

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*.

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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 chances 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.



Dialogue talks about a fundamental reciprocity installed between the poles of the relationship: I and others. It supposes similarity and difference, identification and otherness. Dialogue begins when an attitude of listening to the other happens, when the other is recognized as a being of freedom and dignity.

Interreligious dialogue has its own peculiarity: those involved in it belong to different religious traditions. Interreligious dialogue should not be confused with mere coexistence, symbiosis or confrontation of different identities.

It encompasses "all interreligious relations, positive and constructive. The richness of interreligious dialogue relies on the sharing of spiritual patrimonies, unique and irrevocable."

Ana Maria ZINSLEY CALMON points out three principles of interreligious dialogue—equality, difference, and communion—in relation to three dimensions of interreligious dialectics—ethical, theological and mystical.

The option for dialogical communication constitutes a challenge for Christianity. The experience of otherness touches the deepest and most specific point in the original vocation of Christianity; it is an experience that has its *raison d'être* in the experience of Jesus' God, which is communion and not solitude, a God that integrates difference and invokes to the right to difference.

The dynamic of otherness is equally rooted in the historical experience of Jesus of Nazareth, who welcomed with tenderness and love the excluded and the different. The capacity of welcoming was essential in His historical testimony.

Christian mission cannot be understood outside this welcoming hospitality brought by Jesus. This mission cannot be conceived as an extension of empire, or Christian civilization, or implantation of the Church.

Following Jesus, it must be lived as a project to expand the culture of life, able to transmit a new and vital breath against all affirmations of suffering and death; a project to be shared in fraternal communion with all other religions on Earth.

It is true that in this process of knowledge and practice against otherness present in all current conflicts, religions have had and still have a particular place. Religions, as a matter of fact, are marked by ambiguity.

History has shown that religions have promoted violence on several occasions, while on others they favoured generosity and the ability among human beings to live together. It would be wrong to identify violence as a substantial part of religious experience.

Intolerance does not belong to the nature of religion, rather it is more related to its disfiguration or practical and theoretical abuse. We should take a stand against the pessimistic thesis that defines the human being as essentially egocentric.

Dehumanization that happens in the name of a religion is more related to assumptions that are strange to religion; that, in the end, betray the profound dynamism of the relationship with the Absolute.

A true relationship with the absolute, as Edward SCHILLEBECKX OP says, is incompatible with any dehumanization or violence. On the contrary, it "awakens the courage to produce more humanity in all sectors of life."

AFRO-BRAZILIAN PERSPECTIVES IN TRANSFORMATION

Among the theologians who worked on the indigenous issue and inculturation, we might mention the contributions made by theologians who developed the theology of Afro-Brazilian religion.

In the late '70s and early '80s, the first systematic studies were made. These studies recognize values in the Afro-traditions but only as a prelude which has its major expression in Christianity.

François DE L'ESPINAY occupies an outstanding place in this broadening of perspectives, beginning with a unique experience of integral solidarity with followers of Candomble in Salvador, Bahia. His reflection is a radical critique of Roman Catholic exclusivism, pointing to a diversified experience of a God Who speaks in many ways and makes Godself present in mediations different from those we know.

All these studies emphasize that true dialogue implies welcoming the otherness manifested in Afro-religions. There are African priests who come to Brazil to learn about their own religion. This is an amazing phenomenon of cultural survival despite massacre by slave traffic: Iorubas, Daomeans, Fanti-Ashanti, Bantu, are all cultures that contributed in many ways to Afro-Brazilian religiosity.

Among the many slave groups that came to Brazil, three categories should be highlighted: Negros Fons or Nação Jeje, Negros Yorubás or Nação Ketu, and thirdly Negros Bantos or Nação Angola.

Each of these three nations has a dialect and a ritual, but there was a coalition among the gods worshipped: in the Nação Jeje the gods are called Voduns; in the Nação Ketu, Orixás; and in the Nação de Angola, Inkices.

The Jeje-Nago has been the main structuring tradition in Brazil since the XIXth century. A similar phenomenon can be noted in the Caribbean, with the Voodoo in Haiti

and the Santería in Cuba. Religions from these three main regions—the coast of Brazil, the Caribbean and eastern Africa—constitute a circuit of common shared sacred practices.

