

InDIALOGUE

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PROVINCIA AO

COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS

Dear readers,

We have just concluded the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate*. The main focus of this issue is to look at the vision of *Nostra Aetate* with reference to the journey of Dialogue with the religions we are sharing our mission as Comboni sisters.

First section: The Dialogue of Knowledge: We present the historical background of *Nostra Aetate*, its content structure, its vision and the theological impact on the church's perspective on non-christian religions and the dialogical attitude implemented with the Second Vatican Council.

Second section: The Dialogue of Spirituality. In the Spirit of *Nostra Aetate*, on the one hand we consider today's church relation with non Christian religions and, on the other hand, we explore the deep meaning of the quest for God in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Moreover, a Jewish Rabbi and a Muslim professor share their respective Jewish and Muslim views on *Nostra Aetate* and address the question of today's interreligious dialogue challenges.

Third section: The Dialogue of Life. We also look at the African and American religious traditions through the lens of *Nostra Aetate*. We point out the longing for God present in all believers as well as those genuine and true values which enable all believers to work together for the building of God's Kingdom. Perceiving God as the common ground among believers, and in the commitment to build the Ecumene of Unity and Peace, we wish

you: *Happy reading!*

The

Commission



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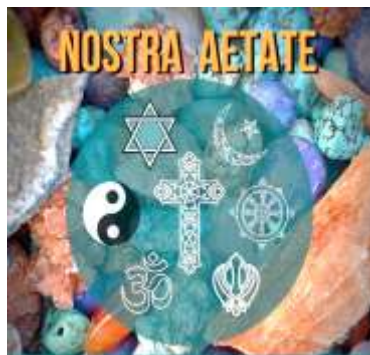
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Sixty years of Nostra Aetate and interreligious Dialogue

by sr. By Sr. Yamilet Bolaños, cms

Introduction to *Nostra Aetate*

The meaning of *Nostra Aetate* derives from the Latin word for "In Our Time". It is a pivotal document of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) that significantly transformed the Catholic Church's relationship



with non-Christian religions. Proclaimed on October 28, 1965, it marked a profound shift in Catholic theology and practice, especially regarding Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

The essence of *Nostra Aetate* lies in its call for mutual respect and understanding among different faiths, promoting peace, harmony, and a shared quest for truth. As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of this landmark declaration, it is essential to reflect on its historical development, its impact, and a chapter-by-chapter overview of its contents.

1) Historical Development of *Nostra Aetate*

1.1) Context of the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council was convened by Pope John XXIII with the aim of addressing the challenges of the modern world. Among its goals were the renewal of the Church, the promotion of ecumenism, and fostering relationships with other faiths, particularly in light of the horrors of the Holocaust and the rise of secularism.

1.2) Initial Proposals

The initial discussions regarding interfaith relations began with a focus on Judaism, largely influenced by the Church's historical relationship with the Jewish people. Early drafts of the document received mixed reactions. Some bishops advocated for a strong condemnation of anti-Semitism, while others were more cautious, fearing that a too-positive portrayal of Jews could lead to theological confusion.

1.3 The Role of Key Figures

Cardinal Augustine Bea, a prominent figure in the drafting process, played a crucial role in advocating for a positive relationship with Judaism. His efforts were instrumental in shaping the tone and content of *Nostra Aetate*. Cardinal Bea's deep understanding of Jewish history and culture helped bridge the gap between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community.



1.4 The Final Draft and Approval

After much debate, the final version of *Nostra Aetate* was presented to the Council in 1965. It was approved with an overwhelming majority, reflecting a consensus that the Church must embrace a new understanding of its place in a pluralistic world, urging for Catholics to engage with other faiths in a spirit of dialogue and respect.

2. Impact of *Nostra Aetate*

2.1 Theological Shifts

Nostra Aetate catalysed a transformative shift in Catholic theology concerning non-Christian religions. It rejects any notion of the Church's absolute superiority over other faiths and emphasizes the shared quest for truth. This theological repositioning has led to a more inclusive understanding of God's revelation, acknowledging that elements of truth exist in other religions as well.

2.2 Interfaith Dialogue

The document laid the groundwork for extensive interfaith dialogue initiatives. Catholic leaders and theologians began to participate in interreligious discussions, fostering relationships with Jewish, Muslim, and other religious communities. This dialogue has been instrumental in combating prejudice and fostering understanding.

