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REPORT ABOUT A "JEAN MONNET MODULE" ACTIVITY
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: STUDY VISIT AT AMBROSIAN CENTRE OF
DOCUMENTATION OF THE RELIGIONS IN MILAN
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"Together for a symphony of peace, solidarity and justice"

1. INTRODUCTION

The interreligious dialogue is an aspect of the life of the Church, an element of its mission that has gradually acquired greater importance in contemporary society, in which we can see an increase of the plurality in religious field. Inside multi-ethnic and multicultural societies, every religious community has to be aware of the existence of other religions. The encounter and the dialogue between the civil society and the religious traditions is fundamental.

Keeping this in mind, it is required to every religious community to recognize the legitimacy of the existence of this plurality. The religions, therefore, are called to undertake a search that is able to consider the religious plurality as a spiritual, cultural and civil value of the society. It is necessary to keep distance from positions that claim for a single religion an exclusive and privileged position inside the society.

In democratic public spaces everyone has the right to believe and to manifest freely one's conviction, respecting the dignity of the human being. Therefore, religious communities mustn't try to impose on the society the sharing of beliefs and their specific ritual rules. Instead, it is desirable that the convictions and the ritual practices of various religions can be known inside the society. Therefore, it is necessary that every community puts effort into the growth of a plural religious culture. Religious communities can contribute to the common good educating their own members to embrace motivations that have positive effects in the ethical-political setting.

Nowadays tensions that cross the different religious, cultural and ethnic components of our society, need to be under a careful reflection regarding the model of "polis" that we intend to build. The starting point of this reflection is the civil society, that is, a space where people with different conceptions of life and of the world can meet and confront each other about their own different projects of life and social organization.

The civil society appears as a place of debate and experimentation oriented to build a correct social organization. To reach this objective, it's important that the civil society is free and

plural: only in this way the different projects and existential and social experiences can show that the good of the whole society can be pursued through different roads.

More precisely, the presence of people who come from different values and who are active in the search of the common good, is fundamental for 3 reasons.

First of all, the civil society has a formative value, since it produces “civic virtues” that are essential to make good citizens who are called to be able to transfer these virtues inside the civil community. Secondly, these experiences of the civil society constitute the field to experiment new projects by social organizations that will be proposed to all of its members. Finally, a free and plural society helps to understand that common good is a conquest that matures through the comparison between different experiences.

I would like to underline also that religions, with their same existence, contribute to enrich the value of pluralism in the civil society introducing a new question, that is the question about the Truth. Many religions, particularly those that affirm to be founded upon a Divine revelation, proclaim to be bearers of Truth that is worth for all human beings.

This sets a fundamental matter, the *relationship between Truth and Liberty*. Social life has to be characterized by the free search of the common good. To avoid conflicts in this pluralistic religious context, every religion is called to contribute to their solutions gaining on our own spiritual patrimony, translating it in order to be comprehensible for everyone and accepting the limits that derive from the civil and democratic comparison. In this perspective it's possible that every religion shows the truth of faith unconditionally the Truth without affirming superiority on the others.

Thus religious liberty is founded upon the dignity of the person: affirming it means that it's possible to participate fully in free and open debate, without being excluded from society.

2. PRESENTATION OF AMBROSIAN CENTRE OF DOCUMENTATION OF THE RELIGIONS (C.A.D.R.)

On 31st May 2018, the Jean Monnet group of Catholic University went to C.A.D.R. (Corso Porta Ticinese, 33 in Milan) in order to meet the vice president Father Giampiero Alberti who spoke about the creation of the Centre and its initiatives.

The Centre was created in 1990 and, since being founded, worked for preparing materials able to inform about the cultures of the immigrants, to educate the Christians to the interreligious dialogue and to take care of the contacts between Ambrosian Church and different religious communities present in the diocesan territory.

It has held contacts with Middle East churches that lived with people of different religions.

In order to work in the best possible way, during the years, the Centre endowed staff made up of many experienced collaborators in various sectors; also, the centre has a Marriage Counseling Service that prepares and follows interethnic families for mixed religion marriage. It elaborated projects for training operators, teachers and social assistants that live in close contact with these new realities.

Today the CADR's life continues also with the animation of the "Forum of the religions" in Milan, made up of the 5 main religious areas: Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and Christian Confessions.

3. FORUM OF THE RELIGIONS

For many years, the religious communities of Milan undertook a path of positive meetings in order to facilitate and develop relationships of mutual acceptance and understanding. One of the most important outcomes of these relationships is the *Forum of Religions in Milan*, formed on the 21st of March, 2006.

Starting with the conviction that the great spiritual traditions may, with their own heritage of wisdom and ethical values, foster the growth of a more inclusive, harmonious, just and supportive society, the Forum intended to hold talks with the civil institutions, in order to guarantee the rights to freedom of conscience, opinion and religion in the public sphere and to encourage action to promote the common good of citizens and furthermore the realization of its aims.

