

DIALOGUE WITH PEOPLE WHO DO NOT PROFESS A RELIGIOUS BELIEF

“Let us unite our strengths, the strengths of those who are not particularly interested in faith and of those who do have faith, because the ideal of a people that nurtures freedom and equality together with fraternal respect and mutual love is really beautiful and absolutely necessary”. (Chiara Lubich)

Aim – People who are not religious or are indifferent to religion are present everywhere in the world, especially in Europe, Latin America, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and also in some Asian countries. The Focolare Movement is in contact with quite a number of people who have no religious affiliation, but who follow their conscience and are faithful to the great common values of the whole of humanity. In some countries, dialogue groups composed of persons who profess faith and others who have no religious convictions, have been set up. The people in these groups, who meet periodically, share the common desire to collaborate and contribute towards universal brotherhood, to recomposing the human family. Dialogue between them develops through studying in depth and promoting human values which are shared through life and reflection. Themes such as “secularism and faith”, “conscience”, “ethics” and other contemporary topics are discussed. Social and cultural initiatives and actions of solidarity are promoted. Dialogue between persons who hold different positions becomes possible if on both sides there is: awareness of one’s own identity, total respect for the other person and for his/her culture, reciprocity which acknowledges that one has much to offer and just as much to receive, inexhaustible patience to listen. One needs to understand and confront the views of others while always considering them as an enrichment, and having an awareness that the beliefs and values of others have the same dignity as one’s own.

History – At the end of the 1970’s, as the Movement became more widely spread, its openness towards people who have no religion, are indifferent to religion or are agnostic, developed and started expressing itself in a dialogue that has its own features. Unity means a deep respect for each person and their dignity, their culture, their needs and beliefs. In 1978 Chiara Lubich set up the “International Centre for dialogue with people who do not profess a religious belief”. In 1995 for the first time Chiara participated in a meeting that was held in Loppiano for people not professing a religious belief and answered their questions. This was followed by a second meaningful meeting with them in 1998.

Further developments – The first International Conference was held in 1992 at the Mariapolis Centre of Castel Gandolfo, Italy. Since then, similar conferences have been held periodically. In December 2003 Chiara launched the idea of study courses and conferences. Persons who have faith and others who do not identify with a religious conviction collaborate together to organize these courses and conferences that offer the opportunity of going deeper into various aspects of the Movement’s spirituality and corresponding secular themes (choice of values and listening to the voice of conscience, the culture of giving, reciprocity and solidarity). The title of the most recent conference, held in 2017, was “The meaning of suffering?”

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