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Note: This paper uses UK standards for spelling and punctuation

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN *DIALOGUE AND MISSION*

1) **Introduction**

The Roman Catholic Church has been actively engaged in interreligious dialogue ever since the Second Vatican Council, especially after the promulgation of the landmark document *Nostra Aetate*, which discusses the relation of the Church to followers of other religions. Under the auspices of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians (later renamed ‘Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue’), the Catholic Church has undertaken many studies and published a lot of literature as guidelines for those engaged in interreligious dialogue. On 10 May 1984, the Secretariat brought out an important document entitled, “The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission”¹, which is

¹ Cfr. Segretariato per i Non-Cristiani, “L’atteggiamento della Chiesa di fronte ai seguaci di altre religioni. Riflessioni e orientamenti su dialogo e missione”, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum. Documenti Ufficiali della Santa Sede 1983-1985*, Vol. 9, Testo ufficiale e versione Italiana, Bologna, Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, 1987, pp. 928-943. (Henceforth referred to as *Dialogo e Missione*).

generally abbreviated as *Dialogue and Mission*. It was the fruit of a work which began in 1979. Undoubtedly, after Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) and the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Nostra Aetate* (1965), *Dialogue and Mission* is a text of considerable importance for understating the Roman Catholic Church's view of interreligious dialogue during the early post-Conciliar period. This paper is a brief analysis of the context, purpose and contents of this document from the perspective of interreligious dialogue², with some critical observations.

1) Occasion and content of the document

Dialogue and Mission was published by the Secretariat for Non-Christians on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Ecclesiam Suam* (6 August 1964)³, and the foundation of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians (19 May 1964).⁴ In 1984, gathered in plenary assembly the Secretariat evaluated its experience of interreligious dialogue, and reflected on the Church's attitude towards the followers of other religions, and the relationship between dialogue and mission. The document also summarized the teaching of Vatican II on interreligious dialogue, and encouraged local Churches to establish adequate structures to promote dialogue in their respective contexts. The document is divided into three parts: a) Mission, b) Dialogue, and c) Dialogue and Mission, and consists of forty-four succinct articles.⁵ Thus, the two major themes discussed in it are, the nature of the evangelising mission of the Church, and interreligious dialogue – and therefore the use of the abbreviated title *Dialogue and Mission*.

² It is to be noted that, the document deals with two key themes, namely 'interreligious dialogue' and 'Mission' ('evangelizing mission of the Church'). Since our interest here is in interreligious dialogue, the aspect of mission will not be discussed in detail.

³ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 5, p. 929.

⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 4, p. 929.

⁵ The document *Dialogue and Mission* was signed by Francis A. Arinze (pro-president) and Marcello Zago (secretary). Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 943.

2) Nature and purpose of the document

The document is primarily pastoral in character, and is inspired by the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent magisterium of the Church.⁶ It is meant – as the document itself states – as a help to Christians to encounter followers of other religions with whom they live in the city, at work, and in the family.⁷ It is a kind of support material for Christian communities, especially leaders, to live according to the directives of the Council. The document was meant to discuss the relation between dialogue and mission because of the challenges and problems they pose.⁸ There was a certain tension between the two, and the document attempts to give a solution to it. It says: “It [*Dialogue and Mission*] offers elements of a solution to the difficulties which can arise from the duties of evangelisation and dialogue which are found together in the mission of the Church.”⁹ It is meant also for non-Christians, inasmuch as through the document, they might also come to understand better how the Church views them, and how it intends to relate with them.¹⁰ The document is also offered to other Christian Churches because many of them have similar encounter experiences with followers of other religions, and in this sense, it was written with an ecumenical spirit.¹¹ Thus, the possible beneficiaries of the document are: all Christians in

⁶ Cfr. Ibid., no. 6, p. 929. Regarding the post-Conciliar magisterium, mention may be made especially of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975) of Pope Paul VI, and the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979) of Pope John Paul II. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is entirely dedicated to the post-Vatican II theology of the Missions. In *Redemptor Hominis* there are some articles that deal with theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. Cfr. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979), nos. 4, 6 and 11, pp. 262, 267, 275-277.

⁷ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 6, p. 929.

⁸ Cfr. Ibid., nos. 7, 36, pp. 929, 940.

⁹ Ibid., no. 7, 929. The quotations in English in this paper are taken from the official English translation of *Dialogo e Missione* available on the Vatican Website <http://www.cimer.org.au/documents/DialogueandMission1984.pdf> Accessed on 3 February 2014.

¹⁰ Cfr. Ibid., no. 7, p. 929. Here, the intention of the document appears to be that, non-Christians may understand clearly that, Christian efforts at dialogue with non-Christians is not aimed at their conversion to Christianity. There are many cases of non-Christians who interpret any initiative of Christians, including humanitarian services offered even in times of disasters and natural calamities, as means to convert them. Even today, many non-Christians do interpret interreligious dialogue as a new method invented by the Church to convert them. This is generally noticed among religious fundamentalist groups and those who are under their influence.

¹¹ Cfr. Ibid., no. 8, p. 930.

communion with the Church of Rome, other Christian Churches¹² and non-Christians – obviously in different degrees.

3) Meaning of dialogue

The document gives a short but broad definition of dialogue, and envisages it as all positive and constructive ways of relating to communities and individuals of other religions in order to promote mutual understanding and enrichment. It says: “It [dialogue] means not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment”.¹³ Dialogue is also described as walking together with people of other religions in order to seek truth and to work together in projects of common concern.¹⁴ These descriptions of dialogue are important developments from Vatican II, which did not define dialogue. Again, the description of dialogue in the document is less complicated and more direct than the one given by Pope Paul VI in his *Ecclesiam Suam*.

