

The Development of Interreligious Dialogue in Slovenia

Fundamental Theologians of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana and their Contribution

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Summary

In Slovenia, the development of interreligious dialogue between the Catholic Church and non-Christian religions was inspired mostly by the fundamental theologians of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana. In accordance with the Vatican II vision, they have been preparing students for dialogue for over a half century and have themselves also been involved in dialogical activities. In this way, they have shaped the character of Catholic scholars in Slovenia significantly — both of the clergy and the laity — who in the course of their education have learned the meaning of Christian dialogue with other religions. However, lecturers of fundamental theology not only lectured on dialogue but also lived it in their own circumstances. They were responsible for dialogue with non-believers, especially in respect to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Dialogue with the Muslims who are present in relatively large numbers in Slovenia (approximately 5%) has been particularly fruitful.

Keywords: *interreligious dialogue; fundamental theology; Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana; Catholic–Muslim dialogue*

Introduction

Since its foundation in 1919, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Ljubljana has been offering courses of study from the scientific field of fundamental theology. The task of fundamental theology is to study the possibility of Christian revelation and to give cause to justify the acceptance of Christianity. In relation to non-Christian religions, Catholic theologians once presented Christianity

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in an apologetic way; however, after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), theological studies became oriented toward dialogue. In the last fifty years, theology lecturers in Ljubljana have also begun to teach courses on non-Christian religions more objectively and comprehensively, since a dialogical attitude in the justification of Christian belief now forms the backbone of fundamental theology and of all theological studies (Dolenc, 2000, 57). At the Faculty of Theology, a special department for dialogue was established in 1973 where fundamental theologians implemented new courses of study with the intent to gain a better knowledge of non-Catholic Christians and non-Christians alike.

The comprehensive study of non-Christian religions at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana and the promotion of interreligious dialogue have also had practical consequences. The teachings of our post-Conciliar lecturers in fundamental theology on the importance of dialogue needed to be translated into practice. The lecturers not only lectured on dialogue but also lived it in their own circumstances. They demonstrated that the aim of the lectures on non-Christian religions after the Second Vatican Council was to establish interreligious dialogue. The dialogical openness of Ljubljana's fundamental theologians was influenced by the teachings of the universal Church and also of the particular Church. However, in a special way, it is an expression of their personalist ethics, since all the post-Conciliar lecturers, namely Franc Rode (born in 1934), Drago Ocvirk (1951), and Mari Jože Osredkar (1963), studied theology at the Catholic University of Paris, which was considered the fortress of the influential French personalism. There they met Guy Lafon, the father of the so-called theology of relationship, by whom they were influenced in various ways. Relationship theology emphasizes that one can recognize the face of God in his or her neighbour (Lafon, 2022, 66).

Recent popes, that is, from Paul VI onwards, have also promoted interreligious dialogue through their example in meeting with representatives of different religions (Osredkar, 2013, 291–293). The Plenary Council of the Church in Slovenia, which in 2002 outlined the pastoral orientation of the Church in Slovenia, also expressed the vocation of Christians to dialogue with non-Christians (*Izberi življenje* 83). Since the Council Fathers of Vatican II also adopted personalism as their guiding thought and in their discussions devoted much attention to the human person (Fajdiga, 1966, 183),¹ they thus developed the principles of interreligious dialogue. We may therefore conclude that the aforementioned three theologians from Ljubljana have actually had a twofold education in dialogue. Relationship theology and Vatican II both were rooted firmly in personalism.

In this paper, we will present the influence of the Vatican II reform regarding the study of non-Christian religions at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana and

1 Documents like *Gaudium et spes* and *Dignitatis humanae* placed an emphasis on the inherent worth of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God. Respect for human freedom and personal conscience was concretely demonstrated in the statements of *Lumen gentium* and *Nostra aetate*, which look with sympathy upon non-Catholic Christians and members of other religions.

the efforts of fundamental theologians to engage in dialogue with various interlocutors, especially representatives of non-Christian religions, including Muslims, who are present in Slovenia in relatively large numbers. The 2002 census showed that 47,488 Muslims lived in Slovenia, which was 2.4% of the total Slovenian population. According to the secretary general of the Islamic Community of Slovenia, the Muslim population in 2022 was approximately 100,000 which is 5% of the population (United States Department of State, 2022, 2–3).

