

Repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation as the path to love and peace.

A case of inter-religious collaboration led by the Cursillo movement and Initiatives of change in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The article shows the example of how the process of the inter-religious dialogue and cooperation went through during the war time in Croatia (1991-1995) and soon after that time. The incentive for the cooperation came from the members of two movements – from Cursillo, the laic Catholic movement and the MRA/IofC (Moral-Re-Armament and the Initiatives of Change). They all worked together in forgiveness, forgetting and reconciliation in this region. It shows how religious individuals and groups built the paths of peace together, starting with their faith and their own growth in love towards God and people. How

the members of the Orthodox and Jewish religion joined that process of interreligious cooperation and, what is especially important, a great contribution was made by the Islamic community in Croatia led by mufti. That is how the members of the two aforementioned movements, each in their own way and inspired by their own religion, cooperated in introduction of a just peace. This is followed by a conclusion that in that process individuals and groups jointly contributed to peace and constructive cooperation within society, based on their own faith, tradition and spirituality, but without syncretism.

Key words: ecumenism, dialogue, Cursillo Ecclesiastical Movement, peace movement, interreligious movements

1. *About Cursillo*

Within the Catholic Church amongst Croats there has been in recent decades an eruption of various waves, so-called movements that in the democratic countries of the West had already had several decades of wealthy religious experience and fruitful activity. Religious movements that emerged prior to the Council and which experienced a new inspiration with the Council, include movements involving laypersons and Small Courses (Cursillo).

For personally convinced believers, that is believers who have an authentic personal religious experience, religion can by no means be, »the first question of youth, and the last page of age.«¹ but instead a question surrounding the entire meaning of life, the crux of that life question which lies in the – here and now, always and everywhere; the complete religious existence. For those for whom »God is a living experience, there is always a path to faith.«² Believers belonging to new ecclastic movements truly endeavour for God to be a living experience for them. Many claim that they have that personal experience and for those who (still) do not, they endeavour to gain it through prayer and service in community. They are aware of course that the entire initiative rests on God's behalf and it is up to them to just »remove the barriers and open their hearts«, and pray. God's love and mercy always comes first in the believers experience, God is always the primary subject, and he who opens himself to that experience cannot be just an »object but rather a subject«. They cannot be the (primary) subject but rather the (main) subject.

However, this experience is very difficult and almost impossible to describe (in words), particularly in a manner which is done through »worldly«, every day and ordinary life situations. It – and they who have experienced it know it quite well, because it is a gift – it cannot be incited by one's own will, nor be repeated or renewed as a religious practice. This (personal religious experience) can be understood, and only to a certain measure by those who have (subjectively) experienced it.³

As one of the core members of Cursillo and an associate of MRA/Initiative of Change, a Christian Catholic writes about her religious conversion and the morning after:

After they were baptised, my daughters insisted that we go to church every Sunday. I went but considered it something required of me, and experienced

1 E. ČIMIĆ, *Drama ateizacije. Religija, ateizam, odgoj*, Sarajevo, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, 1971.

2 B. WELTE, *Religionsphilosophie. Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 1, Freiburg im Breisgau, Herder, 2008.

3 S. TADIĆ, *Religijsko-religiozno iskustvo – neistraživana i/ili neistraživa dimenzija religije i religioznosti, Društvena istraživanja*, 7 (1998) 3, 359-373.

the mass only as a collective ritual. God's presence I experienced at home, in nature and in myself. I could not accept the Church.

The Sunday dedicated to Saint Ann arrived, a time of pilgrimage on behalf of our parish to Our Lady of Bistrica. My children wanted us to go together as a family on the pilgrimage. Again I agreed because of them. I made a packed lunch of fried chicken, radishes, shallots, biscuits, buns, boiled eggs and put the food in a basket, together with everything I thought necessary for the trip. But the pilgrimage itself meant nothing to me, absolutely nothing.

We got onto the bus and people started to pray. I became inwardly absorbed into the prayer. This surprised me and I wanted to oppose that »collectivity«. But I was not able to, the inner call was stronger. I set off with the procession and started to sing. Up to then I had sung only lullabies to my children, who were the only ones in the whole world, I am certain, who were able to fall asleep to them. Occasionally, I was able to perceive »my new appearance«. I could not believe that it was me, walking around the church with the grannies beneath the parish flag. In spite of my incredulity and resistance, some warm, powerful force inside of me was pulling me towards the Church.

