

To announce the Gospel in Europe.

Open issues and prospects

by Prof. Carmelo Dottolo

What type of Christian announcement is possible in today's Europe?

The issue, first of all, calls for a twofold clarification: the reading of the *Weltanschauungen*, which has characterized today's European reality; the shape Christianity has to take so that the Gospel of the Kingdom may contribute to the progress of cultural and religious identity in welcoming differences. The very history of the relationship between Christianity and European culture is a witness of how decisive may be to grasp the interaction between Christian values and processes of social and individual building up. This will help to put in evidence the negative aspects of the process as well as to discern the positive dimension of experiences and traditions which favoured a dynamics of liberation and humanization in contemporary history.

Socio-cultural context

1. Europe is a complex idea, which is the confluence of a rapport at times friendly, often conflictual, between the religious (Christian) dimension of life and the search for cultural autonomy. We could well say that in this nexus lies the specificity of the European adventure of humanity: it is centered in affirming the autonomy of the reality and liberty of the subject, alongside the awareness of the potential of religion as interpretation of life. Such a process is part of the dynamics of secularization and of the process of laicizing which recalls the novelty of the Biblical-Christian religion.

From this dialogue, which has not been successful all the times, emerges the structural complexity of the European cultural history. Along the line, we can find the affirmation of democracy, of the proclamation of men's rights and the 'Christian' ideas of the French Revolution but, side by side, also the devastating violence of religious wars and the cultural and political strives, apart from the fight against any form or attempt of institutional interference on the freedom of the individual.

If we wish to summarize we can pinpoint the following traits

- a. the affirmation of the subject as a determining reference point up to the extremes of individualism
- b. the preferential choice of democracy as a style of organizing society, without stopping the ideological arrogance of different forms of totalitarianism.
- c. the presence of a technocratic logic as a strategy to transform society and improve quality of life.
- d. The emerging of religious forms aiming at the 'human-yet too human' of well-being and tranquility.

At the same time, within this perspective, it appears a dominating paradox, which was formulated by E. Böckenförde. He stated that "modern society is not living only by values which were not produced by it, but, on the contrary, destroys those values upon which it depends unconditionally. This is due to the fact that they constitute its presupposition."¹

¹ R. A. SIEBENROCK, *Europa: un tentativo di definizione*, in *Concilium* 50 (2004) 32.

2. On the front of Christianity, apart from undeniable merits, history of its own presence has taken refuge behind a rather flattering idea, which on the long run may end up being destabilizing: it is the idea of self-understanding as a civil religion translated, in fact, into the concept of *Christendom*.

Its rather uncertain and wavering destiny along with its decisive failure, sealed by the ecclesial separation caused by the Reformation, had never been perceived in depth as a need for rethinking Christian identity and the evangelization processes. On the contrary, in its being latently (and at times patently) opposed to modernity and particularly to the value of secularization, it turned upside down. As a result, society leaves aside religious principles and political and cultural emancipation becomes the password.

It has to be clarified, anyway, that “opposition to modernity does not emerge from a rigid and mean attachment to undeserved privileges. It has, as its origin, an interpretation of the role of faith in the world, which was characterized by such greatness that its failure appeared to be a tragic anticipation of exile.”²

3 What are the issues which are interacting within the complexity of the life forms in Europe? Without entering into the complexity of the interpretation conflict, on the horizon of post or late-modernity, we can single out the sign of an epoch-making shift. It is a process which is disenchanted towards some ideologies which have deceived history up to the violent degenerations which marked the excesses in the expected process of humanization of the world.

“We find ourselves – writes John Paul II - before a widespread *existential fragmentation*. A feeling of loneliness prevails; divisions and conflicts are on the rise. Among other symptoms of this state of affairs, Europe is presently witnessing the grave phenomenon of family crises and the weakening of the very concept of the family, the continuation or resurfacing of ethnic conflicts, the re-emergence of racism, interreligious tensions, a selfishness that closes individuals and groups in upon themselves, a growing overall lack of concern for ethics and an obsessive concern for personal interests and privileges.” (*Ecclesia in Europa*, 8).

It is not a matter of giving way to a pessimist or tragic vision of history leading to bewilderment. What matters, rather, is the perception that what pertains to post-modern critique is nothing else but the charge of *unfinishedness* of those values preached by modernity: freedom, equality, justice and the effort of building a world which may be qualitatively attentive to man’s universal rights. Post-modernity feels the discomfort caused by this vacuum and probably the weakness of singling out constructive paths.