1. *The Dialogic Reform of the Second Vatican Council*

1.1. *The development of Catholic teaching on salvation in *Lumen gentium**

In the history of Catholic theology, understanding non-Christian religions has been contingent upon the doctrine of salvation. In the period prior to the convening of Vatican II, theology had been promoting the traditional belief that salvation for non-Christians was not possible. This was reinforced customarily by Church teaching over the centuries. Being a member of the Catholic Church was the fundamental criterion for salvation. Even the First Vatican Council — which was the main authority on theology issues in the period leading up to Vatican II — taught in the draft of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ *Pastor Aeternus* that the Church was a precondition for salvation, and in the text it set forth the religious truth that outside the Church, no one who is separated from it through his own fault can be saved. The text explicitly states that one should leave his or her religion and join the Church to attain salvation (Strle, 1977, 188–189).² Catholic fundamental theologians have mainly discussed non-Christian religions from the perspective of apologetics in order to prove their errors in relation to Christianity and also for the missionary purpose of converting non-Christians to the Catholic Church. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, Vatican II presented the doctrine of salvation, which acknowledges the possibility of salvation for people outside the Catholic Church insofar as they endeavour to live according to God's will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience (LG 16). This changed the Church's attitude to the world, to other Christian communities, and particularly to non-Christian religions. Furthermore, it seems that Vatican II has recognized the important role of the human conscience in the discussion on salvation in order to enable the Church to initiate an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue (Osredkar, 2016a, 130).

Let us take a closer look at this essential Vatican II document which opens up a new perspective on the value of non-Christian religions. In *Lumen gentium*, published on November 21, 1964, the Council Fathers presented the doctrine of salvation, which made ecumenical and interreligious dialogue possible and

2 The Council Fathers did not formally endorse the positions in the text of the draft because the sessions of Vatican I were interrupted by the political situation (Strle, 1977, 187). However, their standpoints on salvation reflect the theology of the time.

became an important reference for subsequent conciliar documents on dialogue, including the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian religions *Nostra aetate* (Osredkar, 2016a, 133). Of particular importance are Articles 8 and 16 of the Constitution *Lumen gentium*, which have broadened the view of the traditional formula *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* and opened up a new perspective in the study of religions. The text of Article 8 speaks of the Catholic Church and states that many elements of sanctification and truth can be found even outside its visible structure (LG 8). In this way, the Church has expressed respect for non-Catholic Christian Churches and non-Christian religions. Based on this insight, in Article 16 of the same document, the Council of the Church acknowledged the possibility of salvation in non-Christian religions for the first time in history. The text specifically mentions Jews, Muslims, and other religions »who in shadows and images seek the unknown God« (LG 16). Although these religions are not explicitly mentioned, one may assume that the text refers to Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. (Sullivan, 1992, 154). The document acknowledges the Jews as the chosen people in salvation history, Muslims as being included in God's »plan of salvation« since they recognize the Creator, and other seekers as being not far distant from God. The Church values the good and true qualities of non-Christians which prepare them to accept the Gospel.

Lumen gentium stresses that all people who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the people of God, which is the Church, and, therefore, have the possibility of salvation (Ocvirk, 2008, 66). God's salvific plan will embrace all people (LG 16), since »the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God, offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery« (GS 22,5). Therefore, the conciliar teaching on salvation points out that the Catholic Church contains the fullness of grace and truth (UR 3) and constitutes »the universal sacrament of salvation« (LG 48), which includes all people who »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« (LG 16). It is not exclusively necessary to be a member of the Catholic Church or even a Christian to attain salvation. The Vatican II teaching on salvation is significant as, in contrast to previous councils in Church history, it does not only allow for the possibility of salvation to people of »goodwill« who do not know Christianity, but also recognizes the salvific values of particular non-Christian religions.

