

# INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

## PRELUDE

**2.60** *The presence of the Institute since 1817 in the countries of Africa and Asia where Christianity is a minority religion has always been marked by a profound respect for the different religions encountered. (Cf. 1.23) But this classic sense of interreligious dialogue has been greatly extended as a consequence of the expansion of the Institute and the large-scale immigration of the post Second World War era. Nowadays there are Lasallian educational works in Europe, North America and Oceania where Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and many other religious groups can be encountered. Interreligious dialogue, therefore, is not something exotic reserved to scholars and theologians but something which takes place daily in many schools at one level or another.*

### **2.61 Why interreligious dialogue now?**

The history of religions shows that religious people have too often in the past seen their mission too narrowly as persuading or enforcing their particular religion, sometimes even to the extent of imposing it on others. When religion acts in this way and becomes more of an ideology, it effectively loses its spiritual sense because the first gift of the Spirit according to Saint Paul is “*freedom*.” *The Declaration on Religious Liberty, Dignitatis Humanae*, from the Second Vatican Council is uncompromising in insisting “that the human person has a right to religious freedom” so that “*nobody is forced to act against his convictions in religious matters in private or in public.*” (No. 2)

### **2.62 What is understood by interreligious dialogue?**

Ever since this important change of attitude towards other religions, apparent in *Dignitatis Humanae* and in other documents from the same Council, notably documents such as *Nostra Aetate* and *Ad Gentes*, the Church has pursued interreligious dialogue through many symbolic meetings such as the meeting of the Pope with other religious leaders at Assisi in 1986 as well as by the publication of a number of important documents from what is now known as the **Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue** such as *Dialogue and Mission* of 1984 and *Dialogue and Proclamation* of 1991. Both these documents state their understanding of interreligious dialogue.

*“(In the context of religious plurality) dialogue means ‘all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment,’ in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.”* (Dialogue and Mission, No. 3 )

This form of dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* assures us, is “*one of the integral elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission,*” (9) but goes on to say that “*The foundation of the Church’s commitment to dialogue is not merely anthropological but primarily theological. God, in an*

age-long dialogue, has offered and continues to offer salvation to humankind. In faithfulness to the divine initiative, the Church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all men and women.” (38) What is being sought is not to win an argument but rather to be open to the same broad questions which the traditional religions seek to answer:

*“Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the ‘seeds of the Word’ (Ad Gentes, 11, 15), a ray of that truth which enlightens all men; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind.” (Redemptoris Missio 56)*

### **2.63 Such dialogue does not stop us from presenting the Gospel**

Pope Paul VI in his 1975 exhortation, *Evangelization Today*, stresses that *“the presentation of the Gospel is not optional for the Church. It is her duty, by command of the Lord Jesus, so that men may believe and be saved.”* (5) But at the same time, it is the Church which recognizes the importance of being open to these *“seeds of the Word”* which are to be found in the profound truths of other religions. That is why the interreligious dialogue is of such importance, as the document of 1991 called *Dialogue and Proclamation* from the previously mentioned *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* points out:

*“A just appraisal of other religious traditions normally presupposes close contact with them . . . These traditions are to be approached with great sensitivity, on account of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them. They command our respect because over the centuries they have borne witness to the efforts to find answers ‘to those profound mysteries of the human condition’ (Nostra aetate, 1) and have given expression to the religious experience and the longings of millions of their adherents, and they continue to do so today.”* (No. 14)

### **2.64 What are some implications for the Lasallian School?**

When he addressed the question of furthering interreligious dialogue in the school in his address at Strasbourg, Brother John Johnston based his approach on the section called *Forms of Dialogue* (No. 42) in the already-mentioned document entitled *Dialogue and Proclamation*. He published it also in the *Pastoral Letter* of January 1, 1995, where he considers some different forms of interreligious dialogue and affirms that each form is a participation in the mission of evangelization as follows:

*“We can identify at least six ways in which we can engage our young people in dialogue - whether they are Christians, or non-Christians, believers or non-believers.*

**1. Fraternal relations:** *when we promote fraternal relations among our young people, regardless of their religious beliefs, we are evangelizing;*

**2. human promotion and education:** *when we commit ourselves to the intellectual, moral, psychological, and physical development of those God confides to our care, we are evangelizing;*

3. ***promotion of justice***: when we strive to sensitize our students and pupils to questions of social justice and encourage them to commit themselves to the construction of a more just society, we are evangelizing;

4. ***prayer***: when we make possible and promote various forms and celebrations of religious expression and of prayer among our young people, we are evangelizing:

5. ***informal “dialogue”***: when we communicate with youth through the signs and symbols which identify the school as Catholic and when we share our faith with young people in informal conversation - while maintaining total respect for them in their belief or nonbelief- we are evangelizing;

6. ***formal “dialogue”***: when we organize lectures, seminars, discussion groups on topics relating to our faith as Christians, we are evangelizing . . . (Pastoral Letter, January 1, 1995)

## **2.65 Role of faculty members in particular circumstances**

All teachers in the Lasallian school are invited and expected to accept the basic philosophy of the school. At the same time, educators coming from different religious traditions will enrich the overall education by bringing something of their own convictions in their relationships and general attitudes, thus promoting mutual respect and support for religious attitudes. In practice, it is impossible to maintain a strictly “neutral” position in so many aspects of teaching. This is not required. What is necessary is more accurately described as an *impartiality* which indicates a deep respect for convictions other than one’s own and an openness to dialogue.