I entered the church together with the others. It was my first step into the Church. Inside, I was filled with light, illuminated. I felt a deep, soft warmth inside me. I cried with new tears. Everything around me was light, warm mist, like a cloud of gentleness that embraced me. In the middle I saw the statue of Jesus and Mary. I felt infinite love and safety, sorrow and joy. Later I realised that it was sorrow because of the sins I had committed and not repented, and it was joy because of my salvation through the Lord's love and sacrifice. I did not know that then. I cried and cried. I felt the mass as love for the first time. I felt the Church as the power of love, the living, present sign of God's love. I felt the Way of the Cross, which I knew nothing about, as the way of deep communion between Jesus and me, with everything that was me, everything connected with me, as the way of His sacrifice. And I felt my salvation accordingly as the culmination of His love for me. I felt the resurrection as the sense of His coming and the Cross as the way to the resurrection.

On that pilgrimage I felt both Jesus and the Virgin Mary as a living, individualised presence.

In the evening I went to sleep in the children's room, as usual. I had problems with sleeping in my own room – it reminded me of the past.

The next morning I woke up with a peace not known to me before. The craving was gone from my body. I heard birds singing. I saw the sun shining, the blueness of the sky. I felt the real presence of life in me and around me. The feeling of that morning was the feeling of my earliest childhood. As when, after a long illness, my mother had bathed me, combed my hair, laid me in starched, ironed bedclothes; given me a glass of lemonade, caressed my head, kissed me on the forehead and sat quietly, crocheting by my bed. And I had been looking

*at sunrays playing with dust, knowing that I was well again and had only to go through the slow process of convalescence. That was how the recovery of my life began. Since then I have been sleeping in my room peacefully again, not afraid of death because I know that my God is leading me to eternity.*⁴

According to the testimonies of those who have experienced it in recent Church movements, the religious experience most often occurs in complete, personal dedication during joint, spontaneously expressed prayer and in celebrating the Eucharist. This type of experience encompasses man so strongly, and determines his existence requiring truly radical responses: to respond or turn a deaf ear to the call, for or against, yes or no, acceptance or rejection. That deep rooted, or this or that position. One simply cannot remain indifferent to such a significant experience, (God's) calling as a religious experience.⁵

In the life of a believer who has had a religious experience, the dimension of subjective religious experience truly has great significance. The susceptibility, subjectivity, endorsement, fluidity and »incaptivity« of that religious experience at the same time presents a crucial problem in its determination, definition and social detection. However, this experience is also a key, a decisive moment for those individuals who have become members of new religious movements. This motivation is at the same time the basic motive of their religious involvement and attraction to the community. It not only determines their religious but entire life. It directly affects their relations towards believers of other Christian Churches, confessions, denominations and even believers of non-Christian religions and supporters of other world-views, as well as atheists.

Seeing that the new ecclesiastic strongly insist on subjective, internal experience, susceptible elements, feeling religion and religiousness is reflected in them threw fluidity, in determination, emotional unity, rather than clear and current systems of believing in certain religious institutions that they may belong to. Their involvement in processes of repentance, (»I will return to my Father's home«), forgiveness and reconciliation as well as ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue spontaneous, direct, non-institutional, without proselyte intentions and (perhaps) hidden (institutional-ideological) shrewdness. It may be more precise to say that these peace processes and ecumenical and inter-religious movements were primarily about direct inter-religious prayers with believers, encounters, discussions, cheatable activities and similar activities that penetrate through to members of other and different (»We are all children of the same Father«), rather than in their strict sense of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue.

4 Đ. FUČKAN, *Bosonogo srce*, Zagreb, Multigraf – Mali tečaj Kursiljo, 2000.

5 W. JAMES, *Raznolikost religioznog iskustva. Studija ljudske prirode*, Zagreb, Naprijed 1990.

Namely, if we understand ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue with varying dogmatic beliefs, indoctrinate differences, joint declarations etc. Then we can truly say that that dimension in inter-confessional and inter-religious encounters between members of new ecclesiastic movements with other Christian Churches, Church communities and denominations, and other religion and other points of view is hardly present at all. If we however recall that repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and ecumenism is primarily a matter of Christian testimony, living, opting for faith, its values and concrete living in our everyday lives, accepting others in love (a dialogue of love), it is justifiable to say that members of new church movements are quite prepared for these processes and this type of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue with other points of view quite dedicated and actively involved. What is more, members of new ecclesiastic movements are firmly convinced that a »dialogue of love« needs to proceed and prepare the path for a »dialogue of truth« and finally towards human unity in love amongst people who worship God and are open to justice, love and peace.