4) Reasons for dialogue

The document presents some basic reasons for Christian engagement in dialogue. We may classify them as anthropological and social, Trinitarian, Christological, Pneumatological and ecclesiological. The document itself does not use all these terms, but what they signify can be traced in it. In this sense, the document is not only pastoral but also theological.

¹² The document mentions by name the World Council of Churches. Cfr. Ibid., no. 8, p. 930.

¹³ Ibid., no. 3, p. 929. The original text reads: “*Indica non solo il colloquio, ma anche l’insieme dei rapporti interreligiosi, positive e costruttivi, con una persona e comunità di altre fedi per una mutua conoscenza e un reciproco arricchimento.*”

¹⁴ Cfr. Ibid., no. 13, p. 932. The original reads: “*Vi è il dialogo nel quale i cristiani incontrano i seguaci di altre tradizioni religiose per camminare insieme verso la verità e collaborare in opere di interesse comune.*”

First, the desire to dialogue is an outcome of certain personal and social requirements.¹⁵ The need to communicate with others is something fundamental to every human being. Through interpersonal dialogue one experiences one's own limitations and becomes aware that one does not possess the whole truth but needs to walk together with others towards that goal. Dialogue is an occasion for mutual affirmation, reciprocal correction and purification, fraternal exchange and interpersonal communion, and mutual enrichment. Christians engage in dialogue with the followers of other faiths also to listen and understand what they have to communicate, and to profit from the gifts which God has bestowed so generously in different cultures and religions. Dialogical style of human relations is demanded also by the growing interdependence in social life, for harmonious living together, human promotion, and peace.¹⁶

Second, the Church promotes dialogue because of her faith in God the Father. The Trinitarian mystery of Christian revelation presents the Christians with a glimpse into God's life which is one of communion and interchange.¹⁷ The document says that, in the life of each individual and all peoples there is present the power of God's grace which elevates and redeems them. The Church has the duty of discovering and bringing to light and fullness, all the richness and gifts which the Father has hidden in creation and history, and to promote them among all peoples.¹⁸ Interreligious dialogue is one of the ways of accomplishing this important task.

Third, Christians believe that Jesus Christ is God's Word and Wisdom, who enlightens every person. All human beings are redeemed by Christ, and he is united to them even when they are unaware of it. He is present with his grace in every human encounter in order to liberate human

¹⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 21, p. 935.

¹⁶ Cfr. *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 22, p. 935.

¹⁸ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 22, p. 936.

beings from their selfishness and to make them love one another.¹⁹ This is another reason for engaging in interreligious dialogue.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit is operative in the depth of people's consciousness, and he secretly leads them towards the truth (GS 22).²⁰ He is also present and at work outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church (RH 6; LG 16; GS 22; AG 15). Guided by the Spirit, the Church feels impelled to discern the signs of the times, and follow him wherever he leads her, and humbly serve and collaborate with him.²¹ One of the manifestations of the action of the Spirit is inspiring people to engage in dialogue in order to seek after the truth.

Fifth, the reign of God is the final end of all persons. The Church, which is to be 'its seed and beginning' (LG 5,9), is called from the first, to start out on this path toward the realisation of the Kingdom, and along with the rest of humanity to advance toward that goal, which includes also the duty to struggle against evil and sin, beginning always with one's own person. Therefore, the Church is equipped and commissioned to work towards God's reign so that there comes about the progressive fulfilment of all things in Christ.²² One of the ways in which the Church fulfils this mission entrusted to her is through dialogue.

Sixth, many positive values are found preserved in the great religious traditions of humanity. Vatican II affirmed that in other religions there are 'elements which are true and good' (OT 16), 'precious things, both religious and human' (GS 92), 'seeds of contemplation' (AG 18), 'elements of truth and grace' (AG 9), 'seeds of the Word' (AG 11,15), and 'rays of the truth which illumine all mankind' (NA 2). Therefore, they merit the attention and esteem of Christians,

¹⁹ Cfr. Ibid., no. 23, p. 936.

²⁰ The abbreviations of official Church documents found in this paper are those that used in *Dialogue and Mission* itself. They are: AA = *Apostolicam Actuositatem*; AG= *Ad Gentes*; EN= *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; GS= *Gaudium et Spes*; LG = *Lumen Gentium*; NA = *Nostra Aetate*; OT = *Optatam Totius*; RH= *Redemptor Hominis*.

²¹ Cfr. Ibid., no. 24, p. 936.

²² Cfr. Ibid., no. 25, p. 937.

and their spiritual patrimony is a genuine invitation to dialogue (NA 2,3; AG 11), not only in those things which unite them with Christians, but also in their differences.²³

5) Forms of dialogue

Though there are multiple ways of dialogue, *Dialogue and Missions* presents four forms of dialogue, which it considers as the most important and typical. They are: dialogue of life, dialogue of works, dialogue of experts, and dialogue of religious experience.²⁴ This distinction made by the document is a major contribution in understanding the nature of interreligious dialogue. Michael L. Fitzgerald²⁵, maintains that, *Dialogue and Mission* was perhaps the first to present four forms of dialogue.²⁶

²³ Cfr. Ibid., no. 26, p. 937.

²⁴ Cfr. Ibid., nos. 29, 31, 33, 35, pp. 938-940.