2.3 Impact on Jewish-Catholic Relations

One of the most profound impacts of *Nostra Aetate* has been its effect on Jewish-Catholic relations. The Church's acknowledgment of its historical mistakes, particularly regarding anti-Semitism, has led to a significant reconciliation process. This shift has been marked by numerous joint statements, educational initiatives, and collaborative efforts to combat hatred and intolerance. **The most important joint statements are:**

a) The document of *Nostra Aetate* itself.
 b) The **1970 Rabbinical-Catholic Dialogue** that resulted in a joint statement affirming the shared moral and ethical foundations between Judaism and Christianity, emphasizing respect for Jewish heritage.

c) The **1985 “Theological Commission on Jewish-Catholic Relations”**, issued by the Vatican and the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, this statement sought to clarify theological misconceptions and promote mutual respect.



d) The **2000 “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah”**.

This document acknowledged the Church's role in the history of anti-Judaism and expressed a commitment to combatting anti-Semitism.

e) **Papal Messages: Different Popes**, including John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, have issued various messages

encouraging Jewish-Catholic dialogue, emphasizing reconciliation and respect. For example, during the Pontificate of Pope **John Paul II** *Nostra Aetate* (1965) was affirmed in its principles throughout his papacy and made it a cornerstone of his interfaith efforts. Then the document **"We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah"** (2000). It is a document that acknowledges the Church's role in the history of anti-Judaism and expresses deep sorrow for the suffering of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. In 2001, the document **"The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible"** explores the relationship between Hebrew Bible and New Testament, promoting understanding and respect.

Pope Benedict XVI

The relevant events during Pope Benedict were **the publication of the book "Jesus of Nazareth"** (2007). In this book, he discusses the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, highlighting the shared heritage and the importance of dialogue.

In 2010 Pope Benedict presented an **Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome**. In this speech, he reinforced the need for ongoing dialogue and cooperation between Jews and Catholics, emphasizing the shared values and commitment to peace.



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Pope Francis

Pope Francis gave an interview called: **"The Name of God is Mercy"** (2016). In this interview, he speaks about the importance of mercy and reconciliation, affirming the need for dialogue with the Jewish community. In **2016**, during a visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome, Pope Francis gave a speech known as: **The Address to the Chief Rabbi of Rome**. During this speech, he emphasized the bonds of friendship and respect

between Jews and Catholics. In various addresses, Pope Francis consistently spoke about the shared values of Judaism and Christianity, urging mutual understanding and cooperation. In **(2020): The International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Francis** condemned anti-Semitism, reaffirmed the Church's commitment to remember the Holocaust and promote dialogue.

2.4 Influence on Other Religions

Nostra Aetate's principles have also resonated with other religious traditions. The document's respectful tone and emphasis on common values have encouraged dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, fostering a sense of global solidarity among different faith communities. It has reinforced the Church's commitment to human rights and social justice as a common ground with other faith traditions.

2.5 *Nostra Aetate* overview of Content: it is comprised of five chapters, each addressing different aspects of the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions.

Chapter I: The Church and Non-Christian Religions

This chapter establishes the foundation for the Church's engagement with non-Christian faiths. It emphasizes that the Church recognizes the “rays of Truth” in other religions and that these religions can lead their followers toward the divine. The document highlights the commonalities shared by humanity, including the search for meaning and moral values.

Chapter II: The Church's Relationship with Judaism

Nostra Aetate acknowledges the Jewish roots of Christianity and calls for a respectful and positive relationship with the Jewish people. It denounces anti-Semitism and affirms the enduring covenant between God and the Jewish people, stressing that the Church should engage in dialogue and mutual understanding.

Chapter III: The Church's Relationship with Islam

In this chapter, *Nostra Aetate* recognizes Islam as a major world religion with a rich tradition. It highlights the shared belief in one God, reverence for Jesus, and respect for Mary. The document encourages dialogue with Muslims and emphasizes

the importance of mutual respect in fostering peace.

