Txintxa

The Grail Theological Resource Workgroup
## Index

1. International TXINTXA Team 3
2. Eccumenism - Summary of Responses to the Txintxa3 Process 5
3. The Grail Cup by Anne Hope 7
4. Emaus by Maria Carlos Ramos 10
5. “Becoming Christian inter-religiously” - Felix Wilfred 12
   - Comment by Isabel Allegro M. 21
   - Comment by Jeanette V. Loanzon 23
7. Grail experiences of fruitful dialogue 26
Dear Grail women all over the World,

The meeting of the international TXINTXA Team from 16th till 23rd of March 2013 in Kleinmond/SA was a most remarkable experience.

We enjoyed the late summer sky reflected in a deep blue sea, the straw flowers decorating the hills behind the Grail Centre, rabbits and tortoises inhabiting the compound, plus a most wonderful hospitality of the group in Kleinmond, making us feel at home. We are most grateful for that magnificent frame of the meeting. Tours through the centre, visits to Mthimkulu, a township and the holiday houses near the beach showed us clearly the social gaps in the society and the efficient work of the Grail fighting against it.

Our tasks as TXINTXA Team made us discuss intensively about the reactions of the 13 countries sharing their opinions on the TXINTXA III process on ecumenism, so as to foster a third phase, as suggested during the IGA 2011 and endorsed in the IC 2013. Outcome:

An extended summary with quotations of the different national TXINTXA III reports with resulting questions.

As one of the most contradictory topic and concern in the reactions was the theme of the Eucharist, as centre and as stumbling block. Two articles (from Anne Hope and Maria Carlos) will be sent out as contribution for a basis of exchange.

May we invite and encourage you to reflect upon the given papers in your local groups with the questions guiding, contact other Grail communities internationally, you may want to discuss the topic. If you would like to make comments on the summary of responses (via Mary Omedo), you may do so, but it is optional. However, we would appreciate reactions from countries, groups or individuals on the theme of the Eucharist, not longer than 2 pages, till December 15, 2013.

One question kept coming back and we will give it on to you for reflection: What are the contents of our dialogue in Grail meetings? E.g.: “the emerging Church we would love to see – inclusion instead of exclusion”
The following topic will be based on interfaith/interreligious dialogue. Although the process will not start before 2014 – thoughts and discussions were preparing the new round:

Some articles were already suggested with the first papers of ecumenism and should be considered: Concilium 2011/2 “becoming a Christian” (www.concilium.in) with reflections from Isabel Allegro and Jeanette Loanzon.

A letter was started with “experiences of shared spirituality” within Grail groups, and members of other religions and invites for additions and new stories.

As the question “what a real deep dialogue looks like”, was raised in the IC meeting, an instruction of Thomas Keating was added for those interested.

An annotated Reading List put together for those looking for good literature, was attached. (requested during the IC)

All papers and articles will come to you via the secretariat per e-mail or as hard copies for those countries having problems to download heavy attachments (also those who get it per e-mail can ask for a hard copy). The Grail in Portugal offered to translate, illustrate and bind the full TXINTXA III documentation and we are very grateful to them and look forward to the printed booklet.

We hope and pray that the many deep reflections, the good atmosphere, the special ideas and the joy of working together on the given topics can be felt in all the material.

Fruitful and blessed sharing and reflection

With many greetings and much love

The International TXINTXA Team:
Anne, Lucy, Maria Carlos, Patricia and Christa

June 2013
Responses were received from 13 countries (USA, Canada, Australia, PNG, the Philippines, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Mexico, Uganda, Portugal, South Africa and Brazil). The responses were succinct but they went to the heart of the matter, and most of all they were honest. They all displayed a similar openness to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, without glossing over the challenges.

Openness to women of other faiths is one thing; admitting them to Grail membership is quite another, and it is clear that there is a wide diversity of both opinion and practice in our different Grail groups across the world. At one end of the spectrum, some groups are already ecumenical and/or contain women of multiple faiths, while at the other end, there are those that are wholly Catholic and will probably remain so for some time to come. Grail women are honest about where they stand on this question, admitting their own limitations and needs while remaining committed to the vision of a Grail that includes women of all faiths and none. The important point was made, at least once, that it was the Catholic Church, at Vatican II, that started us on this road of new awareness and appreciation of other Christian traditions and other world religions.

There were key themes that emerged from the responses: the need to deepen our own understanding of Christian faith; the importance of dialogue (and especially of listening) with women of other religious or spiritual convictions; a deeply-felt concern surrounding the Eucharist, which has traditionally been the centre of our identity, but which now can sometimes be a source of division rather than unity; and finally, a recognition of the importance of building community in the Grail.

These key themes raise many questions for us as Grail groups in our own countries, and we would like each group to reflect on these issues and discuss them as a way of better appreciating not only our own cultural situation but those of our Grail sisters around the world. We would even encourage groups to extend their discussion to a group or groups in another country if that were possible, to broaden our understanding of one another.

1. The first common theme was the need that many felt for deepening their own understanding of their Christian faith before they could begin to dialogue with people of other religious faiths. In the words of the Manila Group: “In our present situation, we see the need to deepen our Catholic formation and adult catechism so we can learn more about our faith to be more open to interreligious dialogue, which seems inevitable with globalization. We believe that if we are grounded and practise our religion seriously, we will be more capable of true dialogue and become more respectful of others’ beliefs without wanting to convert or be converted.”
2. One of the questions raised by the Canadian Grail was, “How do we stand firmly in our faith tradition and at the same time accommodate the perspective of the other?” There was much said about dialogue. The Italian Grail made an important point that is worth reflecting on: “We agree with Raimon Panikkar about his belief that Christian people will remain as such only if they’ll dialogue with other religions.”

