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Dialogue, Peace and Religion

Abstract: The dialogue is a fundamental anthropological ability to solve personal and social problems. The modern way of life stimulates the competition between social groups and individuals, which increases the rivalries between religious groups. Although, in the past, religions have caused conflicts among people, they possess potentialities for peace as well as long as people are ready to deepen their religious beliefs. The article deals with the possibilities of dialogue between religions, especially between Islam and Christianity.

Key words: dialogue, violence, peace, rivalry, religions, Christianity, Islam, spiritual dimension of religions

Povzetek: **Dialog, mir in religija**

 Dialog je temeljna antropološka sposobnost reševanja osebnih in družbenih problemov. Sodobni način življenja spodbuja tekmovalnost med družbenimi skupinami in posamezniki, to pa povečuje rivalstvo med religijskimi skupinami. Čeprav so tudi religije v preteklosti povzročale prepire med ljudmi, hranijo v sebi potenciale za mir, če so le ljudje pripravljeni poglabljati svoja religiozna prepričanja. Članek se ukvarja z možnostmi dialoga med religijami, posebno med islamom in krščanstvom.

Ključne besede: dialog, nasilje, mir, tekmovalnost, religije, krščanstvo, islam, duhovna razsežnost religij

1. Introduction

Despite globalisation, the readiness for dialogue in the world is growing slowly. Manichaean tendencies prevail, pushing people in permanent conflicts. The willingness for dialogue is lacking. The development of the postmodern individualistic mentality is twofold. Man increasingly develops a sense of individuality and his rights, but also loses a sense of societal relations. Man isolates himself in his own personal world and is not willing to communicate and share his own world with others. The economic and productive haste takes more and more of his time, so he has no time for human relations. The psychological emphasis of individuality also cultivates egoistic mentality. It is stimulated by the economic liberalism, which has established the mentality of competition, exclusion and isolation. The man is less and less prepared to cooperate and share his life. The unregulated envy caused by the economic competition increases societal tensions, so lives of indivi-

duals and groups are more and more out of control. There is an emptiness, which could be easily misused for manipulations by media and politics.

On the other hand, the world is increasingly becoming a unity, also through economic and productive processes. Media has turned the world into a global village. The means of communication connect people and make it possible to contact everybody anytime and to share all everyday things. Everybody is kept informed about what is happening in the world, but this information is filtered and selected by managers of economy, politics and media, so this selection is discriminatory. As Ottmar Fuchs points out, many events are thus eliminated. Some people are discriminated and eliminated from the picture. Fuchs stresses the opposition between the politically motivated and the real problems of man (Fuchs 2007). The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York was politically opportune and attracted much public interest. The deaths of millions of women, men and children in Africa or in other parts of the third world do not earn such publicity.

The communication in the modern liberally oriented world is a problem because it is individualistic. Man is eager to solve his own problems, yet he is not prepared to share his own life and participate in the community. The problems of the globalised society are very complicated and the world is pushed into different conflicts which threaten to destroy the social order and mankind as such. Men with economic and political power have more opportunities than ordinary men and social differentiation is increasing.

2. Clashes of the civilisations

It is understandable, as Samuel Huntington (1996) pointed out, that this globalised world tends to produce antagonisms. In the age of media all differences and antagonisms of the modern world are becoming increasingly obvious. In this way the tensions in the world become more and more public and this brings the risk of clashes between different groups; between national, religious and ideological communities.

Man's perennial problem is that he gravitates toward antagonisms. He tends to develop the mentality of Manichaeism, which in turn produces the mentality of exclusion. There are two worlds: the world of Light, of Goodness, and the world of Darkness, of Evil. People are divided as the good and the bad. Media further intensify these opposites of the modern world (Schulze 2003, 67). These opposites in the world should sustain the balance and tension which make it possible to maintain the world's political order. It is the problematic points that sustain these balances, and innocent people have to take the consequences of the world strife, as in the case of Darfour and other places. According to Rene Girard, the society is looking for a scapegoat (Girard 1987). The scapegoat should be weak, so the society could survive. If he is weak he cannot resist against the will of the majority, which decides about the lives of many.