Chapter IV: The Church's Relationship with Other Religions

This chapter broadens the scope to include Hinduism, Buddhism, and other faiths. *Nostra Aetate* acknowledges the spiritual values present in these traditions and encourages Catholics to engage in dialogue with their adherents. The common ethical principles serve as basis for collaboration in addressing global challenges.

Chapter V: The Call to Unity and Peace

The final chapter serves as a call to action, urging Catholics to promote unity and peace among all people. It emphasizes the importance of dialogue, respect, and collaboration in building a more harmonious world.

Conclusion

As we commemorate the 60th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the principles articulated in the document continue to resonate today, reminding us of our shared humanity and the importance of fostering peace in an increasingly diverse global landscape.

The legacy of *Nostra Aetate* is a testament to the Church's commitment to engaging with the modern world, affirming that in our time, the pursuit of truth and understanding among all people remains a paramount endeavour. *Nostra Aetate* has a particular importance for us Comboni Missionary Sisters because of our encounter and relationship with different religions in the places where we work. As we move forward, the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* will guide us in building bridges of dialogue and collaboration among all faiths, fostering a world where love and understanding prevail.



Nostra Aetate and Buddhist Spirituality: The Longing for Wisdom and Compassion as ground for interfaith Dialogue

by sr. Anna Maria Sgaramella, *cms*



In the occasion of the Buddhists joyful celebration of Vesak (December 2025), the sacred festival, which commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, as usual has send a wishes Message with the title:

Buddhists and Christians in Liberating Dialogue for Our Time. In the spirit of *Nostra Aetate*, and inspired by its vision, the church reaffirms that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy” in other religions and “has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women” (*Nostra Aetate* 2). The commitment to dialogue is further confirmed by the positive recognition expressed in *Nostra Aetate* with regard to the tradition: “Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which people can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or with divine help” (*Nostra Aetate*, 2).

The Buddhist path to liberation involves transcending ignorance, craving, and suffering through insight, ethical conduct, and mental discipline. The journey towards Nibbana – the ultimate freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth – highlights

the transformative power of wisdom and compassion. This yearning for true liberation finds deep resonance in our shared pursuit of truth and fullness of life, and it aligns with the teachings of our respective traditions. The Buddha taught that, “he who is free from craving and attachment, is perfect in uncovering the true meaning of the Teaching, and knows the arrangement of the sacred texts in correct sequence – he indeed is the bearer of his final body. He is truly called the profoundly wise one, the great man” (*Dhammapada*, Ch. 24, V. 352). For Jesus, knowledge of Truth is liberating: “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (*John* 8:32). In our time, marked by division, conflict and suffering, it is urgent need for a liberating dialogue, one not limited to words but capable of translating those words into concrete actions for peace, justice and dignity for all, to express the capacity of religions to offer meaningful responses to “the unsolved riddles of human existence” (*Nostra Aetate*, 1).



In our interfaith attitude, open to be enriched by the Buddhist spirituality, **W. Muesse** tries to underline the main elements of it. For him Buddhist spirituality is concerned with the end of suffering through the enlightened understanding of reality.

- The holy life in Buddhism begins and ends in practice, not belief and doctrine.
- The first aspect of Buddhist discipline is morality. To act in a moral way is connected to the essential natures of human being which is to be compassionate.
- The four disciplines of wholesome concentration, wholesome mindfulness, wholesome thinking, and wholesome understanding are ways of restraining the mind and harnessing its considerable powers for the benefit of others and ourselves.

From an interfaith perspective, Buddhists acknowledge that other perspectives and practices can genuinely mediate salvation. To be wise and compassionate does not require to settle the many metaphysical questions we might pose. Wisdom and compassion are innate. **Our fundamental nature as persons is to be wise and compassionate, but years of social and self-conditioning have obscured those qualities.** Developing Compassion through moral behaviour is in the very natures as persons. The human being is called to act in a moral way following also particular precepts.

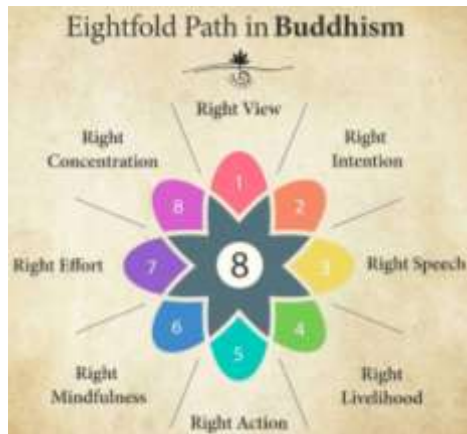
The first precept states this principle in its simplest form: "I will refrain from harming other beings."

