

The paradigm of dialogical identity as a way of overcoming the interreligious conflicts

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Abstract

In the 21st century man understands himself and the social reality in which he lives better. The global context of today's world takes man out of his cultural-religious isolation and places him in the reality of his relationship with otherness. Not an easy task, but a necessary one. Our study proposes an analysis of what we can call dialogical identity, as an agent of active involvement in the dynamics of constructive relations between religions.

Keywords: *identity, interreligious dialogue, reconciliation, religions.*

Introduction

Each of the believers of the world's religions are beginning to be aware of themselves as being in the context of the others. Representatives of religious communities, whatever their identity, but also ordinary believers, are challenged, are called to relate to other religious communities in the horizon of freedom.¹ An issue in one religion sooner or later becomes a challenge for another religion. For example, the secularist ideology in Western society - an expression of the promotion of religious indifference - which aims to eliminate or dilute the presence of the Christian religion in the public sphere, has become or will become a real challenge for other traditional religions. It is illusory to believe that it will not. Historical experience confirms it. For these reasons, it is a priority for the religious conscience of religious leaders, theologians and clerics to rethink an appropriate way of relating beyond political programs, which not infrequently have proved bankrupt. The formalization of interreligious dialogue is a major risk, which unfortunately is felt at most meetings of this nature. Dialogue presupposes at least two people who are willing to communicate, two hearts, two souls who aim for the good of both.

Identity in the dynamics of globalization

Many books and studies have been written about globalization as a reality of our present, an exciting one with negative and positive effects. We can only state that in historical-anthropological order, globalization is a long-term historical process of increasing global interconnectedness.² Globalization means space-time compression, which implies more intense interaction in a wider space and a shorter time than before; in other words, the experience of a world that feels its borders and limits differently.³ So globalization refers both to the compression of the world and to the intensification of awareness of the world as a whole;⁴ a social process in which geographical constraints on social and cultural patterns are withdrawn and people are increasingly aware of this reality;⁵ a mechanism or rhythm that brings people into

articulated proximity and intensifies the dimension of cultural, religious, linguistic, racial and ethnic diversities.⁶In our days, "interdependence is the global norm that engages all aspects of life. Space has somehow been diluted in its physical aspect, in the sense that people from different parts of the world take part instantaneously through the internet, the media in global events. What was once at a great physical distance away is now simultaneously accessible and localized, in the sense that the local becomes the experience platform of the global."⁷ This means that globalization produces a different kind of perceptual experience of time and space. This leads Mark Davis to speak about a "phenomenology of contraction" of space and time through globalization.⁸What is the impact of such a global society on identity, and in particular on religious identity? In order to answer this question, it is a priority to establish what defines identity in the social and religious order. Identity, from a social point of view, can be understood as the dynamic outcome of a process of subjective self-awareness that results in a self-constructed resource that satisfies the need for belonging and integration within the tendency of giving meaning to.⁹ The construction of identity is therefore the result of a process that unfolds over time, an experience of transformation shaped by the context in which a man is born, grows up, and matures as a subject aware of himself and of the others. In this sense, identity can be defined as the capacity for self-recognition based on continuity, a persistence that is subjected to the flow of time, of everyday experience and psychosocial commitments. Identity marks the state of being of the self in the continuous or discontinuous vector of the rhythm of the world. Thus, the construction of identity takes into account: „(a) the passage through the experience of temporality, time having both an internal-subjective and an external-social dimension suggested by the interaction of several social segments and layers, (b) the inseparability of the relationship with the social environment and the particular relationships that man has in the course of his life."¹⁰ On the premise of these elements that factor in the construction of an identity, theorists have developed the idea that identities are not static, fixed, but fluid, i.e. situated in a constant flux of change.¹¹ Social-psychological and discursive approaches to identity suggest that personal and social aspects of identity can fluctuate substantially depending on the context in which an individual finds itself. Discursive approaches to identity suggest that individuals shape their identities as they unfold during social interactions. Religious identity is a social identity in conjunction with the conformity to the precepts of a religious tradition. According to Sarah Azaransky, religious identity describes how a person or group understands, experiences, shapes and is shaped by the psychological, social, political and devotional aspects of religious membership or affiliation.¹² Religious identity is a molded identity, constitutive of man, but which develops in its content under the influence of a number of factors. Religious institutions and the family are most often mentioned as the structures that play a providential role in the formation of religious identity. These institutions provide several sets of beliefs, moral perspectives through which an individual can understand and legitimize his or her identity from a religious point of view. Cultic acts, social-religious actions, religious communities provide material and concrete opportunities for an individual to confirm and reaffirm aspects of their religious identity.¹³ But N. T. Ammerman has insisted that religious identity is never confined to a religious institution or kept within private boundaries. It lies in the tension of