²⁵ Michael L. Fitzgerald (1937-) a native of the United Kingdom, was Secretary of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions from 1987 to 2002, and President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue from 2002 to 2006. He was made bishop in 1992 and Archbishop in 2002. He is one of the leading experts on Islam, Muslim-Christian relations and Interreligious Dialogue. Cfr. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_L._Fitzgerald Accessed on 3 February 2014

²⁶ Cfr. Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue. A Catholic View*, New York, Orbis Books, 2006, p. 28. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* which will be published in 1991, by the Vatican Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, will retain all these four forms of dialogue with some minor terminological changes: 'dialogue of works' (*opere*) will be translated into English as 'dialogue of action' (*opere*); 'dialogue of experts' will be reworded as 'dialogue of theological exchange'; the other two forms will remain as they are. Cfr. Pontificio Consiglio per il Dialogo Interreligioso e Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli, "Dialogo e annuncio: Riflessioni e orientamenti sull'annuncio del vangelo e il dialogo interreligioso", in *Enchiridion Vaticanum. Documenti Ufficiali della Santa Sede 1991-1993*, Vol. 13, Testo ufficiale e versione Italiana, Bologna, Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, 1995, no. 42, p. 208. (Henceforth referred to as *Dialogo e Annuncio*).

Obviously, there are different ways of categorising the forms of dialogue. For example, Erick Sharpe speaks of: discursive dialogue, human dialogue, secular dialogue and spiritual dialogue. Cfr. Erich J. Sharpe, "Dialogue of Religions", in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 4, New York, Macmillian Company, 1987, p. 347; Volker Küster, speaks of three forms of dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of thought, and dialogue of heart. Cfr. Volker Küster, "Who, With Whom, About What? Exploring the Landscape of Interreligious Dialogue", in *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden 2004, pp. 78-79; Jane Idleman Smith speaks of such diverse models of dialogue as: dialogue of persuasion model (debate model which is already out of date), 'get to know you' model, dialogue in the classroom model, theological exchange model, ethical exchange model, dialogue about ritual model, dialogue about spirituality model, cooperative model addressing pragmatic concerns. Cfr. Jane Idleman Smith, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, 63-82; Scaria Thuruthiyil speaking of dialogue in the Indian context broadly divides dialogue into 'interior dialogue' and 'exterior dialogue'. Interior dialogue is dialogue within the Church and it is divided into Indianisation of liturgy, discernment of elements that are positive and negative in Indian and Western cultures, and inculturation of the style of life; exterior dialogue is divided into dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of study and reflection, dialogue of prayer and religious experience,

a) Dialogue of life

The first form of dialogue is dialogue of life. *Dialogue and Mission* describes it as a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's behaviour. It implies concern, respect and hospitality toward the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, modes of expression and values.²⁷ The document also calls this form of dialogue 'dialogue of daily life' because every follower of Christ, by reason of his human and Christian vocation, is called to live dialogue in his daily life, whether one finds oneself in a majority situation or that of a minority. One ought to bring the spirit of the Gospel into any environment in which one lives and works, be it familial or social or educational or artistic or economic or political. Dialogue thus finds its place in the dynamism of the Church's mission.²⁸

Edward Idris Cassidy²⁹ avers that, dialogue of life is a true Christian witness of charity, mercy, pardon, reconciliation and peace. Thus, interreligious dialogue begins with a dialogue of life that is directed towards a friendly co-existence that enriches the partners by living out the human and spiritual values of the respective religions.³⁰

Fitzgerald says that, dialogue of life is not something passive or mere co-existence. It requires openness, a desire to enter into relations with others. Its aim is to establish good neighbourly relations to ensure that people live in peace and harmony.³¹ This form of dialogue in the neighbourhood, at school, in the work place, concerns everybody and is within the capacity of all.

associations of dialogue, intra-personal dialogue and dialogue of reconciliation. Cfr. Scaria Thuruthiyil, *Principi e valori educativi nella tradizione Indiana*, Roma, Edizioni Progetto Cultura, 2010, 258-268.

²⁷ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 29, p. 938.

²⁸ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 30, pp. 938-939. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation*, referring to dialogue of life states that, it exists where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. Cfr. *Dialogo e Annuncio*, no. 42, p. 208.

²⁹ Edward Idris Cassidy (1924-) a native of Australia, was President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity from 1989 to 2001, and headed the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. He was made a bishop on 1970 and cardinal in 1991. Cfr. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Cassidy Accessed on 3 February 2014.

³⁰ Cfr. Edward Idris Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate*, New York, Paulist Press, 2005, p. 137.

³¹ Cfr. Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue*, p. 29.

It does not require any special training, but calls on qualities of the heart, such as, sympathy, respect, patience, and it is in this form of dialogue that laypeople have a particular responsibility and a special role to play.³² Dialogue of life may appear to be spontaneous, but it does require an effort. It is easy to close in on oneself and ignore the other, especially if that other belongs to a rather closed community, which apparently does not want to enter into dialogue. It requires perseverance to overcome the barriers of diffidence and suspicion. Hence, this form dialogue cannot be taken for granted. It has to be worked at all the time. Otherwise, outside influences can come into play and break up the existing harmony.³³

Fitzgerald adds that, dialogue of life has a special value of its own. If one is familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Jn 4, 1-30), one will certainly rate this form of dialogue very highly and place it well up on the dialogue scale.³⁴

b) Dialogue of works

The second form of dialogue is dialogue of works. It is a dialogue of deeds and collaboration with others for goals of a humanitarian, social, economic, or political nature, which are directed towards human liberation and advancement. For example, it can be for the defence and promotion of social justice, moral values, peace and liberty. This kind of dialogue often occurs today in the context of international organisations where Christians and followers of other religions work together in order to find solutions to the problems of the world.³⁵ The field of

³² Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 75. For some typical examples of 'dialogue of life' where different religions are involved, see *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

³⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁵ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, nos. 31-32, p. 939. *Dialogue and Proclamation* calls this form of dialogue 'dialogue of action' and describes it as a form of dialogue in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. Cfr. *Dialogo e Annuncio*, no. 42, p. 208.

collaboration can be extremely wide, and the great problems with which humanity is struggling, call on Christians to work together with followers of other religions.³⁶

Fitzgerald states that, the underlying reason for dialogue of works, which he calls ‘shared action’ is that, good neighbourliness also means giving and receiving, and rendering mutual service. Here again there is a vast field for involvement of lay people. This form of dialogue also has a profound theological value. To work for the integral development of human beings, to strive to liberate people from unjust structures of oppression or poverty, is to share in the building up of the Kingdom of God. Lay people who engage in this form dialogue are truly instruments of God’s love, helping to fulfil the prayer of Jesus, ‘your kingdom come’.³⁷ Besides, work for justice and peace is an integral part of the Church’s mission, and has to be carried out at all levels. A great deal of confidence is needed to be able to work harmoniously together, and this kind of action can truly be considered a form of dialogue.³⁸

c) Dialogue of experts

The third form of dialogue is dialogue of experts, which is of particular interest to specialists of various religions.³⁹ Here the Christian, without ignoring the differences that exist among religious traditions, recognises the treasures of other religions and enter into theological discussion and exchange. They study, confront, deepen, and enrich their respective religious heritages or apply something of their expertise to the problems which must be faced by humanity in the course of its history. Such a dialogue normally occurs where one’s partner already has his

³⁶ Cfr. *Dialogoe Missione*, no. 32, p. 939.

³⁷ Cfr. Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue*, p. 75.

³⁸ Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

³⁹ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 33, p. 939. *Dialogue and Proclamation* rewords this form of dialogue as ‘dialogue of theological exchange’, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. Cfr. *Dialogo e Annuncio*, no. 42, p. 208. Fitzgerald says that he would have preferred ‘dialogue of discourse’ or ‘dialogue of formal exchange’ instead of ‘dialogue of theological exchange’, since the subject may not necessarily be confined to theological issues. Cfr. Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue*, p. 28.

own vision of the world, and adheres to a religion which inspires him to action. This is more easily accomplished in pluralistic societies where diverse religious traditions and ideologies coexist and sometimes come in contact.⁴⁰ In this type of dialogue, the partners come to a mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's spiritual values and cultural categories, and promote communion and fellowship among people (NA 1). Dialogue of experts is also a way in which the Christians can work together with others for the evangelical transformation of cultures (EN 18, 20, 63).⁴¹

Dialogue of experts is perhaps the most familiar type of dialogue. It can be bilateral or trilateral or multilateral with people of many different religions taking part, and each has its own special advantages. Meetings will also differ in the number of participants, ranging from large congresses to groups that can meet in people's homes. Again, the topics addressed may be theological or social issues. The way of organising the meetings can differ: the choice of participants may be through inviting individuals, or by institutions selecting their own representatives.⁴² Fitzgerald says that, in any type of formal discussion, laypeople can take an active part: reading papers, acting as discussants, or simply joining in the exchanges. Today more and more people are studying theology and can therefore, make an informed contribution to theological dialogue. Their presence in such formal meetings is of great significance. It helps to give a witness to what the Church really is, not just a clerical body, but the people of God.⁴³

Fitzgerald says that, if the dialogue of experts is to succeed, certain conditions need to be fulfilled: preparation should be carried out jointly; it should be a serious preparation while still leaving room for spontaneous discussions. Care must be taken to avoid polemics, but also not to

⁴⁰ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 33, p. 939.

⁴¹ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 34, p. 940.

⁴² Cfr. Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue*, p. 32.

⁴³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

restrict the exchanges to a purely academic approach. Continuity is important because confidence grows when people meet at frequent intervals.⁴⁴

Regarding the value of this form of dialogue, Fitzgerald states that, it is best seen, as ‘walking together towards the truth’. Through honest presentations of one’s views, through discussions, and above all by listening to one another, one can come to a better appreciation of the respective religious traditions. This can help to remove prejudices, and create understanding, and thus encourage both the dialogue of life and the dialogue of works.⁴⁵

d) Dialogue of of religious experience

The fourth form of dialogue is dialogue of religious experience.⁴⁶ At a deeper level, persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their spiritual riches of experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for God or the Absolute. This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful co-operation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals. It leads naturally to each partner communicating to the other the reasons for one’s own faith. Sometimes profound differences can exist between religions, but it does not prevent this form of dialogue. Dialogue of religious experience also gives the Christian the opportunity to offer to the other the possibility of experimenting in an existential way with the values of the Gospel.⁴⁷

Sharing spiritual experiences can be done formally or spontaneously in private conversation. There can be the joint study of religious texts, holding of joint prayer meetings, or simply the presence at one another’s worship. All this requires great care, a sense of profound respect for

⁴⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴⁶ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 35, p. 940. *Dialogue and Proclamation* describes dialogue of religious experience as a form of dialogue where persons rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute. Cfr. *Dialogo e Annuncio*, no. 42, p. 208.