The second precept intends to minimize harming by respecting the possessions of other: "I will refrain from taking that which is not offered."

The third precept concerns the potential harm one might cause in the area of sexuality. The promise is: "I will refrain from sexual misconduct."

The fourth precept concerns the misuse of language: "I will refrain from false speech."

Finally, **the fifth** precept regards the abuse of intoxicants and other substances: "I will refrain from stupefying drink." These precepts have the aim of free from habits which obscure the basic compassion of the human heart, deluded patterns of thinking hinder the ability to understand the world. **The way to freedom, the so called "Noble Path" which leads to God,** is achieved through disciplines that enable the human beings to exercise Wisdom and Compassion: expressions of the divine nature in the human nature



Nostra Aetate and Hindu Spirituality: The Longing for “becoming One with the Ultimate” ground for interfaith Dialogue

In the occasion of Diwali festival, the message of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue to Hindus affirms that: ‘Hindus and Christians together nurture peace in our homes, communities and societies.’ This very message is a fruit of that noble vision’ of *Nostra Aetate*. It is precisely the memory of the document that in 1965 encouraged Catholics around the world to engage in dialogue and collaboration with people of other religious traditions, that interreligious understanding and collaboration must find a place in our daily lives and become a natural way of living together. In the document we read: “The family, as the primary place of education in life and faith, has a prominent role in nurturing these values. Religious traditions also have a crucial responsibility in promoting peace, encouraging their followers to respect diversity and build bridges of friendship and fraternity”. In the open dialogue between Catholic and Hindu believers, the area of spirituality is a ground of encounter in the longing for Oneness in the plurality of God’s manifestations.



The ultimate aim of Hindu spirituality is to **gain the Supreme Knowledge and become one with the Supreme Being. At the Heart of Hinduism is the monotheistic principle of Brahman.** The entire universe is basically a representation of the Supreme Soul, and He is present in each and every thing, human and animal, animate and non-animate. Deity is simultaneously visualized as a triad.

Brahma, the Creator, who is continuing to create new realities
Vishnu, the Preserver, who preserves these new creations.

Shiva, the Destroyer, who is its ultimate destroyer.

According to Hindu beliefs, Brahman is the fundamental source of the universe. This divine intelligence exists in all beings. Thus all the Hindu gods and goddesses are manifestations of the one Brahman. Hinduism is based on the concept of reincarnation, in which all living beings, from plants to gods, live in a cycle of living and dying.

Life is determined by the law of karma; for the Karma, the quality of rebirth is determined by the moral behaviour displayed in the previous life. The goal of existence is to reach liberation from the cycle of rebirth and death and enter into an indescribable state called moksha (liberation). Spirituality in Hinduism is typically oriented around the divine relationship between **Atman**, the spiritual self, and **Brahman**, the supreme divine reality.



Individuals should seek a realization of the ultimate divine unity. By realizing the inseparable unity of Atman and Brahman, the believers can understand the divinity within themselves and develop spiritual knowledge and lasting inner peace. Hindus live by the **principles of Dharma**, which entails living a virtuous life and following certain moral codes that exhibit respect and honour to all.

Yoga is a system involving physical postures and breath control, while meditation involves practices such as mindfulness and silent contemplation. Through these practices, individuals strive to cultivate self-awareness, mental and emotional equanimity, and connection with the divine. One of the key components of Hindu spirituality is the quest for inner peace and union with the Ultimate. Hindus view nature as a manifestation of the divine,

with both humans and the environment being interconnected and interdependent. This **principle of interconnectedness is essential to Hindu spirituality and works to reunite human beings with the divine truth.** Ultimately, nature is seen as a source of spiritual grounding and allows humans to look inward and find guidance and peace from the divine.

Spirituality is deeply expressed in Festivals. In Hindu culture, festivals are like a spiritual tune-up that digs deep into religious traditions and gives people a chance to feel the vibes of Hindu spirituality.

