

Summary of Working Group Deliberations

Speaking Notes: Paul Tighe

Overview of the discussions. Joint production of the moderators – Carlo Maria Polvani (French Group), worked with Mons. Capanni (Italian), Father Aguirre (Spanish) and yours truly (English). We have attempted to prepare a synthesis while also maintaining the flavour of the discussions.

I would like to express a word of appreciation to all of you for your attendance and engagement. We had over 40 participants each week – time differences meant some of you had to stay up late while others had an early start to their days. I wish also to acknowledge the quality of the discussions and richness of the contributions.

Week 1 – Discussion of Conversation between Cardinal Ravasi and Professor Dionigi which focussed on the encounter of Athens and Jerusalem, the encounter of two worldviews, cultures or *logoi* – the classical and the biblical.

- The material received a highly positive response from all the groups. *Enlightening, stimulating and thought provoking* were among the terms used.
- There were two different dimension to the discussions. In the first place, the participants focussed on the content of the conversation and in a second moment, more attention was centred on the processes of encounter and inter-cultural exchange being described.
- The **specific content** of the conversation. The precise account of the interplay between two cultures and of the fruits of that encounter – the transformation in the understanding of time (cyclical and linear) and the horizon of hope.

- A crisis of the West, especially among the young, was noted – a crisis which involves a loss of a sense of hope. This loss was related to various factors – the shadows cast by the environmental crisis which threatens the future of us all; the awareness of the growth in inequality globally but also within nations – a gap that has been widened by the Covid pandemic; and the widespread perception in the West that the current generation of young adults is the first in recent centuries that cannot aspire to a better quality of life than that of their parents.
- More generally, this loss of hope was seen as indicating the loss of a *telos*, the loss of a sense of purpose and meaning. It was suggested that many young people live in an *eternal now*.
- In this context, it was indicated that the most urgent task for believers was to articulate and formulate more clearly the meaning of hope for future generations. *We must legitimate hope*.
- The **dynamism of the encounter – can it serve as model for further encounters with different cultures?** How relevant is it in helping us to think about subsequent encounters of Christianity with other religious and belief systems and with contemporary cultures and value system, with secularism?
- How well has Christianity through the years been able to appreciate and assimilate the value of non-Western cultures? There was a feeling that something of the original mutuality of the encounter of cultures has been lost.
- Has it been open to the types of values to be found in African and Asian Cultures which are rooted in a strong sense of humans belonging to a community? The concept of Ubuntu was mentioned (*I am because we are*) – such a concept challenges the more individualist conceptions of being a human that have shaped Western and by extension Christian thought.

- This sense of community also conditions how we might think about time and hope – especially where the community of reference, of belonging, includes those who have gone before us (ancestors) and those who will come after us (the unborn generations).
- Have we lost something in being too quick to exclude traditional rituals pertaining to death and remembering the dead? The rituals were expression of an identity but also reinforced that identity and the associated culture.
- It was pointed out that in non-Western cultures, there is often a much stronger sense of our connectedness to the earth and the rhythms of seasons and nature. These often find expression in rituals concerning seeds and the harvesting of crops.
- An interesting question was asked concerning what converts to Christianity in Africa and Asia may feel they lose in terms of cultural values and their sense of identity. Have they been asked – unnecessarily – to jettison too much of their traditions?
- It was suggested that Christianity needs to not only ‘know’ but ‘recognise/appreciate’ the values to be found in other cultures.
- Did some of the reactions to the use of symbols in the context of the Amazonian Synod betray, at best, a lack of openness and, at worst, some form of presumed cultural superiority?

Week 2: Deum sequi (José Casanova); Parere temporis (Francesc Torralba); Se noscere (Alessandra Talamo).

- The groups expressed high degrees of satisfaction with the inputs provided by the presenters.

