

What, if not religion, will be the conscience of society?

[Translation of Vatican News Article:](#)

Rabbi Jack Bemporad, a renowned Biblical scholar, philosopher, and researcher, also heads the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue. The Center was created as a result of the collaboration of the Russell Berrie Foundation and the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas "Angelicum" (Rome). The goal of the Center is to build bridges between Judaism, Christianity, and other religions, and to help younger generations of religious leaders to gain knowledge and practical skills in interreligious dialogue. This year the Center celebrates the 10th anniversary of its foundation. On this occasion, the Pontifical University of Thomas Aquinas will host a conference on "Education for Action. The Urgency of Interreligious Leadership for the Global Good".

In an interview for "Vatican News," Rabbi Jack Bemporad spoke about the activities of the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue, that include the provision of scholarships for students of the Interreligious Dialogue program, and the organization of open lectures and conferences.

From the language of "mutually exclusive" to the language of "inclusion"

The professor noted that the Center's activities are based on the conviction that we all need to learn to coexist in the interreligious world. "There were times," he stressed, "when religions were more or less concentrated on themselves and, most of all, tried to separate themselves from other religions, and their representatives often did not tell their believers the whole truth about other religions and how they behaved with representatives of other religions".

According to Rabbi Jack, the present world is interreligious, and we are constantly stumbling onto the teachings of other religions. He stressed that it was necessary to move from the "language of interference", according to which "I am right, and you are wrong", to the language of inclusion, that says: "I am right, I do not deny the truthfulness of my religion, but, at the same time, I want to know what values other religions have."

Mutual understanding through communication

The main question, according to Rabbi Jack, is how can one develop a language that would help religions to better cooperate for the common good, which is the task of interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding. He spoke about the interesting experience he had during one of the conferences in New York organized by the Center for Interreligious Understanding: the conference was devoted to ethical codes of Judaism (Halach) and Islam (Sharia). The best experts in Jewish and Islamic law during the conference were extremely impressed when they discovered how similar the two systems are. According to Rabbi Jack, they even managed to learn and learn a lot from each other.

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Professor Jack Bemporad emphasized that the Second Vatican Council and Saint John XXIII, who said that recognizing other religions and living in peace, also meant to speak the truth about how your own religion relates to other religions, have contributed greatly to

interreligious dialogue. He added that St. John Paul II during his first meeting with representatives of Judaism noted that Catholics would try to do everything in order to better understand the Jews and speak about them, trying not to distort the truth, but at the same time he pointed out the importance that Jews tried to do the same for Catholics.

"You know, I am an old man," the Rabbi emphasized, "and I remember that when I visited the synagogues and the churches, I always heard:" We are the best, and others are bad. " So, we need a certain structure that would develop a new language, new categories that would allow the religions to cooperate. For what will be the conscience of society, what will be the voice of mankind, if not religion? "

In this context, according to the professor, the program of interreligious studies - the Russell Berrie Fellowship tries to educate leaders who can contribute to the development of a new language, new ways of understanding and new ways of influencing the world. Prominent representatives of different religions received scholarships in order to gain knowledge of different religions and return to their workplace, and they could look at them from the perspective of interreligious understanding.

The space for another religion

According to Rabbi Jack Bemporad, the program of interreligious dialogue belongs to the Faculty of Theology, because, unlike philosophy, which mainly deals with questions: "What is truth?" and "What is real?", theology studies mean the study of a particular faith, its main categories, systems of beliefs and practices. And the program of interreligious dialogue deals with the question of how it is possible to know another religion from the standpoint of your own religion; as well as what space "in my religion exists for your religion."

The Rabbi explained that in the past, people believed that their religion did not leave any room for other religions. And, in fact, interreligious dialogue tries to find space for other religions, so it is important that the Russell Berrie scholarship developed a new language and new categories for the conduct of such activities.

Places important for Christianity and Judaism

The program of interreligious education also offers students a two-week study trip in Israel, during which Christian students from different countries of the world, on the one hand, can feel transforming experiences by visiting holy places related to the life and death of Jesus Christ; but on the other - to see Israel in their own eyes and form their own opinion about this country and Judaism. "We are trying to explain to the students part of the Jewish identity," Rabbi Jack explained. - We show them the places where prophets lived and preached, where, for example, the prophet Isaiah spoke to the people, where the Temple was. It becomes a visual material of what they learned during lectures. And thus, they will learn about Judaism in a way that they could not find anywhere else. "

Students also study other religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Therefore, after completing this curriculum, they have a good knowledge of these religions and missions in a society that each of them has identified for themselves, and are ready to use this knowledge when returning to their countries to their places of work.

Dialogue to overcome violence in the world

Rabbi Jack Bemporad noted that during his ten years working in the area of interreligious dialogue, he also learned a lot from his students. For example, a Sudanese student told him that a woman had brought him a three-year-old boy and asked him to take him to school because she did not want him to be a child-soldier. According to the Rabbi, such a terrible experience makes these young adult students aroused in their desire to make every effort and dedicate their lives to change something in the world.

Interreligious dialogue does not mean syncretism

In conclusion, the chairman of the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue to noted that interreligious dialogue does not mean syncretism, which consists in combining and mixing elements of different religions. "We clearly emphasize the need to insist on the integrity of each religion. For every religion has its liturgy, history, doctrine. And we do not want to limit it in any way. But we want to focus our attention on putting an end to the mutually exclusive and its worst manifestations. "

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