Only with the development of the teaching on salvation could Catholics enter into ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, since dialogue could previously not be achieved with an attitude of superiority that denies others the possibility of salvation merely because they are not members of the Church. However, one must note that Catholic theology, even in the course of the Vatican II Council, still teaches that Christ and the Church are indispensable for the salvation of every human being (LG 14). However, it envisages the kingdom of God in a broader sense than merely that of a visible ecclesial organization.

1.2. *The study of non-Christian religions at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana*

The Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana has a long history of dealing with ecumenical and religious topics. Since the founding of the Faculty of Theology, students took courses dealing with non-Christian religions in (comparative) religious studies, missiology, and, to some extent also, apologetics. The first lecturer on such topics was Lambert Ehrlich (1878–1942), who was succeeded by Vilko Fajdiga (1903–1984). One must note that, before Vatican II, the non-Christian religions were treated by the Church in a distinctly defensive manner, since the sole purpose of discussing religions was to prove the truthfulness of the Christian faith in relation to other faiths (Osredkar, 2018, 196).

After Vatican II, there was a sharp increase in the number of courses on non-Christian religions at the Faculty of Theology. Following the conciliar theological renewal, the new Faculty Statute, drawn up on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Faculty's existence (1969), provided for an independent Department for Dialogue to be established and to be staffed by the lecturers of fundamental theology. The aim of establishing the Department for Dialogue (1973) was to prepare students for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, as well as for dialogue with non-believers (Perko 1990, 127). In the years following Vatican II, which sought to respond to the needs of a globalized world and made it possible to begin studying other religions in a spirit of understanding and respect, theologians Rode (lecturer: 1967–1981), Ocvirk (1981–2013), and Osredkar (from 2002 onwards) gradually launched new courses of study devoted to the dialogical discussion of non-Christian religions. The course which was titled *History of Religions* or *Theology of Non-Christian Religions*, in particular, contained material on non-Christian religions but, in addition to this, various special and elective courses on individual religions were offered as well. Since the Bologna higher education reform at the University of Ljubljana (2009), the study of non-Christian religions at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana has been intensified. With the introduction of new religious studies programs, the Faculty has given even more space to the study of non-Christian religions in order to respond in dialogue to the challenges of globalization (Petkovšek, 2009, 262). The curriculum at all levels includes courses on religion, whereby three programs are specifically devoted to the study of religion. These are the first cycle of Theological and Religious Studies, the Master's program in Religious Studies and Ethics, and the interdisciplinary doctoral program in Humanities and Social Sciences. The study of non-Christian religions definitely occupies an important place in the Faculty. Since Vatican II, we have not been interpreting religions from the perspective of apologetics by seeking their weaknesses in relation to Christianity, but rather and above all with the desire to cooperate with them and to accept their differences.

2. The dialogic activities of the fundamental theologians of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana

In the Church in Slovenia, the dialogical awakening of Vatican II, for which, at least at the academic level, the fundamental theologians (religiologists and ecclesiologists) were primarily responsible, first manifested itself in ecumenical contacts with non-Catholic Christians and in conversations with non-believers. In 1964, for the first time, the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana invited guests from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade to the annual convocation in honour of St. Thomas Aquinas. A theologian who made a special effort to promote ecumenical dialogue at that time was Franc Perko (1929–2008), a professor of Ecclesiology and later Archbishop of Belgrade. Together with another important member of the Department for Dialogue, ecumenical theologian Stanko Janežič from the Maribor unit of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana, he helped organize theological ecumenical conferences between 1974 and 1990 and established fraternal relations between the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade and the Faculties of Catholic Theology in Ljubljana and Zagreb. At the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana, Perko was succeeded by Bogdan Dolenc (born in 1953) who is considered one of the leading ecumenical workers in Slovenia.

However, interreligious dialogue with non-Christian religions was slower to develop in practical life after Vatican II because at that time there were not many representatives of non-Christian religions in Slovenia, and the idea of dialogue with non-Christians had yet to mature through courses taught at the Faculty of Theology. In addition, the strengthening of contacts between religions during the communist regime in Yugoslavia was made more difficult because believers of all religions were neglected by the atheistic regime. Relations between Christians and Muslims were also burdened by the political past (Mojzes, 2014, 26). Nevertheless, spontaneous interreligious cooperation in the fields of culture, education, and various protocol visits did occur (Kostrešević, 2016, 206).

