



Outside of Dialogue, there is no Salvation

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Received: 2024/03/24 • Revised: 2024/05/29 • Accepted: 2024/07/28 • Available Online: 2025/01/10



Abstract

The starting point of the reflection is the assertion that to live is to be in a relationship. In society, relationships are built through dialogue, which is particularly evident in communication between religious communities of different religions. The article presents the decision of the Catholic Church for interreligious dialogue at the last Vatican Council (the document *Nostra Aetate*), which was made possible by the development of the doctrine of salvation. A sincere dialogue with those who think differently renews religion and deepens faith. The article concludes with a presentation of dialogical actions between Catholics and Muslims in the world and an outline of the religious situation in Slovenia. There is no salvation outside of dialogue, and dialogue is the most effective means of preventing war and maintaining peace.

Keywords

Interreligious Dialogue, Salvation, Second Vatican Council, Renewal of Religion, Slovenia.

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* Osredkar, M. (2025). Outside of Dialogue, there is no Salvation. *Theosophia Islamica*, 5(1), pp. 7-45.
<https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.72138.1087>

Article Type: Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy, Qom, Iran

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Introduction

We start this presentation in the name of the Almighty and Merciful God. He is especially Merciful. This gives us Hope in a time of many wars and in a moment of danger that violence escalating into world war, which we do not want. This is the reason why in the Catholic Church we started on the 24 of December 2024 the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025. Pope Francis invites all people to reflect on the divine attribute: that God is Merciful and so, we should keep the Hope.

It is quite clear that violence started in the world with the appearance of human beings. The Bible references the first man, Adam, as he who refuses the will of God. We can say that this was the first act of violence in the chronicling of human history. The murder in the story of Cain and Abel that we read both in the Bible and in the Coran is just the evolution of the act mentioned above. Nevertheless, God was not afraid to create man free. God knew that man would refuse His will, but he created him free and even after the act of violence, God gave him freedom too. Man is both free to kill or to beg the pardon of God. In addition, because we human beings are still in the world, violence is still here, and it seems that violence will remain a fact of our lives until the end of the human presence on the planet. We cannot completely avoid violence. What can we do? We cannot avoid that others are violent, but we can do our best to ensure that we are a little less violent. In this paper, we will be reflecting on what we might do such that our religious communities; our religions and followers will be less violent. In our reflection, we focus on the question, how religion can work to prevent World War III. In seeking answers to this question, we remain within the boundaries of the Christian religion, especially of the Catholic Church.

We know that the Christian Church throughout history provoked a lot of violence. We do not speak just about different wars.

We point also to the conflicts between Christian communities and the excommunications of leaders of Christian churches. The Pope of Rome excommunicated the orthodox Christians, and the Patriarch of Constantinople excommunicated the Pope of Rome. The same story with the Martin Luther followers. A big mistake. However, popes in modern times recognized this mistake and the excommunications were canceled. Therefore, the author of this paper is proud to be Christian. He is proud to be a member of the Church that recognizes the mistakes of the past time, cancels the excommunications and begs the pardon for them.

The Catholic Church does her best not to be violent today, against her members and against the world beyond her. How can she do her best not to be violent? The position of Catholic theology is that violence, especially religious violence, can be avoided or reduced just by dialogue, in fact by interreligious dialogue. In addition, for interreligious dialogue two things are necessary: freedom of religion and respect for others, in fact mutual respect between the partners in dialogue. What exactly does this mean?

In the last Council of the Catholic Church (1963-1965), the Council Fathers proclaimed the *Declaration on Religious Freedom (Dignitatis Humanae)* with which the Catholic Church recognizes completely religious freedom to all human beings. If a member of the Catholic Church wants to become Muslim, he can do it and the Church respects his will, and if a Muslim asks for the baptism in Catholic Church, he can receive it. The Catholic Church respects other religions so much that students enrolled in a Catholic Faculty of Theology are obligated to study the doctrines of other religions with a view to respect them.

Our first thesis, in this presentation, is that good interpersonal relationships prevent violence and thus war. Because the Gospel, as

the constitution of Christianity, places the relationship, or love of one's neighbor, of every person, at the center of a Christian's life, we are convinced that a Christian can do the most for peace in the world by living a radical life according to the teachings of Christ. Theology discusses this subject in the chapter on salvation, so in our article we will extensively describe the development of the doctrine of salvation in the Catholic Church. Our second thesis says that only dialogue can save humanity. Finally, we put forward a third thesis that religious communities are a very important element of human society, which can do a lot to prevent wars through interreligious dialogue.

Catholic documents in the context of the Second Vatican Council encourage believers to have a fraternal relationship with all people. The Christian religion is therefore today a solid foundation for peace in the world. With his peaceful attitude, a Catholic will contribute a stone to the mosaic of peace in the country and between countries. Every religious community has a special role in building peace. However, only in the case when it lives in friendly relations with other communities and when the religious community in society is an equal partner to the political entities in the country. In the case when religion is superior to politics, the religious community will not be a bringer of peace. Likewise, a religious community is prevented from building peace if politics ousts religion from social life. Dialogue in society is the most effective tool for peace. Why? Because living means being in a relationship with others!

1. To live Is to Be in a Relationship

The statement «To live is to be in a relationship» is taken from the relational theory of Guy Lafon (1930-2020). What do we mean by this statement? First, we must say that Lafon was intellectually influenced by following Philosophers and Thinkers: Emmanuel Kant, Henri

Bergson, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. They emphasized the importance of relationships in life. The French theologian placed relationship at the center of his theological thinking (Osredkar, 2020, p. 1014). Let's look at the most important steps in the development of his theological thought.

Dictionaries define theology as the doctrine of God. When we pronounce the word «God», Lafon writes, we first think, without a doubt, of a Supreme Being, transcending man, that is, we first think of an «object». At the beginning of his theological thought Guy Lafon has also called God «a Being»: «God is a Being who can relate to us!¹» (Lafon, 1964, p. 64). It seems that in the beginning of the development of his thought, in terms of talking about God, he was most influenced by Bergson. That is why he defines Him, as we have seen, as a Being who can enter relationship with us. God is, therefore, not yet treated otherwise than as an object. We can imagine many things about Him, but the question always arises in the end: will God correspond to our affirmations? By remaining in this line, we will only come to declare with **some** certainty that God is completely different from what we can imagine of Him. The scientists or theologians thus risk making judgments, or even formulating criticisms, about the objects treated, even when it concerns God. Then, in the sequel, Lafon no longer speaks about God, but about man's relationship² to God. He has committed himself to a new epistemology. Fifteen years after claiming that God is a Being, he writes: «God is not a being, not even the greatest. Neither above nor below being, he is, to speak like

1. «Dieu est un Être qui peut entrer en rapport avec nous.»