Keeping in mind that the process of repentance (the self awareness before God that I am a sinner and that I need His mercy in order to be able to repent and »return to the Father«), forgiveness-relationships between others and I; that is, me-you, and reconciliation (the result of repentance and forgiveness), co-existence with others, varying religious beliefs and points of view are a condition for quality human living.

Her Christian experience, her Catholic experience of separating from God and returning to God, through the process of repentance and reconciliation with God and people, this same person, a member of Cursillo and MRA/Initiative of Change describes:

I was praying daily for a couple of hours, including the prayer of the rosary which I had become extremely fond of and had started to experience as a web of love with which I was surrounding the whole world. Little by little I started to experience the world, people, nature, the environment created by man, in a different way – as homogenised light, the gift of God. I remember going out in front of my house in the morning and, from the deepest depths of my being, uttering blessings in deep thankfulness for the gift of life. It was as if a rain of beatitudes was, through those blessings, bathing me, my family, friends, parish, my homeland, the whole world. Thanks to the inner teaching I started to become aware of the deep, creative, life-giving dynamics of the blessing and its connection with adoration...

(...) At that time prayer became for me the way to fight for my homeland, and the rosary the most important weapon in that fight. But I, as a woman of action, needed action, a visible enterprise: to realise what I had heard, to carry peace where it should be carried. All I was doing and trying to do was not enough for me. I wanted some great task, something that would change

the world around me. It did not occur to me that it was I that had to change, because I had not yet found the key which unlocks the secret of change in the world. In other words, I did not realise that I was the one who should enter the process of change, or that the key is woven from a humble and disciplined entering into the process of knowing one's own being, its inner struggles, its basic fabric of light, the threads of which, freed from the wrapping of evil, lead us by their light to their inner source, to the Weaver Jesus Christ. I did not know that through the change in myself the world was being changed, because I did not know what it meant that God was in me. I did not know that as a result everything was in me. I did not know that whatever I did to another person, I was doing to the whole of existence, and that everything which had been done remained uncorrected unless touched by the blood of Christ, which cleansed and purified us from our uncleanness by confession and reconciliation with the divine, thus cleansing the whole world, the whole of existence. But that is knowledge that came later and which I still pray I might be able to live every moment of every day – to be aware of that truth in my life and that of every other human being.

I tried various things, but nothing worked. I felt ever so helpless. The war was horrible, with suffering everywhere. Suffering within me as well. Sorrow and bitterness were still present in me because of the circumstances of my own life. My suffering had increased by the sufferings of the people around me and by my helplessness to soothe such suffering, both mine and that of others. The hardest thing was that I could not find any purpose in my suffering. I could do nothing, I felt complete weakness. I used to pray for hours for a clear sign of where to go and what I was supposed to do or organise so that THE OTHERS could become better. As I of course, was good enough. I was so blind to my own nothingness, ugliness, wickedness. That was a time when I was already going to Caux.

It was the winter conference of 1991/92. I clearly remember the room I had stayed in. It had a view over Lake Geneva, big bay windows and a beautiful, comfortable sofa where I used to pray, looking at the moonlit outlines of the Alps which were, just like the rest of the landscape, covered in pearly white snow. It was as though I had entered a dream. One night, after praying for a long time in the chapel, I entered my room, sank into the sofa and again started to cry out to God for peace in my homeland. And then I received a clear answer to my prayers: »Write a letter of repentance to Vlado and stop smoking!«

The First step

I was shocked. What had smoking and some completely unnecessary repentance of mine to do with the suffering of my homeland, with the war I wanted to stop, with my wish to be active as a peacemaker, with my ability to help others?

