



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 25, 2021

**A new decade
for social changes**

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

Interreligious dialogue and socio-religious dialogue in today's society

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Abstract. Today's society needs to organise interreligious and socio-religious dialogues in order manage to work effectively for finding a form of concord between peoples, so that no more unfortunate events such as terrorist attacks and other violent acts occur. One of the solutions is given by the interreligious dialogue carried out worldwide, a dialogue from which the participants, although having different traditions and cultures, can draw points of common interest, so that peace becomes a natural conclusion of the latter.

Keywords. interreligious, socio-religious and socio-cultural dialogue

Introduction

Religious dialogues could be defined as gatherings of different theological perspectives and they are carried out for the purpose of mutual knowledge on the one hand, and for solving problems of a theological nature on the other hand. Regarding the socio-religious dialogue, the religious representatives enter into a dialogue with representatives of the civil society, thus creating a fruitful cooperation strategy for all participants.

Interreligious and implicitly socio-religious dialogue are particularly important today, especially after the multitude of terrorist attacks that took place worldwide. However, it seems that today's society perceives this dialogue as at least suspicious, being understood as a means by which civil society can be deceived in the relationship resulting between Christianity and Islam. In other words, the conclusions of the interreligious dialogues between Christians and Muslims do not in any way indicate the desire of the latter to orchestrate terrorist attacks on religious grounds.

However, understanding interreligious dialogue from this perspective in today's society should not devalue the importance of the dialogue between different religions. The existence of some derailments coming from some religions, in fact, denotes, once again, the need to intensify these dialogues both on a strictly religious and on a socio-religious level¹. Both forms of dialogue are absolutely necessary for society, and the interreligious dialogue must always be extended towards the socio-religious one.

Restricting the interreligious dialogue strictly to religious issues means a decrease of its efficiency for the society, therefore it is necessary to keep it going in the social environment,

¹ Reinhold Bernhardt, *Ende des Dialogs ? Die Begegnung der Religionen und ihre theologische Reflexion*, Theologischer Verlag, Zurich, 2005, p. 112.

the participants being thus able to discuss issues of a political, ethical, and many other natures. If in the interreligious dialogues the participants are representatives of the traditions involved, but in the socio-religious dialogue the representatives of the society may belong to both traditions. In other words, the committees of the society that take part in the dialogues between religion and society can be mixed, thus composed of people belonging to both traditions, unlike the inter-religious dialogue where participants who support the position of their own tradition are put face to face. It is clear that the intertwining of the religious dialogue with the socio-religious one is based on the existence of interreligious gatherings, as without the latter it is more difficult to carry out a dialogue that would bring around the same table politicians and representatives of religious denominations.

The problem of contemporary society is that, through in the form of secularism, some seek to eliminate religion from human life. This elimination brings to the fore only the data provided by science as the only certitude. "The secularized society we live in is characterized by the gratuitous support of the conflict between science and theology, as a natural consequence of the divorce between the secular and the sacred. As a result, the today's society has kept science as the only option for knowledge, claiming to be unique in the space of objectivity"².

However, contemporary society does nevertheless show an interest in socio-religious dialogue because the latter might be the key to a harmonious coexistence of all citizens, regardless of their religion. This would of course also help to solve potential conflicts peacefully, thus preventing violent clashes between different cultural and religious groups.

I. The levels of religious dialogue

Religious dialogues address different topics of an interreligious and socio-religious nature and can be classified into three levels, each one corresponding to the pursued objectives. Thus, the first level that can be expressed is the practical one. It contains elements that define the practical life of the religious traditions that take place in society. An example is the approval or non-approval by the authorities for building a place of worship, or the organization in the public domain of religious events and other such matters of a practical nature, that the proper conduct of religious life depends on³.

The second level to be mentioned is the communication level, whose main purpose is to encourage mutual understanding, by mutual respect between all participants at the dialogue. At this level, the dialogue has the ability to create exceptional interpersonal relationships, which create in mutual trust.

At this level, consensus is not sought between participants, but rather an understanding of the differences between the traditions participating in the dialogue. Therefore, this level of dialogue can be defined as the one that seeks to provoke a change of vision regarding the problem exposed through the eyes of the other. This practice implies a special attention given to the other's faith, resulting in deeper human relationships, which in the long run can have practical benefits. In this respect, the moderator of the World Council of Churches said in 2008: "Relationship, reciprocity and responsibility build the community. Sharing life together involves building the community. Human beings cannot live without community. As an expression of love for God and our neighbour, community building has been essential to both Muslim and Christian teachings and ways of life. We strongly believe, as we have stated on various occasions at ecumenical meetings, that a strong commitment to living together would

² **George Daniel Petrov**, The importance of the dialogue between theology and science from an anthropological analysis perspective, in *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, Vol. 24, 785-790, October, 2021, pp. 785-786.

³ **Nicolas Adams**, Plural Methods in the Study of Interreligious Relations, in *Religion in dialog*, vol. 18, University of Hamburg, 2020, p. 50.

help us break down the walls of prejudice, reaffirm that every religion has integrity and will generate mutual liability and shared responsibility”⁴.

The third level of interreligious dialogue is the spiritual or theological one. The encounter between different beliefs and implicitly between beliefs and secular aspects of the world should not be considered negatively, as long as all seek to understand the opinion and belief of the other. Thus, when the dialogue reaches this level, it may be an instrument of deepening one's own doctrine and implicitly the other's doctrine, therefore new experiences in the participants' lives could occur.

Thus, interreligious dialogue can also be defined as a stimulus that constantly pushes forward in the search of the truth. Viewed from this perspective, interreligious dialogue can lead to an acceptance of the other, thus building a model for a pluralistic cohabitation⁵. According to Perry Schmidt-Leukel, the primary purpose of interreligious dialogue is "the search for common truth."⁶ Hence the intellectual character of the dialogue, without which no common denominator could be reached.