2. Guy Lafon, in French language, uses the term «l'entretien» to which he gives a rather special meaning. In our discussion we will use the English word «relationship».

Emmanuel Lévinas, in strict fidelity to the biblical testimony, other than being» (Lafon, 1979, p. 15). The development of his thoughts on God is part of the continuation of this affirmation. The author does not consider God alone, as he would an object and its attributes; he does not pose the question of the existence of God. It is the relationship with God that is important to him. God remains an «object» because we can still talk about Him, but as a theologian, Guy Lafon is not interested in this object being separated from the relationship that binds it to man and man to Him. For him, what happens «between God and men» is essential. By this, he means that man has the capacity to establish a relationship with God. It should be noted here that the French theologian uses the active form, that is, that man can «establish a relationship» with God, only in the first period of his theological thought. Later, he strictly uses the passive form, that man «finds himself in a relationship with God», as we will show below. And this is what he wants to talk about: «It is not a question here of God but of our relationship with God» (Lafon, 1982, p. 82). And this relationship, made up of faith, hope and love, is of the order of desire (Lafon, 1982, pp. 86-90). In short, faithful does not just talk about God; it is much more important that he addresses him in prayer (Lafon, 1987, p. 169). Today, theology, which in the past was defined as the science of God, has become the science of our relationship with God, that is, of faith.

From the book *Le Dieu commun* onwards, for Lafon the word «l'entretien» does not only mean the relationship with God, but also any relationship between humans. Since God is a person and man is a person too, he speaks of interpersonal relationship. In addition to this fact, we find there another step further in the development of Lafon's thought: a man does not enter to relationship but this one is given to him as the gift to «be in this relationship» or, man, as a person, «finds

himself in the relationship»!¹ When a child is born physically into the material world, he simultaneously finds himself in the world of relationships as a person when his mother or someone else addresses him with «you»! In the relationship we start to live as a person, and the relationship helps us to continue our life and to delve deeper into it. More than that, the relationship between humans, as the first experience of the transcendence, is the place where man can have an experience of the relationship to God. This is what Christ tells us when he says: «Whenever you did for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me» (Mt 25:40). This Gospel passage confirms that we can recognize God in the face of every human being. However, lest anyone understand the last sentence in a polytheistic sense, we will put it another way: in relation to every human being, we can recognize the relation to God.

In Lafon's thought, there is the Copernican reversal of a thinking-reality: the relationship is not created by subjects, but subjects are born into the relationship (Osredkar, 2003). Materialist philosophy defines life as the growth and death of body cells, while the Theology of Relationship argues that to live means to be in a relationship. This theology asserts that there is no life outside relationships. A man enters the material world by a union of two cells. He starts to live as a material being. Then a man starts to live as a person when someone, a mother, addresses him as «you», in verbal or non-verbal ways. Called «you», a human being is born as «I», as a person. This personal identity, his existence, can only be maintained when «I», the person, continues to look for «you», that is, «I» interacts

1. Lafon claims that the relationship is given to man as a gift, so he cannot enter into it, and he does not deserve to be in it because he found himself in the relationship.

with the »you«. To call another as you is an ongoing search for »you«. «You» become my responsibility, and «I» in turn, begin to give up myself. Responsibility and sacrifice are key to understanding a relationship. This interpersonal relationship is the first human experience of transcendence (Lafon, 1982, p. 43); therefore, it is possible that a person in this relationship with another man at the same time seeks God and finds himself simultaneously linked to Him through faith. We might say that in relationships with other humans, we can and do experience a yearning for a relationship that goes beyond us.

Thus, to live with everyone means to live with God in faith. In this way, faith gives us life by inviting us to live together, and in the relationship, we can find the beginning and the end of our existence. The relationship is also the beginning and the end of our faith.

2. Relationships in Society Are Built Through Dialogue

The fact is that people speak; we utter words. We communicate with one another, verbally or nonverbally. We express our feelings, desires; in short, what we think, we are able to convey to others. And we take this for granted as something natural, so to speak. Natural in the sense that the ability to communicate has created humanity. This is the essence of our human nature. The ability to communicate continually creates humanity. It sustains our existence. The more this ability develops, the more human we become. Furthermore, this ability makes us like God. The words on the first pages of the Bible, which state that God created man in His own image, should not be understood in terms of physical resemblance. The true image of God is described in the opening lines of the Gospel of John:

«In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning the Word

was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to people» (Jn 1:1–4).

What is a dialogue? In a similar way to how we introduced a relationship in the first chapter, we can also define dialogue as a situation in which different subjects are found whether they want to be there or not. I can only become aware that I am already there. For example, I cannot decide to enter life; I can only become aware that I am alive. We all find ourselves in a life situation. I was not asked if I wanted to live or not. At one moment, I realized that I was alive. I recognized my belonging to someone. In the same way, we humans found ourselves in dialogue. It is not something that we deserve. Therefore, I can say that the dialogue was offered to us. It is a gift (Osredkar, 2008). But it is up to us whether we will deepen and maintain the dialogue, or whether we will interrupt it.

Robert Petkovšek emphasizes that dialogue is a two-way communication between people who have different, complementary beliefs. A conversation with like-minded people often becomes a monologue. In a monologue, difference disappears. Dialogue, on the other hand, is the acceptance of difference. In fact, we must say that a balance between equality and difference is a condition for dialogue to develop at all. «I» and «you» are equality and difference at the same time, and in dialogue they must be in balance, so that neither of the two different poles has an advantage. In dialogue, neither «I» nor «you» should be at the center; equality and difference must be equal. In other words, «I» and «you» must make space for each other (Petkovšek, 2016).

