merits» from the ordination). These new young monks are often children and teenagers who regularly come to us for the weekly activities. Once one of them called me early in the morning, asking me to shave his head and his eyebrows, so that he could be prepared to be ordained: one more experience of communion and dialogue in my life.

In Dialogue with the Abbot

Less than two years ago Fr Alex and I had just moved to the building in Khlong Toey, and we started to invite the youth of the slum area to gather in our premises for English classes and other evening activities (every month we prepare a moment of formation for them and sometimes a moment of prayer). This movement around our building seems to have disturbed some neighbors (Before our arrival the little road was completely silent and a place in which one had the possibility to get about carry one's own business undisturbed). These people started to grumble and murmur, gossiping with some monk relatives or close friends with them. The behavior of some of these neighbors was quite explicit and talking with some of the youth we realized that our presence and our activities caused some unexpected reactions. In order to clarify everything, we decided to go for a talk with the Abbot of the temple, not without some apprehension. We were afraid to find problems that could force us to leave the place. Personally, I was also afraid that he would question us about the way we were approaching the youth, our teaching about some parables of Jesus Christ that we use with the Buddhist children coming to our activities. Instead, the dialogue with the Abbot went in the opposite direction: he started his reflection saying that: «All religions are ways that lead the people onto the path of goodness» (I cannot remember exactly each word, but this was the clear meaning) and then he said that he was pleased to know that there are foreign priests trying to gather the youth in order to protect them from the dangers of the slum areas, first of all the consumption of drugs. He invited us to carry on our mission and to go to talk with him every time we had problems. The conversation with the Abbot was really pleasant and simple; I felt really comfortable in his presence, even though my possession of the Thai language was still scarce, so that it was impossible for me to ask more questions. But certainly both of us appreciated his kindness and honesty.

Camp Activities with the Slum Children

In order to offer our Buddhist children a more effective human formation, we started to organize three-day camps outside Bangkok for groups of 25/30. Every year, we try to organize about six camps, centered on the most important values which can help the children to open their minds and hearts. The children are willing to accept our dynamics because the material we give them is well prepared, and the topics are interesting: «Self-acceptance–service–sanctity» was the theme of the last camp, in which we tried to introduce these values recalling some Buddhist teachings too, even though it was not directly relevant. It is interesting that we have become the ones striving to preserve the good practices that Buddhism promotes, but which are facing a crisis due to our hyper-technological world, in which the children are becoming more and more cellphone dependent. For example, we ask the children to sit in a meditative posture, to close their eyes and attempt to enter into themselves, concentrating their attention on the present and not wasting energies dispersing their attention all around.

One evening during each camp we organize a moment of Taizè prayer with the children, in which we let them listen to the Taizè songs alternated by some Biblical passages. Keeping silence all the time, we invite them to color a Mandala, and then ask them to share the feelings and emotions experienced while coloring it. I consider this an attempt to help them follow a Buddhist way of concentration and meditation, announcing in the meantime the Love from God our Father. I am sure we have to respect the great heritage of the Buddhist tradition, trying to penetrate its meaning ever more deeply, so as to find possible points of contact with the Gospel and to build meaningful bridges. Our desire is to announce the Gospel in the midst of this culture and religion.

I could have written about several more experiences, but have chosen these three because of a personal involvement and the fact that all of them are experiences that can raise questions about the method we use in the dialogue with Buddhism and the Buddhists as missionaries of Jesus Christ. Such questions can push forward our missionary praxis, and can give us more valuable inputs to develop our presence in Thailand.

An Exchange with Fr Daniele Mazza

In conclusion, I would like to report a conversation that I had with Fr Daniele Mazza (PIME)², about the most attractive points of our faith that can be interesting for a Bud-

2. Fr Daniele is the first missionary to earn a Master's Degree in Buddhism at the Mahachulalongkorn University.

dhist. Father Daniele reports two elements which could be worth thinking about in our missionary approach.

a) *The forgiveness of sins*: Fr Daniele stresses the fact that «In the Buddhist vision, sins are weights that the individual has to carry for himself and for which he has to pay himself.» This is totally different from the Christian understanding, in which there is a deep solidarity due to the special relationship we have with Jesus Christ: God is carrying the evil of the world. Accompanied by God and with His Grace we can have the possibility to transform evil into goodness, our wounds into sources of Life. Fr Daniele adds: «Even in Buddhism there is the possibility to share the merits, but it is only a partial aspect that doesn't involve the complete entity of evil;»

b) *The communitarian dimension*: «The experience of belonging to a family is proper to the Catholic church, in which God is constituting communities of disciples.» This aspect is missing in the Buddhist experience.

In this report, I have tried to make a description of the different aspects in which the dialogue with Buddhism is developing in our experience here in Bangkok. I have omitted other aspects because I think that the ones described are the clearest and the most interesting expression of our missionary work.

I hope that God, little by little, will help us to develop ever more effective forms of dialogue with Buddhism, as is really necessary in this context.

Dialogue and *Missio Dei*

Interreligious Dialogue and the Xaverian Mission in Asia

A Report from the Meeting Held in Taipei on 12–14 February 2019

From 12 to 14 February 2019, the meeting of confreres engaged in Interreligious dialogue ministry in the Xaverian circumscriptions of Asia was held in Taipei. For the Chinese Delegation, who hosted the gathering, it was an occasion to foster continuous formation on Interreligious dialogue as a modality of the Xaverian Charism.

The convention has a threefold aim: first, to become aware of the Interreligious dialogue activity happening in each circumscription; then, to start a reflection on the essence, foundation and implication of Interreligious dialogue as an integral aspect of our Xaverian mission; and last, to formulate concrete suggestions to promote further Interreligious dialogue engagement in each circumscription.