3. The Darwinian Paradigm

Joachim Bauer (2006) criticises in his book *Prinzip Menschlichkeit* (*A Principle of Humanity*) Darwin's »war of nature« as a principle of un-humanity. According to Bauer, man's genes are more willing to cooperate than to fight. The man is inherently disposed to cooperate and not to exclude others. There are no proofs that man's genes are by nature made to exclude others. On the contrary: Bauer as a physician confirms that genes are willing to cooperate. Aggression is caused by lack of cooperation or love.

Bauer rejects the concept that man and the whole nature are inherently deté-rmined to struggle for life, and that this struggle means the war of all against all. Yet this is exactly how Richard Dawkins (1999) revives Darwinism – by stressing that the »selfish gene« directs our actions. The man has »a selfish device«, which means the subject is considered as a »selfish device« (Dawkins 1999, Ch. 5). The most important discovery in connection with this is according to Dawkins the Theory of Evolution by Charles Darwin, who thorough this theory enabled a new view of human history. The man should be engaged in the same struggle. There are fights between generations (Ch. 8), the sexes (Ch. 9), there are family disputes, there are struggles between races, nations etc.

Yet according to Bauer, Darwin and Dawkins found out just a part of the whole story of the life in nature (Bauer 2006, 95). Darwin's theory was strongly influenced by Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834). Darwin was also racially prejudiced, he favoured the so-called cultured nations. According to Bauer, the theory contains many simplifications in regard to nature. However, Darwin had strongly influenced psychologists and other natural scientists at the end of the 19th century. His racism was accepted by many German psychologists and influenced the idea of a pure race and the tendencies to expel the weak from the society (110). Dawkins operates on the basis of Darwin's premises, while Bauer regards the model of Dawkins as science-fiction made to appear as science (135 ff).

A very influential perpetuator of Darwin's theory was Marxism. According to Engels, Darwin's theory finds its fulfilment in the natural dialectic process. This process is manifested in the fight of the opposites. A revolution, as a driving force of this process, functions by excluding others. There should be only one party, only one class and only one type of man. It led to the big revolutions of the last centuries, which destroyed innumerable lives and thoroughly degraded people. The entire generations have been suffering because of this man's experiment. The story of Marxism ended in 1990, confirming its own unnaturalness.

The next perpetuator of the modern struggle to survive is the liberalistic economic and social system. Economism, as a déviant form of the economic and social doctrine, influenced the rivalry in the postmodern society. The strongest have the possibility to survive, the weak have to perish. There are many variations of this system in the modern society. All this influenced struggle in society which culminated in the societal perturbations of the 20th century. Today they have more sophisticated forms of political and economic exclusion and discrimination. Wars,

revolutions and power struggles marked and still mark this period of history, and many consequences of this so-called imperialistic era are still felt.

This is the reason why religious institutions fought and still fight the systems of modernity – liberalistic states, organisations and other powerful institutions. Churches are in general against the modern ácquisitions. The same reason guides some Christian and Islamic religious leaders to oppose modern political institutions. At the same time they use the benefits of the modern world. So it is understandable that clashes among different groups appear, especially among different ideological or religious systems and political systems. These are the reasons for the tension between religious and political systems and the present politisation of religions. Religion becomes more and more a political factor. This is today a important problem, as the economy dominates entire political, social and cultural life of man. The economy reduces man to economic interests. Political orders and even religious doctrines are subordinated to these interests, so religion will become not only a political but also an economic factor. Maybe the difficulties in economic developments will change it, but this is now a fact that influences our daily life.

It is quite clear that the social system could not work well if we are not prepared to cooperate, to combine old traditions with new demands, spiritual needs with the needs of our bodies, connect the old generation with the new, link the system of consumption with the idea of social justice, the life of the present generation with the lives of those yet unborn, one nation with another and one system with another. Religions have an anthropological basis for giving people the reason to cooperate and work together. Man is an ethical being and cannot function without tradition, without connections with others, his ancestors and his progeny. This means that cooperation, dialogue and regard for others represent a sine qua non for humankind.