Branko Klun reflects on dialogue and defines it in the Greek-Jewish-biblical tradition (Branko, 2012). He also emphasizes the diversity and unity of interlocutors in dialogue. According to the Greek

tradition, interlocutors must unify regarding the meaning of words to be able to talk at all. They must share a common intelligence or agree on a common logic. The Greek word *logos* (reason, mind) is the basis of the word *dialogos*, which connects speech (word) and mind. Dialogue itself is said to presuppose the unification of interlocutors, because *dialogos* is based on *logos*. The initiator of philosophical dialogue was the ancient philosopher Socrates, who focused primarily on the interlocutor and wanted to hear and understand his thoughts and arguments. Since there were different opinions about some things, Socrates wanted to reach a common truth with his interlocutor. This openness to the other person, which Socrates showed in the dialogue, is, according to Klun, the foundation of the dialogical relationship. The truth of the thing that Socrates sought in the dialogue with his interlocutor was timeless, universal and unchanging *logos*, the logical structure of the entire reality, which also means the logic of our mind. Socrates' goal in the dialogue was to arrive at a common *logos*, a common truth. However, a common truth is not possible in the confrontation of two different teachings. We will address this fact in the next chapter.

God is the Word; God is communication, and man can find God in every communication, which is the most authentic image of God. Therefore, man is similar to God in the ability to communicate. We can write that the word is the most that man has been given to manage. The word is so great that a person cannot «take back» the spoken word. No one can destroy the word. The word is the most that a person can give to a person, because the word connects us and thus keeps us alive. If we paraphrase the aforementioned words of John the Evangelist, we can write in the beginning there was dialogue! The word is the means of dialogue, the means of communication. We could also say: in the beginning there was a relationship!

3. Catholic Doctrine of the Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue is not just a conversation among different believers. It is much more than an exchange of words, expressions or meanings. In the Catholic Church this is quite clear since the Second Vatican Council, which finished 60 years ago. In that occasion, the Council fathers defined interreligious dialogue as a search for common points in different religious doctrines, religious traditions and religious practices. In fact, they clarified that the interreligious dialogue cannot exist without mutual respect and collaboration.

The person rightfully attributed for the present attitude of the Catholic Church to non-Catholic Christians and non-Christian religions is Pope John XXIII. After his election to the Chair of Peter in 1958, he proposed his idea of recasting Church doctrine with two important points: the inclusion of the Catholic Church in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue efforts. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli as a diplomatic representative of the Holy See, in the service in Bulgaria (10 years) in Athens (4 years) and Turkey (6 years) met the Christian East and the Islamic world. Without a doubt, this diplomatic experience led him to convening the Second Vatican Council and the Catholic orientation towards ecumenism and dialogue with world religions. He and his successor, Paul VI, championed the institutionalization of the new policies of the Catholic Church.

The document *Nostra Aetate* (Latin: *In our Time*) is the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions* of the Second Vatican Council, officially promulgated in 1965 after the votation in which 2221 Fathers of Council (in total there were 2312) approved the text (Nostra Aetate, 2015). This document is in fact the first in the history of the Church, to examine the «relationship with non-Christian religions» with the objective to construct peace in the world. In this difficult period of humanity, when there is no safe place

in world, where the innocent could be killed, we are extremely sure, that the dialogue and good relationships between religions are the indispensable conditions for our survival.

Inter-religious dialogue in the Catholic Church 60 years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council seems to be self-evident. However, it would not have taken place if the Council Fathers had not redefined the understanding of the doctrine of salvation. In this paper, we want to show how interreligious dialogue in Catholic theology is based on a new interpretation of the traditional Catholic doctrine of salvation. Only the new interpretation of the axiom «Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus» has allowed Catholic dialogical activity in the interreligious field. Our presentation of the Catholic Doctrine of the dialogue will be divided into 5 parts. First, we highlight the fact that the Second Vatican Council is the first Catholic assembly, which speaks positively about other religions and non-Catholic Christians. In the next chapters, we will examine Article 16 of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, which is the heart of Council doctrine of salvation and a key to understand the Catholic conception of interreligious dialogue. The document indicates the transition from ecclesiology of belonging to ecclesiology of communion. In the third part, we will underscore that at the last council the Church no longer had the intention to proclaim itself as the one true church, but to proclaim the kingdom of God, which goes beyond Church boundaries. Then we will make look at the acts of dialogue between Catholics and Muslims in last 60 years and lastly we will reference the religious situation in Slovenia.

3.1. The Search for the Common Points

At the request of Pope John XXIII, the Secretariat for Christian Unity produced the draft of the Cardinal Bea's text in the

draft, initially envisaged as one of the chapters in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, speaks purely on anti-Semitism, thus as the debate ensued it was felt that the text of the general contents should emerge independently. From it arose a council document, which was originally called *Nostra Aetate*. In this paper, the Catholic teaching profession for the first time in its history considered the question of the relationship of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions. The details of this decree demonstrate its positive evaluation of other world religions and its recognition of the presence of elements of salvation in other religious traditions.

The *Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* begins by describing the unity of the origins of all people, and the fact that they all return to God; hence, their final goal is also one. It describes the eternal questions, which have dogged men since the beginning, and how the various religious traditions have tried to answer them. It mentions some of the answers that Hindus, Buddhists, and members of other faiths have suggested for such philosophical questions. It notes the willingness of the Catholic Church to accept some truths present in other religions in so much as they reflect Catholic teaching and may lead souls to Christ. Part three goes on to say that the Catholic Church regards the Muslims with esteem, and then continues by describing some of the things Islam has in common with Christianity and Catholicism: worship of One God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, Merciful and Omnipotent, Who has spoken to men; the Muslims' respect for Abraham and Mary, and the great respect they have for Jesus, whom they consider to be a Prophet and not God. The synod urged all Catholics and Muslims to forget the hostilities and differences of the past and to work together for mutual understanding and benefit. Part 4 speaks of the bond that ties the people of the 'New Covenant' (Christians) to Abraham's stock (Jews).