Casanova

- The concept of an 'all-inclusive humanism' was judged to be highly appropriate and helpful as a way of articulating the required (receptive) dynamism to address a more globalized world.
- It was felt that the concept addressed some of the concerns expressed in the previous group discussions that our approach was too Western centric. The reminder that 60% of the world's population live in Asia was both timely and challenging.
- It could be useful to ask what each religion or 'denomination' might contribute to the search for an 'inclusive humanism'.
- In terms of the insight concerning the need for religions to contribute to the search for a true sense of the unity of the human family – a sense of fraternity (all of us brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of God) – it was stressed that this should not simply be a matter of theory and words but something concrete, something that is best achieved through the lived experience of solidarity in action.

Torralba

- The exploration of the notion of time in terms of a series of paradoxes was found to be most helpful and it resonates with both the personal experiences of the participants and what they observed among younger people.

- The fundamental tension was felt to be between a sense of a pressure to be 'speedy' and 'reactive' while acknowledging that many of the practices that make us human require time and reflection.
- There is an expectation that we use time to do things, to be productive, and a loss of the sense of simply being. This can impact our ability to be present to each other. Pressure to be '*always on*'.
- Time is increasingly perceived as a commodity which has to be '*invested*' in productive or profitably activities. Fear that otherwise time is being '*wasted*'.
- We are witnessing the emergence of a *transactional* concept of time – there is no space for *gratuity* – no time for charity or generosity.
- Our understanding of time has been affected by urbanization. Loss of the sense of time and seasonality required in rural and agricultural settings. The elderly can feel displaced – no one has time for them. Different cultures also have alternative ways of perceiving time – observation from 'First Nations of Canada' – '*you have watches but we have time*'.
- Young and old experience time differently – time perceived as speeding up as we get older.
- Caring for others requires time and it also fosters a sense of vulnerability, loss of control (handing over of time to the other).
- The loss of patience was also noted. It often expresses itself in a desire for the immediate satisfaction of a person's consumeristic needs and wants. This can be harmful for the person but the development of an economy aiming at satisfying this need for immediate satisfaction has been particularly damaging to those who are expected to service such an economy. Attention was drawn to those who work in the so-called 'gig economy' – parcel delivery drivers, warehouse workers, food despatchers – slaves to algorithms dictating time management and expectations.

- On a more hopeful note, it was suggested that Covid, and the confinements associated with it, changed the relationship between time and space. The contraction of space may have led to a perceived expansion of time. Maybe we can take from that and learn something positive.
- The necessity of deceleration (to contrast *rapidación*) was affirmed. In this regard, there is perhaps something to be learned from some of the 'secular spiritualities' such as mindfulness and, of course, Buddhism. The whole slowness movement (focussing on intentionality, attentiveness and respect for our environment) needs to be embraced.
- Could a recovery of the sense of time in our liturgical practices be something which we might contribute to humanity? Have we allowed chronos to kill Kairos? How can we recuperate Kairos – the sense of special or grace filled times.
- How has our sense of time impacted the concept of memory? How can one archive this post-modern time where there is no clear consensus on what we need to remember?

Talamo

- One of the issues that captures the attention of the different groups was how the narratives that dominate society shape people's identities. The crucial question to be asked is who shapes the narratives.
- These narratives can lead to a tension or rupture between authenticity and the act of self-communication. There can be a performative element in how people present themselves to the world especially on social media platforms. There can be a pressure to conform, to meet expectations – body image, views and opinions.

- There seems to be a perfect life, which others appear to have, which drives individual and social expectations. Rene Giraud's understanding of the mimetic drive was mentioned in this context.
- The link between the use of time and identity has been impacted by digitalization. Platforms have been designed to hold people's time and attention – this is their business model. Hard for people to break out of these loops.
- The default understanding of the good life is tied up with consumerism and individualism. *I want it for me, just for me and I want it now!* To some extent, this understanding has been globalized.
- A general concern emerged concerning the lack of direct interpersonal relations. We are losing the capacity to look each other in the eye, to engage face to face.
- We need to highlight the importance of relationships in defining what it is to be human. We are made in the image of a relational God, of a Triune God for whom love is not just an activity but the essence of being.

Concluding Observations.

General satisfaction of the complementarity of the different elements.

The theme that captured the most attention was that of time. Most time of groups focussed there – urgency and immediacy of the theme.

Faith (Casanova), Hope (Torralba) and Charity (Talamo).