⁴⁷ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 35, p. 940.

other religions, and avoidance of any semblance of syncretism.⁴⁸ Fitzgerald says that, in dialogue of religious experience too, laypeople have a particularly valuable contribution to make. Spirituality is not restricted to priests, monks and nuns and members of religious congregations. More and more laypeople are studying spirituality, engaging in retreat giving, offering their services for spiritual direction. Such people, firmly rooted in their own religious faith, are well suited to this particular form of dialogue.⁴⁹

6) Theological developments in *Dialogue and Mission*

Though it is true that *Dialogue and Mission* is a continuation of Vatican II, in it one comes across certain theological developments. In some cases it elaborates and clarifies what has already been said by the Council and the subsequent magisterium, but in certain other things it goes beyond them. Though the document states that it is pastoral in character, it has also a theology of dialogue. These new developments may be articulated as follows:

a) *Dialogue as integral element of Church's evangelising mission*

Dialogue and Mission affirms that, interreligious dialogue is situated within the single but complex and articulated reality of the mission of the Church.⁵⁰ This means that, dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions is part of the very mission of the Church. The document explains that, though the Church's mission is one, it comes to be exercised in different ways, according to the conditions in which the mission unfolds.⁵¹ Without being exhaustive, the text identifies five fundamental elements of the single mission of the Church. They are: a) simple

⁴⁸ Cfr. Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue*, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁹ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵⁰ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 13, p. 931.

⁵¹ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 11, p. 931.

presence and *living witness* of the Christian life; b) concrete commitment to the *service of humankind* and all forms of activity for social development and for the struggle against poverty and the structures which produce it; c) *liturgical life* and that of prayer and contemplation; d) *dialogue* in which Christians meet the followers of other religions in order to walk together toward truth and to work together in projects of common concern; and, e) *announcement and catechesis* in which the good news of the Gospel is proclaimed and its consequences for life and culture are analysed. The totality of Christian mission embraces all these elements.⁵² Thus, interreligious dialogue is understood as one of the elements of evangelisation, so that one can now speak of dialogue itself as a form of evangelisation. But dialogue is not a substitute for Church's mission. This is a major development in the understanding of the concept of dialogue, and it has a validity of its own. The document also states that, the life of Jesus contains all the elements of mission, including dialogue, and Christians ought to act in the same way.⁵³

Jacques Dupuis says that, the direct aim of *Dialogue and Mission* was to show the place which interreligious dialogue occupies in the overall evangelising mission of the Church, thereby stating explicitly what other documents so far had left unsaid.⁵⁴ According to Cassidy, *Dialogue and Mission* is certainly a positive development in the Church's understanding of her relationship with other religions. While being firmly rooted in the Council declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the document strengthens the Church's commitment to interreligious dialogue by pointing out the relationship between dialogue and mission, and then by affirming dialogue as an essential

⁵² Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 13, p. 932.

⁵³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 15, p. 932.

⁵⁴ Cfr. Jacques Dupuis, "A Theologian Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation", in William R. Burrows (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue. Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1993, p. 129.

element of the Church's mission.⁵⁵ Thus, interreligious dialogue itself is a specific task of evangelisation, which finds its place in the great dynamism of the Church's mission.⁵⁶

Pope Paul VI, while encouraging interreligious dialogue in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, did not take a position on the exact place that such dialogue might occupy in the Church's mission. Similarly, Vatican II encouraged dialogue with other religions, but it did not declare it to be part of the Church's evangelizing mission. This has come, for the first time, with *Dialogue and Mission*, and will be followed by other important ecclesial documents of the future.⁵⁷

Dupuis says that, Vatican II was the first Council in the conciliar history of the Church to speak positively of other religions. It made a strong appeal in favour of dialogue with the members of other religious traditions, but nowhere has the Council affirmed that interreligious dialogue is an integral part of the Church's evangelising mission. In the Conciliar documents evangelisation remains identified with the proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him and the invitation which the Church extends to them of becoming his disciples in the Christian community (Cf. LG 17; AG 6). Whatever importance or merit may be attributed to dialogue, in terms of its relation to evangelisation, it represents but a first approach to other religions, to which the pre-Conciliar theological term of 'pre-evangelisation' could still be applied. A broader concept of the Church's evangelising mission, comprising, besides the proclamation of the Gospel, other elements, such as, human promotion and liberation and interreligious dialogue, is a post-Conciliar development.⁵⁸

Dupuis further states that, *Dialogue and Mission* also has a broader concept of evangelisation than that which is found in previous official documents of the Church, especially *Ad Gentes* of

⁵⁵ Cfr. Edward Idris Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 149.

⁵⁶ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 30, p. 939.

⁵⁷ Cfr. <http://tomryancsp.org/proclamation.htm> Accessed on 22 January 2014.

⁵⁸ Cfr. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York, Orbis Books, 2001, p. 359; Id., "A Theologian Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation", p. 124.