It states that even though some Jewish authorities and those who followed them called for Jesus' death, the blame for this cannot be laid at the door of all those Jews present at that time, nor can the Jews in our time be held as guilty, thus repudiating an indiscriminate charge of Jewish deicide; 'the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God'. The Declaration also decries all displays of antisemitism made at any time by anyone. True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. The Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God, they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone. The fifth part states that all men are created in God's image, and that it is contrary to the teaching of the Church to discriminate against, show hatred towards or harass any person or people based on color, race, religion, condition of life and so on (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965).

During the preparation of this document, the successor of the «John the Good», Paul VI, the 19 May 1964 established the Secretariat for non-Christians. Its first head was Cardinal Marella. Paul VI before the release of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* published his first encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, which presents the Catholic concept of dialogue. Pope Paul VI founded the Secretariat for non-believers, which was headed by Cardinal Franz König. On 22 October 1974,

Paul VI Commission for Relations with the Jews of the Catholic Church joined the Secretariat for Christian Unity. All this work was accomplished with a view to realize a dialogue with non-Christian religions. It is the same for the Church, which realized, 60 years ago, that it had been already in relationships with the world and with other religions in particular. It realized in fact that it had been in relationship with the world even before the last Council, but it did not recognize it. The sign of this recognition is the new positive opinion of others. In *Nostra Aetate*, we can read: The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings that, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (Nostra Aetate, 1965, para. 2) Text of the book Nostra Aetate and The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their desserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting (Nostra Aetate, 1965, para. 3)

In fact, the Church document exposes the common values of Christianity and Islam. In the past, it was the opposite. The responsible persons of the Church spoke about differences between Catholics and other religions.

A criterion of Catholic theology after The Second Vatican Council is so that it should be in constant dialogue with the world. In the sense not to expose differences in religions but look for the common points in religions. Theology has a particular competence and responsibility in this regard. Through its constant dialogue with the social, religious and cultural currents of the time, and through its openness to other sciences which, with their own methods examine those developments, theology can help the faithful and the magisterium to see the importance of developments, events and trends in human history, and to discern and interpret ways in which through them the Spirit may be speaking to the Church and to the world (International Theological Commission, 2011, p. 58).

3.2. Evolution of the Doctrine of Salvation

One of the most misunderstood teachings of the Catholic Church is this one: «Outside the Church there is no salvation» (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Those trying to grasp the meaning of this teaching often struggle with its formulations by various Church Fathers and Church Councils down through history. Of course, to understand the isolated formulation of any Church teaching, one must study the historical context within which it was written. Why was it written? What was going on in the Church at the time? Who was the intended audience? And so on. One must discover how the magisterium of the Church understands its own teaching now. If someone fails to do this and chooses, rather, to simply treat a particular formulation as a stand-alone teaching, he runs the risk of seriously misunderstanding it.

It seems that the further development of the Catholic doctrine on salvation was the decision for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. One cannot approach the other, people cannot talk on the

same level, and they cannot be in dialogue if someone is hindered to be equal. Dialogue would not be possible if the Catholic Church would insist that there is no chance for salvation outside the Church. Dialogue demands mutual exchange, the equality of everybody involved. It does not presuppose that everybody is the same. To succeed in the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, it was necessary to abandon the objective understanding of salvation. With this acceptance, Catholic theology recognized the existence and a value of all who are not members of the Catholic Church. In accordance with the document *Nostra Aetate*, the new ecumenical strategy is very cautious. It does not say that other religions are an instrument of «salvation», it just says that «She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men» (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965, para. 2). This is a meaningful remark. The fact of the religious plurality which the Church had to face and plurality which the Church accepted into its doctrine may become positive values if we do not interpret it exclusively as a dialogue with those who are different and foreigners. It does not mean just an apology to the non-believers, but first of all an opportunity of purification of our own identity and our own foundations. Pluralism is a challenge for the Church to distinguish between the foundations and everything that was added from different sources through history.

Pluralism became part of the doctrine of the Catholic Church together with ecumenism and interreligious dialogue at Vatican II. The documents state that the Savior wants the salvation of everybody. Even though the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation and the most distinguished way to salvation, it is possible to gain eternal life outside the Church. The scale for salvation is life according to

someone's conscious: «Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.» (Lumen Gentium, 1965, para. 16) One can read in *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* that «Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.» (Lumen Gentium, 1965, para. 22) Very similar thoughts can be found in the *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church*: «Therefore though God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to find that faith without which it is impossible to please Him». (Ad Gentes, 1965, para. 7)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks clearly about the need for positive inter-religious encounters. It sees part of the mission of every Christian to include a respectful dialogue with those who do not ... accept the Gospel. Believers can profit from this dialogue by learning to appreciate better »those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples [of other religions], and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992, p. 856).

3.3. Dialogue Is not the End, but Renewal of Religion

We can divide different doctrines of salvation into two groups. In the first group, we put old Chinese philosophy, Hinduism, also Jainism, Buddhism and old Greek philosophy; in these we find the idea of self-salvation. Adherents of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism do not believe in salvation in the sense understood by most Westerners; they do not focus on Hell or Heaven as the result of life. They believe in reincarnation after death. According to this belief,

one's actions allow one to be reborn as a higher or lower being. Eventually, one can escape from *samsara* by attaining the highest spiritual state. Thus, one is able to save himself. In the second group linked to the doctrine of salvation, we put the three monotheistic religions. Belief in One God is connected to the idea of being saved by someone other than the self; and this other is God the Savior.

We thus have two different schools of teaching about salvation. In the first, a man can by himself alone find out the purpose and the goal of his life. The teaching of the second group is based on the dependence on God's mercy. Also in the monotheistic religions, man participates in his salvation: he receives divine revelation, which instructs him how to live, and faithfully following this revelation enables him to be saved by God. In fact, the basic difference from the first group is man's inability to discover by himself the correct way of life. Monotheistic believers need God's revelation, and they willingly accept it as the instructions needed for saving their lives.

Ideologically these two doctrines of salvation give rise to a tension between self-sufficiency and dependence. However, this tension is in fact a reflection of the tension between the «I» and the «other» in human society. They are competing and they are in conflict with each other. This tension could be relieved by paying attention to the already existing relationship between the «I» and the other. That is the proper business of life; let us say the art of life. This fight between the «I» and the «other» is in fact the fight between man and God that has endured since mankind's fall from grace. Man makes God culpable for his own suffering and death and attempts to avoid them. At the same time man attempts to avenge himself by pleading ignorance of God's will. Man searches for God and at the same time he hides himself from Him, much like the first man in the Bible. Once again, this tension could be relieved by paying attention to the already

existing relationship between God and man.

