PILGRIMAGE INTO, OF AND FOR FRIENDSHIP

None of our major traditions, in its origins, saw itself as "opposed" to another. Yes, of course, there were tensions, in several cases from very early on (Jews and Christians, Hindus and Buddhists).

Still more, in almost all cases, our histories have bequeathed us many difficult, even disgraceful, episodes of hatred and destruction. Yet the crucially encouraging experiences have been those of friendship being discovered and growing, even in the midst of communal tension and strife.

Are there not enough such experiences in the long history (Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan Saladin, for example), not least in the XXth century, to encourage us to believe that friendship can be won and can win out, provided that on all sides and from all starting points we are ready to meet at a depth where we allow ourselves to be positively enriched by one another?

A most notable exemplar in this way of pilgriage, now living not far from me in Oxford, is Bishop Kenneth CRAGG. As witnessed in his still-growing list of books, his knowledge of Islam and of the other major world faiths is second to none.

Still more, the respect in which he is held by Muslims in many places is a striking witness to his ability to reflect, in his speaking and writing, the best in a tradition other than the one he was brought up in.

His early books were already deeply promising. The long line since then, each dealing with a specific range of questions and historical material, is by now an unendingly fascinating library of spiritual and theological resource.

Happy are the communities where people of two or more different faith traditions can both learn as much from one another, and carry that through into shared action, as Bishop Kenneth CRAGG has done.

So, may all our hesitant attempts to open up some dialogue grow into experiences of friendship that can bear fruit not only for those immediately involved, but also for the wider traditions to which we belong and to the surrounding communities which can benefit from the understanding and trust that develops.

Suggested Reading

BOUQUET C., *Comparative Religion*. Harmondsworth, 1941.

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Mogens AMSTRUP

Interreligious Dialogue,

Multiculturality and Multireligiousness

What do we understand when we use the phrase "dialogue"? Dialogue has become a very modern and often-used phrase. It seems like everybody is talking about dialogue. Politicians talk about the importance of dialogue, but also we as the people of the Church talk about it: ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue.

LOOKING BEHIND THE TERM "DIALOGUE"

The phrase is originally taken from Greek: *dia-logos*, literally meaning "through words." The words simply mean "talking together." Interchurch dialogue has existed for many years. But the XXth century has shown us that ecumenical dialogue is simply not enough.

The XXth century has, more than any other, brought people of different faiths close to each other. Before the XXth century, interreligious dialogue or experience of other faiths and religions were brought to us by missionaries far away from our own world.

But the world has changed and migration has started. Wars and conflicts around the world have brought people from places we barely knew existed close to our homes and often also to our hearts.

As a consequence of the European colonisation of other countries and regions, immigrants come to the far richer West and North of the world—a scene unimaginable just a hundred years ago. The world of today is globalised. Most of the nations of Europe live together no longer as single monocultures, but as a kind of pluralistic culture. And the world also has become much smaller.

Through mass media an attack on, for instance, the United States of America, is immediately brought into our living rooms and our consciences, and also brings reactions from around the world. And in the name of globalisation we react, and we are asked to react.

DIALOGUE IS ESSENTIAL

And here dialogue gets essential, not only in solving international crises, but also when I walk out of my room, my home, and suddenly meet my neighbour who turns out to be a Muslim, a Hindu, a Buddhist or a person of no faith.

Suddenly I have to understand the plurality of my own world and I also have to face it. All religions are influenced by these forces in different measures. We also, Christians of Europe, are facing this situation.

The religious meeting no longer takes place "out there," but has become globalised and happens everywhere. We, the Christians of Europe, are facing these new times and tasks for our own belief at a time when Christianity in Europe has become quite secularised.

And with the multicultural also comes the multireligious. We as Christians have to face and handle this in a serious way. In Denmark there has been for the last 25–30 years an ongoing dialogue between Christians and people of other faiths.

In the beginning this was primarily between Christians and people from new religious movements, having their source in Hinduism and Buddhism. Later on, it was mainly between Christians and people from the New Age movement. And in the last decade, it has also been between Christians and Muslims.