However, at that time Christians focused their dialogical efforts mainly on dialogue with non-believers or Marxists. In Slovenia, Fajdiga had been an advisor to the Roman Secretariat for Dialogue with Non-Believers since 1966. Although Rode was the first to lecture on interreligious dialogue at the Faculty, he also taught various courses on contemporary atheism and, therefore, met atheists, who were the leading social force. Thus, he wanted to show his openness to dialogue in the circumstances of the time, and he did so by conversing with people who were not following the religious way of life and often denied it. He had been an adviser to the Secretariat for Dialogue with Non-Believers since 1973, and after moving to Rome in 1981, as (sub)secretary he met atheist scientists at international conferences in different countries and debated social issues in dialogue with Marxists (Rode, 1987, 53). During his time at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana, he wrote a book titled *Uvod v moderni ateizem* (Rode, 1977, 134–135). Thus, he was involved in dialogue by studying the phenomenon of atheism.

In Slovenia interreligious dialogue began to develop at an official level only after Slovenia gained her independence. The Catholic Church in Slovenia began to engage in dialogue with Muslims, who were the most numerous representatives of a non-Christian religion in Slovenia. The official beginning of interreligious dialogue in Slovenia occurred on April 15, 2004 when four representatives of the largest religious communities in Slovenia met in the Slomšek Hall in Maribor, namely a representative of the Muslims, as also of the Catholic Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. They agreed to work together in discussions on various social issues (Osredkar, 2013, 294). Although the lecturers of the Faculty of Theology began to take into account the conciliar initiatives for a dialogical understanding of other religions immediately after Vatican II, a concrete cooperation with non-Christian religious communities (especially Muslims) has only been outlined recently, that is, in the past twenty years.

The Church in Slovenia has been promoting relationships with the small Jewish community there. Interreligious contact was indirectly established during the time that Chris Killer, former secretary of the Jewish Community in Slovenia, attended the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana (293). Representatives of the Church regularly attend Jewish festivals. In 2021, the Archbishop of Ljubljana Msgr. Stanislav Zore attended the opening of the synagogue in Ljubljana. Until this point in time, no real dialogue has developed between the Catholic Church and Buddhists on an institutional level, nor has any contact between Ocvirk and Lama Shenphen Rimpoche, head of the Tibetan Buddhist Congregation Dharma-ming, been fruitful since the two have not found a common language. Rimpoche's criticism of the Catholic Church and the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana in the media did not even suggest a willingness for inter-religious dialogue, and he was also engaged in conflict publicly with Janez Juhant of the Faculty of Theology. Nevertheless, there is informal contact between individual Catholics and Buddhists in Slovenia. The dialogue with Muslims, on the other hand, has been much more fruitful. One of the most high-profile events in the field of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue was the Forum for Dialogue and Peace in the Balkans which took place on June 16 and 17, 2023 in Koper and brought together 22 religious representatives from the Catholic Church, the Orthodox and Lutheran Churches, and the Islamic and Jewish communities of Slovenia and the Balkan countries. This was an expression of the responsibility that all religious leaders have to work together for peace.

Among the lecturers of fundamental theology in Ljubljana, the two who wrote the most about interreligious dialogue were Ocvirk and Osredkar. Both representatives of Vatican II theology, which encouraged the brotherhood of all men (GS 3,2), were also encouraged to implement interreligious dialogue by their personalist ethics. The ethics of French personalism, rooted in the philosophy of Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950), defined the human person as a person who is in relationship with another person (Osredkar, 2016a, 128). Moreover, man can only encounter God in the encounter with his fellow man, as was taught

