

Rome, January 17, 2015

A declaration by Maria Voce, President of the Focolare Movement, after the recent massacres that took place in Paris, Nigeria and Pakistan

One asks today, after the murderous attacks in Paris and the massacres in Nigeria and Pakistan, whether there is need for dialogue between people of different religions and cultures. I beg to reverse the question and ask: can we live without dialogue in a globalized world? On our planet, besides an increase in the number of people who choose to emigrate in search of employment or otherwise, there are entire populations who are forced to flee from their countries because of persecutions taking place in various parts of the world. These people are uprooted from their environment and their future, and are forced to live with others of different races, cultures, opinions and religions.

The pressing question in our Western countries is: how do we live with these people? The answer is clear: we either dialogue or fight with one another. But conflicts lead to the destruction of both residents and immigrants, while openness and dialogue create life and lead to life. Dialogue between people of different creeds always leads to something constructive from which their society and all humanity can benefit, because their actions are based on the fact that they recognize themselves as brethren. I have noted this during my trips to places in the Middle East, Africa and Asia where dramatic situations are present. The brave commitment to dialogue is lived by children in their schools, by families in their neighbourhoods and by many people in their workplaces.

The most effective dialogue is the one built on the sharing of everyday life. It is not generated through an immediate confrontation of ideas, because essentially it begins through getting to know the other person – and not his religion – to be able to discover the bond of brotherhood that binds all human beings. This is the starting point that may lead one to understand the other person's beliefs and respect them fully. Thus, dialogue becomes truly constructive and is not limited to a non-belligerent coexistence that hinders people from building their common future together.

This dialogue gives us the unique opportunity to discover that everyone has something to donate to the other and to note that diversity does not necessarily cause opposition, but that it can be a source of mutual enrichment. And we truly enrich one another because God is generous and he bestows his gifts on all men, whatever religion they belong to. Through this discovery, we all become richer and freer in our mutual relationship.

Pope Francis sheds a particular light on this process through his words and attitudes; he emphasizes warmth, empathy, listening fully to others; he speaks a lot about friendship and invites us to consider one another as brethren and as friends, as persons who can understand one another and evaluate each other's wealth.

Equally valuable is the Pope's indication not to make concessions on our identity as Christians in order to prepare ourselves for this dialogue, because we can dialogue only if we are deeply and authentically Christian. Our dialogue has to start from the awareness that every encounter can be an opportunity to offer our Christian values with gentleness, without imposing them, but convinced that others have the right to partake in these treasures

Many times I have noticed that dialogue leads to identifying common topics that require solutions to be found and shared initiatives to be started. And problems are confronted with a very decisive spirit. When the spirit is strengthened by a spirituality – that is by a conception of life that flows from a spirituality – one does not only value the good things of others, and discovers and highlights God's gifts in every religious tradition, but also gives his share towards their progress. Thus, a Christian or a Muslim become better persons when they walk on the road of dialogue and discover that they can progress together, and that this progress leads to common initiatives, starting from peace, that contribute towards the benefit of all mankind.