

OROVA Csaba

## *Commitment: to Truth or Identity?*

*In the perspective of Christian faith, in the seed of our personality the Holy Spirit is hidden. Turning to Her, our soul and body become Her holy temple. All who commit themselves to Jesus, recognising in Him the Christ via the Spirit hidden in their personality and hoping to be invited to the last feast at the Father's table, necessarily form a communion.*

*It is both to signify this anticipated universal salvation and to make it a reality through mission to others. In this commitment there is a decision; we can not make this decision, however, independently of conditions existing in the outer layers of our personality.*

*These conditions are determined concretely and historically, and as a result for centuries Christians have been living in one of the denominations. How it can be possible that these Christians do not recognise the same decision, conversion and hope in their sisters and brothers living in another denomination? After all, they made a decision for Jesus in the One Church. Or did they?*

### COMMITMENT: AN ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS ISSUE

The Christian faith has a dimension of love for truth, and the Church hands over truths among special historical circumstances in a special way. There is a creative tension between faith and reason when we think about truth.

Tolerance is important both at the level of theory and in the actuality of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, even though commitment plays an essential role as well. To what do we commit as a person of faith: to a Christian truth which we consciously accept as a gift from outside? Or to a Christian identity which primarily cloaks us in cultural patterns?

Ecumenical and interreligious dialogues have similar methodology and ethical bases. The method and responsibility of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue is a new challenge to convert to Jesus Christ. I will write now in a *provocative* way, in its etymological sense: *calling out* thoughts.

### TRUTH: OUTSIDE COMMITMENT OR SELF-CONTAINMENT?

Standing in a bookshop, years ago I read this story in a handbook of the history of philosophy.

A Far Eastern monastery was known for its inhabitants' intensive quest for truth. A crowd from far away went on a pilgrimage to listen to their discussions, fighting through all the difficulties which jungle, marsh and beasts had meant.

One day, though, the monks decided to lock themselves in because the questions of the visitors disturbed them in seeking the truth peacefully. They covered the paths of the forest with leaves and blocked the portals to prevent themselves from being discovered.

Then they were wrapped up in truth. With the coming of the rainy season, the marshes swelled up and the rivers overflowed everywhere in that land, but the monks were not aware of these.

They listened to each other and reflected on truth; they disputed with each other and sought the truth. Thereafter the damp seeped through their monastery's walls, but they did not take notice of it.

When the rainy weather ceased, the monastery had disappeared — the water swallowed it together with its inhabitants. No trace was ever found of them; the persevering pilgrims sought them in vain.

Putting the handbook back on the shelf, I thought that henceforth it is useless to follow the discussions about truth throughout the history. It is sufficient to live our life in a practical manner. But later on, I discovered that seeking truth is a logical, personal and religious commitment.

### COMMITMENT ON THE BASIS OF LOGIC: PARTIAL RELATIVITY

There is an essential correlation between truth and commitment. There is neither truth for itself, nor Truth without consequence. This is why we can say that 'A' serves as a base for 'B'. In all argumentations, truths result in and are followed by truths. In this logical sense, truth means that a statement corresponds to the facts to which it refers.

Though the consequences of the truths might be various and of differing weights, these oblige those familiar with them. But how can we know if a statement corresponds to the facts to which it refers?

One can engage in a debate on the theory of knowledge, moving the limits of cognoscibility. One can even raise the question if there is only a single truth. Nevertheless, wherever we arrive, we insist on particular results, while there are no better results.

We feel that our results which we consider as true, are binding us. Thus it is worthy to express them, to dispute on them and to make an effort for them. Because they are not the same; and not all the statements are true which are held true. Thus, a belief in *absolute relativity* would not lead us anywhere either.

*Partial or qualified relativity*, however, is an intelligible and defensible attitude. In everyday life we are aware of our truths' limited validity; in science we speak of hypothetical validity; and the mysterious character of the Holy is also known to all traditions.

### COMMITMENT IN IDENTITY: A LAYERED VALIDITY

Imagine the architecture of a personality as a unity of concentric layers with a seed in the centre. On the surface, we can find the layer of perception, information and logic in the sense of trained or manipulated rationality and intentions.

We show this personal history to the others, and our everyday (inter)actions take place at this level, as well as professional work. We also learn what others usually do and how they do it. We create the new mainly through combinations.

Here the truths of cultural and religious patterns become evident very soon; and our commitment is *flexible* to these patterns, because we perceive their *temporal* character.



In the inside layer, we can find desires and memories, as well as waves of emotions, from which our logical thoughts originate and which affect the direction of our intentions and the elaboration of our past; which attract to a special area of activity.

