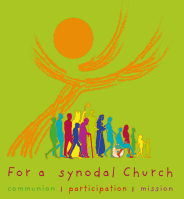


TOWARDS A SYNODAL CHURCH: PATHWAYS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS



Christians live side by side with people who are not baptised yet serve God by practising a different religion. We pray solemnly for them in the liturgy of Good Friday, and we strive together with them to build a better world, imploring the one God to free the world from the evils that afflict it. Dialogue, encounter and exchange of gifts, typical of a synodal Church, are calls to open out to relations with other religious traditions so as ‘to establish friendship, peace and harmony and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love’” (quoting the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India). (FD 41)

In February 2019, Pope Francis travelled to Abu Dhabi to meet with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayyeb, a principal leader of Sunni Islam. Together, they issued the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, in which they committed to adopt “a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.”

A synodal Church commits itself to walk this path alongside the believers of other religions and people of other beliefs wherever it lives. It freely shares the joy of the Gospel and gratefully receives their respective gifts. Through this collaboration, we aim to build together, as sisters and brothers all, in a spirit of mutual activity and aid (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 40), justice, solidarity, peace and interreligious dialogue.” (FD 123)

Read Acts 17:22-28, Paul’s address at the Areopagus in Athens. Paul’s encounter with the pagan religions of Athens models attentive listening, affirming common ground, and proclaiming the Gospel without coercion.

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What, therefore, you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor, he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’”

Conversation in the Spirit, questions for reflection:

- How can we live out the prayerful solidarity described in paragraph 41 when encountering people of different religions in our daily lives or communities?
- What does it mean for us to “exchange gifts” with other religious traditions, as highlighted in paragraph 41, and how can we cultivate reciprocal listening that recognises the Spirit’s work in their lives?
- What visible actions can we take to make our community a sign of harmony in interreligious settings?