by professor Guy Lafon. Therefore, Ocvirk and Osredkar established personal contacts with representatives of other religions, believing that the Church can only exist in relationship to the world, to other Churches and non-Christian religions (Osredkar, 2016a, 135). Although Ocvirk was involved in several public arguments with representatives of other religions, he cannot be accused of a lack of willingness to engage in dialogue and to meet non-Christians. As a professor, he always proceeded from the Vatican II position on the issue of respect for other religions and was inspired by Lafon's vision of faith as interpersonal communication (Ocvirk, 2006, 206) but in practice, he exercised his dialogical activity in debates on the religious, moral, and political background of various religions, which could unfortunately lead to more acrimonious debates. For him, dialogue has always been a space for freedom of speech and responsibility for the common good (Rustja, 2010, 11). His successor Osredkar has a different understanding of dialogue. For him, dialogue means accepting the interlocutor in his or her differences. He is convinced that interreligious dialogue is not possible on the level of religious doctrine because the members of different religions differ too greatly in regard to fundamental theological standpoints (Osredkar, 2019b, 89). He is convinced also that dialogue on the institutional and individual level, as defined by the French Islamologist Marie Therese Urvoy, is possible and necessary. He actively pursues dialogue with representatives of religious communities in Slovenia, especially with Muslims, as he is convinced (having taken his inspiration from Lafon's relationship theology) that only finding a way to the interlocutor — especially to one with different beliefs — is a condition for the survival of the partners in the relationship, and that this is valid for both the institution and individuals (Osredkar, 2016a, 135). In his zeal for dialogue, Osredkar initiated a visit to the leaders of the most important religious communities in Ljubljana to express his respect for their religious beliefs and to welcome their presence in the Slovenian capital (Osredkar, 2019a, 10). His commitment to the values of dialogue in Slovenian society goes beyond the mere pursuit of interreligious dialogue since he also wishes to pursue dialogue with all those who think differently. Only by accepting differences is it possible to coexist and to achieve reconciliation among peoples (Osredkar, 2020, 21).

Ocvirk and Osredkar have also pursued their goals in the field of interreligious dialogue by taking part in various national and international commissions. From 1995 to 1998, Ocvirk was head of the Institute for Religious Studies and Dialogue at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana, and from 2001 up until 2012 he was again head of the same body under the new name: Institute for Religious Studies, Ecumenism, and Dialogue. The organization has been committed to the development of interreligious dialogue through its scientific and research activities. Since 2017, when the Institute changed its name again, Osredkar has been head of the Stanko Janežič Institute for Ecumenical Theology and Interreligious Dialogue. Osredkar's involvement in the development of interreligious dialogue is evident through his membership in various commissions. In Slovenia, he is a member of the Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue of the

Slovenian Bishops' Conference, and at the European level, he is a representative of the Slovenian Bishops' Conference in the Commission for Catholic–Muslim Relations of the European Bishops' Conference.

3. *The dialogue with Muslims*

Post–Vatican II lecturers of fundamental theology in Ljubljana have focused mostly on dialogue with Muslims. Even in their textbooks of faculty courses on religion, the largest volume of topics is taken up by the study of Islam. This was a result of the efforts of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana to conduct a dialogue with non–Christian religions in its immediate surroundings (Perko, 1990, 127). As was already mentioned, Muslims comprised the largest population of non–Christian religions in Slovenia.

A larger number of Muslims immigrated for economic reasons to Slovenia in the early 1960s (Pašić, 2005, 94). However, at that time there was no official dialogue between Catholics and Muslims. The number of Muslims coming from Bosnia, Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro steadily increased in the following decades. After practising their religion in various forms for a long period of time, the Muslims of Slovenia became better organized only after the break–up of Yugoslavia. In 1994 they established the Meshihat, the highest religious and administrative council. The Islamic Community of Slovenia, which brings together the largest number of Muslims in Slovenia, was then established. The first resident mufti arrived in Ljubljana in 2001. The greatest administrative success of the Islamic Community of Slovenia has been the construction of the Ljubljana Mosque, which opened in February 2020. Today, Muslims in Slovenia are divided into several communities. A smaller number of Muslims belong to the Slovenian Muslim Community (founded in 2006) and the Association for the Promotion of Islamic Culture in Slovenia (2007). Since 2018, the lesser–known Slovenian Islamic Community of Grace, based in Brezovica near Ljubljana, has also been registered as a religious community (Ocvirk, 2019, 171). Muslims in Slovenia are therefore not administratively united.

