



#WorldInterfaithHarmonyWeek



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WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK REPORT

Round Table “The deconstruction of the enemy”

Madrid | 15.02.2023

Within the framework of the World Interfaith Harmony Week, and to commemorate the International Day of Human Fraternity, a round table was organised on the theme “The deconstruction of the enemy”. Being the first edition, it was organised by the [Asociación Amistad y Encuentro Interreligioso, Cultura del encuentro](#), in collaboration with the [Instituto para la Reconciliación](#), the [Asociación para la Mediación, el Encuentro y la Escucha - AMEE](#) and [Arco Forum](#).

The event was held in the John Paul II Room of the *Basilica de la Concepción de Nuestra Señora*. In the welcoming speech, given by Mr. José Aurelio Martín Jimenez, the parish priest, the Pope that gave name to that room was mentioned due to his role in the rapprochement of the religions.

Miguel García-Baró, the President of AAEI, was responsible for moderating the debate. In his speech, he introduced the topic saying that our world is going through a dangerous and unsettled situation and that the topic “The deconstruction of the enemy” was chosen in order to get to know the approach of different religious traditions and anthropology about this relevant issue.



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In addition to the presentation of the subject matter, García-Baró, set forth the idea that there are two manners of saying “I”; the first one is to elaborate an identity in conflict with other identities, thus an enemy is needed. The second one, is a way of saying “I” that is open to what the other has to say, hence, the idea of “I” is transferred to the idea of the “other”.

After this presentation, the first intervention person to intervene was Mrs. María Rosario González Martín, a pedagogy teacher and founder of the *Instituto para la Reconciliación*. That initiative proposes a workshop on the deconstruction of the enemy, in which theatrical practices are used as well as other pedagogical methodologies.

González Martín, organised the explanation of the workshop around a quotation of Emmanuel Levinas, in which it is stated that the world is looked at from the “dwelling place” of each person. In this activity it is firstly recognised as each person’s “dwelling place”, and it is important that individuals receive their origin well. After that, through theatrical techniques, participants experience how they are in front of “others”, not an image of how they have to be or how they think they are, but how they are.

Thereafter, she allude to the different educational spaces, and to the fact that some of them, such as schools, might give to each person a representation of the “other”; the problem, from her point of view, is not the representation, but he reduction of the “other” to that representation.



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She also states that it is not only the violence of the reduction through the representation, but that it can also be called a banality that is not delved into. González Martín, finally says that the problem is to reduce the whole to each individual's own thinking, that not letting it open to the infinity is going to be a violence. It is not possible to be a believer reducing God to the image that each person has about it from its "dwelling place".

The next speaker, Mr. Andrei Kordochkin, Reverend of the Russian Orthodox Church of Madrid, begins by introducing the major conflict currently being addressed by the international community, the war between Russia and Ukraine. This war is not just about the Russians being the enemy or the Ukrainians being the enemy; there is much more to it than that. It is a much deeper and more complicated rift. As an example, he describes that in his country there are many Russian people who are totally against the ideology and the way their country is acting, but he also states that there are many Ukrainians who want to free themselves from the "demons of the West", thus supporting this invasion.

There is a big rift in Russia, especially between different generations. As a sign of this rupture, he talks about his personal experience in which he spends a lot of time with young people whose parents are alive but who feel orphaned.

He also mentions how many people are disappointed with the message they receive from the official church. Christians again find themselves in a moral dilemma. Most believe that if a nation is under attack it has a moral right to defend itself.



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Do they NOT believe that in Russia they are reading St. Augustine and carrying out the concept of just war? In conclusion, he states that everyone needs to find his or her own answer.

Mrs. Pilar González Rivero, President of the *Asociación para la Mediación, el Encuentro y la Escucha – AMEE*, talks about her personal experience in dealing with this issue. During her presentation, she stated that restorative justice must be complemented with ordinary justice, as the latter has many benefits, but still has many shortcomings.

The first experience she shares at the round table is an experience she lived as a magistrate during a trial. After this trial she had to take time off work because what she had seen had created a deep fear in her humanity.

This crisis led her to approach those people she had labelled as enemies. For her it was inconceivable that evil could be part of the essence of a human being, so she felt the need to approach this evil because she longed to discover from what divine or goodness-filled place that person had acted with the malice that had done so much harm. They come to prisons to help themselves and others to discover others in their fullness.

When we cause harm to another it is because there is an open wound causing harm to others. People cannot hold the belief that the other is our enemy. If we remain in that belief, something in us is destroyed. When everyone knows the reality of the other, life is transformed. When human beings are able to meet the other (the enemy) they are able to look at life and others with hope and beauty.



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When you are in the minority there are two attitudes, to be the enemy or to behave as others behave towards the enemy. According to this speaker, the concept of enemy is very relative. The moment a person becomes more sure of their thoughts, values, faith, who he/she is and who he/she is not, the enemy becomes smaller and smaller, as it is only important to know the greatness and creation of God.

She goes on to quote two people who lived through two very hard and different periods. Instead of treating each other as if they were enemies, what they want to make society see is that human beings are made in the likeness of God and what they have to do is to renew themselves and to create every day, to be positive in some way.

To conclude, the speaker talks about the need to break the image that the enemy is always the other and reflects on the fact that every day we need to be aware of what we have done or what thoughts we have had during the day that distances us from our values and beliefs.

Mr. Alfredo Abad, President of the Spanish Evangelical Church (IEE) and member of the AAEI, described the reconciliation process as the key to deconstructing the other as an enemy.

As believers, we are at a time when we are losing faith, and he invites everyone to not repeat the same mistakes as in previous conflicts in History. There is currently a great polarisation and that is why we create enemies.



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The creation of the enemy happens in major conflicts but in everyday situations as well. In conclusion, he argues that reconciliation and recognition is essential.

Mr. Temir Naziri, Executive Director of Arco Forum and member of the AAEI, started his participation in the round table discussion by quoting Ibn Rushd by saying: “Ignorance leads to fear, fear leads to hatred, and hatred leads to violence. This is the equation.”

So that there is no hate, it is necessary to know and then to recognise. Then he goes on to talk about the story of Moses and makes several references to the Qur'an to address this issue.

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