The function of art is to inspire admiration and happiness in the beholder. The highest kind of art is a human life; human life is constituted by relationships, and what could inspire us more than that? Therefore, to live means to be with others. We will try to show how modern Catholic theology considers human salvation in relationship as the art of life. As we said above, a human being cannot live outside of dialogue. It is only in it that one can understand himself, because by belonging to others one becomes «himself». To be in relationship involves especially talking with somebody. To say it in a simple way, it means to pronounce the word «you». The pronounced word you is the guarantee of the existence of the «I». Yet I can only pronounce it when I find myself in relation with you. It should not be said, Until I form a relation with you, but when I find myself in relation with you, or even better, when I become aware that I am already in relation with you. We can say that relationship saves man from nonexistence and brings him to existence. This is the first step of man's salvation in terms of relationship. In addition, as long as he stays in it, he will be saved, he will be alive.

Being in a relationship, one realizes that this dynamic works according to certain rules. One of these rules is that one is simultaneously present to and absent from the other. But this presence and absence alternate in intensity. This is a basic condition of relationship and how it works. The difference between «I» and «you» assures the separate identity of each person; the similarity between subjects assures their closeness. Given this, when they are together, they are still apart, yet when they are apart, they are nevertheless still together. Ordinarily, presence and absence are experienced partially; it is only in the case of death that absence is experienced in its totality and there is no presence. In the case of faith, on the other hand, we

find the extraordinary situation that God and even those who have died are totally absent and totally present to man at the same time even though he is still alive.

It is in the simultaneous alternating of presence and of absence where we can understand the relationship between man and God, called faith. Faith is often imagined by people as «conviction about God's existence», but it is more rightly a relation. Many have an idea about God, many philosophers and wise men speak about God, yet this is not yet faith, because to believe in God means to address God with a personal «you». Faith is the situation wherein I can address God with a personal you. Faith creates a believer in me. And this faith is a gift since I can claim no credit for it. Saint Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*: «I would not have sought you if you had not found me before». What does that mean? Man would not seek God if he did not already believe in Him. It is only when one feels that he believes that one starts seeking God. And as long as one seeks God, one believes. Once one stops searching or one believes that he has found Him, he does not believe any more. When he comes to the awareness of living in faith, he starts seeking God and starts to call Him you, my God. Actually, faith is a relation with a someone whom a man does not know, but he addresses Him with a personal you nevertheless. And when a believer calls him you, god, becomes God. Because God is present in his absence, one can believe also that those persons who are departed can be present while they are absent. So, Christians believe that life after death continues but in a different way. This is the second step of man's salvation in relationship.

The third act of salvation occurs when a believer recognizes God's face in each human person—there is the recognition that relationship with the person includes relationship with God. Each relationship consists of two sides, a theological one and a human one.

Like a sheet of paper with its two sides, the recto is inseparable from its verso. Just as it is impossible to divide them, it is also impossible to separate one's relation with God from one's relation with people (Mt 25:31-46). This union of relation with God and people can be designated by (O)other. Faith then means seeking the (O)other and since we are all in relation, we all need and long for seeking the (O)other and desire to realize the relation with the (O)other. Since relation with people is inseparable from relation with God, the longing for other is essentially a longing for God.

As was pointed out above, faith is a relation with a Someone we do not know. Neither is there a need to know him. The objective of believing is to maintain the relation with the (O)other. That is the key to understand that interreligious dialogue is a realization of faith in God. Even more, we are sure that without interreligious dialogue faith is not real and that, conversely, interreligious dialogue leads into renewal of religion.

3.4. Concrete Examples of Dialogue between Catholic Church and Islam

In spite of everything, the dialogue between the Catholic Church and Muslims is running at several levels and between many participants. We shall treat the events at the macro level (Holy See) and at the micro level (Slovenia). Thus, we shall study the structures for the dialogue with Islam established by the Church and describe important events in this area. At the level of Slovenia, we shall present the history of cooperation between the Catholic and Islamic communities, the present situation and the upcoming trends in these relations.

John Paul II, in 1979, was the second Pope in history who visited Turkey and started the active realization of the dialogue

between the Catholic Church and Islam. In the following year he visited Morocco where on the 19th of August he spoke to 80.000 Muslims and said that Christians and Muslims honor the same God. He went also to Tunis; unfortunately, the murder of monks in Tibhirine, Algeria, in May 1996, stopped short a crucial dialogue, but Pope John Paul II demonstrated his goal of dialogue by an important gesture, that is, his authorization of the construction of the mosque in Rome. He was also the first Pope in history who entered a mosque in Damascus, Syria. The most significant interreligious dialogue act of Jean Paul II was the invitation to the representatives of all world religions to come to Assisi 27 October 1986. They prayed together for peace. These meetings were the results of changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council with respect to interreligious exchange.

Pope Benedict XVI continued the «politic» of Jean Paul II. In his *Message for the XLIV World Day of Peace*, devoted to the theme: *Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace*, he says: «For the Church, dialogue between the followers of the different religions represents an important means of cooperating with all religious communities for the common good. The Church herself rejects nothing of what is true and holy in the various religions. She has a high regard for those ways of life and conduct, precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women. The path to take is not the way of relativism or religious syncretism. The Church, in fact, proclaims, and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (*Jn 14:6*); in Christ, in whom God reconciled all things to himself, people find the fullness of the religious life. Yet this in no way excludes dialogue and the common pursuit of truth in different areas of life, since, as Saint Thomas Aquinas says, every truth, whoever utters it, comes from the Holy

Spirit. The year of this document, that is 2011, marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *World Day of Prayer for Peace* convened in Assisi in 1986 by Pope John Paul II. Pope Benedict organized the memory of that experience.

The speech of Benedict XVI delivered to former students at the University of Regensburg in 2007 was misunderstood, but it provoked fruitful discussion. A month following Pope Benedict's address, 38 Muslim scholars sent a letter in response, and a year later, a second letter (signed by 138 scholars) followed in an effort to find common ground of collaboration between Christians and Muslims. In his turn, Benedict XVI responded to the letter of the 138, opening the way to possible collaboration in various areas. This correspondence became the basis of a forum for dialogue between Muslims and Catholics; the first session occurred in Rome, November 4-6, 2008.