4.   Toward a dialogue

Bauer stresses: »The model of Darwin neglects the basic role of cooperation, which is the beginning of all biology« (Bauer 2006,128). He found out that not only in genes but also in other areas of life the cooperation is the basis of life. Without the cooperation, the basic biological functions could not be sustained. This is not only Bauer's conclusion, it is acknowledged also by different biologists, psychologists, sociologists and other experts. An important example are childeren who grew up with animals. The consequence of this was that they could not live in normal human relations. Similarly, the children who grew up in abnormal conditions could not develop normal feelings, they aggressively related to other people and had in adulthood difficulties with relating to other people. They needed psychological care to help them cooperate.

According to Bauer, the life tends toward cooperation. The whole genealogy of life is based on genes. Organisms are much more complex. The genes are »under acute control of the whole organism« (158). Genes thus work in cooperation with

other functions of an organism – especially important and influential among them is human consciousness. So genes are willing to cooperate with the internal and external facts of life. In case of man, nothing can be accomplished without cooperation. The biological and psychological components are formed by environment. The genes are thus not only the basic codes of development, they are also caused by the »biochemical depositness« (163). This means cooperation is the basis of biogenesis and without cooperation human life is not possible, since people are beings of dialogue. Human genes are influenced by environment and there are many variations of this cooperation. The cooperation is an important factor of evolution. Economists are today emphasising the importance of cooperation. Reinhard Selten is the author of the so-called »Urexperiment der Spieltheorie« (»the first experiment of the theory of game«) (178). Cooperation is so important for man that, as Bauer stresses, our brains do not agree with uncooperative unfairness; they consider such behaviour punishable (185).

Bauer goes on to show that dialogue is an important basis of the living nature and especially of man, because man depends on his environment more that other living beings – he depends on his own species. According to different researches, between 70 and 90 % of man's activities are directed by dialogue.

5. The religion – an anthropological factor

The religion is thus an important anthropological factor in man's life. The enlightenment encouraged the studies of religions at the same time it opened the one-sided (reductionist) status of religions, which has survived to this day. Various reductionisms – sociological, psychological, scientific – limited the religion from their individual perspectives. However, theories of religion gradually adopted the anthropological approach, because man is a religious being and the religion covers a very influential dimension of man, his transcendent openness. But there are still relicts of the enlightenment in our cultural, scientific and political world. The religion is seen as a vehiculum (car), as an appendage (Kant 1956, 660), which should be indispensable for ordinary people and their safety, while nobility can do without. Close to this is the definition of religion by Durkheim, who pointed out that religion is an integer system of beliefs and practices, »which the people combine in one community, namely Church.« (Lavrič and Flere 2008) Religion is only necessary to uphold the social order. So different enlightened circles are not ready to accept a holistic view of religion and acknowledge that religion is an important part of life for all people. It is a question of the wholeness (completeness) of man's personality.

Although the religion is as an important part of man, these reductionisms cause many misunderstandings among scientists, politicians and opinion makers. Maybe religion is going to be a growing political factor, but the social and personal consciousness still maintains that religious ideas are not compatible with the modern »way of life«. Today this combines with the problem of man's means of living. Already the Dutch theorist of religion Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950) point-

ed out the phenomenological or the anthropological view of religion. He stresses the religious experience of man, which declares man as a being in a relationship with the other. Man knows himself as a being who is given to the other. There is an »open structure of man«, which means »to be with other«. Religion is a belief that all activities of man are solved within a safety framework. It is an experience that a person is given by the other and at least by the Other (Juhant 2000).