We can make words of this cognitive layer or bring it up only through rationalities, while we largely hide them. Our identity's dynamics (disposition) originates from this layer; as well as our basic responses to ethical questions (personal character).

Here, the activity in connection with others is primarily communication. We have far less possibility to perceive and control this layer, because its patterns are inherited.

Truths are conditioned culturally, though our relation to them is new and personal. Our commitment is *stronger and tighter* because these truths change more slowly; their validity is a *thousand years old*.

Under these layers is the seed of our personality or our *heart* pulsate. It presents itself at limits or extreme situations and in delighted states of mind. This seed or *keel* (a term by OTTLIK Géza, one of the greatest Magyar and European writers) is profoundly hidden from ourselves.

So it can happen that we do not take note of it for a lifetime. It is here, however, that our life is assured; here takes place the fundamental option about our existence (and not about direction): are we created or alone, without transcendence?

The truth of this seed goes through the upper layers and commits them to their due decisions. The truth of this seed is *timeless*, though "at the same time" we make an *option* about it. The *narrative puzzles* of identity arise from its layered reality; we can find validities of different degrees and duration in identity.

Our identity is like a steamer. On board there is a great amount of comings-and-goings; the crew do their jobs while and as they are needed. In the body of the steamer, the motor is working or just quiet; the rudder is turning slowly.

The keel steadily assures the balance of the ship. Yet the captain (our unity) oversees, understands and navigates the whole activity of the ship simultaneously; she or he senses the right direction with confidence: the keel will not allow its ship to sink.

## RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT ACCORDING TO THE HIERARCHY OF TRUTHS

For a religious person, the truth(s) of a religion comprise one of her or his identities. We can describe this logic of the religious attitude in accordance with the superficial norms of religion as truths.

We can describe the truths of this religious attitude through one's religious notions (doctrine) and religious emotions (liturgy). It is important that doctrine and liturgy do not work on the surface, but rather in an inside layer.

Only the expression of doctrine's truth is on the surface, and liturgy is only seemingly a formality. Indeed, its words and gestures not only surround but also affect the religious person as images. We can describe the ethical options of this religious attitude which result from ideas and images together.

Nevertheless, the truth of a religion is not only a fixed part of the total identity, but embraces the whole personality of a religious person and goes through all of her or his identities. We can not describe and determine this

religious dimension originating in the seed of personality; we can only meditate on its existence and quality.

Commitment to religious truths and the validity of these truths are layered in accordance with the above. On the surface, the usual expressions of religious attitude in everyday life, disciplinary logic and its application manifest themselves.

By this we primarily mean speaking of our religious identity. We know the rules and order of attendance in a church or service; we perceive ourselves as separate from a person committed to another religion.

We acquire patterns from those similar to us, and we also shape these patterns in our religion as a cultural system. Our commitment to these patterns is *temporary* and depends on our religious subculture. We know about the historical mutability of these patterns.

Inside, the identity is obligated to a larger degree to systematized notions and sacred actions (both usually confirmed by authorities) of one's religion, as well as to ethical positions. A critical disposition in a person, or a *special critical obligation existing in concrete religion* is needed to change this layer of religious identity.

For instance when commitments to the truths of religion clash and the temporal or qualitative validity of these commitments are not clear, the tension might drive out a religious individual or subculture from the community to create a new (version of) religion.

## THE CRITICAL LAYER OF DIALOGUE

This is the point where ecumenical and interreligious dialogues, as well as movements reflected by ecumenical theology and religious studies, intervene. Is there an essential correlation between decisions made in this layer of religious identity, *both in the sense of individual and collective*, and the characteristics of a concrete historical church or religion?

If there is not, then it is useless to ask who is right or which the right way is. In this case, difference among religions is an issue merely of tolerance, and the communion of Christians is a utilitarian task of cooperation.

If there is, though, such an essential correlation between our decision and the specific tradition of the community to which we belong, then we live in the tension between truth and loyalty to history (or cultural determination) and only one instrument remains for us: *dialogue*.

In dialogue there is a risk of transformation. Tradition, however, does not exclude changes, since it exists in time. Dialogue belongs to tradition. Through this dialogue we must explore the patterns of our religion or church (theological) traditions which motivate and encourage dialogue. Seeking communion among Christians and creative peace among religions are not exclusively aims of our times.

Opposite efforts and trends could cover up these patterns in olden times and nowadays as well. Our epoch is *kairos*, a mature time to enter into dialogue.

Throughout the dialogue, we must perceive the plural identities of ourselves and others, as well as differentiating between the layers of these identities. Yet the elements of truth in these various layers have different validity in regard to commitment to a community.

Degrees of a given commitment might be also different between communities. Through the external viewpoint of religious studies, we can explore those historical, cultural, social and psychological patterns which are hidden in the various approaches to God.