Spiritual practices are bridge to true self and the bigger soul of the universe. Doing practices regularly can shape life with discipline, peace of mind, an understanding of oneself role in the cosmic dance. What we have been considering, represents the spiritual richness of the main Asian religious traditions. In the Spirit of *Nostra Aetate*, in our mission of proclaiming the God of Jesus Christ, we, Comboni sisters, are called to dialogue with Buddhists and Hindus believers, growing together in God's Compassion and Wisdom, in a process of Unity with God in Whom all the realities are embraced and found the real essence and place.



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“The Light of Nostra Aetate” From a Jewish Perspective

by Rabbi Jeremy Milgron

The winter holiday candles bring light that dispels the darkness; such was the light that Nostra Aetate brought to dispel the darkness of interfaith hostility, particularly that which prevailed between Judaism and Christianity. When asked, “Whence do we come,” the grim reference was clear; “Where are we going?” The hope was to a commitment to work for interreligious harmony. Now, sixty years later, we must evaluate how much has changed, or whether this lofty document did not amount to much more than Father McKenzie’s “words of a sermon that no one will hear” (Beatles, “Eleanor Rigby”).



My favourite paragraph from Nostra Aetate is the following:

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together, for the benefit of all mankind, social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

Some may be surprised that a rabbi would highlight this paragraph, but for someone who lives in Israel, a mostly Jewish enclave in the mostly Islamic Middle East (where Christians are also a small minority), ending the sad saga of interfaith disputation, is of great importance. This is true even more so in our times, when Western economic interests continue to dominate third world countries at the expense of the world’s poor. **Can religious sensitivities confine themselves to theological exchanges while the disadvantaged are sidelined?** Turning now to the real reason behind the creation of *Nostra Aetate* - the issues that most concerned the Jewish

interfaith sector – we find, **“what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today,”** and **“the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone”**. Here are two reflections on what is here, and what is missing:

1. It took courage to stand up to centuries of Christian teachings and to refute the notion, based on Matthew 27:25: “All the people answered, ‘His blood is on us and on our children!’”, that all Jews are eternally cursed for the death of Jesus, courage that the Jewish establishment is unable to muster in neutralizing a commandment in the Hebrew Bible that has emerged from the shadows and is a major factor in the State of Israel’s slide towards committing genocide, the crime of crimes:

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt— how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

For centuries, from the rabbinic period of late antiquity until recently, the harshness of the biblical commandment was softened: “Amalek” was spiritualized as an internal impulse that the individual had to subdue (similar to the Islamic Great Jihad), and only with the contamination of Judaism by nationalism that came with Zionism did certain sections of Jewish society begin to label the Palestinians as an enemy that had to be eliminated. While Christians are “cleaning up their act” with liturgical reform and eliminating belligerent phrasings, nationalistic Jews are reviving the most intolerant, even bloodthirsty elements of

biblical religion. I am grateful for sixty years of spiritual partnership developed with Christians in dialogue which have modelled for me the humility, sensitivity and metanoia; we will need these to own up to what has poisoned our own spirituality and to heal our damaged souls.

How much Jewish-Christian interfaith dialogue is devoted “to preserve as well as to promote together, for the benefit of all mankind, social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom?” In interfaith dialogue, “the post-Holocaust place where Jews and Christians have mended their relationship.” As Ellis put it already back in 2013, “Israel was huge in this dialogue. Christians supported Israel as repentance for anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Then as Israel became more controversial with their abuse of Palestinians, Christians remained silent. Non-support and, worse, criticism of Israeli policies, was seen by the Jewish dialoguers as backtracking to anti-Semitism. That’s where the dialogue became a deal: Silence on the Christian side brings no criticism of anti-Semitism from the Jewish side.” Twelve years later, after more than two years of the relentless attack on millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, Israel is still confident that it can



silence criticism by waving the antisemitism card. Politicians in western (yes, Christian) countries, out of fear of being labelled antisemites, are still checking their consciences at the door; is the Church challenging them? Sadly, it is the rare Christian clergyman who will speak up, who will take his pilgrims to a refugee camp, who will support the living stones and not just visit the tourist traps. Ellis wrote it in past tense, because he saw hints that the times they are a-changing’. Are they?