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expansion, of openness, of communication.¹⁴ Religious identity does not imply rigidity, but an act of presence in relation to an otherness. For this reason, the construction of religious identities is a dynamic process in which a person is shaped by other identities that intersect within his or her life experiences. He concluded that religious identity is the result of an ongoing and fluid negotiation between dominant narratives, institutional authority and individual agency.

Implementing dialogue - a nexus of reconciling religious identities

The experience of the past reinforces the articulated awareness of the present. Regrettable religious conflicts that occurred in the past represent the assumption of not repeating these dramatic experiences, regardless of political or religious motivations. In the course of history and with social, technical and cultural developments, there has been a growing awareness that the proximity of one religious tradition to another and the interference of some religious communities in others through the process of migration can be addressed in a dialogical and relational manner, capable of changing mentalities and ideological stereotypes, in order to overcome conflicting states and attitudes. Of course, it should not be thought that the "revolution" of implementing dialogue will radically change things in the world, that there will no longer be religiously motivated conflicts. It is utopian and naïve to think so. But the proliferation of a dialogical identity or, in other words, the "conversion" of rigid and immobile identities in terms of their relationship with otherness, would attenuate and diminish to a very great extent the conflict tendencies generated by radicalist attitudes.

When they discovered each other, it was long believed that one religion was the enemy of another and vice versa. An idea inoculated for centuries. For this reason, dialogue is an instrument of reconciliation.¹⁵ The path to reconciliation has several stages, which the conflicting parties and their communities of interest go through in different ways and at a different pace. But a pace that is secure, established and effective, if it is based on commitment. That is why meeting the other and understanding their perspective is a necessary condition for mutual reconciliation to take place. Inter-religious dialogue has always existed since people belonging to cultural-religious communities became aware of their own behavioural, cultic and dogmatic particularities, particularities observed in relation to other people who thought, believed, worshipped, behaved religiously and socially differently. Moreover, interreligious dialogue has been present in the consciousness of theologians and those concerned with political philosophy since ancient times. We recall here: *Dialogus inter philosophum Iudaeum et Christianum* de Peter Abelard (1079-1142), *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis* a lui Ramon Llull (1232-1316), *Disputatio Christiani cum Gentili* de Gilbert Crispin (cca. 1092-1093), *Dialogi de Petrus Alfonsi* (cca. 1109-10), *De pace fidei* a lui Nicolaus Cusanus (1401-1464), *Colloquium septaplomeres de rerum sublimum* - *Colloque entre sept savans qui sont de differens sentimens des secrets cachez des choses relevees* a lui Jean Bodin (1530-1596).

A dialogic encounter, contrary to what many people believe or describe, is not simply a meeting with the other. It is an encounter with oneself and confronting one's own negative perspectives and prejudices about the other. These are often real obstacles that block the process of reconciliation, of synthesising intentions for the

common good. After all, reconciliation means accepting the assumption that the other has a different point of view and narrative, and that this difference needs its own space and the right to exist alongside your own. Resistance to reconciliation among religious communities stems from the fact that most, if not all, religious doctrines claim certain exclusive truths that exclude other versions of truth. Belonging to each faith has requirements, duties and privileges. Therefore, those who believe in and promote interfaith dialogue are often on the fringes of their own community by offering a different interpretation of the multi-religious reality.

Engaging in a dialogical process for reconciliation requires that the one involved accepts certain assumptions, some of which may contradict the theological interpretations of one's own religious community.¹⁶ Some principles are thus established that make the dialogical character between religious identities more effective. The factor of unity and trust between members of the religious community. First of all, it is essential to start from the premise that trust can be built or rebuilt in the other members of the religious community. Trust is necessary to build a relationship based on honesty and transparency. Secondly, mutual exploration of theological sources and frameworks from different religious traditions is required. Today, in most of the world's universities, there is a course in the curricular area that is intended as a subjective or objective presentation of other religions. The essential thing is that this exploration of other religions should not be carried out according to the equation that the other thinks wrongly, is in falsehood, what he proposes doctrinally is in contradiction to what I believe, or, at worst, is my enemy.