Diversity is often seen as enrichment and an opportunity to deepen one’s own spirituality through dialogue. “Learn to bear with plurality, accept suffering, trust that by the Spirit something new can grow out of it.” (USA)

Other interesting comments pertaining to dialogue:

“We must be tolerant and know how to listen, to be silent and reflect whether I coincide with their opinion and, if not, dialogue with respect...” (Mexico)

“To promote dialogue, we need to listen to each other, learn how to appreciate other people.” (Uganda)

“We don’t wish to proselytize; we want to witness to the hope that is in us.” (Canada)

“Dialogue...For most of us that means deepening our Christian faith and understanding...It requires deep inner work and self-examination.” (USA)

3. There were many comments and questions around the Eucharist. “Can we share the fact that participation in the Eucharist in the Catholic Church is only open to Catholics affects us in the Grail which is growing in spiritual diversity? (Pilgrim Place, USA) “We desire a theology of the Eucharist that is fully inclusive of all believers. When we pray together, we choose forms of prayer where all can fully participate.” (Canada) “How do we honour the celebration of the Eucharist for those for whom it is meaningful and at the same time respect those who have a problem with its centrality?” (Canada)

“Can the Eucharist remain something that unifies us or not?” (Australia)

For some groups, where nearly all are Catholic, there are no difficulties with celebrating the Mass together, while, on the other hand, the Dutch Grail comments that “it is not for everyone acceptable that a man is coming in for the liturgy or it is too traditional for some.” In Portugal, “we celebrate the Eucharist as often as we can. Yet we do not intend to force that convergence for all of us.”

4. There were many groups who were concerned as to how to build community and solidarity, both nationally and internationally, if we are becoming more diverse.

The Manila Group stated: “Should any non-Catholics want to become a member of our Group, this will hardly be an impediment as long as there is willingness to live as community.”

The Canadian Grail wondered, “Can our identity as Grail move towards focusing more on the community that draws us together than on religious belonging?”

“It is important to know what we have in common.” (Dutch Grail)
Many groups felt quite clearly that our common goals are what unify us. The Western Cape Group (South Africa) mentioned “our common search for economic justice, integrity of Creation, equality of women and men and the search for truthfulness in our public discourse.” For Portugal, it is the Grail mission of “reconciling the whole of humanity” which unites us. Canada reminds us that “the place where Christian women and women of faith from different traditions meet is when we act together on justice and peace issues.” For Americans, “taking action together is perhaps the most effective road to ecumenical understanding.” However, they also say that what is essential for community is to provide “opportunities for personal encounter. Such community requires spiritual conversation and sharing stories and personal experience. Community implies deep respect and interest in the various spiritualities among us.”

This summary and small sample of responses with respect to the key themes that emerged serves to convey something of the diversity within our international Grail, even as we struggle with many of the same questions. We have produced some questions that you might like to consider in your discussion and reflection on these issues, but do not feel limited by them. We do not expect reports from this discussion, which is for your own benefit and understanding, but please feel free to give feedback to the Txintxa team if you want to.

Some Suggested Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways do we or could we deepen our own faith within the Grail community, nationally and internationally?

2. For those of us seeking to reach out to women of other faiths, how might we go about this? Have we already made some initiatives that we can build on? Is there a local interfaith initiative we can join? Can we start our own interfaith initiative?

3. If we do not feel ready yet for outreach to women of other faiths, how might we prepare ourselves for this? Are there important issues that we feel we must address first in our group?

4. Can we have a dialogue about our common search that includes honest sharing about the Eucharist?

5. What can we do to be more effective in building community within the Grail?
The Grail Cup.
The Search for ever-deeper Communion with one another, with the Earth Community, and with God
by Anne Hope

We have come from many lands,
many occupations, many cultures,
drawn by the legend of the Grail,
our mysterious symbol of Blessing,
of generosity, of sharing, of peace,
fulfilment and understanding, of 'shalom'.

The search of the Grail is a search of longing,
and longing to belong.
I think all of us are in the Grail
because we long for a different world,
a world of peace and plenty, of justice and love,
a world of caring, friendship and conviviality,
where people live happily together,
sharing generously the abundance of God’s gifts
and where the fundamental human needs
of every woman, every man and every child
can be met.

We are aware of our own woundedness
and our limitations.
This only increases our eagerness in the search
for the fullness of life in abundance,
for ourselves and for all others,
a fullness which includes
the enjoyment of goodness, truth and beauty.
We only glimpse, in graced moments
of attunement, to one another and
to the world around us,
the mysterious, elusive Presence,
within and way beyond us,
which many of us call God.
We long for intimacy with one another,
and intimacy with God.

The Irish poet and philosopher, John Donohue, writes of the ‘longing to belong’ like this:

“The human heart is inhabited
by many different longings.
In its own voice each one calls to your life.
At different times in your life they whisper to you
in unexpected ways.

“Beneath all these is a longing that has somehow always been there
and will continue to accompany
every future moment of your life.
It is a longing that you will never be able
clearly to decipher
though it will never cease to call you.

“The voice comes from your soul.
It is the voice of the eternal longing within you,
and it confirms you as a restless pilgrim
on the Earth.

There is something within you
that no-one or nothing else in the world
is able to satisfy…..
When you befriend this longing
it will keep you awake and alert,
as to why it is that you are here on Earth…..

“If you listen to the voices of your longing,
they will constantly call you to different
forms of belonging.
Why do we need to belong?
“The shelter of belonging empowers you. It confirms in you a stillness and sureness of heart. You are able to endure external pressure and confusion you are sure of the ground on which you stand.....

“Once the soul awakens the search begins and you can never go back. From then on you are enflamed with a special longing which will never again let you linger in the lowlands of complacency and partial fulfilment. When this spiritual path opens you can bring an incredible generosity to the world and to the lives of others.....”