It is not by chance that the beneficial effects produced by the globalisation processes, through quick communication and multiple exchange of information, carry along also a time marked by new types of poverty, violence and fundamentalisms created by a sort of homogenization.

² C. DUQUOC, *Cristianesimo, memoria per il futuro*, Brescia 2002, 99.

Within this frame, we have to underline an exclusive concentration on human resources, which appears as an attempt for an “*anthropology without God and without Christ*”(*Ecclesia in Europa*, 9).

In the end, on one side, the explanation of the world is given without referring to the hypothesis which is God. This implies giving up the perspectives of creation and revelation in favour of scientific and technical processes, which are exclusive of man. On the other side, God’s absence does not seem to create any uneasiness nor to represent any problem. It appears to confirm that phenomenon of religious indifference identify themselves as post-atheistic.³ Its peculiarity lies in a type of crisis which facilitates the process of going back to religion. Nevertheless, it would be superficial not to spot, in the *nostalgia for the Absolute* and in the thirst for truth and authentic values, a claim for a deeper reading of the present search of the European man.

Demand for religiosity and laicity

4. If we wish to single out some decisive constant factors in the contemporary European ethical and religious search, we realize that they head for a two-fold issue: a demand for a *new religiosity* and the need for an *ethical space* for intercultural dialogue.

- a) As already mentioned, we should not be surprised about a religion come back. Our times are characterized by a *new religiosity*, which find expression in the need to find again new balance, oasis of psycho-social tranquility, where stressful daily life conditions can find moments of relaxation. They can be spaces for an inner form of religiosity as a guarantee for self-recharging. In other words, the religious experience presents itself as an identifying proposition in the splintered galaxy of the social sphere and in the progressive lack of energy which characterizes relationships. The ideal of a society looking for an on-the-spot gratification seems to offer the background for the post-modern spirituality. It is a spirituality crossing many people’s desires, especially in the emerging of subjectivity as the only reference point capable to interpret and to guide the action. Z. Baumann, the famous sociologist, writes: «It is a matter of getting satisfaction from a ready-to-use product. When the pleasure does not match the expectation and the promise and, when joy disappears with the novelty, then there is no reason at all to remain attached to a product, which is after all inferior in quality and old. It is better to find another one ‘new and upgraded’ available in the shop.»⁴.

We are here in front of a never heard-of demand for salvation and a new *experience of sacredness*. Its larger suitability to man and to his needs for a psycho-spiritual compensation makes its proposition stronger. A significant

³ Cf. Y. LEDURE, Dall’ateismo all’indifferenza religiosa: il nuovo statuto del fatto religioso, in F. LENOIR – Y. TARDAN-MASQUELLIER (edd.), *La Religione VI. Linguaggio ed esperienze religiose. Le nuove religioni*, Torino 2001, 355-368.

⁴ Z. BAUMANN, *La società della gratificazione istantanea in culture differenti: Europa e Nord America*, in *Concilium* 34 (1999) 24.

example of all this is *New Age*, which has been defined as the typical post-modern form of religiosity, deeply interwoven with oriental spiritual perspectives.

Where does its charm lie? It can be traced in the possibility of crossing reality into a virtually serene world, of overturning existence through a new spiritual grammar.

In the effort to defeat the scattering and polluting enemy of daily *routine* as well as the institutionalization of belonging, *New Age* claims to be the interpreter of the *mystical tension*, where the refuge *of* and *in* the Self and the search for the whole, are the answers to the identity loss of the "I" and to the relativism of principles.

In front of the representation of post-modern religiosity, it is necessary, now, to bring to the fore some issue.

First of all, when exposed to a spiritual revolution, it is necessary to question ourselves on the "*why?*" of such demand. For sure, the primary data is the new need for *health/salvation*. It emerges the perception of the importance of the affective sphere, of the self-care, of the quality offered to daily life by the emotional dimension. All this calls for a theological verification which has to be responsible and capable of singling out the necessity of assuring Christological roots to this new demand. This will ensure a balanced discernment. This awareness will safeguard from the danger of falling into a neurotic and crippling *search for health/salvation as an end in themselves*. In fact, the true personal salvation/healing always reflects beneficial effects on the others and on the surrounding world. It possesses, in fact, an implicit social and political value which prevents from being dragged into individualistic and narcissistic extremes.

