



**Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy "St. Thomas Aquinas"  
"Religious freedom, minority rights and dialogue with non-believers"**

**Naples - May 15, 2023**

See: Human Brotherhood Document of Pope Francis and Imam Abudabhi

The theme of this meeting includes reflections on:

1. religious freedom,
2. the right of minorities, and
3. dialogue with in non-believers.

**Religious freedom and the right of minorities**

From the perspective of the Taoist religion, on the first and second themes, I want to quote just two passages from the Scripture of the Tao and His Power, a text of ours from the third century B.C.E:

The Saint accepts everyone, those who are good and those who are not good.  
Therefore the Holy One thinks that it is always good to save men,  
so that no one may be lost;  
DDJ, 27

Here we find the non-judgment of the other with the filter of our ethical, moral and religious standards. Just as evident is the complete readiness of us Taoists to serve and care for the other.

Before continuing, I would like to reflect on two words: **Freedom** and **Rights**.

These are two words that express noble universal concepts. They are recognized and accepted by almost all regulations of the world's nations. Yet they are completely ignored by the financial interests of large international holding companies and the countless epiphenomena of pure violence in various parts of the world.

I am thinking, for example:

1. the slave exploitation of mines in Africa,
2. to the warlords in the Middle East and Central America,
3. to the now unbridled gap between rich and poor in the West
4. to Al Qaeda, Daesh, Isis, groups financed and used to destabilize and then exploit entire nations, moreover with an instrumentalization of religion that is truly intolerable for believers.

Yet nothing happens. Nothing changes.

These tragedies are shown to us by the media every day but made to forget a moment later, to make us unwitting accomplices of barbarities perpetuated against humanity.

Even this seminar of ours, in the company of countless others like it, does not affect us at all.

What can I do about it? Nothing! I can do nothing. Nor can any of us. Individually.



---

## Cultural critical mass

The only way out is to create a cultural critical mass. The only one capable of promoting a "new" culture and determining the trend of the whole world. Here I refer to the research of U.S. sociologist Paul H. Ray, who first in the 1980s tried to frame the values of a changing society. He developed the concept of "social creatives," that is, all those instances, collective and individual, oppressed by the dominant culture that decide to promote a "new" culture, more responsive to the needs of a fair and inclusive society.

Clearly, a certain percentage of the world's population sharing the same ideals and values is needed in order to create a critical mass capable of effective influence. There are countless movements and associations around the world to this effect. None, however, are able to trigger the mechanism of cultural change. Currently, there is only one cohort that has every chance of success because it can spread the "new" culture widely: the Religions.

I demonstrate this not with philosophy but with mathematics. Just check a simple calculation I made. If you take (official published data) the number of all the clergymen of all the major religions in the world and divide it by the area of the earth, do you know what the result is? Staggering but true: 1 clergyman per square kilometer. Practically a neighborhood.

I think there is no need to comment on the implications of this to demonstrate the potential effectiveness of religions. Moreover, beyond the different theologies, All religions have one and only one object of their existence: the human person, his protection and preservation. I see the Human Brotherhood Document of Pope Francis and Imam Abudabhi, as a first step in this direction.

## Limit of joint action of religions

The trouble, however, is that each religion moves in its own sphere. There is no joint and global action. Directed from the top down. As would be logical by the simple calculation of presence on the ground I have given you.

I understand that it is complicated, almost a utopia. But **utopia is the mother of hope** and the daughter of need. Mother and daughter together make previously unthinkable things possible. There is not a single human achievement that has not been a utopia!

If we truly believe in the Brotherhood called for by Francis and I believe shared by all believers, it is up to all of us, individually, to share, spread and carry out this program.

## The Risks

Of course, like any undertaking, this carries risks. Today religious pluralism is normally accepted in our society, with all the difficulties of inculturation. Of course, at least in Italy there is no widespread intolerance but, in my opinion, we should give more breathing space to the concept of plurality and not pluralism, to properly frame this issue. First of all, I think there is a need for a pedagogy to dialogue. A pedagogy developed together among different religions to avoid mistakes that could undermine everything.

The first mistake not to make is to try to Assimilate because we would jeopardize the identity of minorities and their freedom of belief in their own forms. Unfortunately, the presumption of being the repositories of Truth or worse, of truth can be a great limitation for common growth. Moreover, the dynamics of dialogue, like any other relationship, can be distorted by those who engage in dialogue.



Moreover, the encounter with the other can be experienced as a risk. A risk that, in my opinion, must be taken if we want to be peacemakers. A risk that actually resides only in hearts that are weak in their faith.

In my experience I know that the encounter with the other always strengthens my identity. The stronger the figure-background contrast the sharper the images become. To the other and to ourselves. If we have the humility to learn from others, without losing our identity, then diversity becomes a resource and not a threat.

### Dialogue with nonbelievers

The relationship between the sacred and the profane is dichotomous by its very nature. Among those who have faith that they are children of a meta-natural Creator, it is relatively easy to dialogue but how can we dialogue with those who have no faith in this, indeed, deny it?