I myself have been involved in this kind of interreligious dialogue for the last 12 years. It is very important that we do not see it as something going on from Christianity to Islam, for instance, but rather as a process going on between the *peoples* of Christianity and Islam, between Christians and Muslims, between our neighbours and us.

From the time we accept dialogue as something personal, something that involves us personally and maybe even moves us, it will succeed. Let me try to explain it using a model first presented by the Norwegian psychologist David KVEBÆK.

The mind is conceived as two concentric circles: an inner circle, which belongs to my self, and an outer circle containing lots of small rooms. This is a picture of a mind. Let us call it the house of my mind.

In the middle (the inner circle) I can have my own place. The centre of my house is my own room. Before I start talking to other people (it does not matter who), I have to know my own room, my base.

In my mind there are many rooms. My mother, my father, my brother, friends, wife and so on, they all have a room in my mind. On the walls in the different rooms there are different pictures, how I, for instance, see my brother—common experiences, our shared world and so on.

If I now engage myself in interreligious dialogue, I create a new room in the house of my mind, the room of the person I am in dialogue with. And before I enter into dialogue, I have to go into her or his room in my own mind and visit that.

Then I will be ready to go into serious dialogue. First at the point when we both have created a room for the other and have confidence in it, the dialogue can begin. Let us dwell a little here.

Think it over. Take two minutes when you think about when you have met a person of another faith. Was she or he your neighbour, a friend, a fellow student or a stranger? Thank you. I hope you have realized that multiculturality and multireligiousness is around us, even though we sometimes are a little afraid to face it.

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IS ALSO INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Interreligious dialogue often is intercultural dialogue as well, and the road can be very difficult going. Be sure the road is often very long to walk. It is a long journey. Now, let me try to draw a picture.

Dialogue, and especially interreligious dialogue, exists in four steps: acquaintance, study and understanding, the Emmaus Road, and criticism. The first step is *acquaintance*: here we get acquainted, start visiting each other.

This can be our first visit to a Hindu or Buddhist temple or shrine, or a mosque; or just meeting some other believers, some Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Hare Krishna monks or "New Agers."

The second step is the one of thorough and dedicated *study* and of deeper understanding. Here we start to know the scriptures of the other partner, or her or his liturgy, and we continue meeting each other.

I have chosen to call the third step the *Emmaus Road*, even though I know that this might be a misleading expression. It is the step of near friendship. We are walking along the road together with our dialogue partner, and we accept each other and our differences.

But we are also eager to tell about our own beliefs and listen to the other's beliefs. I might participate in services given in her or his community of faith and vice versa, and afterwards we discuss our experiences. The Emmaus Road is the road of friendship, where we are searching for truth in our lives.

The fourth step is the step of *criticism*. Now we are such close friends that we actually can criticise each other as friends do and should do. It is very important to understand that criticism belongs to step four; otherwise our dialogue will hardly succeed.

It can be hard to wait to criticise people until we are as well acquainted as we should be. But often criticism has its roots in misunderstanding, because of a lack of knowledge. I am not saying that we must not criticise. What I am saying is that we have to know what we criticise before we dare to engage in it.

WHY DIALOGUE?

Because dialogue is important for pluralistic coexistence. It is a necessity, nothing less than that. If we do not walk the path of dialogue and understanding, we will end up in all kinds of different situations of conflict.

But for me as a Christian, dialogue is also of great importance in at least two other ways: in clarifying my own beliefs and in searching for truth. Before I am walking the path of dialogue, and continuously while I am walking, I have to ask myself questions about my own beliefs.

And during all this process I have to formulate my beliefs in ways that a stranger, a non-Christian, could understand. I think I know what is meant by the Holy Trinity, that Jesus is fully divine and fully human, what is meant by resurrection.

But how can I explain this? This process I am thrown into during dialogue is of great importance and makes me understand more of my own beliefs and can make me stronger. And in this process fellow believers are of a great help.