For us the Grail Cup is the “pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in a field.” It is the cup of Blessing. Intuitively we know that if we could find it, it would satisfy the hunger and thirst, not only of each yearning human heart, but of the whole human family longing to belong, challenging us to share all our riches. We live in a world hungry for bread and love, for food, clothing and shelter, for security, intimacy, freedom, justice and peace. We try to respond with love. Love often involves suffering, and suffering can often only be healed and made whole, holy, by sacrifice. (sacre facio to make holy)

So often we are aware that our love is only a feeble flame, bringing little light or warmth, easily extinguished as it encounters difficulties. As we grow in awareness of the pain of our neighbours, the pain of the people of the world, we try to respond.

Our efforts arise from mixed motives, seldom as single hearted as we hoped that they would be. We face our failures and feel the need to repent, to make amends, we ask for mercy..... The flawed efforts of much of our work are only fragile fragments of love, small crumbs of bread. The intensity of our joys and sorrows are like drops of wine, small and insignificant in the wider scheme of things, and yet, we have been blessed with so much.

There are a million things for which we must give thanks, for food and friends and family, for fun and laughter, for goodness, truth and beauty, and for the ‘great, gay inimitably happening Earth’ (e.e.cummings) and, particularly, for the privilege of life itself. We need to express our gratitude. Thanksgiving naturally arises in our hearts, except in times of dire distress.

So we place the bread crumbs of our work and the wine drops of our experiences into the Cup
and raise them on the altar of life. An extraordinary transformation takes place. These crumbs of our lives, these drops of our feelings of joy and of fear are made holy, sacrificed, made life-giving, powerful and effective, as they are incorporated into the sacrifice of Christ.

In a way we would hardly have dared to hope they help to ensure that the hungry share the bread of the world, the poor forgive the greed of the rich, the isolated find a place in loving community, and the alienated feel welcome again in a warm home.

We are all in need of nourishment, food for the body and food for the soul. As we share the transformed bread and wine we rejoice in the unity that already exists among us, and are given strength and love to make that unity, deeper, wider, more perfect.

Many Christians have experienced all this deeply in the celebration of the mass and in their communion services, this experience of ‘communio’ a ‘oneness with’ God, and with one another, a oneness that goes far deeper than the sum of all the separate parts. This has been especially strong for many in the small informal community celebrations of Eucharist in the Grail gatherings Many Grail groups have come to rely on this spiritual nourishment and this source of inspiration and bonding.

We all long for the time when the celebration of the Eucharist will be ‘inclusive’ open to all believing Christians, helping us all to live in harmony of mind and heart.

However we know that many Grail members, who are not Catholic, have felt painfully excluded, and the celebration of the Eucharist has caused division not unity in groups where some of the members are on a different faith journey.
Questions for discussion

• In what ways does the above passage ring true, or differ, from your own experience of the Eucharist in the Grail?

• How do we deal with this problem which was raised by many group in the previous Txintxa programme?

• What are other ways, other rituals, that we could use to deepen the experience of communion among us?

• Is it essential that, before we can deal with dialogue with people of other faiths, we need some deep dialogue among ourselves on this question of the Eucharist?
Emmaus

by Maria Carlos Ramos

The story in Lk 24, 13-35 usually called "On the road to Emmaus" or "The two disciples of Emmaus", is part of a sequence of narratives about the experiences of Mary of Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James (24,10), and of Peter (24,12) by the empty tomb.

Unlike these narratives, "On the road of Emmaus" is a long narrative, which fills more than half of the chapter devoted to the apparitions of the risen, from which one can deduce that Jesus, according to Luke, spent a large part of the day of his resurrection on a walk with two unknown disciples.

I move forward with my own interpretation:

The description of the walking is weaved in an alternation of contrasts:

- not seeing / seeing
- not knowing / knowing
- road from Jerusalem towards Emmaus/ Emmaus road of Jerusalem

The axis of the narrative, or turning point, is a gesture: the breaking of the bread.

Thus, it seems that those who joined the movement of Jesus, three days after his crucifixion on the cross, dispersed. Each one goes back home.

The movement seems disintegrated, the one who united them died.

The narrative continues: the outsider-whom they cross, is from the beginning of the story, identified by us, readers, as Jesus, the Risen. They however, see-but do not see, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (v.16). This inability, this lack of vision is due to the "slowness of heart" (v.25), "to believe in everything that the prophets have spoken" (v.25) which is also, according to the two friends (v.26), a justification for returning to Emmaus. Go back to Emmaus is returning to the past tense, the place of comfort, it is the rejection of the Future and of the commitment, it is the refusal of the uncertain and the temporary, it is the refusal of the quest and of the question. Jerusalem, on the contrary, presents itself as the future of God that breaks through the story.

After a long conversation (v.27), the 'unknown' who had been invited to stay overnight becomes visible, known, by a common gesture as the breaking of the bread (v.30). That familiar gesture becomes the hermeneutical key, decodes the enigma, makes possible to see what was invisible. Their eyes, intelligence and understanding were opened and they said to each other "did not our hearts burn within us"(v.32).
This key allows the reading of the past and creates a new movement. Still the text says: "And they rose that same hour" (v33). I call here to your attention, the fact that Luke used the verb ἀνάστηναι - resurrected in the participle form. The same verb that gives body to the noun and to the adjective: risen, used by Luke when referring to Jesus.

What then can we say about these two disciples? What happened to them?

It is the 'breaking of bread' that rises (ἀναστάσις) the disciples. It is through the 'breaking of bread' that everything is transformed. The 'breaking of bread' emerges in the story as a code.

They were lifeless and were on their way to the past.

They came alive with the 'breaking of bread'. They stand up, resurrected, and depart.