Ecumenical theology can explore such patterns in the diverse models of the Church. This exploration must not mean that we throw away these patterns as historical silt. No doubt we will find some manipulated and corrupt patterns worthy of discarding freely, but primarily the question is to review and interpret the tradition with which we identify ourselves.

Then we will have an insight into our commitment's diverse claims. Out of interpretation will arise a *new language*. In dialogue, with an analysis of commitments of different strengths and cultural determinations it might become clear that our own tradition is also many-coloured. We might explore patterns in another church which are nearer to us than patterns of our own.

By understanding the hierarchy of truths, we can avoid fundamentalism and syncretism as obstacles to dialogue. In fundamentalism the layering of identity is melded together with diverse commitments. In this case, truth is a monolithic block—one can catch and determine it. Conversely, in syncretism truth is inaccessible or absolute relative, so it is a non-committal trend.

The community to which we belong hands over its religious heritage (*traditio*). This tradition does not require an uncritical loyalty, but rather a *commitment which is layered in accordance with the hierarchy of truths* in time.

## ABOUT THE SEED

The Truth we meet in the internal seed of our identity is beyond the layers which are determinable religiously and culturally. This Truth is chosen like a person beloved, yet still given from outside as an authority. This Truth is describable and expressed by religious and cultural means in time.

Its validity, however, points beyond these means and beyond time itself, as well. Theology as intellectual talk about God is converted into a lover's conversation with God. Religious commitment calms down. For *Deus semper maior*.

### Suggested Reading

BEINERT Wolfgang - FIORENTI FRANCIS S., *Hierarchy of Truths. In Handbook of Catholic Theology*. New York, 1995.

KREINER Armin, *Das Verhältnis von Dialog und Wahrheit in der Kirche*. In Fürst Gebhard (ed.), *Dialog als Selbstverwirklichung der Kirche?* Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1997. 155-149.

RAUBER Karl - VORGRIMLER Herbert, *Truth*. In *Dictionary of Theology*. New York, 1981.

*Unitatis Redintegratio Decree on Ecumenism*.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/va\\_ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/va_ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html)

Onova Csaba (1976) is a student of theology at the Sapientia School of Theology (Budapest). He is Roman Catholic and a researcher at Békés Gellért Ecumenical Institute (BGÖI) in Pannonhalma, Hungary. He is a board member of KÖD (Magyar SCM). His email address is [csabor@internet.hu](mailto:csabor@internet.hu).

Josue Soares FLORES

## Afro-Brazilian Religions: Dialogue, Coexistence and Peace

*Dialogue is imperative to maintain sense among humans. It is through dialogue with "significant others" that individuals make the world their own, as the constructed world is in such a way maintained.*

*According to the perspective of the biology of knowledge, it is by dialogue that the human being is constituted as such in the history of evolution. It is in communication and interaction with others, in accepting the uniqueness of our neighbours, in sharing emotions with them, that love emerges and becomes the foundation of every social phenomenon.*

## COMMUNICATION IN DIALOGUE AND MISSION

Humberto MATURANA maintains: "The anthropological genesis of *Homo sapiens* did not happen through competition but through cooperation, and cooperation can only happen as a spontaneous activity in mutual acceptance, that is, through love."

Leonardo BOFF also comments: "It was not because of the survival of the fittest that individuals and life were guaranteed, but because of cooperation and coexistence between them. Hominids, millions of years ago, became humans as long as they were able to share their harvest and their affection. Language emerged from this dynamics of love and sharing."

One of the major obstacles for interreligious dialogue is the sense of predominance of one over

others, or blind competition that overshadows one's uniqueness. MATURANA's reflection helps us to understand that all competition works against the possibility for love, generating blindness and reducing the dynamics of creativity and the circumstances for human coexistence.

Love implies gratitude. It means, in his words, a "biological desire that makes us accept the presence of the other beside us beyond any reason, brings us back to socialization and transforms our ways of reasoning. The acceptance of the other is the enemy of tyranny and abuse, because it opens a space for cooperation."

There cannot be interreligious dialogue without the graceful acceptance of the other and her or his involvement in the open space of love. Peace among religions is an essential requirement for peace among nations.

True interreligious dialogue must be globally responsible and cannot permit the continuation of violence and unjust suffering among human beings. This dialogue, according to Claude GEFFRÉ, becomes the bearer of "new changes not only for religions, but also for the future of the human family, which frequently questions in anguish its own future."

K-J. KUSCHEL defines conscience as "a broad knowledge of ones about others, a respect for others, a responsibility of ones for others, and mutual cooperation." Dialogue is affirmed as such in a relationship with another individual.

