

COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO

PATHS OF PEACE
MUNSTER OSNABRUCK
GERMANY

PANEL 14
LIVING TOGETHER

Frans-Hitze-Haus, Saal 1
Monday, September 11, 2017 at 04:30 PM

CHAIR: Mgr. Johan Jozef Bonny

Participants: Religious leaders from Indonesia, France, Saudi Arabia, Kurdistan, Egypt and China, both Christians and Muslims.

CONTRIBUTOR: Mor Polycarpus

*Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light;
but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness.*
– **The Gospel of Luke 11: 34-36**

The Syriac Church Tradition of which I am a member is rooted in the Semitic/Biblical world out of which the Bible and the three monotheistic religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam sprang. In the course of history, these three monotheistic religions have lived together side by side for many generations. Their relationship is sometimes characterized by peaceful co-existence and co-operation, and at other times with a major struggle and conflict.

The living reality of these ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse and yet similar communities is treated in Syriac dialogue poetry. The distinctive Syriac genre of the dialogue or dispute poem, where two characters conduct an argument in alternating verses, has its roots in the ancient Mesopotamian precedence disputes, composed in Sumerian and Akkadian and going back to late third and the second millennium BC. Within the Syriac literary tradition, where the earliest examples of such poems are found in the writings of St Ephrem (306-373). One such dispute poem is between the Synagogue and the Church. Here, I shall present but three stanzas to show how after the initial dispute, a solution for living together is found. The Church says to Synagogue: Why should we fight? There is a room for both of us to co-exist. The poem reads:

- There fell about a dispute between the two assemblies
and here they are standing in conflict.
Let us listen, my brethren, to what they have to say
as they sing in their disputations.
- The Daughter of the Hebrews is boasting
that she is heir to the House of God,
but the Church says, for her part,
that I am the daughter and true heir.

- The Church says, The Son who was crucified has made me an heir together with you; the House can hold us both, do not begrudge me, let us inherit together, I and you.

It is often said that goodwill and tolerance will help people to live in peace and harmony. However, what will save people, is not goodwill and tolerance but clear thinking as expressed in the maxim of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Luke saying: *Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness.*

What is clear thinking then and how one does arrive at it?

In his last meditations, collected in a book entitled, *The Way to Love*, the late Jesuit Father Anthony de Mello considers the subject under consideration saying: The first thing you must know is that clear thinking does not call for any great learning. It is so simple as to be within the reach of a ten-year-old child. What is needed is not learning but unlearning, not talent but courage. You will understand this if you think of a little child in the arms of an old, disfigured housemaid. The child is too young to have picked up the prejudices of its elders. So, when it snuggles in that woman's arms, it is responding not to labels in its head; labels like white woman, black woman, ugly, pretty, old, young, mother, servant maid, it is responding not to labels such as these but to reality. That woman meets the child's need for love and that is the reality the child responds to, not the woman's name and figure and religion and race and sect. Those are irrelevant. The child has as yet no beliefs and prejudices. This is the environment within which clear thinking can occur. And to achieve it one must drop everything one has learned and achieve the mind of the child that is innocent of past experiences and programming which is so cloud our way of looking at reality.

Furthermore, de Mello continues saying: Prejudices and beliefs are not the only enemies of clear thinking. There is another pair of enemies called desire and fear. The spiritual giants have come to realize that in order to find truth, they need a heart that has nothing to protect and owes nothing to ambition and therefore leaves the mind to roam unfettered, fearless and free, in search of truth; a heart that is ever ready to accept new evidence and to change its views. Such a heart then becomes a lamp that enlightens the darkness of the whole body of humanity.

--*THE WAY TO LOVE: The Last Meditations of Anthony de Mello* "The Lamp of the Body" (Luke 11:34).

The mid-seventh century East-Syrian mystic who came from *Beth Qatraye*, the modern-day Qatar, and who later became a bishop of Nineveh (modern day Mosul in Iraq), and whose mystical writings exerted influence on people from Qatar to Tokyo, points to the merciful and compassionate heart that will bring peace and harmony to the heart and lives of people saying:

What is a merciful heart? It is the heart's burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason, he continually offers up tearful prayer, even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns in his heart without measure in the likeness of God.

(St Isaac of Nineveh, *Homily* 81).