The Forum proposes to contribute in the elaboration of inspirational criteria and working practices within civil society and its public institutions, in order to promote a balanced ratio between the political and administrative bodies of the *polis*, on one hand, and the community and religious associations on the other. The Forum gives importance to the religions which have their own patrimony of wisdom and ethical values that can favor the growth of a more harmonic and inclusive society. The Forum, therefore, offers the opportunity of comparison and discussions in order to realize a fruitful cohabitation between people and a peace based on the justice and solidarity.

3.1 Short History of CADR

During 1980s, and in particular in the last decade of the last century, in Milan and in other Italian cities, interreligious initiatives and meetings increased. The civil society and the Christian communities have proved to be careful to the problem of religious pluralism. The increasing role of the religions in a global society is the background for the birth of the Forum of the Religions in Milan.

Inside the Forum there are communities and organizations which belong to four traditions (Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim).

The Forum is born from the necessity to express a correct and full interreligious dimension. In this perspective, it's important to talk about the first event that marked the beginning of the history of the "Forum of the religions", entitled "*Religions for the peace in the spirit of Assisi*". The title of this event, occurred on 25th October 2000, referred to the event occurred on 27th

October 1986, an event in which Pope John Paul II invited all the leaders of the religions to pray for the peace in Assisi(city of Saint Francis).

For the event of 25th October 2000, the Archdiocese of Milan with its organisms invited every religious organization and community from the city of Milan in order to meet each other and carry out all together an interreligious initiative. In that event they organized a public meeting and wrote an Appeal to the city that was solemnly signed by different religious leaders of Milan and delivered to the Mayor.

The positive result of the event and the fertility of the experimented method confirmed the wish to continue on this undertaken road: the day after the event, a qualified presentation of *“World Conference on Religion and Peace”* was offered to religious leaders of Milan. Indeed, especially in the period 2001-2004, the process of constitution of a Milanese section of *“Religions for Peace”* was privileged. With this, it was possible to promote some qualified initiatives in their interreligious dimension, such as the interreligious prayers and vigils entitled *“Religions in Milan”*, organized on 11st October 2001.

From June 2004, *“Forum of the Religions”* started with the goal to offer to the multiethnic city the presence and the service of an interreligious organism, in which the religions may be represented through the adhesion of organizations and religious communities formally constituted.

Reconnecting to the event in 2000, that is the origin of the founding of the Forum, it’s important to underline that the signatories often renew their Appeal to the city of Milan, considered *“a crossroad of cultures and different traditions”*. Milan is a city which desires to be fully involved to guarantee hospitality and peace.

3.2 Fundamental principles of the Religions Forum

- To examine in depth the mutual relationship and to make progress in the reciprocal reception, in the knowledge of the theoretical basis and of the customs and the practices of every community.
- To promote the culture of dialogue, solidarity and peace.

- To favor the comparison on the theme of common interest, such as the interaction with civil society.
- To express a meaningful point of reference of the religious traditions near civil institutions.
- To promote protection of the liberty of cult, of religion and of faith and to undertake against every form of religious discrimination.

3.3 Initiatives

In addition to the institutional activity represented by the works of the Forum, that gathers every third Tuesday of the month, the members of different communities meet also during the main festivities of every confession in order to live together all moments of comparison, dialogue and mutual knowledge, essential bases for the respect and the civil cohabitation.

These members organize also initiatives for and towards the city of Milan, such as, for example *"The Curtain of the Silence"* at the Columns of St. Lawrence, the celebration of the Iftar (daily breakup of the fast during the Ramadan) organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio, in collaboration with the Islamic communities.

Another important initiative is the interreligious prayer for the peace that occurs every year during Vesak, that is the principal Buddhist recurrence, near Kunpen Lama Gangchen. Finally there is *"The celebration of the light"* organized by the Hindu Union of Milan whose purpose is to celebrate the universal values of dialogue and the non-violence.

The Forum, with Christian churches, manages *"The Oasis of the Silence"*, an interreligious space. During the meetings, the representatives of different faiths share their own rites with others, devoting the prayer for the peace and realizing permeate fraternity of sacred that never flows in the syncretism but, on the contrary, exalts the peculiarities of every spiritual tradition. Forum believes that the participation at these events is instructive and comforting for every person because they solidly demonstrate how, through the respect, trust and authentic opening of hearts and minds, it is possible overcome the differences and prejudices,

recognizing to every religious tradition equal dignity and right of expression, and to create the causes for the pacific and harmonious cohabitation between all people, anybody excluded and anybody persecuted.

These initiatives are important and precious occasions to experiment personally the climate of mutual reception and honest respect.

4. CONCLUSION

The C.A.D.R is a precious place, in the heart of the city of Milan, which offers initiatives of encounter between different religious communities, of interreligious dialogue and of study about the religious marriage and of preparation to the interethnic and interreligious marriage. From the meeting with Father Giampiero Alberti, the Jean Monnet group learned that every religion shares what more original and more solid has for the future of Europe and of the world in the sign of a new humanism of peace.

The C.A.D.R. affirms that if like Christians we believe truly in a Father who leads the history waiting for us in His reign, we cannot consider extraneous to His project the condition of plurality that we live today.

5. SITOGRAPHY

The majority of the information written in this short thesis, is carefully been read in the official site of C.A.D.R. (<http://www.cadr.it/>).