It is the 'breaking of bread' shaping a future, giving a new direction to the road. No longer into the past (Emmaus) but to the Future ...

They cracked the code.

The code are now means building communities, weaving affinities, shaping 'tribes', setting directions. The breaking of the bread seals an identity. That gesture will gather and give a meaning to the group, always and whenever they repeat it, whatever the place, whatever the time or group constellation.

The theme of the road is a constant in the gospel of Luke. For the evangelist the ministry of Jesus is made on the way between Nazareth, in Galilee, and the city of Jerusalem, their disciples are itinerant (Lk 9.1-6.10-17.23-26; 10.1 to 11), the Gospel itself is the Way (Act 9.2, 18, 25.26, 19, 23.09, 22, 4; 24,14.22) and belonging to the Jesus’ movement is entering the journey.

On the way, what makes the difference is the 'breaking of the bread'.

We do not break the bread alone, not even for ourselves... neither the road! Whatever journey we may choose.
Becoming Christian Inter-religiously

FELIX WILFRED

I  Becoming rather than being

Let me begin this contribution by explaining why I prefer to speak of becoming Christian rather than ‘being Christian’, which can by now seem a stereotyped usage. ‘Being Christian’ suggests a static and a pre-conceived identity. One seeks to define it and circumscribe it and in the process highlights those elements that are specific to being Christian. The frame of mind here is the Aristotelian logic of defining and classifying in terms of genus and species. The essence of anything is defined by identifying the genus (genos) to which it belongs and its differentia (diaphora). All this has focused attention on specificity (derived from species) even when dealing with sublime spiritual and religious realities, something that can be observed in the search for Christian specificity in defining its identity. There is also a theological positivism at work here. I mean to say that the attempt to define what it is to be Christian here is viewed as some object to be analyzed as if one were to decompose something chemically.

But a Christian or a Christian community is a subject. As such, there is a continuous growth and transformation. They are in a process of becoming. Thus we understand ‘Christian’ as a project – and indeed as an unfinished project. This essay intends to reflect upon how becoming Christian today implies inter-religious relationships. The project of becoming Christian inter-religiously calls for some radical shifts in the prevailing understanding of faith and revelation as well as in the understanding of other religious traditions.

II  From dialectical to relational identity-construction

Traditional definitions of being Christian have taken, in general, a dialectical approach. So a Christian was defined as someone who is
over against the world; who is in the world but not of the world; or as someone who passes through the earth, a vale of tears. The many theologies of the world and forms of political theology have helped to overcome the dialectical defining of Christian by showing the close relationship of faith to the world and to secular realities. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Vatican II document of Gaudium et spes signalled a new understanding of faith and the world, which it saw in relational terms and not antithetically.

Another important area over against which Christian identity was defined was other religions. To sharpen the contours of the bright Christian identity, one had to contrast it with the dark background of ungodly and idolatrous world religions. The history of mission shows how missionaries were confronted with the question of defining Christian identity in continuity with the cultures and religions of the indigenous peoples, or in discontinuity with and in opposition to their cultures and traditions. The attempts to understand the Christian revelation in continuity, as in the work of Roberto de Nobili and Matteo Ricci, were a flash in the pan.¹ The dominant strategy of the missionary enterprise, spanning many centuries, was one of extirpación de idolatria. Christ was understood ‘against culture’.² This tendency to define Christian identity against religion and cultures still had its representatives in the twentieth century in such figures as Karl Barth and Hendrik Kraemer.³ One may try to defend Barth by explaining that the German word ‘Aufhebung’ is misinterpreted as abolition of religion. Such fine exegesis in his defence⁴ does not take into account the overall tenor of his theology, which saw other religions dialectically. Barth and Kraemer were not in the least interested in constructing any theological bridge to relate with other religions positively.

If we begin our discourse from becoming Christian, we do not become embroiled in any problems connected with defining what ‘being Christian’ is. Becoming Christian overcomes the dialectical mould of thought and places us in a new mindset of relationships. Here, the presuppositions of identity-construction are different.

Identity-construction can take place in a centripetal or in a centrifugal way. The dialectical way of defining Christian identity is a centripetal model. It tries to strengthen its borders and mark its difference, so that it acquires a profile of its own. Anything in the other that might threaten its centripetal identity is denied or rejected. On the other hand,
becoming Christian is to acquire an identity in relationship to the other – in our case the religiously other. The web of particular relationships creates a dynamic identity that sees the other as part of the identity of oneself and not as a threat. Here, the borders are not rigid and stratified but open and porous. Analysis in different fields also tells us that it is not the concept that determines the relationship, but the other way, namely relations determine the content of concepts and categories. This means that we do not depart from the concept of ‘Christian’ to determine our relationship to other religions (a presupposition underlying most theologies of religion), but rather the nature and quality of our relationships to them will say what becoming Christian means.

III From use to enjoyment

For a deeper understanding of how becoming Christian inter-religiously implies a different approach to identity, I refer here to an important distinction made by Augustine of Hippo in his De Doctrina Christiana.5 There are things we use in order to attain something or arrive at something. But there are realities that lie beyond mere use. These are not in view of something else but are ends in themselves and have value by themselves, and they become our joy. In Augustine’s words, ‘to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake’.6 Sublime realities such as love, compassion, friendship, and realms such as aesthetics and ethics cannot be instrumentalized. These are, in a way, reflections of God, who cannot be framed within instrumental use and who is the realm of enjoyment.