Pope Benedict in fact met personally with important persons from the Muslim world. The 6th of November 2007, he received a visit from Abdallah I, the king of Saudi Arabia. It was the first time that the sovereign of the Arabic country where are found major holy Muslim sites came to the Vatican to a pope. The leaders spoke about interreligious dialogue and about the freedom of Christians in Saudi Arabia. In 2009, Benedict XVI visited Jordan and met prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad Bin Talal, the cousin of king Abdallah II. He was a signator of the letter of 138 Muslims Scholars. In his letter, *Verbum Domini* of November 2010, Benedict expressed the desire to further the relationships of trust between Muslims and Catholics.

Pope Francis immediately after his election in 2013 continued the practice of interreligious dialogue of his predecessors, but in his own way. In his efforts we recognize Saint Francis from Assisi whose name he chose for his pontificate. Like the Poor eight centuries ago, Bergoglio refused to live in the papal palace and, in words and

actions, he shocked a lot of people. Pope John Paul II with the common prayer of representatives of different religions for peace surprised the global public too. He even surprised Muslims when he entered the mosque and prayed with Muslims. The current Pope, moreover, has managed to go a step further. The interreligious attitude of Pope Francis may be illustrated by his speech to the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina in June 2015. He met with leaders of the Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish communities gathered in a Franciscan youth center in Sarajevo: Interreligious dialogue is an indispensable condition for peace and a duty for all believers« and he continued: interreligious dialogue cannot be limited merely to the few, to leaders of religious communities, but must also extend as far as possible to all believers, engaging the different sectors of civil society. Particular attention must be paid to young men and women who are called to build the future of this country. It is always worth remembering, however, that for dialogue to be authentic and effective, it presupposes a solid identity: without an established identity, dialogue is of no use or even harmful. I say this with the young in mind, but it applies to everyone.

Pope Francis, on the first days of February 2019, visited the United Arab Emirates and celebrated a public holy mass in the Arabian Peninsula in Abu Dhabi where Sharia law was established. For almost one thousand five hundred years the Eucharist had not been publicly celebrated there. Pope Francis consecrated bread and wine on Muslim holy land. Much more, the Pope prayed for peace there with the Muslims. Before attending the interreligious conference, he told his host, Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, that the Pope was coming as a brother. He expressed his respect to the Muslims. In the year marking the 800th anniversary of the meeting between Saint Francis and the Sultan, Pope

Francis in Abu Dhabi said during an interreligious conference at the Founder's Memorial Building: I am grateful to the Lord for the 800th anniversary of the meeting between Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malek-al-Kamil. I accepted the opportunity to come here as a believer, thirsty for peace, as a brother seeking peace with his brothers. To desire peace, to promote peace, to be an instrument of peace is why we are here (Pope Francis, May 31, 2019). The highlight of the visit is a *Document on the Human Brotherhood for World Peace and Common Coexistence* signed by the Pope with the great Imam, Al Azhar. Let's just focus on one sentence of this document: The pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings. This divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derive. Therefore, the fact that people are forced to adhere to a certain religion or culture must be rejected, as too the imposition of a cultural way of life that others do not accept (Pope Francis, February 4, 2019).

We could easily understand that the Pope and the Imam agreed that God allows some of us to be born as Christians and others to be Muslims! If we accept the plurality of religions in the same way as we accept the diversity of genders, nationalities and races, then we humans can truly give ourselves a disposition toward reconciliation by accepting and respecting all people as we participate in the modern world. That is precisely the purpose of the present Holy Father. He wants all people to be respected and accepted as children of the same God. Theology always responds to the needs of the time (Petkovšek , 2018, p. 237). Pope Francis' thinking is completely in line with the Gospel and Catholic teaching. As a Catholic, one cannot tell a Muslim that they are brothers, and that only a Catholic will go to heaven. It is also impossible to say that a Catholic was born in a Catholic family by

God's will, however, a Muslim was born in a Muslim family by God's mistake. No, the Pope is right, even Muslims are born into Islamic families by God's will. The sentence in the document from Abu Dhabi is essentially the statement of Article 16 of the *Lumen gentium* expressed by other words.

A month after, Pope Francis sent his delegate to Damietta, March 1, 2019. Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, the prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Church, arrived in Egypt and shared the desire of Pope Francis to make every effort to promote peace and dialogue. For that occasion, the Holy Father wrote a special letter in which he called Saint Francis a «Man of Peace» who taught his religious brothers to say, «Let the Lord give you peace!» (Pope Francis, May 31, 2019) The Pope asked Cardinal Sandri to bring his brotherly greetings to all, Christians and Muslims. In the letter, moreover, he wishes that no one succumbs to the temptation of violence, especially under any religious pretense.

3.5. The Status of Interreligious Dialog in Slovenia¹

The major religion in Slovenia is Roman Catholicism with 1.2 million followers. Eighty percent of the Slovenian Catholic population has traditionally become church members through baptism; however, according to the 2002 census, only 57.8 percent of Slovenians reported being Catholic. Most children of Catholic parents are baptized as infants, but some parents let their children decide to take part in the church rites when they are older. To avoid nominal membership, the Church has begun to request parents' religious preparation for the rite of baptism upon the birth of a child.

1. This text is presented in the journal *Nova prisutnost* 2021, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 243-254.

Unofficially we can say that there is approximately 70 percent of Catholics in Slovenia.

Christianity has existed in Slovenian territory since the first century CE, when the region was part of the Roman Empire. During the seventh and eighth centuries missionaries from Salzburg (now in Austria) and Aquileia (in modern-day Italy) introduced Christianity to the Slovenes. Christianity was officially established in 745 CE, when Borut, duke of Carantania, converted as a condition of receiving Bavarian protection against invaders from the east. Saints Cyril and Methodius from Macedonia, known as the Apostles of the Slavs, arrived in the region in 866. They translated the Scriptures and liturgical texts into the Slavic language, and a written Slavic culture began. In the tenth and eleventh centuries a network of parishes was formed. Numerous monasteries were built in the twelfth century, and the first two dioceses were established in 1228 and 1461. Slovenia has a large number of churches, which are typically located on hilltops. A great number are pilgrimage destinations, and they are often dedicated to the Mother of God.