The Catholic Church in Slovenia supports initiatives to develop dialogic relationships with Slovenian Muslims (*Izberi življenje* 83). For the time being, interreligious dialogue with Muslims is actively pursued only within the Catholic Church's relationship with the Islamic Community of Slovenia, the largest community of Muslims in Slovenia. The dialogue between the Catholic Church in Slovenia and the Islamic Community of Slovenia takes place at both the social and academic levels. Mufti Nedžad Grabus (mandate 2006–2021) attended major Church ceremonies. In 2010, the Archbishop of Ljubljana Msgr. Anton Stres and Mufti Grabus signed a joint declaration for the preservation of marriage and the family, and in the same year, the Islamic Community of Slovenia joined the Council of Christian Churches in Slovenia in a statement on the proposal for a new Religious Freedom Act.

We argue that fundamental theologians have significantly shaped interreligious dialogue in Slovenia.³ As can be seen from the examples cited, they have established various forms of collaboration with Muslims, especially academic, but at the same time also institutional and individual, and have in many ways even been pioneers thereof in Slovenia.

Collaboration at the academic level has resulted in participation in conferences and other professional meetings. Among the professional meetings, it is important to mention the meeting of the professors of the Faculty of Islamic Studies from Sarajevo with the professors of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana, which took place in May 2010. Among the hosts who welcomed the delegation from Sarajevo were Ocvirk and Osredkar. Osredkar traveled to Sarajevo in September 2010 and returned the visit to the Faculty of Islamic Studies (Osredkar, 2013, 294). The Faculty of Theology finally signed a cooperation agreement with the Faculty of Islamic Studies of the University of Sarajevo in July 2018 (Osredkar, 2018, 203). As an expression of the interreligious dialogue achieved and based on the aforementioned academic cooperation agreement, Osredkar invited visiting professor Mufti Grabus to the Faculty of Theology where, in the academic year of 2018/2019, for the first time in the history of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana, a Muslim lectured on Islam. We must note also that Mufti Grabus first lectured at the Faculty of Theology in January 2008, when Ocvirk invited him as a one-time guest in his course, and gave him the opportunity to speak about Islam. Furthermore, Osredkar, in agreement with Grabus, also edited and unified the way the Qur'an is quoted in Slovenian texts (Osredkar, 2016b, 7). At the institutional level, Osredkar was also the coordinator of a pioneering project to bring together local imams and Catholic parish priests, which enabled them to become acquainted at a meeting at the Islamic Religious and Cultural Centre in Ljubljana in September 2022.

In reviewing important meetings at the academic level, we should also mention the visiting delegation from the Faculty of Theology at the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue in Tehran in December 2015, led by Osredkar, where the Ljubljana lecturers also met with representatives of the Islamic Faculty of Theology at the University of Tehran and discussed the possibilities of academic cooperation. Although no official cooperation agreement has been signed (yet), several Iranian students have studied at the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana since the meeting. Furthermore, the Secretary General of the Islamic Community, Nevzet Porić,⁴ participated in a symposium entitled *Slovenia Faces the Demographic Challenges of the 21st Century* organized by the Jožef Stefan Institute at the invitation of Osredkar. Osredkar participated in the international conference in Portorož in May 2019. The meeting entitled *New Philosophical and Theological*

3 This is not to say that other theologians have not practised interreligious dialogue, but the wide range of activities we have listed shows that the greatest volume of activity is to be attributed to fundamental theologians. This is understandable, since they have been academically engaged the most in this field.

4 Nevzet Porić was named mufti in the Islamic Community of Slovenia in June 2021.

Foundations for Christian–Islamic Dialogue explored ways to improve Christian–Muslim understanding in contemporary times.