Deploying this distinction shows how the relationship of Christianity vis-à-vis other religions and cultures has been one of instrumental use. This is true even when the relationship became more open. Other religions and cultures are, to use again an analogy from Saint Augustine, like the spoils of Egypt which the Israelites took with them for their use and self-enhancement:

For, as the Egyptians had . . . also vessels and ornaments of gold and silver, and garments, which the same people [Israelites] when going out of Egypt appropriated to themselves, designing them for a better use . . . [I]n the same way all branches of heathen learning have not only false and superstitious fancies and heavy burdens of unnecessary
toil, which every one of us, when going out under the leadership of Christ from the fellowship of the heathen, ought to abhor and avoid; but they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of the truth. . . . These, therefore, the Christian, when he separates himself in spirit from the miserable fellowship of these men, ought to take away from them, and to devote to their proper use in preaching the gospel. Their garments, also – that is, human institutions such as are adapted to that intercourse with men which is indispensable in this life – we must take and turn to a Christian use.⁷

The spirit of Augustinian ‘use’ of other cultures and religions seem to animate many of the statements in the documents of Vatican II, as for example Ad Gentes no. 22, where the mission strategy is spelt out. But the articulation of this strategy has become today more refined.

To become Christian inter-religiously means to pass on from this mindset of ‘use’ of other religions to serve the Christian truth to viewing them as sublime realities of enjoyment, having value in themselves. When the other becomes one’s joy, the other becomes truly part of oneself, something best illustrated in the spousal relationship. It is this that should characterize the becoming Christian inter-religiously. The more one becomes Christian; the more a community becomes Christian, they will enjoy other religious traditions and consider the truths they (religions) represent as part of oneself. Here the measure of becoming Christian is different from the one implied in the centripetal identity which defines itself dialectically.

IV From stagnant certitudes to being on the way

Beliefs form part of any religious tradition, along with experience, rituals, ethical injunctions, scriptures, and so on. In their perception of self-identity, some religious traditions give greater importance to their beliefs, whereas others such as Hinduism focus on a set of practices. Becoming Christian is not a matter of adherence to a set of articles of faith, but a movement toward experiencing and understanding what they really mean through a way of life that can best be characterized as a journey. To adduce an example from the field of aesthetics: the evaluation of a piece of art is not best done by applying pre-established norms but by finding in the work itself the embodiment of the laws of
beauty. Here, the work of art is not pre-empted by already-given norms and parameters. Becoming Christian is indeed an *ars vivendi* – art of life. Christian identity – individual and communitarian – when institutionalized tends to be abstract, stagnant, and devoid of life.

But if we look at the early Christians, we note how they struggled to find who they were and it was a process of discovery. In fact *odos* – the way – is how they described what they were following (cf. Acts 9.2; 18.26; 19.23; 24.22). Early Christians did not act on the basis of a pre-constituted identity with its defining features. To be able to understand what Christianity is, one needs to walk its path. The challenge of becoming Christians is no less today, especially when we live in multi-religious societies. Times were when geographical areas could be classified as marking the presence of one or other religion. This is no longer the situation. Even in those parts of Europe where Christendom was life, culture, and religion all blended into one, today the processes of globalization, migration, and the like have given rise to a multi-religious situation. The stagnant and centripetal Christian identity can become a-historical inasmuch as it is defined without reference to the concrete situation. Plurality of religions with their world-views, symbols, and ideals is the environment in which, today, the journey to become Christian, to become Christian communities, takes place.

**VI  Sharing in the realm of grace**

Centripetal definitions of being Christian isolate Christians and communities from the multi-religious environment, whereas the centrifugal approach takes peoples of other religious traditions as partners in the same journey. In this common journey one discovers the Ultimate Mystery in its innumerable forms and splendours like the colours of the rainbow refracting the light of the sun. Easy comparisons at the surface level give way in this journey to the exploration of the divine grace and light and the wondrous transformation they effect across religious borders.

The contrast of the supernatural to the natural, long and widely used to distinguish Christian revelation from other religions, has served to fortify the centripetal identity of Christianity. This distinction created a dialectical relationship with other religions. If in reality there is what Karl Rahner would call, “supernatural existential”8 as part of a graced
human existence as a common condition, the real question is not so much defining religious borders (including the question of ‘being Christian’), by which people are separated, as highlighting the grace by which they are united. The mark of spiritual existence would then be not where someone belongs within our pre-defined borders and identities but how people have responded to the offer of grace, which comes always not a-historically but in definite contexts and in the conjunction of many forces and factors. Becoming Christian needs to be placed within this larger scheme of grace and response to it.

VI The shift to emptiness

One of the difficulties Christianity has in relating to other religious traditions has been the concept of fullness. It has been interpreted as having really no need of the other. When one is full, one cannot actually receive anything: at the most one may pretend to receive something. In the scheme of fullness, the other becomes either a preparation for the fullness Christianity represents or part of a hierarchical scale of truths in which Christian revelation occupies the pinnacle. This has been further reinforced by a philosophy that holds that the inferior and less perfect are eminently contained in what is superior and perfect. Such views, obviously, have not allowed Christianity to consider the value other religions represent in themselves and include them as part of its own self-definition.

Becoming Christian can become a moving experience when we start not from the pole of fullness but from the pole of emptiness. After all, the self-abnegation or kenosis of God is at the very heart of Christianity, and therefore its concept of revelation needs to be re-thought radically from the pole of emptiness. Becoming Christian would then mean becoming the receptacle of all those wonderful gifts of God, no matter where they come from, and that would also be the foundation of a different understanding of universality. The greater their emptiness, the more universal will Christians and Christian communities become, because in the infinite emptiness there is room to receive endlessly.

VII Many ways of becoming Christian

There is no one single way of following Christ. The centripetal
definition of Christian identity forces people to make choices that exclude. If one chooses to be Christian, one cannot be a Buddhist or a Hindu. The logic here is aut . . . aut. I think we need to break from this way of defining identity, which inherently excludes the other as strengthening oneself. Could a Hindu become Christian to the measure she follows Jesus, his teachings, his way of life? I think, yes. Her way of becoming Christian may be different from another person brought up in the context of Europe, the Americas, or Africa in traditional Christian communities.