Muslims in Slovenia, which comprise 2.4 percent of the population, began emigrating from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, or Macedonia since the mid-twentieth century. Their religious integration into the new cultural environment has been a two-way process of adaptation between immigrants and between Muslims and the local community. The Slovenian state has wished to enable the integration of Muslims following the European integration policy, which promotes multiculturalism and inclusivity. In the early twenty-first century, Muslims in Slovenia are divided into three administratively separate groups. Integration efforts regarding Islamic expressions of faith in everyday life, such as dress, prayer, nutrition, burial, polygamy, and holidays, show that the Islamic Community in

Slovenia, which continues to accept the leadership of the Islamic Community, centered in Sarajevo, and the more recently formed Slovenian Muslim Community intend to create a Slovene Islamic identity. The Association for the Promotion of Islamic Culture in Slovenia, however, wishes to maintain diverse expressions of faith, directed by the members of different Islamic environments. In 2013, the Muslims started to build a mosque in the capital, Ljubljana.

Since the Muslims living in Slovenia have come from the former Yugoslavia, their experience of coexistence is, in spite of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, very different from the one in Western Europe with other Muslims. Upon these experiences, the dialogue and the understanding of Muslims in our country with Catholics as well as with other believers and non-believers should be built.

The possibility for interreligious dialogue until now has not shown any significant attempt to establish exchanges between the Muslim and Catholic communities. We can say that there is no conflict, on the contrary, there is a good collaboration. Nevertheless, both have had to cope with a secularized society where many people are entirely indifferent to religious faith and belief. Muslims and Catholics could therefore offer together some common spiritual values and open new horizons of sensitivity and solidarity to their neighbors. A common dialogue with (post) communist and (post)modern society also could preserve Islamic and Catholic communities from fundamentalist tendencies. Likewise, a dialogue between Catholics and Muslims in Slovenia may permit the participants to discover respect for spiritual treasures and build a peaceful, democratic and pluralistic society in Slovenia. Former Head of the Muslim community in Slovenia, Mufti Nedžad Grabus, is sure that the Islamic cultural and religious center, which the Slovenian Muslim community

is building, will serve to strengthen the bonds of the community and promote dialogue between Muslims and Catholics. Below we will describe some concrete actions of interreligious dialogue in Slovenia.

Saint Francis from Assisi arrived in Egypt in July 1219. Few historical sources report this event, and the details remain unknown. The Franciscan and foreign sources (Ajello, 2011, p. 477) talk about his meeting with the Sultan in Damietta, but the testimonies are not consistent with each other. Biographies of Francis written by Franciscan brothers Thomas Celano, Julian of Speyern, and St. Bonaventure speak of Francis' desire for martyrdom (Melone, 2011). Everyone in turn is of the opinion that Francis approached the Sultan with the desire to receive a martyr's death. Nevertheless, Giordano of Gian, a contemporary of Francis, points out that Francis did not seek martyrdom in the meeting with the Sultan. Bishop Jacob of Vitry¹ (1170-1240), who closely followed the events of the battles at Damietta, wrote the same. A text written in 1220 describes Francis' visit to the Sultan. It mentions that Francis preached the Word of God there, but with little success. Nothing, however, mentions his desire for martyrdom. Beyond any desire of Francis for martyrdom, these commentaries emphasize that Francis promoted a proclamation of peace (Tolan, 2009, p. 27). The description of the Sultan is much more positive in the text of Jacob than in the official biographies of Francis. In any case, all of the above-mentioned authors presented Francis as a man of peace. On the other side, the Crusaders were looking for a solution to the wars to be fought with their arms.

At the initiative of the Order's special *Commission for Dialogue with Islam*, the General Minister of the Order of Franciscans,

1. Italian literature calls him "Giacomo di Vitry, vescovo di San Giovanni d'Acri", because in 1216 he was ordained a bishop of Accra (Akkon), Syria.

Fr. Michael A. Perry, invited Franciscans around the world in a special communique to remember the meeting of Francis and the Sultan through a variety of commemorative events (Perry, 2019). The response has been very encouraging. In 2019, Franciscans organized a number of events that remind us of the encounter of the saint and the sultan eight centuries ago and that evaluate the breadth and depth of interreligious dialogue occasioned by this meeting in 1219. Slovenian Franciscans also joined the celebration. The Slovenian Franciscan *Province of the Holy Cross* and the *Stanko Janežič Institute for Dogmatic, Fundamental and Ecumenical Theology and Religionology and Dialogue*, operating within the Faculty of Theology, organized a scientific conference on the 800 years of cohabitation between Franciscans et Muslims. It took place October 1-3, 2019 in the Franciscan friary at Tromostovje in Ljubljana. The Conference highlighted the event of eight centuries ago and focused on the dialogue between Christians and Muslims in the past and today. The lecturers concentrated on cooperation between Franciscans and Muslims in the past eight centuries. In the sessions on interreligious dialogue, speaking about dialogue was not the most important thing, but creating occasions for dialogue. At the Ljubljana Symposium, nearly half of the participants were Muslim (800 Years of Convivenc, 2019). Christian professors have sought not to speak of Muslims but to speak to Muslims, with all respect. An honest conversation with them means that interreligious dialogue is alive.