Today there are many theorists stressing this dimension of religion. There are many different forms of experiencing religion, like the one of William James (2002, 391), on one hand, and of different fundamentalism, authoritarianism etc., on the other. There is more openness for the phenomena of religion among sociologists, but there is more criticism of the so-called statutory religions. The reasons are the postmodern fear of institutions and the very influential connection between religion – not only Islam – and political power. In these circumstances there is a good orientation toward an objective estimation of religion by the internationally renowned Slovenian sociologist Thomas Luckmann (1970). He says religion is manifested as an »invisible religion«. In the same sense I understand the so-called *Weltethos* (worldethos) by Hans Küng (1990). There are not many possibilities to make a visible platform as a fundament of different religions, yet there is an important common anthropological ground. According to Gandhi it is important for all religions that their belivers are ready to deepen their religious forms and believe in truth. (Gandhi 1987, 156–7)

The religion is an invisible ground of man – this was pointed out by modern philosophers of language, like Richard M. Hare (van Buren 1965). This ground enables us to live safely and to live our lives as human beings. As beings of language, we can express these »invisible thoughts« through our language.

And to apply a language means to dialogize, to take part in lives of others. The experience of the other could be obtained by man only through dialogue. The anthropological analysis of religion shows that it is a constitutive ground of openness and readiness of man to express himself as a being of dialogue. Jews and Christian knows the famous sentences in the Old Testament by Jeremiah 17, 5 and 7: »Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm … Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord …« It does not mean that the man should not trust anybody, but the trust given to another man is a limited one. Every dialogue of man is limited by man as a final being. The Lord is in fact the one who can deliver the man from his entáanglement in himself or his earthly dimensions. Faith is the ground of the true relationships among people. Faith helps and enables man to take all things on this world as penúltimate. The problem of the Enlightenment critique of religion is that it limits the knowledge and all activities of an individual, who can not fulfil these ambitions. The truth could not be found on the surface. To find it, we should be ready to acknowledge the other and to kneel down before God. The truth is beyond daily procedures, man has to open his spiritual eyes to reach it: H. J. Kouschel quotes words of the well-known philosopher of the Frankfurt school Max Horkheimer: »Theology means the consciousness that the world is an appearance, it is not the absolute truth, is not the ultimáte. Theology is – one has to be careful with words here – the hope

that despite all injustices in this world, it will not stay like this, that injustice is not final, it is the expression of languishing for this, that the murder could not triumph over the innocent victim.« (Kuschel 2008, 52) The philosophical and theological status means to oppose the life as Paul Valery wrote: »The essence is against life.« (Sloterdijk 2010, 125) This *metanoia* has exactly been the philosophical habit. It is an *ars moriendi* as the Christians of the Middle Ages said or as Fichte pointed out »the knower is the actor of the Absolute (114). He has to die himself to become a bearer of the spirit. According to Sloterdijk this is the matter of training. The philosophical (and much more theological) man has to train himself in the sense of asceticism, leading his own life in a steady *epochē*, in a steady *epistēmē*, in a steady observation of the essence.

Theology is an expression of the limitedness of this world and at the same time a criticism about the unjust conditions in this world. Because of this, it is difficult to find the truth of ourselves, of others and of the real circumstances of this world. Dialogue is thus necessarily coming our way. But worldly powers are very strong and strongly hinder this process in order to maintain status quo. Even more – we all hinder this process to persist in this state. Today there are many obstacles which prevent changing unjust conditions in personal and social life, in politics, economy and in everyday life. Politicians and economists produce public opinion, which in media conceals the real problems of man, and adapt the streams of events to their political, economic and sometimes quite personal interests, even their caprices. Even religion can be abused for these purposes. This has been a problem throughout history, yet the present circumstances in the world are much more complicated. Consequently, dialogue is more difficult, yet obviously needed more than ever. It is today a sine qua non of man's survival.