In the Gospels, Jesus had people following him in different ways and in different circles. There were not only the multitude of people who listened to him, but also the seventy-two disciples, and then the closer circle of the Twelve. Then there were people who related themselves to Jesus very differently, such as Zacchaeus, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea who received his body from the cross. So people associated with Jesus in so many different ways, usually depending on their particular context of life. Becoming Christian is open-ended and not a closed project, as the expression ‘being Christian’ might suggest. Living by the spirit of Christ allows one to become Christian without any discontinuity from where one is existentially placed but always in a movement and journey of transformation.

Two arguments may be brought against the plurality of ways of becoming Christian. If one seeks to follow Jesus and to be Christian, one has to follow the entire Christian faith. In other words, one either accepts the totality of Christian faith or does not. But in reality this totalizing approach to Christian mystery has never formed part of the life of Christians even in the visible Church communities, not even among the saints. The way the human spirit is drawn to and deals with sublime realities cannot be regulated and regimented. In the life-journey of a person, there can be certain intersections with Jesus and his gospel. The ways a person encounters Jesus cannot be pressed into one single mould. The entry-point of discovering Jesus may be different: for Gandhi, for example, it was the Sermon on the Mount and the self-negation of the cross; for Raja Ram Mohan Roy it was the precepts of Jesus; for Ramakrishna Paramahamsa the mystical person of Jesus. To those who charged Gandhi with secretly becoming a Christian, he had this to say:

There is nothing in the world that would keep me from professing
Christianity or any other faith, the moment I felt the truth of and the need for it. Where there is fear there is no religion. The charge is a compliment in that it is a reluctant acknowledgment of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity. Let me own this. If I could call myself, say, a Christian or a Mussulman, with my own interpretation of the Bible or the Quran, I should not hesitate to call myself either.  

We need to be open to accepting that the encounter with Jesus and the gospel cannot be institutionalized. This will allow us to dialogue with our neighbours of other faiths, about not only their religious experience but also their discovery of Jesus and their interpretation of the Bible so as to become Christian in the way that responds best to their needs and spiritual requirements – something that cannot be expected from a preconceived definition of ‘being Christian’.

Another argument would be to say that to be Christian means not simply to follow Christ but to become one with Christ, as Saint Paul would say. In a recent interview, Bishop Albert Rouet of Poitiers has made a very important point with reference to such a conception. He notes:

For me, saying that Christ is the Christian identity forms part of those beautiful and pious phrases that are true but do not take into account proper nuances, such as if Jesus would absorb my identity. There is no Christian identity unless I have a relationship with Him, but this must be a longing relationship. This is the logic of grace. Otherwise we fall into fanaticism, which develops from overlapping your existence with the idea or the person whom you defend. This confusion is not Christian.  

Becoming Christian should involve respect for the journey a subject makes in encountering Jesus and relating to him in singular ways that cannot be reproduced or standardized. Phrases like ‘being one in Christ’ need to be interpreted to bring out the nuances involved in the many ways of following Jesus and becoming Christian in spirit and in one’s way of life.
Conclusion

In the context of multi-religious situations, the challenge is to think of becoming Christian. It makes more sense than speaking of ‘being Christian’, which has many pitfalls and may not measure up to the new situation we are experiencing. Becoming Christian is a process that is not done alone, not even with institutionalized Christian communities, but in the partnership of many peoples of other faiths with whom we live and interact on a daily basis. One would see how important this is in the continent of Asia, and more and more also in other parts of the world with global presence of religions. This way of becoming Christian with neighbours of other faiths help us discover the mystery of this reality which would not have been possible without such encounter. Becoming Christians inter-religiously is indeed an enriching and exciting experience.  

Notes

5. De Doctrina Christiana, Book I, Chapter 4. 4
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. Book II, Chapter 46. 60
This article addresses the question of Christian faith as a learning process, instead of a clear affirmation of a permanent, ready-made, identity. Our belonging to Christianity is meant to be an unfinished process of becoming, “a process of discovery” (p. 63), of transforming our lives (60). For Wilfred, the notion of a Christian identity is contained more in the act of “becoming” than in the state of “being”. (The stagnant notion of being – he says - “has many pitfalls and may not measure to the new situation we are experiencing” (67). Becoming, as a progressive action, stresses that nature of a process, which is the first proposal of this text: “a Christian is a subject [...therefore] in a continuous growth and transformation” – Wilfred says (59).

Within this frame of understanding, the author envisages the current contexts of life where we live as multicultural and pluri-religious societies, almost everywhere in the world. Inside these contexts, different cultures and religions are now present in a consistent manner they never had before; therefore they are nowadays part of our current contexts for learning. They are almost informal “schools” where we can learn about otherness. The challenge is, therefore, to be open towards what surrounds us, in order to recognise what differs from us, and consider it as respectable as what identifies our own selves. This means knowing cultures as well as religions totally alien to us before, and which have recently become a part of our own environment. It also implies radical changes in our way of reasoning about cultural and religious identities, about faith, revelation, and other religious traditions, as Wilfred points out (59).

Our growth into Christianity has to happen within this attitude of openness towards otherness, not in reaction towards what is not like us.

Felix Wilfred reminds us of how along History the Catholic Church has stated as withdrawal from the world (no present in the gospels), e.g., envisaging it as a ‘valley of tears’ (60) – as we used to pray in the “Salve Regina” – or as something we rather escape or run away from, instead of looking at it as the place we are meant to live in, in order to transform it into a better place for all.

The way of constructing our identities, and the way we address the other -- the person, culture or religion - - who is different from me, or from us, can use of one of two perspectives (61).