Vatican II and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI. In *Dialogue and Mission* there is a development from Pope Paul VI's view, because he does not assign to interreligious dialogue a place in the Church's evangelising mission as constituting an integral part of that mission. Further, his evaluation of other religions is not very positive.⁵⁹ In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* his negative stand on other religions is more striking, and he sees them as 'natural religions'⁶⁰ and Christianity is the supernatural religion. It must be further noted that, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* no longer speaks of dialogue with the members of other religions, though the concept of evangelisation proposed is broad even as to include human liberation.⁶¹ Hence, considering dialogue as an integral element of evangelisation marks a *significant qualitative change* in post-Conciliar mission theology. It forms part of the development in post-Vatican II years of a broad and comprehensive notion of evangelisation, of which dialogue, together with other elements, is an integral dimension. The breakthrough came with documents belonging to the 1980s and 1990s⁶², and *Dialogue and Mission* may be considered as the first official witness to it.

b) Dialogue as witness to Christian faith

One of the principal ways of carrying out the evangelising mission of the Church is through witness of Christian life. In interreligious dialogue, the most evident element of evangelisation is witness of life, because in genuine dialogue, the Christian shares his experience of Christ with his brothers and sisters of another religion.⁶³ Therefore, Christians are asked to engage in sincere and patient dialogue with people of other faiths with whom they live. They ought to know well the religious and cultural traditions of others, happy to discover and ready to respect the 'seeds of the Word' which are hidden in them, and learn by sincere and patient dialogue, what treasures a

⁵⁹ He says: "Indeed, honesty compels us to declare openly our conviction that the Christian religion is the one and only true religion." Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, AAS 56 (1964), no. 107, p.655.

⁶⁰ Cfr. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68 (1976), no. 53, p. 42.

⁶¹ Cfr. Jacques Dupuis, "A Theologian Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation", p. 126.

⁶² Cfr. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 359.

⁶³ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 40, p. 941.

bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth. At the same time, trying to illumine these treasures with the light of the Gospel, to set them free, and bring them under the dominion of God and Saviour (AG 11; cf. AG 41; AA 14,29).⁶⁴ In this way, dialogue provides a Christian the opportunity to share with others, in an existential way, the values of the Gospel.⁶⁵ Hence, dialogue necessarily implies the witness of Christian life, without which no credible evangelising activity can be spoken of. Dupuis says: “This conclusion confirms once more that dialogue – informed by witness, as it must be in all circumstances – is by itself a form of evangelisation, even in the absence of proclamation.”⁶⁶

c) New understanding of conversion

Dialogue and Mission says that, in the context of dialogue between believers of various faiths, one cannot avoid reflecting on the spiritual process of conversion.⁶⁷ Then it proceeds to give two distinct interpretations of the term ‘conversion’. The first meaning of the term is based on biblical language and Christian tradition. Here, conversion is understood as the humble and penitent return of the heart to God in the desire to submit one’s life more generously to him. In this sense all persons are constantly called to conversion.⁶⁸ In the second sense, conversion means the free decision to change one’s religious adherence. The document says that, in the course of the process dialogue, the decision may be made by someone to leave one’s previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself toward another.⁶⁹ It also adds that, in process of conversion, the law of conscience is sovereign⁷⁰, that the principal agent of conversion is not human beings but the Holy Spirit, and that the Christian is but a simple instrument and co-worker

⁶⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 27, p. 938.

⁶⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 35, p. 940.

⁶⁶ Jacques Dupuis, “A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*”, p. 148.

⁶⁷ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 37, pp. 940-941.

⁶⁸ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 37, p. 941.

⁶⁹ Cfr. *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 38, p. 941.

of God.⁷¹ This interpretation of conversion can go a long way to clarify the misunderstanding often prevalent among some followers of other religions that, the Christian initiative in interreligious dialogue is a ‘new devise’ invented to convert them to Christianity.⁷²

According to the above interpretation, the kind of conversion aimed at in dialogue is not the conversion of the partner to one’s own religious tradition, but a common deepening of both partners’ conversation to God. It is a conversion understood in the biblical sense of *metanoia* (change in one’s way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion) which is comprehensive enough to cover all the fundamental aspects of life, personal and social, which lead to positive changes. Conversion in this sense is open to all, to whatever religious tradition they may belong.

But, as we have seen above, the document also cautiously adds that, in the process of conversion to God, the decision may be made to leave one’s previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself toward another. This can happen to any partner in dialogue, including the Christian. But the document clearly states that, this form of conversion should take place in accordance with the principles of religious liberty, freedom of conscience, human rights and dignity, and there should be no force or coercion.⁷³

Therefore, dialogue does not serve as a means to the end of converting others to one’s own religion, as some might be erroneously led to believe. Neither on one side nor on the other, does it tend to the conversion of one’s partners to one’s own religious faith. Rather, it tends toward a deeper conversion of each person to God. In this sense, the proper end of interreligious dialogue is ultimately the *common conversion* of Christians and the members of other religious traditions

⁷¹ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 39, p. 941.

⁷² Here, it is important to note that, in the Roman Catholic Church, the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue are two distinct dicasteries. This institutional separation also points to the fact that the scope of dialogue is not conversion.

⁷³ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, nos. 18, 19, 37, 38, 39, pp. 933-934, 940-941.

to the same God. This is one of the important positive fruits of dialogue. Hence, those who think that Christians enter into dialogue as a covert way of trying to bring about conversions to Christianity are grossly mistaken⁷⁴, and such a perception has much to do with their ignorance of the position of the Catholic Church.

d) Dialogical spirit as norm and style in mission

Another emphasis of the document is that, dialogue is not only a distinct aspect of evangelisation, but also an ‘attitude and a spirit’ which must permeate every aspect of the mission of the Church. It is therefore a norm, an indispensable style, the spirit, and the necessary manner in which the Church should carry out her mission, whether it be simple presence and witness or service and human development or liturgical life or direct proclamation and catechesis or any other. All these forms of mission must be ‘permeated by a dialogical spirit’. The document states: “Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel.”⁷⁵ Thus, as Dupuis says, the ‘spirit of dialogue’ must *inform* all the expressions of the Church’s evangelising mission.⁷⁶ This possibility of a ‘universal applicability’ of the spirit of dialogue is another novelty of the document, and a further development from *Ecclesiam Suam* which spoke of four concentric circles of dialogue.⁷⁷

e) Dialogue as an obligation for all Christians

The document further affirms that, interreligious dialogue is not something that is left to the choice of a Christian, but an obligation for every member of the Church. The declaration makes it clear that, contrary to the widespread thinking in the Church in the years following the Vatican II,

⁷⁴ The document says: “Dialogue does not grow out of the opportunism of the tactics of the moment”. Ibid., no. 20, p. 935. The original text reads: “Il dialogo non scaturisce da opportunismi tattici dell’ora”.