6. Religious dialogue and critics of religion

If the things are the way I have described them, it is necessary for man to accept the way of dialogue in religious relations. Like other kinds of dialogue, the religious dialogue is a difficult task, because man is a limited being, often covered with hard and firmly ossified structures. Pope John Paul II called this »the structures of evil« (John Paul II. 1994, Nr. 36). Personal and societal life of the people are structured, but if the structures do not serve man, they cause negative effects. There are many such structures of man's life today and we have to ask ourselves whether our economical and political development in its different modern dimensions serves the majority of people of this world. If the majority of people are not invited to participate in the benefits of this life, this development should be questioned and criticised. Already Plato knew that the powerful do not use justice. It is difficult to attract rulers to dialogue, but maybe all people, including the leaders of this world, have to take into account that this world is in danger (and they, as well), if we are not ready to examine its problems together. Through dialogue we have to find solutions for all people, because our common future is at stake. This can happen, if everybody becomes aware of his own limitedness. Only if we are all prepared to accept this, our limitedness, will we understand that

man is »a dependent rational animal«, as MacIntyre says. Today we are living more superficially, sometimes we are caught in the structures of our modern life and we are not willing to question them. But this is also an important question concerning our religious relations, because religious structures are in the same danger of becoming inhuman and supporting the structures of evil, if religions are not ready to open the grounds of man's existence and merely keep up appearances. As human beings we need openness towards one another and only thus can we deepen our views, including religious views. We need to accept each other as partners in this project and to see it as a very important religious project.

7. Religious dialogue – the (historical) obstacles

A very important problem, which results from the anthropological view of religion, is the problem of violence. Through René Girard the ambivalence of rivalry has its roots in nearness. (Girard 1986, 133) A rival is at the same time an example for himself and his opponent, because none of the two can obtain equal level of recognition. The traditional monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam have been rivals throughout history. Problems of rivalry are common in the history of our religions. I have no time to elaborate on the complexity of these problems, but they display, as Hans Küng (2007) explains, certain common denominators.

Hans Küng marks the catholic tradition to other religions: »The traditional Catholic position up to the twentieth century – prepared for in the early Christian centuries by Origen, Cyprian and Augustine – is generally known: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus,* no salvation outside the Church. *Extra ecclesiam nullus propheta,* no prophet outside the church. The ecumenical council of Florence in 1442 issued an unequivocal definition. 'The Holy Roman Church ... firmly believes, confesses and proclaims that no one outside the Catholic Church, whether pagan or Jew or unbeliever or one separated from the church, will participate in eternal life; rather he will fall into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, unless he joins it (the Catholic Church) before his death!'« And he concludes: »For Catholics, doesn't that settle the claim of Islam? For more than 1200 years it seemed to.« (Küng 2007, 55). Oficially it changed at the Second Vatican council.

On the other side Küng stresses three characteristics of Islam: »exclusivity, theocracy and militancy«:

Exclusivity: *on the basis of the treaty of Medina, non-Muslims too were originally members of Mohammed's community, especially Jews, so strongly represented in Medina. However, after the successive elimination of the Jewish tribes the community became exclusively Muslim. At first, Jews and Christian were tolerated in Arabia, until they were driven out under the second caliph 'Umar. He wanted Arabia to be purely Muslim. This is decisive point for understanding Islam: so initially the intensity of the religious and political following of the prophet differed considerably – and the Qur'an tells us there were also some »hypocrites« (unreliable people), as well as the true »believers« – soon it was no longer disputed that*

the whole of the religious and the political life of the state was subject to laws which did not come from man but from God.

(Küng 2007, 158–159)

Theocracy: *here the difference from Christianity is evident. The Christian community or church was outside the state (whether Jewish or Roman), even in conflict with it, and sometimes persecuted by it. Even in Byzantine mode of a »symphony« of throne and altar it remained completely distinct from the state… Things were quite different right from the beginning in the Muslim community… It formed the core around which the Islamic state was build up. Here the religious and state institutions were, in principle,identical. The Islamic commonwealth is both a religious community and a political community, a »divine state«, where there is no separation between state and religion.*

(Küng 2007, 159)

Despite this theoretical observation, we can see that faith in some orthodox, protestant and even catholic forms in practice took the indicia of the »divine state«, it means the sociological effects were often the same, if we critically observe these examples of our Christian history.