One of them Winfred names centripetal, meaning with it that as Christians, as Church, we affirm our vision over against the world, trying “to strengthen its borders and mark its difference, so that it acquires a profile of its own” (60). Therefore other religious and cultural identities may be disrespected, every time anything in them seems to threaten our own identity, focused in itself, or centripetally.
The other perspective, called centrifugal, implies that our Christian identity should be built in relationship to the other, and this other becomes thus part of our own identity (61). Within this perspective, the frontiers that distinguish me or us from the others are flexible, “open and porous”. This leads to a not imposing attitude upon the other, but rather to a dialogical attitude. In Felix Wilfred’s own wording:

[...] it is not the concept that determines the relationship, but the other way, namely relations determine the content of concepts and categories. This means that we do not depart from the concept of “Christian” to determine our relationship to other religions [...], but rather the nature and quality of our relationships to them will say what becoming Christian means. (Wilfred: 2011, 61)

Hence the mode we relate to different religions allows for a process of becoming Christian, where the other is listened to, and where we also learn from them, without any intention of instrumentalizing them, but rather enjoying their just being different, with their own values (62). Becoming Christian is then a kind of ars Vivendi; an art of living, where inter-religious sharing is one of the elements that give a structure to our identity as Christians (63).

Nowadays, Wilfred says, any notion of a rigid, all-defined, centripetal identity is totally a-historical (p. 63), as it escapes concrete references to the cultural and social reality of contemporary societies. To live within History today, he says, implies accepting the value of plurality in our societies: of religions and cultures, trying to learn from them. Therefore, the attitude we are called to develop is to see the others as “partners of the same journey” towards “the Ultimate Mystery in its innumerable forms [...]” (63). This is what Wilfred sees as becoming Christian inter-religiously (61). So, instead of a sense of owning the truth (as often we think of Christianity), and instead of trying to convince the other to that supposed truth, we are called to a sincere recognition of the call of God to all, each one following his or her own path within the religious tradition and the culture where one belongs to. And within this multiplicity of paths the point is to be able to share our belief and vision with others, as well as to be able to share from their beliefs and visions, aware also that there are as many ways of “following Christ” as people: “becoming Christian is open-ended” – we read —, “not a closed project as the expression ‘being Christian’ might suggest” (64).

As Raimon Panikkar - the well known Christian-Hindu theologian, a catholic mystic and priest who has recently left this earth for good — says:

of remaining with a awakened consciousness, aware that we are intoning different notes in the same symphony, and that we are walking on different paths towards the same peak. This then is faith: the experience of the symphony, of catching a glimpse of the summit, while being attentive to the instrument we use, and trying not to stumble on the way. (Panikkar: 1990, 11. 19)

Therefore, “the encounter with Jesus and the gospel cannot be institutionalized” (66). Conversely: it may take as many forms as a limpid crystal, and as many colours as the rainbow.

* 

Reflection on “Becoming Christian Inter-religiously”

by Felix Wilfred  Concilium 2011/2 for TixinTxa process

Comment by
Jeanette V. Loanzon

“Becoming Christian can become a moving experience when we start not from the pole of fullness but from the pole of emptiness” (Wilfred, F., p.64). This seems to speak to our experience of the Grail as a community of search. The Grail symbol of the cup reflects this emptiness; we are empty and “. . . there is room to receive endlessly” (p.64). Rachel Donders, former Grail international president from the Netherlands, said it so well for us:

The Grail chalice
Emblem of our movement,
Speaks of the basic attitude
Of the human before the Divine,
The attitude of receptivity,
Wide open, the chalice stands empty,
Ready to receive, eager to be filled . . .

Our “emptiness” suggests an openness to the other. When we are asked during Grail gatherings, national or international, what are our values as Grail members, we often answer hospitality. Our “emptiness” and openness is very much related to the high value we place on hospitality of the heart. In our Grail centers, family homes and hearts, we receive Grail members, would-be members or unknown guests who need hospitality. Thus, we can say that the greater our “emptiness” and openness, our hospitality, the more “universal” we could be as a Grail community.

Our openness “to being on the way” (p. 62) and our “becoming” rather than being Christians enable us to receive and enjoy. Wilfred refers to these shifts: from uses to enjoyment (p. 61) and from stagnant certitudes to being on the way (p. 64). When we hear the early morning call to prayer from a Muslim mosque, we feel affirmed that like our Muslim neighbors, we are called to a life of regular prayer. We rejoice when we learn about the works of charity of a United Methodist Church in a remote province, driven by the Christian compassion we share with each other. Music, being a universal language, we feel uplifted when we listen to heavenly voices from an ecumenical choir where a Grail member belongs. “When the other becomes one’s joy, the other truly becomes part of oneself, something best illustrated in the spousal relationship” (p.62).

Forming our identity as Christians can be arrived at through two ways, Wilfred said. The centripetal way marks boundaries and differences (p.60) to make identity unique. Becoming Christian is to acquire “an identity in relationship to the other” (p.61). This is the second approach, the centrifugal way. It is not the concept that determines the relationship, but rather “the nature and quality of our relationships to them that will say what becoming Christian means” (p.61).
Religion creates a web of relationships between us and our Creator, between us and our co-creatures (Galtung, J., World Social Summit, UNRISD, 1995). Since religion is rooted in the Latin word, *ligare*, meaning link, we are linked to each other by our common humanity. What becomes important is our relationships with each other and we are to relate to each other from this deepest truth: we are all co-creatures from a Creator.

To live together is the last pillar of “Learning: The Treasure Within” (Delors, J.); we learn to know, to be, and to do. “Becoming Christian is a process that is not done alone, not even with institutionalized Christian communities, but in partnership of many other people of other faiths with whom we live and interact on a daily basis” (p. 67).

