

Vatican Official Backs a Next Step for Multiculturalism

Says It's Time to Move Past Mere Coexistence

By Roberta Sciamplicotti

ROME, JUNE 2, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Instead of multiculturalism, it's time to speak of interculturalism, according to the president of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers.

Archbishop Antonio Vegliò made this proposal today when he addressed a [conference](#) on the Christian-Jewish-Muslim interfaith dialogue, under way through Friday in Hungary. The conference is sponsored by the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the European Union, and includes a variety of high-level representatives from the three monotheistic religions.

Archbishop Vegliò addressed "Common Values in the Ambit of the Religious and Social Impact of Migrations," stressing that education and dialogue are the two key instruments for a new model of life based on interculturalism.

The prelate, who will be in Hungary through Monday for a pastoral visit at the invitation of Monsignor Janos Szekely, the Hungarian bishops' official for the ministry to migrants and travelers, noted how Europe is a historically multi-cultural reality.

He spoke of how this is a positive phenomena, making it possible to enrich one's own life situation and keep from being shut in and thus impoverished.

But, he said, more than multiculturalism it would be good to speak of interculturalism. The first term, the prelate proposed, simply describes two or more cultures in the same space.

Interculturalism, meanwhile, connotes "stable relations between the cultures present in a certain geographic space and emphasizes the attitudes, the objectives to attain and the educational itineraries that lead to this encounter of cultures."

"Approach" isn't enough, he insisted, since "exchange" is also necessary -- "and not a simple exchange of what one has, but above all of what one is."

One way

Integration is "not a one way process," the 73-year-old Vatican official affirmed.

"Natives as well as immigrants must be ready to undertake the way of dialogue and of reciprocal enrichment, which makes possible the appreciation and acceptance of the positive aspects of each," he said.

In this regard, the prelate recognized, respect for migrants and their cultural identity must of course be taken into account, while on guard for elements "contrary to ethical and universal values, or to fundamental human rights."

Faceless peoples

Archbishop Vegliò offered education and dialogue as the "indispensable" instruments to create interculturalism.

Dialogue, he explained, must be the most important instrument to use in everyday interactions.

He lamented, however, the "great problem" that has arisen of late, saying "Europe has concealed the principles and values that characterized its birth and molded it" -- even denying its Christian roots.

"This impedes an appropriate reception and a real integration of immigrants who come from another cultural context, because for them it is impossible to establish a dialogue with a land that seems to be deprived of a face and of history, a land without common principles or fundamental values," the archbishop suggested.

Another reason for failure in Europe's reception of migrants, the archbishop stated, is the fact that "it has been done in a passive way and it is justified with a desire for tolerance."

"We often confuse the concept of tolerance with an a-critical acceptance of all styles of life, beginning with unlimited respect and avoiding making any judgment," he said.

Meeting the challenge

Speaking then of education, Archbishop Vegliò said traditional models are inadequate for present-day challenges.

A new educational model should concentrate on several elements, he proposed: "to teach to respect and appreciate the various cultures, discovering the positive and fruitful elements they might enclose; to help to modify conduct of fear or indifference in confrontations with diversity; to educate in hospitality, in equality, in liberty, in tolerance, in pluralism, in cooperation, in respect, in co-responsibility, in non-discrimination."

Such an educational model should teach positive appreciation for dialogue and listening and help to overcome generalizations, prejudices and stereotypes, he said. It should "surmount individualism and the isolation of closed groups; to foster mature, flexible and open personalities."

This intercultural education is key for overcoming "cultural extremism" that is contrary to "the values contained in the Declaration of Human Rights," pointed out the president of the Vatican dicastery.

Religions and migrations

In all of this, Archbishop Vegliò affirmed, religions have a fundamental role.

"Religions represent one of the most important forms of cultural identity," he noted, and "there is a profound and undeniable link between religion and culture."

"It's not possible to understand religion without culture, or culture without religion," the prelate proposed, "because the vision of the universe present in each of our societies, which also offers

certain values, behavior and ideas on life, clearly implies religious origins, shared by the great majority of its members, whether or not they are believers."

"In the second place, if we consider that the transformations of our continent pass necessarily through a change of mentality in each individual -- native or immigrant, and if we are conscious of the important task carried out by religious confessions inasmuch as they are formators of consciences, we cannot but acknowledge the indispensable role of religions in this process of European construction," he said.

"The promotion of the intercultural dimension calls for the acceptance of fundamental values and principles, which must be considered indispensable and the basis of the construction of our European societies," indicated Archbishop Vegliò. "The various religious confessions and their places of worship have a particular mission to fulfill to foster the adoption of these values by all those who arrive to our continent."

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