⁷⁵ Ibid., no. 29, p. 938.

⁷⁶ Cfr. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 363.

⁷⁷ Cfr. Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, nos. 97, 107, 109, 113, pp. 650, 654, 655, 657.

interreligious dialogue cannot be reserved to specialists. Since every Christian is called to mission, every member of the Church is expected to promote dialogue. The document says that, every Christian, by virtue of his faith and baptism, is called to carry out, to some degree, the whole mission of the Church.⁷⁸ In this, they are to follow the example of Christ⁷⁹, the early Church⁸⁰ and illustrious missionaries.⁸¹ It also adds that, every local Church is responsible for the totality of mission⁸², which naturally includes also interreligious dialogue, and that the text of the document is meant as guidelines, especially for Church leaders.⁸³ What is implied here is that, local Churches are to set up suitable structures for dialogue, and actively promote it among the faithful.

f) Ecumenical spirit in dialogue

Another emphasis of the document is on the importance of ecumenical spirit in dialogue. It states that, many Christian Churches have rich experiences of encounter with followers of other religions. Then it makes a special reference to the World Council of Churches which has a sub-unit for “Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies”, and states that the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians has stable and fraternal contacts of consultation and collaboration with it.⁸⁴ Thus, the insistence on ecumenical spirit in interreligious dialogue, and the specific mention of the World Council of Churches are also among the novelties of the document.

⁷⁸ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 14, p. 932.

⁷⁹ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 15, p. 932.

⁸⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 16, p. 933.

⁸¹ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 17, p. 933.

⁸² Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 14, p. 932.

⁸³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 7, p. 929.

⁸⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, no. 8, p. 930

g) Other aspects

Some of the other aspects of dialogue mentioned in the document are that, dialogue is a means for evangelisation and transformation of cultures⁸⁵, for promotion of genuine peace⁸⁶, a source of hope of communion and unity of the human race⁸⁷, a way to overcome racial, social and religious differences⁸⁸, a path to mutual enrichment, and mutual transformation of individuals and communities to build a new humanity under the guidance of the Spirit⁸⁹, etc. The document also mentions that, in the Church's dialogue none is excluded, but includes all those who have respect for human values, and even those who oppose the Church and persecute her in various ways.⁹⁰ In themselves these ideas are not anything new in the magisterium of the Church on dialogue, but the document presents them inasmuch as they are ideals, perennial values and lasting fruits, and methods to be used in any genuine dialogue.

7) Some critical observations

After having analysed the nature and contents of *Dialogue and Mission* we shall now make some critical observations on the same, highlighting some of its positive and negative aspects.

The document is the result of continuous reflection on the teachings of Vatican II and post-Conciliar magisterium on non-Christian religions. As we have seen, it interprets dialogue as all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths that are directed towards mutual understanding and enrichment. For the first time, dialogue is also defined as walking together with people of other religions in order to seek truth and to work

⁸⁵ Cfr. Ibid., nos. 34, 41, pp. 940, 942.

⁸⁶ Cfr. Ibid., no. 42, p. 942.

⁸⁷ Cfr. Ibid., no. 43, pp. 942-943.

⁸⁸ Cfr. Ibid., no. 44, p. 943.

⁸⁹ Cfr. Ibid., no. 42, p. 942.

⁹⁰ Cfr. Ibid.

together in projects of common concern. Here one notices a *significant development in the understanding of the concept of dialogue*.

The document affirms that, dialogue is an authentic expression of the Church's evangelising mission in its own right, and possesses its own validity, and therefore, has no need for further justification. In this sense, it is *not a means to evangelisation* as it was understood by many in the early decades of the development of the concept. This affirmation means that dialogue is a necessary norm for Christians.

Another merit of the document is that, it *clarifies the concept of conversion* and states that, all the partners in dialogue are subject to conversion to God, understood as *metanoia*. This is a very important statement as far as non-Christians are concerned, as they often have the fear that dialogue is a new tactic used by Christians to convert them.

The document has furnished many *practical guidelines for dialogue*, especially through the four forms of dialogue. It is a further development from *Nostra Aetate* and other Conciliar documents, and it is one of the novelties of the text.

The four forms of dialogue deals with all the dimensions of Christian life shared with the followers of other religions. In them is implied a *pedagogy of dialogue*, as it develops gradually from dialogue of daily life, and climaxes in the deepest form of dialogue, which is dialogue of religious experience.

When the document speaks about the 'spirit of dialogue' or 'dialogical spirit', it brings out clearly the *universal applicability of dialogue*. The dialogical spirit is not something that belongs only to the Church's mission; rather it belongs to the dynamism of human life itself. This is clear from the four forms of dialogue which the document proposes. In fact, the spirit of dialogue affects every aspect of human life, personal, social, cultural, economic, political, religious, etc. It can be applied at home, in work places, in villages and cities, and beyond the boundaries of

religions and ideologies. In this sense, the ‘spirit of dialogue’ is more than something that must inform every aspect of the evangelising mission. It has a universal applicability inasmuch as it belongs to the very structure of the human person.