Secondly, post-modern spirituality takes the shape of a *bricolage* of beliefs carrying a different religious and cultural matrix. The sociological analysis is complex but meaningful, especially when it underlines that the reason for this religious *puzzle* is framed into the conviction of the *contextual-environmental* character of faith and religious experience. It is as if it responds only to the present problems suggested by the cultural situation. The overall picture is worth a detailed observation on the level of inculturation achieved by Christian faith. In fact, the clear stating of the religious beliefs is not followed, on the part of the people, by the growth of sharing them. We have to ask ourselves in what way the whole of religious ideals and images may help to integrate faith and life. We may doubt, in fact, that the whole may remain at the level of a perception of a cultural uniformity (not longer safe) rather than reaching an in-depth level capable of transforming the individual and collective existence.

We are not in front of a misleading circle within which civil religion is strengthened and faith weakened?

"The religious configuration which emerges in all countries is 'a scalare'. Notwithstanding all inconsistencies, the majority of people claim to be believer and Christian, keeping a link with the original religious tradition and sharing some basic doctrinal elements. Still they find it difficult to specify more in details their own religious identity and to express their own faith."⁵

⁵ F. GARELLI, *L'Occidente e il cristianesimo*, in *Hermeneutica* 1999, 14.

Thirdly, we have to mention, especially in Eastern Europe, the presence of a traditional religion, which contributes to the formation of new social and individual identities capable to confront themselves with the need for a civil *ethos*. For sure this type of religion represents a cultural and a social system of rules, which have been helpful in facing complex political and cultural situations in tune with the historic, economic and social conditions of Eastern Europe. Such reality has to be kept in mind, even if it appears pre-Vatican Council II with the risk of becoming sclerotic as a nostalgic tradition incapable to meet the demands and the challenges of the post-modern culture.

It may be useful to remember what M. Tomka writes: «The post-communist Europe appears to be characterized by almost diametrically opposed phenomena. On one side, it brings to the united Europe pre-modern social relations along with a high number of believers who follow an intact popular devotion. On the other side, in Eastern Europe we can find the presence of groups (with the same consistency) who had never been part of a religious type of cultural tradition. For this reason they hardly belong to the European tradition but still find themselves perfectly at ease with the European secularization»⁶.

Finally, a specific cultural configuration takes shape: within it we can find the presence of other religions and the principle of a secular society as a horizon which can not be crossed in order to ensure mutual cohabitation. Religious pluralism calls religions to re-examine their perspectives up to the re-elaboration of a new way of being believers, born from meeting each other and from the capability of making choices regarding one's own faith. The presence of *other religions* calls Christians to question themselves about their own identity. At the same time, it contributes to the perception of the fact that the question marks emerging from the universe of other religions ask for a deeper understanding that Christianity has about itself. What emerges is that religious pluralism goes beyond the factual awareness of the existence of different religions and modifies the context of theological reflection and of the missionary practice.

At the same time, the present cultural and political season is claiming ever more loudly for its own lay dimension. It can be objected that often it is a matter of laicism, understood in its being an a-confessional situation, claiming for independent spaces, which place themselves in areas which are forbidden to a constructive criticism. Different, instead, is the reading of a secular dimension defined as a common space and guaranteeing surplus rather than a reserved *locus* where undefined and imprecise identities live while wavering about the role they should play.

It is precisely the relational function of secularism which is call to allow a confrontation enabling the interpretation of democratic values as a cultural and political condition for a process of social construction. This remains true even though the ecumenism of values seems to contain or to call for naïve truths on key concepts of our contemporary reality.

To evangelize in prospect

It is necessary to master a capability of discernment endowed with an awareness that Christian announcement and praxis can not simply be starting

⁶ M. TOMKA, *L'Europa postcomunista e l'ateismo perdurante*, in *Concilium* 50 (2004) 151-152.

again from previous decisions which have to be applied now to present different situation and contexts, though with some modifications. The need to enter in the interpretative conflict about reality is important in order to understand the Gospel potentials and the significance of its proposal. It can be added that the reading of culture in its existential concreteness is an integral part of the process of self-understanding of the ecclesial prophecy. If the Church is the Gospel communicating subject capable of activating the demand for sense and of provoking the conversion of culture, it is because one of its historic-cultural functions lies at the level of those questions which cross personal and social existence.

«Whoever does not read history starting from a preconstituted ideological grill, whoever allows himself to be provoked and disturbed by those *'interrupted paths'* of the human living and suffering, whoever accepts to bear the weight of not having ready-made diagnosis and ready-to-use therapies, is capable of taking upon himself this complexity»⁷. It is mandatory, therefore, to search the signs of times. It is an exercise which demands awareness of the opacity of history and the attention to dialogue.