A point of view on interreligious and even socio-religious dialogue is also expressed by Catholicos Aram I. as follows: "Dialogue is a search for truth. All religions are, in a sense, bearers of truth but in different ways, and each religion has its own perceptions and claims of truth. Dialogue gives a religion the sense of being incomplete without the other. This does not imply a lack of fullness or deficiency. Dialogue is a learning-and-listening process. It may lead to the discovery of new dimensions of truth. It may also challenge a religion to redefine and reaffirm the truth it holds."⁷

If socio-religious dialogue is very well expressed through the first two levels of dialogue, only interreligious dialogue can reach the third level in particular. Religious problems often find answers through a deep theological analysis, which can use various elements of philosophy, just to be able to advocate a point of view at an academic level.

II. Interreligious dialogue expressed from a socio-cultural perspective

According to sociological and political analysis, interreligious dialogue may be described as a socio-cultural phenomenon⁸. This analysis demonstrates that interreligious dialogue is a semantic marker that can be related to a multitude of socio-cultural contexts. Thus, in 2018, the prestigious Social Compass publication stated: "The case studies included share an understanding of the multifaceted nature of the interreligious movement and its internal diversity and complexity. This is reflected in a variety of terms used to denote the semantic field of the phenomenon, such as interreligious, interfaith, multifaith and interconvictional."⁹

Viewed from a socio-cultural perspective, interreligious dialogue displays three fundamental characteristics:

1. It requires the participation of at least two traditions belonging to different religions;
2. Unlike interreligious meetings, socio-cultural ones require a different kind of planning;

⁴ www.acommonword.com (consulted on May 4, 2021).

⁵ Schmidt-Leukel Perry, *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology*, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2016, p. 63.

⁶ Schmidt-Leukel Perry, *Interreligious Comparisons...*, p. 70.

⁷ The text of the annual report of His Holiness Aram I presented to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches on Tuesday 26 August 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland, www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org, 2003 (accessed on February 20, 2021).

⁸ D. Dussert-Galiant, *Le dialogue interreligieux -Entre discours officiels et initiatives locales*, Rennes, 2013, p. 93.

⁹ M. Griera and A. K. Nagel, *Interreligious Relations and Governance of Religion in Europe: Introduction*, in *Social Compass*, 65 (2017), p. 304.

3. It encourages interaction between participants of different religions, in order to reach mutual understanding.

As presented above, interreligious dialogue shows a different dimension in comparison with the one of the dialogues in general¹⁰. Through this new dimension, the purpose of the dialogue is to provide a superior understanding of the role of religion in a society defined by pluralism. This new dimension also highlights the general relationship between "interreligious dialogue initiatives and specific sectors of society"¹¹. Also, hence the complex networks consisting of dialogue activities in specific socio-cultural contexts and implicitly the relations with other fields such as economy or politics¹².

III. The Dialogue as a factor promoting ethics in interpersonal relationships

Interreligious dialogue generally shows a common understanding of all creation and avoids legalistic theological structures. The research from recent years, when interreligious dialogue has manifested itself intensely worldwide, exemplifies an ethical dimension. Large-scale projects denote the inclination of interreligious dialogue towards moral and ethical action. This is also demonstrated by the presence of no less than 143 religious leaders at the centennial meeting of the World Parliament of Religions held in 1993 in Chicago.

Interreligious dialogue, as a factor promoting ethics, is a result of the condemnation of the state of irresponsibility towards the planet in general and towards the human person in particular. It highlights the fact that, in all areas of life, the orientations of human behaviour can be sketched by religion, so that a world order exists.

This idea is supported by many religious representatives and great theologians from various denominations, including Hans Kung, who emphasized that religions may contribute to world peace, provided that they live the basic moral values. Without religious peace there can be no peace between peoples in the true meaning of the word¹³.

Since its inception, the World Parliament of Religions has sought to implement the commitment of all religions to non-violence, thus instilling ethical values that bring in everyone's awareness the respect for life. This very Parliament sought to find an economic-cultural balance, especially important for society. It has naturally resulted in a culture of tolerance, with human rights being experienced from the perspective of equality for all.

IV. Conclusions

All the above lead us to the conclusion that interreligious dialogue is absolutely necessary for society. Through it, participants of different beliefs and implicitly of different ideologies, might find points of convergence on the religious, cultural, social level, therefore helping the whole society. When the religious plan is stabilized in harmony and tolerance, a lasting peace between peoples can be discussed. This peace brings by itself the elimination of the terrorist attacks of all kinds and implicitly of their repercussions.

Only by establishing as many interreligious and even socio-religious dialogues as possible, we have the possibility of knowing the other, as the participants learn to deepen their

¹⁰ **K. Lehmann and A.Koch**, Perspectives from Sociology: Modeling Religious Pluralism from Inward and Outward, in *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 2019, p. 142.

¹¹ **M. Nordin**, Secularization, Religious Plurality and Position: Local Inter-Religious Cooperation in Contemporary Sweden, in *Social Compass*, 64 (2017), pp. 388–403; J. Ipgrave, T. Knauth, A. Körs, D. Vieregge and M. von der Lippe, *Religion and Dialogue in the City—Case Studies on Interreligious Encounters in Urban Community and Education*, Münster, 2018, p. 73.

¹² **A. Nagel**, Religious Pluralization and Interfaith Activism in Germany, in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 25 (2016), pp. 199–220.

¹³ **Hans Küng**, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, Crossroad Publishing, 1991, p. 18.

own culture and to know other cultures, which they learn to see as an enrichment, as an addition of knowledge, therefore leading to mutual respect and implicit tolerance towards the other.

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