Of one thing I was certain: I had done no harm to the father of my children. Before my eyes, I could see only the things that had been done to me. And there was so much that was painful: I had been deeply hurt in my inner, female being, just where I was most vulnerable. I thought how, in our living together, I had done everything for him and more than everything, and the deceit that I had lived through had been horrible. The hardest part for me was knowing that I had done everything to »earn« love. And I had not succeeded. I felt utterly defeated without knowing how to go beyond that defeat and what I could learn from it. What had been wrong with me, that I had not earned love? What was wrong with me, that I could not earn love? Later on, I realised that we could not and should not earn love. It is already here, without our performing good deeds, and we do not have to do anything except to be open to it, here and now. It does not ask from us some kind of tomorrow where we shall be like this or like that, where we shall be better, nicer, or smarter. It embraces us now, in this moment; it does not walk away from us, but teaches us patiently about the life of Love. It teaches us at life's own pace, by accepting everything that we are. It does not wait for us to become everything that we »should« be, in order to accompany us. It transforms us in the unity giving reliance to God. It does not force, it does not push, it does not create deadlines. It only lives with us, loving us. Where I hear »you should« I know Love is not, but merely the wish that I should be as somebody else wants me to be because of his own wishes. »You should« affects my fundamental ability to breathe freely in love and to be grateful for this moment of my life. And I feel pain throughout because I am again in a situation that I should do something to be loved. I see with complete clarity that all activity is useless, unnecessary – because I am a beloved being, and every one of us is a beloved being, just as he or she is, right now. And what I know about my need to come closer to love I feel deeply in the press and pain of my heart, in the movement of my soul; I fight so hard, in freedom, to fulfil all my inner needs because I want to come closer to God and to people. I have learned that love transforms by itself, by mutual gentleness of the heart. Only, I still do not know how to live it. Sometimes, yes.

I worked so hard during that period that I used to faint as a result of tiredness. I tried to be both father and mother to my children. Now I know that I was making a mistake. I should have been the mother only. Night after night I used to spend alone, awake and afraid for them when they were sick. During the day I would go to lectures as though nothing was happening. Working and writing to earn extra money to pay off the loan, simultaneously working on my doctoral thesis. Vlado never asked me if I needed anything and the woman he was living with would put down the receiver upon hearing my voice or the children's on the phone. And now I should write a letter of repentance! I was quite certain that it was not something that I needed to do. I thought, rather, that there were in me unconscious impulses towards self-sacrifice that were senseless.

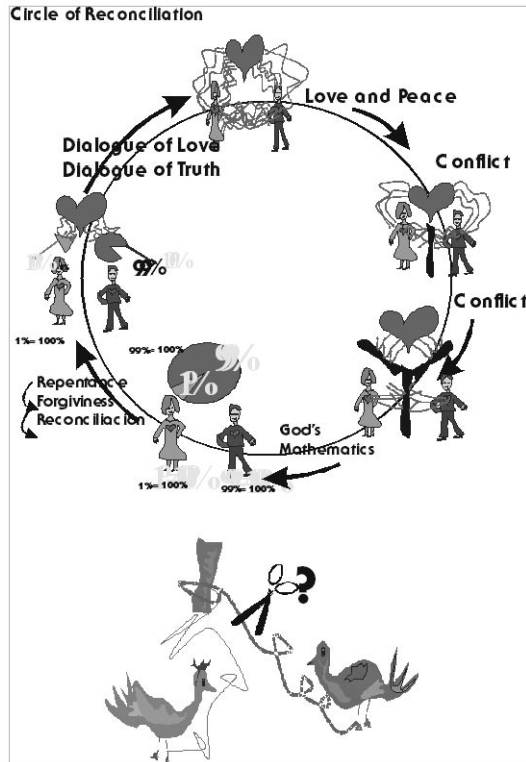
Not to mention smoking! What had smoking to do with my relationship to others or with any of my inner processes that were the cause of it? I put aside what I had heard and I did not pay any attention to it. I continued to pray just the same, waiting for the answer. The sentence that I had heard, »Write a letter of repentance to Vlado and stop smoking!«, would repeat again and again; when I did not pray, it filled my whole being. But it was not commanding, harsh. Gradually I started to realise that that instruction was something I should carry out because of truth. It became clear to me that that instruction was an answer to my prayers. I wanted to stop smoking. I thought that that part would be easier, and then I would write a letter of repentance to Vlado. But it was not to be as I wished; the list of priorities was not the one I imagined. God wanted it the other way. First, I had to write a letter to Vlado, just as I had been told. I did not know what I was supposed to write. I did not feel any guilt, but rather saw myself as a completely innocent victim of life. What? I should pray and cry all night long, kneeling, including Gethsemane hours in prayer? What had I done wrong, I who had been abandoned, I who had been faithful, I who...? Until one night, when in a way inexplicable and indescribable to me, without a word or image, a concentrated »space« of insight descended into me in a single moment. It spread all over me, reaching every particle of my being. At that moment I realised that I had hurt love throughout my life up to that moment. I realised, in the extent I was given (if I had been given more, I think that I would have died of horror, aghast at myself), how much I had separated from myself in Truth, in Love, in God, and had hurt my family, my people, mankind. It was a deep, silent, a sad insight. At the same time, I was saturated with joy and gratitude because I realised that I had been pardoned completely. Everything, everything had been forgiven: all the time of my separation from love, all the time of my unknowing love, of my abandonment of the love that had been calling me all the time. Everything was forgiven; everything was cleansed by the Lord's blood. And God is with me and I am with Him. In spite of the enormous heaviness of my sins against life, the distancing of myself from the Lord, that night I felt the deep, to me inexplicable, embrace of the love that does not judge anything, does not expect anything, only, by forgiving, embraces and loves.