First of all, the opacity of history emerges from the turbulent relations between the Church and the world, between Gospels and culture. In this context, we have to be aware of the dramatic path which characterizes history of salvation. Its solution is marked by the risk of failure and by the sensation that the promise for the Kingdom keeps on dragging away. To announce the Gospel does not imply an immediate success and a peaceful communication, which would run into easy and emphatic *slogans*. On the contrary, since evangelization has to shake off the anxiety provoked by something, which appears to be out of control and can not be codified as normal and oriented through normal methodologies, it is necessary to go back to the core of Christian message. This means that, whenever we announce the Gospel and in every proposal of evangelization we make, the kerygma all the times essential and irrevocable vital core has to be re-expressed anew.

Secondly, we have to underline the dialogical attention to those signs coming from the search of man who, as an *autonomous being*, constantly looks forward to shaping a better quality of life. The task of the community of believers is the one of tapping all history messianic demands to contribute to their promotion and realization. This choice demands that, while helping every man in the delicate task of discerning the design of salvation history, we remain in the heart of complexity without being subjugated by it, in the midst of the conflicts without exorcize them with easy answers, in ambiguity, in order to reject it.

After what we have said, it is understood that the evangelization process has to make necessary and urgent choices.

a) It is urgent to start off from the centrality of the uniqueness of Christ, mystery of God's presence in history. The *Kenosis* represents the criterion, better the foundation, in order to recognize any authentic transcendence. The Jesus' New Testament history points out to an irrevocable form of universal responsibility in participating in the others' suffering and injustice, opening up

⁷ B. FORTE, *Qualità pastorale dell'insegnamento della teologia sistematica*, in M. MIDALI – R. TONELLI (edd.), *Qualità pastorale delle discipline teologiche e del loro insegnamento. Una ricerca interdisciplinare*, Roma 1993, 72.

to a policy of acknowledgement and compassion, to a kind of *open eyes mysticism*. This, in fact, is the same mysticism fulfilled by Jesus Christ who defeated neutrality of the real, posing Himself as a parameter of reality.

Jesus' life recalls a *presence and a life style* which knows how to make space for the other, up to the point, as it happened in the crucifixion, of bearing with being far away. In Christ, God hides, while revealing it, his existential condition so that every man can receive as a gift the freedom to choose to live the Gospel with its radicality of building the Kingdom.

«God allows Himself being thrown out of the world on the cross. He is powerless and weak in the world and only in this way He is at our side to help us. In Mt. 8,17 clearly emerges that God does not help, thanks to his allpowerfullness, but rather through his weakness and suffering»⁸. It is precisely in not keeping for himself, as a priceless treasure, his power that God makes *epochè* of his total and absolute transcendence. He creates the premises to think *relationship* as a foundation of the gratuitous event which is that com-*passion*, which in the covenant first, and in the incarnation, later, draws the outline of the novelty of the salvation history.

This implies to give a clear connotation within the logic of communion to both, the modality of God's presence and of man's choice; in fact, the Crucified one is, above everything else, *to-be-for-the-other* up to the total gift of life.

For this reason, with His Easter, Jesus puts an end to the concept of a religious person, worried with the psycho-bodily balance, able to ensure an easy-to-get tranquility. On the contrary, He reveals the unheard-of of God's being: showing the poverty of the theistic God, who is not capable of suffering and therefore of loving, He makes come into evidence the reality of God, who is not only a suffering and understanding companion, but, rather, the one who, on the cross showing the power of love, takes upon Himself the desperate and dejected humanity. In the Paschal event, therefore, the uniqueness of Jesus shows the chance man has to love, because whoever encounters suffering and does suffer, while he reacts against indifference and apathy, protests against such reality in the interest for life which is a compassionate, albeit fragile and vulnerable, love.

b) We can, therefore, understand the decisive responsibility of the Church in announcing the christian kerigma, according to which God has reconciled with humanity. The Church, called to constantly arouse the news of the christological novelty, fulfills its own identity in the constant setting off of the salvific promise and in its re-interpretation according to the unfolding of time. In this perspective, it is even more necessary to return to the meaning of its being *alternative*, when compared to other institutional forms⁹. It is an alternative expressed by the provocative dimension of being a real sign of the unheard-of claim of the Gospel. The comprehensive meaning of such identity should find an articulation in the public responsibility which the ecclesial community has to perform, in promoting a life style capable of disturbing the general ideological apathy, which characterizes the commercial management of the religious experience (and not only).