Third, it is essential that the conduct of dialogical interaction take place through appropriate and accessible channels of communication. Interaction must take place through appropriate communication channels that allow for the correct interpretation of religious and cultural meanings and codes. This means, for example, that participants in a religious community must listen fully and be able to articulate clearly their own perceptions of their spiritual and religious identity, especially those aspects that block them from reconciliation.¹⁷ In most cases, participants come to the meeting with an implicit communication system that relies on defensive and offensive inter- and intra-religious strategies to sustain difference. In a dialogue, when a participant from one religion describes his or her perception of the other participant from a different religion, in many situations, the latter assumes the role of correcting, "setting the record straight" and ensuring that the other participant knows the correct version of his or her religion.

Fourthly, a relationship of parity, of symmetry, is required between the participants in the dialogue. Members of different religious communities are rarely in a symmetrical relationship with each other. The fact that they belong to different ethnic or national communities places them in asymmetrical power relations.¹⁸ Such asymmetrical relationships are reflected in everyday social interactions. However, the dialogical process of reconciliation is based on the assumption that all members of the group are equal and have the same rights of expression and action.

Fifthly, the ability of participants to take risks through inter-religious dialogue is highlighted, as participants need to feel that they can overcome a point where they do not feel safe or comfortable while participating in the dialogical process. Lastly, it requires each participant to be able to engage constructively relationally

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with each other, but also with members of their own religious community, and to discuss sensitive theological and non-theological issues that also specify differences, not just what is common.¹⁹ "Interfaith encounter is limited in its effect or success when it remains at an abstract level and participants are unable to commit to any kind of joint or unilateral action to illustrate their commitment to reconciliation."²⁰

These clarifications help us to understand the profile of a dialogical religious identity. But despite the rapid increase in the number of meetings, conferences and projects that address the need for and frameworks of interreligious dialogue, formal and traditional religious authorities and their institutions have not made a clear institutional change in their structure to ensure that interreligious dialogue and the culture of religious encounter are an integral part of their theological and operational structures. Of course, there are designated persons, leaders, authorities within religious communities as representing and mandating factors in interreligious dialogue, but nevertheless, these persons and their centres or departments rarely have the human or financial resources to institutionally promote the significance of interreligious encounter. Whether inter-religious dialogue is confined to a small unit within the religious authority structure or assigned to a single person, it remains marginalized compared to the priorities of religious institutions as a whole.

A profile of dialogical identity

We can now conclude that the significant constitutive elements of identity are formed or discovered in dialogue with the meaning frames of the other. Dialogical (religious) identity:

- prioritizes the common good, beyond the particularities of life, culture, religion;*
- has an optimistic horizon in which the values of communication, tolerance, acceptance are references for the foundation or strengthening of the relationship;*
- is aware of its own definition and particularity in the global space, which it feels is pressing in the dynamics of the compression of the world;*
- the structure of the dialogical identity (the core) is based on the criteria of the teaching of faith in a particular tradition;*
- is in a continuous process of development in communicative dimensions;*
- represents an agent (simple man, religious leader, theologian) who verbalizes and intends ideals of peace, security, progress, good coexistence;*
- it is directly connected to structural-community belonging, and its expression in the societal and relational field does not imply the dilution of the beliefs in which one believes;*
- it highlights an active awareness of contemporary realities and challenges;*
- participates actively and responsibly in meetings, conferences and inter-religious forums.*

Conclusions

Humanity around the globe is today in the process of entering a new and significant phase in the religious history of the world, one in which religious

isolation is coming to an end. The pace of highlighting religious diversity is repositioning the stakes of identity on a new plane of interpretation. However we view and accept the reality of today's world, isolation is no longer an option, whether we are talking about religious, ideological, political or cultural isolation. The contemporary world has become, through the dynamics of the global economy and the fluidity of communication, a network in which it is virtually impossible for a community to be cut off from this interrelated complex. Society has become a space compressed by new communication technologies, a space in which people are aware of and feel the ripple effect of an event taking place on the other side of the world, perhaps thousands of miles away. The event itself becomes global, which also leads people to have a "global" sense of reality and to assume a dialogical identity, at least in the religious sphere.



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