Proceedings

The confreres of the Chinese Delegation were present on the first and second days. The first day dealt with an exchange of information on the activities through which the ministry of Interreligious dialogue is fostered in each circumscription, underlying the specific Xaverian involvement of the Xaverians. Fr Domenico Pietanza presented the situation of Bangladesh, Fr Vitus Rubianto and Bro Alexander Ivan that of Indonesia, Fr Matteo Rebecchi that of the Philippines, Fr Paulin Batairwa spoke for the Chinese Delegation and Frs Franco Sottocornola and Rocco Viviano, for Japan.

The second day was dedicated to a reflection and discussion on the connections between Interreligious dialogue, as understood from the perspective of Catholic magisterium and practice, and the Xaverian Identity. Two points reiterated during the exchange, deserving particular attention are:

a) overall, the Interreligious dialogue engagement of the Xaverian missionaries in Asia as integral part of our mission is quite significant, in terms of quality and also of amount and variety of initiatives. The observation emerged from the relations of the circumscriptions present, namely, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, Japan and the Chinese Delegation. (Though Thailand could not attend, the delegation sent a report on their engagement with Buddhism in Thailand);

b) all the confreres engaged in specific Interreligious dialogue ministry perceive such engagement as a coherent expression of their identity as Xaverian missionaries, in full harmony with our specific charism and style.

On the third day the smaller group of those directly involved in Interreligious dialogue ministry strove to reap the fruits of the learning and discussion of the previous days. They filtered points of particular interest to all the confreres, brought to the attention of those working in Asia in a special but not exclusive way, as well as thoughts to share with confreres entrusted with the service of leadership in our circumscriptions.

Interreligious Dialogue and Xaverian identity

Though many Xaverians often feel inadequate to this specific form of mission, our charism does, in fact, equip us to carry out Interreligious dialogue. (*Constitutions* nos. 2, 4). There is hence an urgent need to help all confreres become more aware of the gift we possess. This should be one of the tasks of those directly engaged in Interreligious dialogue within our circumscriptions. Among several connections we have identified between Interreligious dialogue and the Xaverian Identity, we would like to emphasize the following:

a. Spirituality

«*In omnibus Christus*»: The Founder exhorts us to keep our gaze fixed on Jesus in everything we do (*Testament Letter* 7). When we engage in Interreligious dialogue, this means focussing on Jesus present in the «other believer,» i.e. a person who is committed to another path of faith.

«*Caritas Christi urget nos*»: It is Christ's love for us and for all people, and our love for Christ that motivates us as we encounter «other believers.»

To the extent to which we strive to be faithful to our Christological spirituality, our Interreligious encounters will become occasions for contemplative experience, in the sense of contemplating the presence and action of the Spirit at work in other believers and learning from that how to be better Christians and missionaries and, at the same time, precious opportunities to proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ, so that others may come to know him, love him, and be united with him—if it is God's will—through communion with his Body, the Church.

b. Hospitality and the Human Dimension

We consider ourselves as a family called to «make the world one single family.» As a matter of fact, the Xaverians are often known and appreciated for their ability to build

friendships. Despite our limitations, the family style is an intrinsic value of our charismatic identity that characterizes our communities. Where the context makes it possible, our hospitality naturally extends to all people, including «other believers.» Practising hospitality towards the followers of other faiths is a powerful way of enabling them to experience an encounter with the Christian faith through our human mediation.

c. The Community

The previous idea points to the importance of the community in our Interreligious dialogue ministry. Although not all confreres are called to or have the possibility to engage directly in Interreligious dialogue ministry, the work of those specially dedicated to Interreligious dialogue is not isolated, but can be much more fruitful if carried out in unity with the Xaverian community and with its support, which can take different forms.

d. Knowledge of the Other

The Xaverian tradition has constantly emphasized that for our proclamation to be more effective, it is important to know the cultures of the people to whom we are sent. With regard to Interreligious dialogue, this principle implies the necessity to know as much as possible about their faith as well, which is the point of reference for their lives.

Suggestions

On the basis of our reflections, we would like to recommend the following.

First, that we cultivate hospitality as a lifestyle, generously extending it to followers of other faiths, and paying special attention to the way we present ourselves.

Second, that we become aware that Interreligious dialogue is not merely the personal interest of a few but a common responsibility.

Third, that Interreligious dialogue be included in the formation programmes at all levels, including ongoing formation.

Fourth, that Interreligious dialogue be included in the planning of our respective circumscriptions.

Fifth, that the continuity of existing Xaverian Interreligious dialogue initiatives in each circumscription be ensured.

Sixth, we would like to recommend that networking among the confreres directly involved in Interreligious dialogue ministry in Asia, particularly through frequent exchange of information and periodical gatherings, be promoted and supported.

Seventh, we present the fruit of our reflection to the attention of the Xaverian family and especially to the attention of the Regional Superiors and Delegate Superiors of Asia. We do so in the hope that it may be a useful contribution to the Xaverian mission in the Asian context, and perhaps also a contribution to their reflection at the forthcoming continental CoSuMa.

Last, we express our heartfelt gratitude to the Chinese Delegation for convening and hosting this meeting.

TAIPEI, 14 February 2019

Fr Paulin BATAIRWA — *Taiwan*

Fr Domenico PIETANZA — *Bangladesh*

Fr Matteo REBECCHI — *Philippines*

Fr Franco SOTTOCORNOLA — *Japan*

Fr Rocco VIVIANO — *Japan*

Fr Vitus RUBIANTO — *Indonesia*

Bro. Raymundus Pasca Putra Alexander IVAN — *Indonesia*