Islam and Nostra Aetate: “The longing for God and faith in everyday Life”

by *Ustaz Yasser*

The yearning for something beyond ourselves - a divine presence, a higher power, a sacred mystery - is one of the oldest and most universal human experiences. Whether we call it “God”, “Allah”, “Almighty”, “Jesus”, “the Universe”, or simply “the sacred,” this longing shapes how we live, love, work, and relate to others, even those whose faiths differ from our own. About the “**Deep Hunger**”, I consider the questions:



How/What does Longing for God Look Like? I would say that at its core, longing for God isn’t just about prayers, it’s a quiet ache in the soul, a restlessness that no job, relationship, or achievement can fully satisfy. Saint Augustine famously wrote: *“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”* This restlessness drives people to seek meaning, purpose, connection, often through prayer, scripture, or acts of service. For some, the longing is expressed in silence, listening to music, or gazing at the stars. In every tradition, the longing is real, even when the language and rituals differ.

Faith in Action: How Belief Manifests Daily? Faith isn’t just a private feeling, it shows up in how we treat our neighbours and , even strangers. Here are a few everyday ways faith manifests:

- ***Compassion***: Many believers see serving the poor or sick as a direct expression of love for God. A Muslim might give *zakat*, a Christian volunteer at a shelter, a Hindu offers food at the temple. The act is sacred, regardless of the label.

- ***Integrity***: Honesty in business, keeping promises, admitting mistakes; for many, they’re spiritual disciplines. “Doing right by others” becomes a form of worship.

- ***Forgiveness***: When someone hurts us, faith often gives us the strength to let go of resentment.

- ***Gratitude***: Pausing before a meal, thanking God for small blessings, recognizing the gift of breath, these micro-moments keep faith alive amid chaos.

- ***Listen deeply***: Ask your colleague about their holy days, their sacred texts, their spiritual struggles. Don't assume you know what they believe, let them teach you.

- ***Respect rituals***: If your Jewish friend observes Shabbat, respect their rest. Small gestures build trust.

- ***Find common ground***: in the values of love, justice, mercy.

- ***Celebrate together***: Attend each other's festivals, light a candle in church, share **Iftar Ramadan**; these moments turn "WE vs. Them" into "we're all on this journey together."

When we approach interfaith relationships with openness, the longing for God becomes a bridge, not a wall. We realize that the same yearning that drives us to pray also drives our neighbour, and that shared hunger is holy.

The Risk & Reward of Interfaith Living

Misunderstandings happen. Assumptions creep in. Sometimes, deep conversations reveal irreconcilable beliefs., and that's okay. Faith doesn't require uniformity; it asks for integrity.

The reward: A richer, more textured understanding of the divine. When we walk alongside people of other faiths; listening, serving, laughing, even disagreeing..., we glimpse the infinite ways humanity reaches for God. We see God in the stranger, the colleague, and the friend who prays differently.

Final Thought: The Sacred in the Shared Space

The longing for God doesn't need to be loud to be real. It shows up in the quiet kindness of a coworker, the shared silence before a meal, the hand extended in forgiveness. In a world divided by labels, faith, lived authentically, becomes a meeting place.

Therefore, whether you're Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, agnostic, or simply someone who feels a pull toward something greater, know this: your longing is sacred. Moreover, when you live it out with grace, you invite others to see God in you, and perhaps, to find their own path home!

Traditional Religions and interfaith values: common ground to build God's Kingdom

by Sr. Patrizia Di Clemente,

In the vision of Nostra Aetate, in the perspective Dialogue with **African traditional religions**, considering my personal experience mission experience, I address the following questions:



Which are the values which become common ground for the Kingdom of God? How do followers express their longing for God and for truth?

When I arrived in Zambia, 2008, I took time to come to know about the environment and context where I was sent. I had the opportunity to take part to a short course entitled *Welcome to Zambia*, organised by the Missionary of Africa, during which was presented the historical and political background, the social and economic situation, and most important of all, the anthropological dimension related to the people of Zambia. This component includes aspects of traditional culture and spirituality. Yes, spirituality. More than religious, I like to address the topic under the connotation of Spirituality.