That night I wrote a short, clear letter of repentance. During breakfast I summoned Tiha and Lenka, told them how I had wronged them, their father and God. I asked them their forgiveness, showed them the letter, told them that by that letter I asked their father for his forgiveness and that I had no strength to send it. Lenka sent it. I did not expect an answer. I knew that I had done my part. I felt lightness within myself. Through confession I handed what I had realized over to God and thanked Him for His forgiveness by saying penance. But, although it has been forgiven and I am free from what I have done, sorrow is still in my heart.

Lightness, the freedom that I felt within me, was the consequence of the mercy of repentance and God's forgiveness, my reconciliation with God and with my life. I knew that I had been forgiven, forgiveness created gratitude, and gratitude created an even deeper love towards God. I was able to step deeper, and I did, because I was, step by step, starting to enter the mystery of repentance for one's sins, the mystery of love cleansing the soul. Truly I started, step by step, to learn to live the permanent reconciliation between God and man. I learned that what was my responsibility as a result of sin – as a result of separation from love, which, whether consciously or not on my part, had created the situation of dissatisfaction, bitterness, hatred, conflict by word, thought or neglect – was my responsibility alone and I alone could expiate my sin to God. I alone could ask for forgiveness and give thanks for my forgiveness by doing repentance. And however small or however, in my eyes or in the eyes of others, large my guilt, it is always mine – 100% mine – and I am responsible for it. I entered the web woven of the darkness with it, I wove my own unliberty with it and I co-operated in weaving the unliberty of others. Before that time of realisation I had been used to »weighing« guilt and creating relationships of guilt. I do not do that anymore because I know that everything that is my responsibility is mine and relates to me, that it is I who am separated from love, but at the same time my separation is the instrument by which I separate others from God as well. I learned that the one with whom I am invisible and invisible in conflict is my God-sent teacher. Through him God teaches me forgiveness and love, teaches me the paths of reconciliation, no matter how difficult they might be. For a long time, I have been passing through the labyrinth of my heart to come to the source of love, to fill the bucket with it and allow myself and others to drink. So often I had no strength to reach the water, get the bucket out and find a way to my neighbour. But step by step God teaches, through the cross, the secrets of the labyrinth of the heart, entering its centre and leaving it in the clear and easy-to-survey purity of truth. The more often I enter it, the more familiar the labyrinth of my heart becomes to me, because its paths becomes clearer, and what is unclear – the snares of our body, the world and the Evil One – disappears under the strength of warmth and the simple clarity of its Centre.

That is why we should pay reverence and ask forgiveness of God and our sisters and brothers that we have sinned against. I learned that I would be able to fly into freedom as God's child when I let God show me the bonds of sin with which I have been tied to non-freedom, accepting His purification afterwards. God comes and, with a knife of love, cuts the bondage of sins that weld the human soul into time and space. He cuts because sin, whatever it might be, prevents us from flying.⁶

6 Đ. FUČKAN, *Bosonogo srce*, Zagreb Multigraf – Mali tečaj Kursiljo, 2000.



The time of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue through hierarchical declarations is a matter of the past. This was always, and is especially now insufficient – such declarations stand as a paper tiger. What remains and what we as Christians should say and do, as it is our responsibility, is change our mentality; a change which is to lead us Christians towards God and love for others of our own faith, and faiths other than our own. This type of change in mentality in the Catholic Church is what members of the new ecclesiastic i.e. church movements, are most active in.

Ecclesiastic movements never emerge as a result of theological speculation, brainstorming and reflection, or for that matter by the will of hierarchical authorities (from above) – and their activities in the process of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation have emerged from the »grassroots«, from the »base« – »spontaneously«. Religious movements namely always emerge as practical, living responses by believers to the challenges and concrete social issues faced by believers themselves. And there has certainly not been a lack of concrete social challenges to believers in Croatia during the nineties and to this day. The uniqueness of these movements lies in the fact that they are

not »established« but rather they have »emerged«, were »born«, and initiated. Alongside their fundamental features which each of them has: emphasizing one's personal religious experience, communal living, spontaneous prayer, (anti)rational moments and »basic unity of inspiration«, each of them – particularly authentic members – more or less, are involved with working for ecumenism, forgiveness and reconciliation.