Militancy: *here a further difference from the Christian community or church is striking. The Christian community is committed, by the message, behaviour and fate of its founder, to non violence – despite what violent »Christian« rulers (emperors, kings, bishops and popes) and believers did with the original Christian ideal once Christianity became a state religion. The Islamic community, in which state and religion coincide from the beginning, is quite different: Mohammed understood it to be as a fighting community which was allowed to fight with sword. Indeed, war as a political means of was not only affirmed in principle but, when necessary, waged without any great inhibitions. Thus from its origins Islam has had a militant character, fighting for God – in this respect it is closer to early Judaism and its »Yahweh wars« than to early Christianity.*

(Küng 2007, 159–160)

On the other hand the Christinas were fighting against people of other religions too.

But there are enough grounds for the other side of our religions:

1) The early Jewish constitution as a »religious democracy«: Israel, the prophetic pioneer and its message amidst the surrounding dynasties

2) The Christian profession of a pluralistic »church in places« with its constant strife for diversity in unity and against sectarian schisms and tendencies of a »divine centralism«.

3) The Islamic Ummah amidst the united nations of the modern world. The various traditions of Islam in a common plead for human rights and religious freedom in modern states.

4) Buddhist attempts to promote interior life as an universal means of commu-
    nication. The silent resistance against violence, usurpation and exploitation
    (deceit).

8.   From conflicts to religious peace

The film by the Dutch politician Geert Widlers *Fitna* became an answer in the
film of a blogger from Saudi Arabia *Shisma.* We all have to confess there was
much violence in own religious traditions. As human beings we all need the ackno-
wledgement and mercy of God and of the people of God. The life of people in this
world is more and more complicated. As religious men we have a duty to contribu-
te to solving these problems. These are our challenges. It is our duty to show and
to confess the anthropological, the human contents of our religions and to confirm
God's love for all people.

The basic aims of all religions are peace, reconciliation and salvation of all people.
This could be reached only through open dialogue among members of religions and
through their dialogue with God. We need religious communities with true faith.
Communities which are free from external pressures and which through internal
exchange enrich and promote their religious heritage. The Slovenian word for riches
derives from the word God. The wealth of communities comes from the wealth of
their experience of God's and man's love. It could be reached by the exchange of
opinions, prayers and decisions within a community, in dialogue with others and
with God.

Nowadays the global cultural and the political development in the world causes
problems in religious communities, because cultural development in the modern
world is in many ways problematic for people and their religious faith. But on the
other hand we all benefit from this modern world, which is the consequence of a
liberal person, democracy, technical development and profits. It is very challenging
time. As religious people, we have to oppose »Mächten und Gewalten«, »forces«
of this world. The answer to the uncertain situation is dialogue and especially our
readiness to cooperate and facilitate benefits for all people. We need to overcome
our earthly entanglements with ourselves and with things, and live our faith sin-
cerely. It is not only the task of ordinary men, but also the task of scientists, politi-
cians, media people, economists, of all people of good will, and especially of us,
believers in God. The people can not trust only one another, they have to trust God
if they want to solve the pressing problems man is facing. It is necessary to over-
come manipulations (even those religious) and be ready and open for this dialogue.
The crucial problem in this dialogue is economic exploitation. Moslems are not the
only second-class citizens of this world, more and more other people are becoming
second-class citizens. Among these are many believers who are oppressed by other
believers. But we should oppose this and try to free all »the untouchables«. Gandhi
said they are particularly loved by God, and we, believers, have to testify to this di-
vine love for all people of this world, especially for those discriminated, lost and
weak, thus showing the anthropological value of our religions. (Fischer 1986,184)

Acording to Charles Taylor the problem is much more complicated: »The modern world, through its subjectivism and its denial of its moral roots, was falling into ever deeper disorder. As Evelyn Waugh put it in an article of 1930: 'It seems to me that in the present state of European history the essential issue is no longer between Catholicism, on one side, and Protestantism, on the other, but between Christianity and Chaos … Civilization – and by this I do not mean talking cinemas and tinned food, nor even surgery and hygienic houses, but the whole moral and artistic organization of Europe – has not in itself the power of survival. It came into being through Christianity, and without it has no significance or power to command allegiance … It is no longer possible … to accept the benefits of civilization and at the same time deny the supernatural basis on which it rests.'« (Taylor 2009, 734)

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