⁸ D. BONHOEFFER, *Resistenza e resa. Lettere e scritti dal carcere*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1988, 440.

⁹ Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Un popolo messianico. La chiesa, sacramento di salvezza. La salvezza e la liberazione*, Queriniana, Brescia 1976, 69-91.

Christian faith unconditional realism proofs that the signals of hope present in the search for a new spirituality can shape a different way of being. This is, nevertheless, subject to one condition: the quest for immediacy and gratification has to open up to acknowledge the logic of gratuitousness. For this reason Christian communities should exhibit the *criteria of the kingdom* as a very reason of their pro-existence. This will clearly show that Christian message is reasonable, in the sense that it does not ask for irrational climbing heading towards a rarefied spirituality, as it may appear from certain forms of anonymous sacredness. Only in this way faith, hand in hand with reason, can present itself in a form of otherness capable of potentially provoking every culture which refuses to open up to meaning systems which are not directly promoted by it. The logic of fraternity and of solidarity with and for the other, the overcoming of that fear which prevents that event which is communion and the criticism of the selfish drives lying beneath the auto-project that man feels he is, whenever he affirms his existence as an isolated reality, are they not the Kingdom breaking signs?

The responsibility for evangelization calls the Church to live a *critic-prophetic tension* towards the world. This is not meant to fill the vacuum of the absence of hope, with the risk of failing to give value to and to promote human history to full maturity, but rather to confirm the Christologic project as a place where man can search for truth and for a sense, which can offer far more than what man may dare to hope. Its originality and its being irreplaceable lies in its being *function of humanity*, at least at two levels.

First of all, it promotes the awareness that God's people is an historical subject and lives in a situation where each believer takes upon himself the task of giving witness and sharing the faith. It follows that the community of believers can not be but an inter-subjective event, expression of a communion which is nourished by the involvement in the decisive experience of following Christ. C.M. Martini writes: "An alternative community in the sense of the Gospel is not a sect, neither is a self-referential group which proudly detaches itself from the common social context and not even a alliance of few in view of emerging and mattering in society. As a consequence it is not visible all the times as a compact group, as it knows how to accept even diaspora; it may live, because of historical circumstances 'scattered'. Still, as a whole has a character of visibility and, whether it is traceable or not, it acts as leaven where all particles mysteriously operate in connection with one another and in mutual support to the point of making the dough ferment."¹⁰

Secondly, only a relational (and pneumatologic) ecclesiology, aware that the Gospel may not be welcome, makes it possible to insert the issue of the relationship between the subject and the receiver of the faith, between the Church and the world. This calls for a different maturity and the experience of being disciples has to form people with an adult faith. Here identity and belonging depend upon serving the Word and living all conditions for being disciples. Moreover, here lies the prophetic power of a *qualitative minority* who knows how to propose more credible witnessing signs, arousing the hope that the salvation promise does not depend on the capability of foretelling a better future, but, rather, it depends upon the energy flowing from the Paschal event, which, while

¹⁰ MARTINI, *Ripartiamo da Dio!*, 34.

canceling the present, announces the future. In this perspective, the Christian community offers an 'alternative' in as much as it succeeds to be an effective anticipation of the Kingdom symbolism. Symbols may remain ineffective if they do not reveal some aspects of reality in its commitment in searching for its own path towards meaning. Still it will remain the awareness of temporariness of those signs, provoked by the gap existing between the promise and its fulfillment. It is here, in fact, that the wound of injustice, unhappiness and of the excess of suffering will be constantly impending.

“Finally, we ought to think that only when local Churches will be able to show themselves as the “place” where human existence in its historical concreteness (viz. in its understanding of meaning, in joy, in love, in loneliness, in suffering, in fatigue, in civil passion, in contradiction, on the path towards death, elements which are constitutive of and can not be done without in everyone’s existence) can be lived in ‘happier’ way, which knows no-match, they will become once again attractive and capable of effectively fulfilling their task of evangelizing. It is simply obvious that the Church has to accomplish all this. If we wish to put it more radically, the Church does not exist but to fulfill this task.”¹¹.

c) The true aim of evangelization is an authentic humanization. In the end, man, as a person, is the great gamble of Christian proposition, which finds the climax of meaningfulness and truth in the christological-trinitarian dimension: being a person means to share in the love event keeping an inexhaustible and endless openness towards ‘the other’.