2. MRA – Initiatives of Change International

Frank Buchman (1878-1961) founded the Moral Re-armament (MRA) movement for acts of reconciliation in families, state and community of nations. He was associated by a group of associates who belonged to Churches and Christian communities that resolute with reform. He himself was a Lutheran. Amongst his associates from the very beginning were Catholics, Orthodox, Hindu, Buddhists, Muslims and others. Today the movement is active under the name Initiatives of Change but acts as a foundation in Switzerland.

Seven principles led F. Buchman in his social work:

1. The person of each individual is vital because without the positive participation of a certain individual there is no end to human hate, greed and fear.
2. The process of reconciliation begins with oneself and this requires change.
3. They who suffered the most can give the most; that is why the defeated Germans and people of the nations who suffered under Germans are offered a chance by Buchman to be included in the process of reconciliation.
4. Not one person should be crossed-off.
5. Reconciliation is not just a humane action, but a response to God's motivation because God can change people.
6. The experience of forgiveness is accessible to everyone, and it includes taking responsibility for the evil inflicted, repentance and plea for forgiveness; Buchman would not be deterred in his attitudes by those who do not respond when being asked for forgiveness or one-sidedly pointed the finger at those seeking forgiveness as the only perpetrator.
7. By communicating an individual shows us that he wishes to change; that is why it is necessary to pass on the vision that is possible to other individuals and countries.

Biographers of Frank Buchman emphasize that he had chosen »four absolutes«, or »four moral standards«. Buchman drew his four absolutes or moral standards from other authors and reformulated them in a way which would make them attractive to young people who are not fond of moralizing or who do not feel the need for moral values.

- a) Absolute honesty – is based on statements of the New Testament about love towards God (Mk 12:30), about believing in the small (Lk 16:10-11), about the truth that liberates (Jn 8:22), about correctness towards one's neighbours 1 Thess 4:3-6; Rom 2:17-21).
- b) Absolute unselfishness – is founded in statements in the New Testament about love towards God and one's neighbours, carrying one's own load of life (one's »own Cross« Lk 14:13 etc.), love towards one's neighbours, seeking the will of God.
- c) Absolute purity – is also founded in texts from the New Testament about love for God and one's neighbour, and through Jesus' »exclamation« »Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God« (Mt 5:8). True purity presumes respect and self-control and leads to true love.
- d) Absolute love – is also based in texts in the New Testament about love for God and one's neighbour particularly in the text about the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). True love is not sentimental nor does it only occur with things that are comfortable: »Love is not just kindness; it cannot be pleased if there is injustice but rather it rejoices the Truth.«⁷

The MRA's Initiative of Change movement is known in the world for its endeavours in the processes of reconciliation between mutually conflicting nations. Members of this inter-religious and inter-confessional movement and their guests at regular conferences, which are held each year in July, August and December in Caux Switzerland, always highlight their personal experience of reconciliation, repentance and forgiveness between God and people. Despite the fact that most participants are scientists and are influential social, political and diplomatic figures – their papers are not academic speculation, but rather a deeply religiously motivated brief description of their personal experience and testimony from their own lives and practical experience of reconciliation. The conferences are always featured with personal repentance and reconciliation in one's own family, working environment, nation, and country and amongst nations. Members of the movement, particularly interactively involved activists – are concerned that their endeavours and activities in the field of repentance,

7 P. SPOERRI, *Franck Buchman and his Philosophy of Reconciliation*, Caux, 1998.

forgiveness and reconciliation becomes known to the people in the higher social categories – figures in social, cultural, religious, political and public walks of life. What is more, they are not interested in just gaining support from these people, but rather that they too become actively involved in the field of forgiveness and reconciliation. This occurs not only on a personal level between man and God or individual mutual reconciliation but rather true reconciliation which is the primary objective of the movement – i.e. reconciliation between conflicting nations.

Franck Buchman, the initiator of the MRA's Initiative of Change has always stressed that everyone needs to face their own wrongs and insufficiencies and to arrive at repentance, change and forgiveness. No matter how often he had stressed his Christianity, he respected people of other religious beliefs and had never suggested them to abandon their religious roots nor to convert to Christianity. On the contrary, he always motivated people to reinforce their own religious belonging and then to become involved in reconciliation work on behalf of the spirit.