Among 94 million Filipinos, about ten per cent of us work overseas as cleaning women in Singapore, second language teachers in Sydney, or accountants in California. Before the declaration of independence by East Timor in 2002, we were said to be the only Christian country in Asia. The gift of our Christian faith only becomes a blessing when we are able to share our values in the inter-religious world we live in.

In the nineties, the late Mimi Marechal, Grail member from Belgium and the Netherlands, recalled how her Filipina nurse was going through a medical procedure with her tube while at the same time looking from the corner of her eye if Mimi was in pain. It was the same Mimi who remarked that while the rest of their Southeast Asian neighbors were refusing the boat people from Indo-China in the seventies, the Filipinos were welcoming them despite our poverty. Indeed, our Christian faith provides an anchor in these turbulent days of financial turmoil bringing with it less jobs and more misery. It becomes our responsibility as Filipinos to share more deeply the compassion we learn from our Christian religion. The love of neighbor is a value which we share with the great religions with their roots in Asia.

As we journey towards becoming Christians in an inter-religious environment, we are guided by Grail members, past and present, who have done much. Alberta Lucker of Germany has blazed the trail in gathering members of the world’s religions to help bring about dialogues towards peace and our members from Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands work with migrants and their families in the fields of education and human rights.

“Aware that we are empty vessels” (Donders, R.), becoming Christians in an inter-religious world is our responsibility awakened by globalization and threatened by fundamentalism. We relate, face-to-face or via cyberspace, with people of different religions. We need to see where they come from, how they view the world, and learn how to live together. Since we are on the way, we remain open and free from “stagnant certitudes” (p. 62). We are likely to discover that we are on the same journey towards wholeness and healing, to the point that we could each say as Grail members “My cup is overflowing” (Donders, R).

29 February 2012
For those who have asked for some help in how to initiate dialogue, these guidelines are offered as a possible resource and starting point. We suggest that you think about the attitudes required for constructive dialogue both within the Christian community and with people of other beliefs, and that you draw up a set of practical guidelines.

Keating offers a model of how to begin a relationship of dialogue: meditation in silence and sharing personal spiritual journeys that talk about our religious tradition.

The eight points of agreement that he mentions offer ideas which may serve as a basis for dialogue, whether among ourselves or with a wider group.

The 15 examples of disciplined practice may serve as a basis for sharing our own experiences of spiritual practices in our own tradition.
Grail experiences of fruitful dialogue

FOOD FOR THE SOUL
Since 2007, a few Grail members and others have been meeting every Wednesday night in school term time at the Grail Centre in Sydney. Each term we choose a theme: e.g. a gospel, Wisdom literature, Psalms, the writings of Teresa of Avila, Jesus and Mary in the Koran, etc, and someone prepares a program of readings relevant to the theme. We spend half an hour in silent meditation on our reading, in the spirit of lectio divina, and then we share our insights, thoughts and feelings. Over the years we who attend regularly have become a close community through our shared prayer and stories.

WOMEN’S INTERFAITH PRAYER FOR PEACEFUL ELECTIONS IN KENYA.
From the beginning of December 2012 a group of women from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds have been meeting once a month for two and a half hours to pray for peaceful elections in Kenya on 4th March 2013. A group of 14 Christian and Muslim women from Kenya, the Philippines, Turkey, Sri Lanka and Tanzania have been meeting once a month to pray and share their life experiences, and to know more about each other and especially about each other’s religious teachings. We have had wonderful moments of sharing wisdom, food, love and welcoming to each other in the spirit of sisterhood as people drawing our strength from one Creator. We have shared what the Bible and Quran says about Mary, and this was very enriching to everyone. Personally I learned a lot and was not the same as I learned some basics of practical interfaith dialogue.
Thanks be to God! (Al-hamdu lilah!) that elections were done peacefully.

VOICES AND WAYS OF RESURRECTION
During the Easter time to Pentecost, we proposed a constant and permanent way of celebration, praise and thanksgiving, which extends on each day the feast and the joy of the Resurrection.
And how we did it? We chosen a a stained glass called LIGHT, made by Alice Fernandes (a Portuguese Grail member), that remained during the six weeks of this liturgical season, and every Tuesday we posted a text on the GRAIL’s website (http://www.graal.org.pt), that, through different voices, lead us on new and true ways of Resurrection.
To better internalize the text we suggested writing, at least, one haiku inspired by the proposed text. The haiku, originally from Japan, can be defined as a poetic style that, in terms of format, has three short verses and, in terms of content, expresses the subjectivity of the most important thing that every person kept in their heart. It captures the instantaneous, it records, falls, makes present, evokes, it thrills.
The occidental haiku differs from the traditional Japanese haiku, especially in the form. However, the brevity and lightness, the permanent use of words associated with nature, the combination of perceptions (sensory and emotional) and the division of the strophe in three verses, are also important features of occidental haiku. Connected with the proposed text can even become a spiritual practice.

There are many great experts writing haiku. For example, in Portugal, one of our great poets, Herberto Hélder, made some haiku translations, like the following example: Oh, the past / Time where slow days/ are accumulated.

However, anyone can write, in a simple but complete way, haiku, which calls for our sensitivity and listening of ourselves and what surrounds us.

This was the invitation: to become "poets" of simplicity in the depth of ourselves. The proposed text was the source of our inspiration, the stained glass, the beauty that also inspired our writing, allowing the discovery of an unexpected interiority.

The haiku, was published on the Grail website each Sunday, and in that way we were able to enjoy and celebrate together the Beauty of God, through the inspiration of each one of us.
**Txintxa** is a xangana word from the south of Mozambique. It comes from the verb *ku txinxa*, “to change.” It is used as a slogan when a community starts a work project together: changing a hut roof, planting a vegetable garden.... Txintxa supposes a movement and a change that result from a collective effort.