The vitality of Afro-religions in Brazil is evidenced by a particular way of expansion: it was not restricted to an affirmation of ethnic identity. Black peoples' symbols and the African memory are strongly brought back, and they offer a perennial source of elements which animate these movements. "Negro" is not, for the faithful, a colour that identifies the essence of their religion. Oxum is golden, Oxossi the green of the forests, Yemanjá sea blue, Xango red and white, and so on: the colours of the rainbow.

In the rituals, the emphasis is put in the history of detribalization, of traffic, of crossing of the Ocean and the disintegrating violence of slave work.

Rites and myths in Candomble speak little about history.

Of a higher value is the presence of Orixás in the sacred spaces, as well as its influence in the minds and behaviour of people. Candomble dramatizes relations in a cosmic dimension that happen in a mythical time that involves life as we know it.

CANDOMBLE, UMBANDA AND ORIXA

This mythical openness, combined with the syncretic dynamic of Roman Catholicism in Brazil, led to the fact that the claims of Candomble were perceived and appreciated by a large number of Brazilians, whether black, mulatto or white.

Candomble has always been condemned by the Church, persecuted by the state and treated with violence during the Getulio VARGAS time, but the policemen that invaded the *terreiros* were themselves frequently practised in Candomble itself.

Persecution has diminished since the '50s, opening up more freedom for cult sites and worship attendance. Cultural movements changed the image of Candomble in literature, music, cinema and television, making it an attractive event for the elite.

Under the influence of Umbanda, a new and expanding movement, Orixás became cult objects in broader circles, including the middle classes. A survey in the '80s showed the existence of 16.000 Umbanda Centers in Rio Grande do Sul (the southernmost state of the country)—most of them led by descendants of Germans, Italians, Polish and other European immigrants.

There are also devoted Orixás among Japanese descendants and Jews in Brazil. Candomble houses and Umbanda centres proliferate in Argentina under the Brazilian influence. The aesthetic sophistication of Candomble rites contributes to its attraction to people involved in art.

Open ceremonies in worship houses have the characteristics of a feast. Divinities who are manifested in them do not come to preach or to give advice but to express vital energy through dancing. They do this following a strict ritual logic, under the command of drums and chants.

They dress in a colourful, obvious way and produce a codified gesture that identifies each Orixá. Feasts end, without exception, with a banquet open to the public, in which sacred food related to the night event is shared.

Candomble houses develop an intense, constant activity to maintain the relations between the Sacred and the profane. The space is carefully divided: a space for the public feast, a chamber for the initiated, a room with restricted access where the sacred objects are left, the houses of each Orixás, sacred plants, reception rooms for the faithful—composing an architecture as complex as the cult hierarchy.

There are also obligations for each Orixá: initiations, individualized relations with the public, reading of *buzios*, a variety of rites, the hard harmonization of the different powers that constitute the house of Candomble, the relationship with society—all this has to be attended to in detail, according to a meticulous aesthetic ritual.

The authority of an Ialorixa (saint mother) or a Babalorixa (saint father) is linked to her or his dominion over these matters. Their know-how, the justification for each gesture in the different traditions, embodies a huge symbolic world in the figure of a saint mother or father.



DIALOGUE AS A FUSION OF HORIZONS

The search for peace is, actually, discovering the different, respecting its otherness and its identity, and building links of commitment and respect for cultural, social, ecological and economic realities that mediate the social relations among human beings.

Dialogue as a fusion of horizons is one of the actual possibilities for humanity, a space for self-affirmation and solidarity. While a society free of violence seems utopian, there are many concrete efforts made to actively reduce violence in several social spaces.

Interreligious dialogue demonstrates the possibility of a new perspective for religions to act in favour of the construction of an ethic to overcome violence in order to save both the integrity of humanity and the Earth.

A true relationship with the Absolute is incompatible with any dehumanization or violence. This relation is "non-violence in any aspect; on the contrary, it awakens the courage to produce more humanity in all aspects of life."

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