In the years, I came to learn, understand and experience that the specificity of the identity of this nation unfolds itself sourcing from the richness of the 73 ethnic groups living together in one of the unique countries of Africa which has been living in an appreciated peaceful mode. The spirituality has played its relevant role in all this. Each ethnic group has its own

specificity, as well as some commonalities that facilitates interactions and mobility within the various groups. This clearly reflects in the National motto: *one Zambia, one Nation!*

In my ministry with adolescent girls, from the early stages, I experienced how the contemporary social challenges could bring confusion and disorientation, especially in the suburbs of the capital city, Lusaka, where the adults have the tendency of dealing with the young ones through manipulation and coercions, handling somehow the traditional beliefs. Here I see how the beauty of traditional culture and spirituality can be corrupted. So, I started offering the opportunity of having seminars at school, where groups of prepared elderly (*alanghisi*) where presenting through interactions the values of their own culture on which life pillars where established. What caught immediately my attention was the deep-rooted connection with nature. God, creator of all, established for us the everlasting relationship with His Creation. God, called *Chauta*, means *rain*, is the source of life. Through rain the people can cultivate and have their living. Even in the Catholics Hymns often people sing and pray God-Chauta! God created everything at His image and affirming the difference and specificity of each living creature. The difference is in order to enforce unity through the possibilities brought into society. Each and every one is beautiful in his-her been different and each and every one has his role to play in the family, in the community, in the nation. Differences don't nullify unity, but reinforce it. There are symbols created with clay while all this dynamism is explaining. The central tower is God connected to the Universe and the universe is inhabited by all creatures,



represented by different seeds, which are interconnected. Each one of us is given a seed and is invited to place it wherever in the construction. The consequence of this social-spiritual approach is reflected into the solidarity expressed and lived in the clan and in the community. This still very relevant in the rural setting; instead, in the bigger towns, it is at risk because of the vulnerabilities brought in by extreme misery and strayed social behaviours. This is only one among the rich components of the traditional Spirituality in Zambia.



by Sr. Soloumta Hélène
to: sr. Jheni Buele

sr. Jheni, could you say something about **American traditional religion** and their religiosity? **Which are the values in that religion which become common ground for the building of the Kingdom of God?**



“Standing from our history, I have to state first of all that, we were for many years repressed when the Spanish people with the catholic church came. So, the religions or whatever we had, were destroyed. However, I can talk about my country, Ecuador. From some indigenous group, God is considered god the sun, the moon, also the big mountain. But in Ecuador, most of us are Christians, so we have the God of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, there are still some ethnic groups who believe in spirits. Until now, the indigenous people pay offering to **Pacha Mama** (*Mother Earth*). They go to the very high mountain to offer to Pacha Mama (*Mother Earth*), the first and good fruits of whatever comes from the earth. They pray, then they leave them there. I have never gone there, but I believe

there are special places because every year, they go there and perform a big celebration. There is also **Inti Raymi** (*Sun God*). This is a feast of the sun. In my small knowledge, I can say that there's Inti Raymi's feast. The Inti Raymi is a festivity that goes back to the celebrations of the great nation Cañari-Inca, in which homage and thanks are paid to the *Sun God and Mother Earth* for the kindness of allowing a good harvest of traditional Ecuadorian products such as corn and potatoes... Inti Raymi has a more spiritual focus. It involves purification baths (Armay Chisi) to cleanse and purify the body and soul. In this way, negative energies are eliminated.

Pacha Mama and **Inti Raymi** go together in importance and people's



devotion. I believe, they have values which can become common ground for the building of God's Kingdom. First of all, followers gather together. It's the gathering in communities. Music and plenty of food. They share food, eat and dance. I can say: this is Latina America which for us means community. There's also a solidarity as value to perform rituals of gratitude to the different deities. The value of Inti Raymi lies in its profound spiritual, cultural, and community significance. It strengthens community, bonds and fosters a sense of unity, and a deep connection to the natural world.

Then, total respect for the elders when the followers gather. And the respect of the family with the idea that *together they can achieve things*. In essence, these values, I think, become common ground for interreligious dialogue, for the building of the Kingdom of God. In spite of the fact that, I have never attended the ceremonies, this is what I know because I heard about Pacha Mama and Inti Raymi".

Thank you so much, sr. Jheni, for your sharing!!!