Being involved in interreligious dialogue always raises new questions about my own beliefs. Here, 12 years after I started the journey of interreligious dialogue, I still need to meet with other Christians and talk with them about questions raised on my road.

In this dialogue no question is stupid and I have to handle every question with great care and seriousness. The latest questions I have been asked were: "What does the body of resurrection look like?" and "What is covered by and what is going on in your eternity?"

Questions like this can be very hard to answer. Let us do a little exercise: I will give you five minutes to think over how we can understand the dogma of the Holy Trinity. How can three entities differ but still be the same?

I think you realized that this can be a very hard exercise; now try to imagine that you have to explain it to a person who does not have a Christian background.

The other reason why dialogue is of great importance to me is in searching for the truth. We might think we already know the truth. But the Indian theologian Thomas THANGARAJ says it in another way: "Truth is nothing we know. Truth is a part of eschatology and we are living in the eschatology, but we do not know all of it."

For Thomas THANGARAJ, who lives as a Christian in a Hindu society, interreligious dialogue is important and necessary. He is talking about dialogue as a process "not only of talking, but also of walking." And I think he is right.

The same view of dialogue as a process, a path to walk, was presented by one of the great personalities in interreligious dialogue, a kind of pioneer, the Norwegian theologian and missionary to China Karl Ludwig REICHELT.

He practiced his interreligious dialogue at the beginning of the last century. A modern theologian who is walking the same path is another Norwegian, Notto THELLE, now a professor of systematic theology at the University of Oslo.

We can only talk about serious dialogue if I have my own strong beliefs and the person I am talking to has hers or his. But I also have to understand the possibility of being influenced. The other partner can move me in a direction I was not going beforehand. If I accept this possibility, there is a great chance that dialogue will further itself.

IS DIALOGUE MISSION?

I think even with the view of dialogue as a process, a path to walk, there will be the aspect of mission from both sides. We would not take our own belief seriously if we were not eager to tell other people about it. The question arises: Can we pray and worship together, then?

This question can also be asked in another way: "How far do I have to go on my journey in the name of tolerance, in the name of interreligious dialogue, and in the name of moving and being moved myself?

Before I go on giving you my points of view, I would like you to think it over for some time. Worship has its specific liturgy. And for us a part of this liturgy and worship would be the Apostolic faith, or the confession of Jesus Christ as fully divine and fully human.

I look at this in the following way. It would be disrespectful of me to force another person into a belief that that person does not have. I would not like to be forced, for instance, to confess Allah as God and Muhammed as God's Prophet, nor to see Jesus Christ only as a human prophet, but not as God. This is not a way to take other people seriously.

But what can we do together then? At interreligious gatherings, which I am involved in, we have found a way that has proved to be very convenient for all of us: we are silent together.

This *silence* can be filled with what everybody likes to do on her or his own. But when I participate in a meeting in the local mosque, I have to accept the Muslim prayer, and I can say my own prayer inside myself.

Visiting a local mosque I have walked into strange fields, foreign lands, and I know it; therefore I have to accept it. In the same way if a Muslim, a Hindu, a Buddhist or somebody else walks into a church or wants to participate in a meeting in the church, she or he knows the conditions and will not be surprised to hear a Christian prayer or liturgy.

Globalisation and migration has given us a new pluralistic world order, where the different monocultures, for instance of Great Britain, Scandinavia or Germany, are becoming more multicultural.

With the multicultural comes the multireligious. The new situation forces us as Christians, as the Church, to rethink our Christianity so that we can answer the questions we are asked by our neighbours.

Interreligious dialogue is a necessity, and it is a personal dialogue going on between me and the other person. The road of dialogue is not always easy to walk and it often takes quite a long time.

Suggested Reading
KÜNG Hans, *Projekt Weltethos*.
KVEBÆK David, *Sjaelens Hus*.
PANDIT Moti Lal
THANGARAJ Thomas
THELLE Notto, *Hvem kan stoppe vinden?*

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This article is a revised version of a lecture given at the WSCF European Regional Assembly (ERA) held in Nürnberg in 2001.