He was primarily interested in the complete moral transformation of all – regardless of what religion or confession they belonged to. In this regard he was truly the initiator of the first ecumenical contact and inter-religious dialogue; working without any proselytisation or hidden desires to neither covert, nor lead. His living faith and personal religious experience rose above the borders and exclusivity – not only confessional but inter-religious borders. In his speech in 1948, he said that, »Catholic and Jew, Protestant, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Confucianism – all disclosed that they can be changed where needed and can together walk the good path«. He was convinced that in his belief – God, who is the father of all people, does not only disclose His will to members of any particular religion, confession, denomination, or following, but to all people of good will. During his work he did not look at whether a person belonged to this or that religion, or to any for that matter.

3. The Collaboration of Cursillo and the Initiative of Change movement

The religious movement Cursillo and The inter-religious movement MRA – Initiative of Change began their work in our region and amongst Croats in the difficult year of 1991. Between 1991 and 2000, numerous people from our area have attended the mentioned international conferences on reconciliation in Caux, these include some distinguished scientists and politicians, as well as members of religious movements including Christian, Jewish, and Muslim individuals all together. The aims of the conferences are of a deep religious and

spiritual motivation, inspired by the processes of reconciliation between and by persons who were reconciled with their Creator, and in that way have created and established a network of quiet, active cells of peacemakers who themselves have witnessed reconciliation in varying regions. Its involvement encompasses the religious and spiritual through to economic and socio-political elements. The conferences are directed to believers of various beliefs, who in their everyday lives endeavour to deepen and actively live their faith.

As an exceptional occasion for the method of inter-religious dialogue, a significant confirmation of the long-term value of such interactive encounters of people who have chosen different ways to reach the Creator, was uttered by the President of the Mešifat of the Croatian Islamic Community, Mufti Ševko ef. Omerbašić to the participants of the 30th anniversary celebration of the Course (Cursillo) in Croatia.⁸ The celebrations took place at Tabor, in Samobor, on September the 30th, 2004.

*Honourable Mr Andrija Vrane and co-workers of the Small Course!
Honourable guests and invitees!*

Despite having some very important duties and official business to attend to today, I left it all behind upon receiving an invitation to be a part of this big anniversary of the Small Course of Christianity in Croatia. I did this as a sign of honest respect and gratitude for everything that the members of this Christian movement have done over the years, when Croatia had needed to hear warm, humane words the most, and to feel the expression of joy. Those were the years of sadness, suffering and hopelessness for which we still suffer and which we will not be able to free ourselves for a very long time.

Some may wonder what I, as the head representative of the Islamic community and Muslims, am doing here and where did my connection to your movement come from? About twelve years ago, during the time when the former state had broken down, I was honoured to have some members of your movement visit me, with whom I spoke about the possibilities of cooperation and joint action for peace, tolerance, cooperation and coexistence. During those years we had organized meetings and had opened towards each other, teaching each other about honesty and warm human emotion. These friends that I had gained from your movement, I have never lost. On the contrary, we have had a lot of use from our friendship. Thanks to that very acquaintance and friendship between us and the members of your movement, my colleagues and I have carried with us the most beautiful impression about Christians and Christianity. What impressed me the most about the teachings of your movement was the sheer honesty towards a collocutor and fellow companion.

⁸ Š. OMERBAŠIĆ, Addressing the audience on the 30th anniversary of Cursillo in Croatia; recorded in the archives of the Short Course – Kursiljo, Zagreb, on September the 30th, 2004.

That was of great help to me and my colleagues who had spent time with you in learning and cognition about Christianity. Also, we have to admit that during this mutual cooperation, female and male members of your movement were ready to hear and understand others, which today we have to admit, is very rare.

For several years now, the world has been hit by unseen scenes of violence and brutality. Unfortunately for us members of Islam, many of those who carry Muslim names have been the protagonists of numerous violent attacks or they have been proud of their actions carried out »in the name of Islam«, thus bringing a lot of irreversible damage to our faith. Because of their brutality, our faith has often been described as aggressive and intolerant towards others and those who are different. Today we can witness various, mainly negative depictions and descriptions of Islam. Of course, Islam is distant and has nothing to do with such tendential presentations and just like Christianity and Judaism, it calls for God's basic message, the respect for peace and tolerance. In order for you to understand more about our faith, I will quote one of the commandments from the Kur'an which refers to you, the Christians:

The closest and friendliest to the believers (Muslims) you will find amongst those who tell you: we are Christians, for they have spiritual leaders and priests who have not become vain.