It means to plant into the *humus* of existence the ontological root of communion and the ethics of being-in-front of the other, within a space which extends beyond inter-subjective relations. “It is the person’s and subject’s characteristic to give up his own isolation. Morality and love are precisely to abandon one’s own particularity, peculiar personality in order to widen it on a universal dimension. [...] Whatever in one’s personality is true consists precisely in obtaining it by immersing oneself, by being immersed in the other.”¹² In an epoch when every absolute seems to be reduced to become relative and every truth is halved into the dimension of factuality, the Christian anthropological option states that man is an absolute, whom can be crossed over by no ideological form.

d) Dialogical meeting of cultures is a choice which can not be further delayed. We are surely not lacking in objections, which point out at intercultural dialogue as a risk of certain cultural relativism bordering on a loss of the values system and meaning. It is a matter, as we can guess, of setting into motion a process, which may be endowed with the courage of going out of standardized interpretative patterns or, even, leaving behind the good will of a meeting without a change. Interculturality has to be understood as a movement reinterpreting cultures, capable of producing a new cognitive experience leading to unforeseen results. Meeting another culture is an event which makes the subject perceive a way of thinking different from his own and, at times, if not often, even divergent, which has to be kept into account if we wish to dialogue in a responsible manner on life issues. For this reason we speak of exchange relations and of a fertile reciprocity with an interpretative circularity which is a true factor of enrichment.

¹¹ COLOMBO, *Sulla evangelizzazione*, 61.

¹² W. PANNENBERG, *Cristologia. Lineamenti fondamentali*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1974, 227 e 232.

Intercultural dialogue does not leave the subject unchanged; in fact, it pushes for a growth which can not be content with the superficial reading of the socio-cultural reality. It cannot surprise, therefore, that interculturality is both: to welcome the other and to be in conflict while understanding. It leads, in fact, towards an anthropological growth and the construction of a new civil cohabitation. Often the comparison among the interlocutors is blocked because of prejudices or because of being used to relationships which are only functional. The problem originates from the conviction that giving time and listening to the 'other' may be a choice leading to no results. Intercultural dialogue is, therefore, a reciprocity movement which pushes towards changing the existent and towards a project which aims at a *common civil ethos*. Unless we desire to change whatever prevents from building a more just and respectful society, the intercultural exchange can not be materialized. Within this frame, Christian contribution appears as a cultural service to man as an unrepeatable and unique being, who calls for an ethical initiative: to give attention to the problem of fundamental values constantly to be adjusted to different contexts. Interculturality involves the task of reaching the roots of the many cultural processes, posing questions on the rapport with the essential conditions of hope and of what is possible. This means being sensitive to building a different kind of humanity who may be capable of aiming at dignity and lawful rights, especially in favour of all those who are dejected and marginalized, because of imperialistic policies. To acknowledge cultural pluralism is something which typically belongs to Christianity and to its history. It is something typical of the Christian message to be a "religion, which, in the name of its mission, is in search of *freedom and justice for everyone*", understanding itself as "a religion capable of developing within itself a specific culture, *the culture of acknowledging the others in their being others*." ¹³.

e) It is important that religions know how to cooperate to build a Europe of lawful rights rather than or simple tolerance. It is a choice which calls for great maturity, especially in the context of an ever growing multireligiosity. It remains decisive, though no longer sufficient, the principle of religious freedom and equality, which finds its expression in the possibility of the individual person to live and change his own identity and belonging. A new style of cooperation among states and religions is called for, and not only where religious groups are better inserted in the cultural and social tradition of a people.

It remains true that the past twenty years deep crisis of transformation carries a compelling demand for an identity and for symbols where to recognize ourselves. In this perspective religion represents a remarkable reservoir from where to draw. The attention given to the social, cultural and political dimension of religion has to be extended to all religions, in order to avoid creating once again ideological blocks and discriminations between strong and well rooted religious groups and new movements, religious minorities and other religions. That is why, we have to revive ecumenical tension and interreligious dialogue capable of creating conditions where people may feel welcome and open to dialogue on objectives which may be functional to a more just society, which may be caring for everyone's needs.

¹³ J. B. METZ, *Differenziazioni nella comprensione del policentrismo*, in F.-X. KAUFMANN - J. B. METZ (edd.), *Capacità di futuro. Movimenti di ricerca nel cristianesimo*, Queriniana, Brescia 1988, 116.

“We invite each faith community to formulate its own **specific ethos**, what, on the basis of its own faith, it has to say on the meaning of life and death, on bearing suffering and on remitting sins, on selfless service and on the necessity for resignation, on compassion and joy. (*Declaration on world ethics by World Parliament of Religions IV, 3*)