The Neiye , a scripture of ours from the 4th century B.C., says:

心之中又有心焉。彼心之心意以先言。  
Within the heart, there is yet another heart.  
This inner heart is an awareness that precedes language.

(Neiye, 14)

This inner heart is spiritual awareness. It is the divine emanation that is present and animates all living beings. As much as, as a believer, I am convinced that all humans are connected by an umbilical cord to the Creator, having awareness of this is quite another matter:

When a scholar with superior spiritual sensitivity learns about the Dao,  
he practices it diligently.  
When a scholar of average ability learns of the Dao,  
sometimes practices it, sometimes loses it.  
When a scholar of low spiritual sensitivity learns of the Tao,  
he bursts out laughing.  
If he did not laugh at it,  
The Dao would not be the Dao.  
(DDJ, 41)

The presence of the divine in itself cannot have a rational explanation. If it did, we would not be standing here today. The problem would not arise at all. Either we would all be atheists or we would all be believers. The presence of the divine in oneself is a perceptual self-certainty that cannot be proven by logic but, if the calling is real, it permeates our whole Ethos.

The Taoist Ethos rests on Two Principles and Three Values.

the two Principle are: **Ziran** and **Wei wu wei**.

The first we can translate as: a thing, a person is such in its uniqueness.

The second, is to act without interfering with one's desires, fears or expectations with the natural and spontaneous evolution of people.



---

The Three Values are:

- 1. Compassion**
- 2. Frugality/essentiality**
- 3. Don't dare to think you are the first in the world.**

Therefore:

1. I will accept the atheist because he is such in himself (freedom of self-determination).
2. I will not seek interference between my beliefs and his beliefs.
3. I will have lovingkindness for him, (as for everyone, regardless of whether they are a believer or not),
4. I will aim at the essence of our dialogue, that is, the common goal, the Human Person,
5. I will listen with humility and respond with simplicity, without hypocrisy and superstructure.

This approach is also shared by Pope Francis' Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, Chapter 34:

"it becomes clear that faith is not intransigent, but grows in coexistence that respects the other. The believer is not arrogant; on the contrary, truth makes him humble, knowing that rather than possessing it, it is it that embraces and possesses us.

Far from stiffening us, the security of faith sets us on the path, and makes it possible to witness and dialogue with everyone."

Yes of course but how can I dialogue if we speak totally different languages?

My experience has shown me that With nonbelievers You can dialogue but you have to use the language we share: the anthropological and social language. But even here there are undoubted difficulties in coming to a common conclusion.

### **Secular and Religious Values**

It depends on the values one follows to make sense of one's actions.

For example:

1. The atheist has moral values but inspired by the anthropological necessity of "civilized" living.
2. Believers have moral values but inspired by revelation.

In order to really have a dialogue there must be a sharing of meanings and signifiers as well as a common purpose. Therefore, with non-believers, more than a dialogue I see a mutual "understanding" and acceptance. A living the respective diversities with equal dignity. There is no need for the atheist to see us believers as stupid babies who believe in fairy tales. Much less see them as rebellious children, who do not yet have a mature spiritual consciousness, on our part. Of course we believers will always be the first to extend our hand, knowing full well that we may receive a punch or a brotherly hug. But that is in the hands of the Creator.

The world, for us Taoists, is not divided between the bad (others) and the good (us). As far as we are concerned, we make no moral judgment toward nonbelievers. Perfection is a demonic inspiration that poisons the mind.

Finiteness, imperfection, fallenness, error, sin, make us "human."



---

All beings undergo yin and embrace yang,  
DDJ, 42

That is, all of us do good and evil, all of us are good and evil.  
To which I place side by side the words of the evangelist John:

He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone.  
(Jn 8:1:11)

There is no way to explain the mystical experience to a nonbeliever with words, because our signifiers are totally different. There is no logic that can convince a nonbeliever That something "beyond" exists. Because contact with the divine happens only in silence and in "non-speech." When I deal with a non-believer Who, however, actually wants to know and not simply understand, then, I do not ask him to study the Scriptures, nor to pray, nor to confront us, I ask him to meditate together with me. At least for a week. Our basic meditation, it is called Jingzuo, sitting in stillness, allows the mind to be turned off while maintaining full and total self-awareness. At this point he/she will be faced with emptiness and silence. It may be that he/she will get up and say that this is all nonsense BUT meanwhile he/she will have had the experience. The experience of a state of consciousness, of vacuity of speech, that he/she previously ignored. And, as my experience has shown me, at least the doubt that there may be something beyond that emptiness will remain with him. Definitely.

A seed will have been planted.

I greet you by expressing my belief that we are all on the path to divinity and no one, no one, is a stranger to the other.

**Rev. Li Xuanzong**  
(*Vincenzo di Ieso*)  
李玄宗 - 会长  
*Prefetto Generale CTI*