*However, there are also critical observations about Christians in the Kur'an but never towards Christianity and its founder Jesus Christ or *Isi elejhiselam*, as we Muslims call him.*

The history of Islamic/Christian relations is filled with examples of conflict, wars and hostility. Unfortunately, there are many of those on both sides who wish to continue such conflicts and hostility. The historical experience tells us that such conflicts have been the bloodiest and have left some of the deepest consequences. On the other hand, we have to ask ourselves how will we, the believers and exponents of divine religions stand before God on judgement day and justify such mutual killings, even though He had addressed this in the Bible and in the Kur'an:

»Those who have killed someone who had never created any trouble on Earth, they have sinned as if they had killed the entire world – and yet if they save just one life, it is as if they have saved the entire world.«

Some are inclined to claim that war between religions is a natural thing, desirable even, for the survival of the religion itself. Unfortunately, today theology has become a profession and not a life choice and that is why there are so many controversial teachings of God's word and religious rules. That is where the pessimistic prognosis of relations between religions, but also between different religions comes from.

That is why there are movements within religions such as your Kursiljo which has the honourable task to revive God's word and make it effective. This is the reason why we had answered your call – that despite our differences, everyone can contribute, that God's word becomes the law of our lives.

By congratulating you on the 30th anniversary of your movement, I sincerely hope that we will tighten our cooperation and continually improve in our relations.

I pray to the almighty to give your movement a blessing and to all of you success in the honourable task of learning more about Christianity. Thank you.⁹

Đurđica Fučkan
Stipe Tadić

Pokajanje, oproštenje i pomirenje kao put prema ljubavi i miru

Sažetak

U članku se prikazuje kako je uspostavljen međureligijski dijalog i suradnja za vrijeme rata u Hrvatskoj (1991-1995) i neposredno nakon njega kada je poticaj na suradnju došao od članova dvaju pokreta: od Kursilja, katoličkoga laičkog pokreta i MRA-IofC, Reafirmacija morala – Inicijative za promjenu, pa se složno radilo na opraštanju, nepamćenju i pomirbi u regiji. Pokazuje se kako su religiozni pojedinci i skupine zajednički gradili putove mira, polazeći od svoje vjere i svoga rasta u ljubavi prema Bogu i ljudima; kako su se pripadnici pravoslavne i židovske vjere pridružili u procesu međureligijske suradnje i, što je veoma važno, kako je velik doprinos došao od islamske zajednice u Hrvatskoj pod vodstvom njezina muftije. Ukratko, kako su članovi dvaju na početku spomenutih pokreta, u svakome na svoj način, u suradnji radili na uspostavi pravednoga mira, polazeći od svoje religije. Slijedi zaključak da su pojedinci i skupine u tome procesu, na osnovi svoje vjere, predaje i duhovnosti, složno pridonijeli miru i konstruktivnoj suradnji u društvu, ali bez sinkretizma.

Ključne riječi: ekumenizam, dijalog, crkveni pokret Kursiljo, mirovni pokret, međureligijska kretanja

9 On the matter of the article see also: M. ZOVKIĆ, *Repentance and Reconciliation in the Inter-religious Method of Franck Buchmann: Forgiveness and Reconciliation – A challenge to the Church and Society*, Collection of Papers from the International Conference Zagreb, 9th-13th May 2001; G. LEAN, *Frank Buchmann – A Life*, London, Fount Papers, 1988; P. SPOERRI, *Franck Buchmann and his Philosophy of Reconciliation*, Caux, 1998; Đ. FUČKAN, S. TADIĆ, *Repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation as path to love and peace (A case of inter-religious collaboration led by the Cursillo movement and initiatives of change in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina)*. Conference paper – The Global Educational Conference of Peace and Non-Violence, Hans Raj Mahila Maha Vidyalaya Jalandharu, 2007, Punjab, India; Đ. FUČKAN, S. TADIĆ, *The Endeavours and Activities of the Moral-Rearmament & Small Cursillo Courses*, in: *Repentance and Reconciliation in the Inter-religious Method of Franck Buchmann in the book: Forgiveness and Reconciliation – A challenge to the Church and Society*, Collection of Papers from the International Conference Zagreb, 9th-13th May 2001.