The document invites all Christians to engage in dialogue, to love, respect, esteem and study other religions, and appreciate whatever is good in them. In this sense, it proposes a *spirituality of dialogue* to be practiced by all, taking into consideration the cultural conditions and attention to the signs of the times.

As for the ‘negative’ aspects *Dialogue and Mission*, the following observations may be made:

The title of the document is ‘dialogue and mission’ and it points to the fact that there is no question of a Christian choosing between dialogue and mission, but one has a duty of doing both mission and dialogue. Unfortunately, in the document, the mutual relation between dialogue and mission is not properly clarified, and there seem to be a *conflict* between the two, and it can raise *theological and pastoral problems*. Cassidy has carefully analysed some of the theological and pastoral problems the document poses. He says that, *Dialogue and Mission* raises the question of how dialogue is to be related to the duty of the Church to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world. Does this mean that proclamation is now obsolete, as some missionaries are saying? Has dialogue become the new name of mission? Or is dialogue simply another way of bringing about conversion to the Christian Church? These are important questions which cannot be eluded. On the one hand there is the danger of it sapping the missionary vitality of the Church, and on the other hand the risk of arousing the suspicions of people of other religions with regard to the purpose of dialogue. He then adds that, taking into consideration these issues, the decision was taken by the Secretariat for

Non-Christians to produce a new document that would study the relationship between dialogue and mission, which resulted in the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* of 1991.⁹¹

The document cannot totally free itself from the ‘allegation’ that dialogue is aimed at conversion. Inasmuch as it says, “In the course of this [dialogue] process, the decision may be made to leave one’s previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself toward another”⁹², conversion is implied. Though the document gives it only secondary importance, the statement can still be *used by critics to argue that conversion is also one of the aims of dialogue*.

Notwithstanding the positive attitude towards other religions, the document seems to state implicitly that, not everything in other religions is good, and that there are things that need to be illuminated with the light of the Gospel: “[...] let them try to illuminate these treasures with the light of the Gospel, to set them free and bring them under the dominion of God their Saviour.”⁹³ This can be interpreted by some as *implying the superiority of Christianity* over other religions, and if it is so, it is an obstacle to dialogue because an attitude of equality between partners is a condition for genuine dialogue.

The document does not discuss the question of the *role of other religious traditions themselves in the salvation of their members*. It omits the Vatican II understanding of other religions as ‘preparation for the Gospel’ (LG 16; AG 3), and the expression ‘dialogue of salvation’.⁹⁴ One wonders why a document that discusses the general principles of dialogue and mission, *Muslims and Islam are mentioned specially*⁹⁵, leaving out other major world religions. Though the document has Christological, Trinitarian, Pneumatological, ecclesiological and scriptural

⁹¹ Cfr. Edward Idris Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 150.

⁹² *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 37, p. 941. The original text reads: “In questo processo può nascere la decisione di lasciare una situazione spirituale o religiosa anteriore per dirigersi verso un’altra.”

⁹³ *Ibid.*, no. 27, p. 938.

⁹⁴ This was a very important concept in *Ecclesiam Suam*. Cfr. Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, nos. 70-77, pp. 641-643. Pope John Paul II also referred to it in his *Redemptor Hominis*. Cfr. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no.4, p. 262.

⁹⁵ Cfr. *Dialogo e Missione*, no. 17, 32, pp. 933, 939. In the original text the terms used are “saraceni”, “mondo islamico” and “musulmani”.

elements, one *does not find any direct reference to the Fathers of the Church*, except indirectly, when it refers to some of the statements found in the documents of Vatican II.⁹⁶ The document does not say anything about the *interdependence* between the various forms of dialogue. The question of *dialogue and culture* is mentioned only in passing, and yet religions are intimately linked to cultures. *Formation to dialogue* hardly gets any attention in the text. *Fruits of dialogue* are not treated in a systematic way, and *obstacles* to dialogue are hardly discussed. In this sense, *Dialogue and Mission* can be considered as a modest document, nevertheless important, because in it one sees some clear developments from the theology of Vatican II on dialogue.

8) Conclusion

Dialogue and Mission is basically a continuation of the Vatican II programme on interreligious dialogue. But in it one also notices a development in the understanding of the theology of dialogue, which is a sign of the working of the Holy Spirit who is leading the Church into the fullness of truth. The greatest emphasis of the document is undoubtedly that interreligious dialogue is an essential dimension of the Church's mission, and that it has a validity of its own. The document was produced at a time when the legitimacy of interreligious dialogue in the mission of the Church was questioned by many within the Church, and its importance was downplayed, due to ignorance, indifference, lack of formation, and neglect in implementing the magisterium of Vatican II. This was especially noticed in seminaries, parishes, dioceses, regional ecclesiastical organisations, religious congregations, Catholic educational institutions, movements and associations. At this critical juncture, the document served the purpose of creating a new awareness in the Church regarding the importance of interreligious dialogue, according to the mandate of the Vatican II and the immediate post-Conciliar magisterium. Today *Dialogue and Mission* is, by and large, a 'forgotten document', inasmuch as it is 'taken over',

⁹⁶ Cfr. Ibid., no. 26, p. 937.

‘built upon’, and ‘overshadowed’ by *Dialogue and Proclamation* published by the same Secretariat in 1991. Yet, in order to understand the theology of dialogue of this new document, and the later magisterium of the Church on dialogue, a good knowledge of *Dialogue and Mission* seems indispensable.

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