World Interfaith Harmony Week Panel Discussion

New York 19 February 2019

Miguel Moratinos of the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations: **We need to take a step forward**:

build societies - create narratives – train and educate – involve women and youth. .

Pointers to the direction in which to go…

1. Message of Amman 2004 – A Common Word 2007 – Declaration of Marrakesh 2016 – Action Plan. Heads of State facilitating Muslim Scholarship to clarify the true nature of Islam in the context of our time and in dialogue with scholars and leaders of other faith communities worldwide… Jordan: **‘a model that belongs to the world’**:

52 weeks of interfaith harmony. If religion is not the solution it should at least be part of the solution. (Father Nabil Harrad).

*Nation-State power used to* ***facilitate*** *rather than* ***legislate****.* The King of Jordan firstand then the King of Morocco*.*

1. Brotherhood of humanity – justice – to be restored/established in all areas of life – economically – politically - socially (Sheikh Muhammad Al Khalayleh, Grand Mufti of Jordan); an **integrating system, no sphere to be omitted** (William Wendley, General Secretary of ‘Religion for peace’, Moderator).

*Where the conflicts and problems are systemic, the dialogue should become systemic, too. This means dialogue with disciplines, like economy, sociology, medicine which could do with a strong demand for new or neglected old approaches to correct the systemic dysfunction of their theories…*

1. **Contextual Theology**: interpretations of religious traditions and scriptures within the contexts in which they arose, historically, geographically, culturally etc.: no imposition of interpretations from the outside…(Dr Mohammed El-Sannoussi) .
2. **Bring the dialogue down into the field**: American Muslims Network: no faith community can do it on its own: cooperation, inclusion, especially of women and youth. The network has become a counsel/council for UN Agencies re interfaith matter. Dialogue on the battle field, Central African Republic; Thailand’s deep South (Dr M. El-Sannoussi). **No religion is an island**: since the 30 Years War (1618-1648) the religion of the head of state determined/dictated the religion of his/her subjects: persecution of other religions. Hence the rise of diplomacy as a means of resolving conflicts. Now it’s time for a dialogue between interfaith and united nations agencies. Example: Jim Kim of the World Bank asking input from religions to decide which projects to fund. (Rabbi Burton L.Visotsky). A ’subtle complementarity’ (William Wendley).
3. Three principles: Love of God – Love of the neighbour – Love of Good Will.

**Compassion in action**: Buddhist care for refugees in Jordan, from hands-on involvement to assisting refugees in helping fellow refugees to engaging medical teams and oriental modalities, e.g. acupuncture. Interfaith communication. Solidarity towards a disaster-free society (Miss Debbi Boudreaux).

Justice, brotherhood and trust. –

Common care/common action – **bring virtue into human rights** (William Wendley).

*Where disasters are systemic, liberation from disasters needs to be become systemic, too. Love, trust, care, justice and solidarity are virtues. One cannot legislate virtues,*

 *except in the most general terms…what one can legislate is lack of virtue…e.g. lack of care, courage, honesty etc.*

*Before justice may be achieved by rules, it first needs to be ‘lived’ by those who make the rules and then by those who follow them. In her ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ essay Elizabeth Anscombe demonstrates and insist that virtues, not rules are the true, effective foundation of ethics. Anscombe’s essay of 1958 has not received the attention it deserves and its message could be a contribution to any interfaith dialogue as well as dialogue between religions and other spheres of human society.*

*The Golden Rule as formulated in this panel discussion and in some other ways is only a* ***rule*** *in the* ***negative****: do not worship idols, do not treat others in ways you don’t want to be treated. Don’t kill, don’t lie. The* ***positives*** *are* ***virtues****: love, be trustworthy, be honest…*

*In a world where post-truth has become part of our dictionary, our love for good will shall have to fight an uphill battle:* Rabbi Burton L. Visotsky characterized the situation as he experiences it with the image of Sisyphus, who had to carry a rock up a hill each day, as each night it had rolled - over his body – down again. And after 2016 the rock has become heavier and the hill steeper. And his son’s response: we will carry the rock together!

*For me the image of Sisyphus is like a metaphor for the systemic dysfunction of our society, in which in our* ***public*** *life we are forced or allow ourselves to be systematically regulated by an economic, political and ideological machinery that runs our lives. This notwithstanding the reality that billions of us participate in religions or philosophies that teach the golden rule and in our* ***private*** *lives adhere to it.*

*In the myth Sisyphus is punished for preventing Zeus from making love and Hades from receiving the dead. In the story Zeus has turned himself into a rock, the rock he left behind to become Sisyphus’s torture…*

*At the beginning of the session Miguel Moratinos asked for ‘narratives’. Rabbi Burton Visotsky provided an ancient one. In Greek mythology gods have become too human and human beings recklessly presumptuous. During the discussion we heard stories from the field: Africa – Thailand – Syria and watched the video of H.M King Abdullah II of Jordan speaking out for world harmony. Let’s make those stories part of a new narrative that may tell us, how the rock, the paralysing systemic dysfunction of our societies will have been dissolved and how the hill, their dominating power-structures has been flattened…*

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