Active interreligious dialogue for the Slovenian Franciscans has been mainly because of work and activities of Franciscan fr. Mari Osredkar, who is the head of *The Stanko Janežič Institute for Dogmatic, Fundamental and Ecumenical Theology and Religionology and Dialogue*, which is an integral part of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana. His dedication to the actualization of dialogue can be

divided into three levels. On the first level, he talks to Muslims living in Slovenia. They have optimal Islamic identity because the Slovenia state ensures religious freedom (Flisar, 2019, p. 182). He has contact with many believers. His efforts for interreligious dialogue on the first level can be seen in the regular meetings with the Mufti and Imams of the Islamic Community in Slovenia. In places where Islamic imams reside, he organizes meetings between them and Catholic pastors. At these meetings, imams and pastors get to know each other and make plans for how their believers could collaborate at the local level. Knowledge and cooperation are the foundation of dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Good relations can be maintained by even minor signs such as greetings for religious holidays. On the second level, there are the academic contacts of dr. Osredkar with Islamic faculties in Sarajevo, Kutahya (Turkey), and Teheran. Especially he maintains contacts with the Islamic Theological Faculty in Sarajevo, and at his initiative the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana has concluded an agreement on pedagogical and scientific cooperation. The fruit of this agreement has been a series of lectures given by Professor dr. Nedžad Grabus on Islamic subjects taught as part of dr. Osredkar's master's degree program *Religion and Ethics* at the Catholic Faculty of Ljubljana. This is the first time in the hundred-year history of the Catholic Theological Faculty in Ljubljana that an Islamic expert taught Catholic students in Ljubljana. Osredkar is also affiliated with the Islamic Theological Faculty in Kutahya and Konya. In 2015, through the Erasmus exchange, he lectured for a week to Muslim students at the Islamic Faculty of Theology in Kutahya. In 2019, Professor Ahmed Türkan came to teach Slovenian students at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana. On the occasion of his trip to Turkey, Osredkar also visited the Franciscan community in Istanbul. There are several Franciscan communities in this country today, where friars strive for dialogue through the testimony of the Christian life. In

Istanbul and Smirne (Izmir) there are international fraternities, composed of friars from all over the world. Among the various annual activities, there are: The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, exchanges with and visits to Muslims brothers during Ramadan, a permanent formation course on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, an interfaith prayer meeting in the spirit of Assisi, as well as various activities in the local Church. Collaboration with Shia Muslims from Iran is a special chapter in the efforts for dialogue of dr. Mari Osredkar. With the help of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Ljubljana in 2015, he began a collaboration with the *Center for Interreligious Dialogue* in Tehran, which operates within the Ministry of Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In December 13-17, 2015 a delegation of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana attended a conference on interreligious dialogue focusing on the role of religions in the fight against extremism and violence in today's world. The scientific meeting was organized by the Center for Interreligious Dialogue of Tehran. The delegation was led by dr. Mari Jože Osredkar and its members were dr. Tadej Strehovec, dr. Vojko Strahovnik, dr. Lenart Škof and dr. Bojan Žalec. As part of the conference, the delegation gave lectures at three different institutions. On December 14 was the first academic meeting at the Campus of *Islamic Culture and Relations Organizations*. The delegation was received by the Director of the Center dr. Ali Mohammad Helmi, and the welcoming speech was delivered by the President of this Center, dr. Abuzar Ibrahim. There were five lectures given by two Slovenian professors and three Iranian. Dr. Bojan Žalec presented the problems of Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe in the lecture *Obstacles in the Way of Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence: Islamism and Islamophobia*, and dr. Tadej Strehovec gave a presentation on *Religion and Family: Two Sources of Ethics*. The Center also introduced Slovenians to the Declaration of the Iranian Religious Leader on Youth Against

Extremism titled *Message of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei to Youth in Europe and North America*. The Iranian organizers took the Slovenian Delegation to Qum, 100 km away from Teheran, where there is the religious center of Iranian Shi'ism with a large pilgrimage sanctuary. Slovenians were guests of the Dean of the Islamic Research Institute there, and then they went to the University for Religions and Religion Denominations, where two plenary lectures were given by one Iranian and one Slovenian. Dr. Mari Jože Osredkar outlined the foundations and reasons for Catholic interreligious dialogue in a lecture titled *Reasons for Dialogue between Muslims and Catholics Based on Catholic Teaching*. He emphasized that there is no religious freedom and respect for diversity in Islam, so at the theological level dialogue between the Catholics and Muslims is not currently possible, however, future cooperation will be welcome. The fruit of this collaboration was the participation of Iranian theologians at the scientific conference of *800 Years of Coexistence*, October 1-3, 2019 in the Franciscan friary at Tromostovje, Ljubljana. Finally, it should be emphasized that two Iranian students also enrolled in the third level of study at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana (Osredkar, 2016). On the third level of dialogue, Osredkar is active in the *Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue* in the Slovenian episcopal conference and in the *Section for Interreligious Dialogue of the Evangelization and Culture Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe*.

3.6. Outside of Dialogue, There Is no Salvation

The Catholic church cannot survive outside the situation of dialogue nor outside respect for others. It is only in it that position that the Church can understand itself, because by being in dialogue to others one becomes «himself». And even more, to be in relationship involves especially talking «with somebody». To say it in a simple

way, it means to pronounce the word you by words and by acts. The pronounced word you Muslim is the guarantee of the existence of the Catholic. Yet, a Catholic can only pronounce the word you Muslim when he finds himself in relation with Muslims. It should not be said until he forms a relation with Muslims, but »when he finds himself in relation with Muslims, or even better, when he becomes aware that he is already in relation with Muslims. We can say that relationship saves man from nonexistence and brings him to existence, that is, the relationship saves the Catholics from nonexistence and brings him to existence. That means that the dialogue with others assures the existence of the Church. And as long as the Church stays in such a relation, it will be alive.

Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to mutual understanding and respect that allow them to live and cooperate with each other despite their differences. Dialogue within religions refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. faiths) at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practice their faith freely.

Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities on many levels. For example, between neighbors, schools and in our places of work - it can take place in both formal and informal settings. In Slovenia, Muslims and Christians live side by side in the same buildings and they use the same shops, buses and schools. Normal life means that we come into daily contact with each other. Dialogue, therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which

different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions can be resolved.

Conclusion

The author of this text was recently invited to a round table discussion on the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Slovenia and Europe, which was broadcast by Slovenian national television. At the end, the leader asked him what the future of Christianity and Islam in Europe will be. It is completely wrong to think about the future of a religion or religious community without its relationship to others. If Christians are capable of sincere dialogue with Muslims, Christianity in Europe will be very, very alive. Otherwise, Christianity will abolish itself. The same applies to Islam. If Muslims are capable of sincere communication with Christians, they will preserve their faith. If they are non-dialogical or even violent, they will lose their faith. Dialogue is a tool for peace and a means of survival. Outside of Dialogue, there is no Salvation.

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