Another important event for strengthening interreligious dialogue was the three–day international scientific conference on the occasion of the 800th anniversary St. Francis’ encounter with the Sultan Al–Kamil in Damietta, which was organized by Osredkar in October 2019 at the Franciscan Monastery in Ljubljana. The meeting was a response to an initiative by Franciscan Minister General Michael Perry and Pope Francis, who encouraged Franciscans around the world to commemorate an event which occurred 800 years ago in order to advance dialogue with Muslims today. Among the many Islamic speakers from foreign academic institutions at the conference, was Mufti Grabus who attended the event with Porić, the Secretary at the time. On this occasion, the leadership of the Islamic Community of Slovenia offered the participants of the conference a tour of the Ljubljana Mosque. Christians and Muslims lived a dialogue through three days of coexistence and cooperation.

Relations between Catholics and Muslims in Slovenia are exemplary although there have been controversies in the past, particularly over initiatives to build a mosque in Ljubljana when, according to individual statements by Church leaders in the early 2000s, it seemed that the Catholic Church in Slovenia did not necessarily support the project. In 2013, however, the former President of the Slovenian Bishops’ Conference Msgr. Andrej Glavan attended the laying of the foundation stone for the mosque and thus officially welcomed the presence of Muslims as a worshipping and cultural community. Nevertheless, promoting dialogue with Muslims can be difficult, as the Islamic religion often arouses fear and resistance in Europe, especially in the wake of the migrant crisis and the arrival of large numbers of Muslims in Europe. Yet the real answer for the future, as the aforementioned fundamental theologians point out, is to strive for mutual coexistence and cooperation for the common good (Rode, 2015, 123–124; Žalec, 2022, 95), knowing that only interreligious dialogue makes it possible to further develop our own Christian identity (Osredkar, 2016a, 135).

Conclusion

In Slovenia it is evident that the development of dialogue with non–Christian religions was encouraged mostly by the fundamental theologians of the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana. Despite many concrete activities to establish interreligious (and ecumenical) contacts, the main contribution of fundamental theologians to the development of interreligious dialogue in Slovenia was their work as professors, as they were the first to systematically and in a positive way talk to students about other religions. It was they who have been, in accordance with the Vatican II vision, professionally preparing students for dialogue for over a half century. Even in the early years after Vatican II, the focus was placed on the study of non–Christian religions, especially Islam, which — among non–Christian religions — the Slovenian people have come into contact with the most.

Today, religious studies play an important role at the Faculty. The crucial purpose of studying various religions is to be able to understand them and cooperate with them in promoting unity and charity among peoples. This is by no means done to equate the value of other religions with Christianity. The mission of the Christian, following the example of Christ, is to “forgive” their difference and to accept them as an equal partner. Interreligious dialogue is a requirement of the pluralistic and multireligious society in which we live and is also the only acceptable way of proclaiming Christ. In Slovenia, interreligious dialogue is at a sufficiently high level, but implies a constant commitment to finding new avenues for cooperation. Some original forms of cooperation have been demonstrated in the past by Slovenian fundamental theologians.

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Doprinos fundamentalnih teologa s Teološkoga fakulteta u Ljubljani razvoju međureligijskoga dijaloga u Sloveniji

Nik Trontelj*

Sažetak

U Sloveniji su razvoj međureligijskoga dijaloga između Katoličke crkve i nekršćanskih religija ponajviše poticali fundamentalni teolozi s Teološkoga fakulteta u Ljubljani. Prema viziji Drugoga vatikanskoga sabora, oni već više od pola stoljeća pripremaju učenike za dijalog, a i sami prakticiraju dijaloške aktivnosti. Na taj su način bitno oblikovali karakter katoličkih znanstvenika u Sloveniji, od klera do laika, koji su tijekom svojega obrazovanja upoznali značenje kršćanskoga dijaloga sa svijetom. No, predavači fundamentalne teologije nisu samo predavali dijalog, nego su ga i živjeli u svojim okolnostima. Oni su bili odgovorni za dijalog s nevjernicima, a posebno za ekumenski i međureligijski dijalog. Posebno je plodonosan dijalog s muslimanima, koji su u Sloveniji prisutni u relativno velikom broju (otprilike 5%).

Ključne riječi: međureligijski dijalog; fundamentalna teologija; Teološki fakultet u Ljubljani; katoličko–muslimanski dijalog

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