



Round-Table discussion on the theme:
“Human dignity, brotherhood and dialogue between cultures”

**A universal brotherhood experience:
40 years case study in Fontem, Cameroon**

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Summary

Based on what we have seen in the video document, it is not difficult to imagine a society in which people from a different cultural background, religious beliefs and convictions, races, colour and languages could live together, sharing the same environment and committing oneself in the entire development and human advancement or progress in today's world. A world in which conflicts and wars, competition and domination is the live motive and reason for living.

In the United Nations in which the key expressions of dally life are: *globalization, multiculturalism, Right of Diversity, Human Rights, Internationalisation, universality, Common Good, Liberty, Responsibility and Dialogue*, it is obvious that every citizen is challenged to reflect on his or her proper identity within the whole and, to identify worldwide solutions, in full respect of human liberty and dignity, in order to individuate global solutions to problems and barriers , giving birth to new ways of cultural encounter among people from different backgrounds. This may be a starting point for a shared opinion on development and advancement in society.

The principle of Internationality, proper to a multicultural society invites everyone to render the world more human and worthy of peace.

The experience of Fontem, in which, the rediscovery of cultural diversity as a value and resource has brought many people to affirm that, without others there is no true self and that, no one can know himself or herself if not in front or through the other, it is possible to individuate an educative pathway that will guarantee a possibility of a “world citizenship” for all those who nourish the ideal of a United World.

In this case, it is not difficult to consider the world as a family whose inhabitants consider themselves as brothers and sisters.

The experience of Fontem makes it credible that the option of dialogue between cultures, solidarity as well as the experience of reciprocity and finally, recognition of interdependence among people, institutions of every level and kind, remains the most effective way of respecting dignity and equality of all peoples, their diversity and cultures and of shared values. This is, in fact, that which will conduct to shared progress and development. Progress and development which does not favour the rich to become richer, neither maintain the poor in the grass level of life without any hope for a better future.

To conclude, one can say that, a universal brotherhood society, cultural reciprocity, a multicultural society where love, respect, peace, rights and duties, sustainable development and human progress is possible. Fontem is one of these examples.

1. Identity, diversity, complementarily, education and progress within a multicultural society.

That of Fontem is more and more becoming a multicultural society for, right of diversity is constantly respected. In this case, each culture represented is recognised the others and spaces for cultural expressions are guaranteed for all, giving room for cultural integration among all. In this case, one is looking forward to see different historical memory and heritage, generating a new culture.

And we all know that a multicultural experience and sharing life in the same society and environment is possible only when each of the different cultures present willingly welcomes other people's cultural values.

This experience is capable, if honest, of generating a new cultural identity and again, can mark the starting point of a new history of the society, and consequently becomes the deposit of values and of cultural memory. This is in fact, one of the goals of the United Nations. Building a new future together, in which peace and happiness can reign.



People living in this little town are not considered immigrants but citizens and the vocabulary of the common language avoids the use of terms as “strangers” for, each one is responsible for the others and can communicate within the framework of the society his or her original culture and values.

Normally, every culture, shared with the others, though it maintains its originality, is elevated to a universal dimension. This is in fact one of the vocation of a permanent Mariapoli centre – citadel as the Focolare Movements call them.

How do we guarantee these original cultures within a new form of society?

Generally, the difference between one culture and another mostly depends on the way values are conceived and interpreted. In fact, not all that is held as a value by one culture is given the same value and meaning by others. From here, emerge “cultural relativism”. Therefore, it should be recognized that no culture can be considered superior to another just as no culture can consider itself as inferior to the others.

Rather, we could affirm that every culture is different from the others, and none of the cultures can identify itself with the other. Every identity presupposes diversity and diversity remains the starting point for every form of intercultural dialogue and communication between cultures. It is therefore necessary to sustain these forms of model of society aiming to generate in everyone engaged in this process, the awareness and possibility of participating personally to the construction of a new and meaningful culture, without, at the same time minimising their communalities and differences.

2. Interculture, dialogue and interdependence

In order to prepare and educate the human person in an intercultural dimension, proper to these citadels and to generate a new cultural identity, I think, one has to bear in mind the following propositions:

- perceiving in the first place, that interculture is a mutual exchange of gifts;
- secondly, perceiving interculture as a new way of considering internationality due to the process of immigration and recognizing every immigrant - as a new citizen, from which, has meaning the concept of immigration as one of the principles of globalization and of internationality.

Within this framework it becomes essential to consider cultural diversity as wealth and the awareness of the interdependence of cultures as progress toward civilization.

It becomes therefore essential to consider formation and intercultural education as a favourable condition of dialogue among the different cultures.

It then results that formation and intercultural education is a necessary condition through which one can elaborate individual and collective values on which the rights and dignity of every human person can be rooted in respect to one's own experience and history.

Recognising diversity and respecting differences, means to bring and maintain peace in the world and guarantee human rights and thus, preserving the great values of humanity.

The UN Commissioner for human Rights can sustain the activities of these little towns in every aspect, contributing to the stability of the experience of human rights, making it possible for many to witness how the world would look like if only a good percentage of these rights are lived by many.

3. New humanism

In the desire of constructing a new world, the process can start from the exercise of solidarity towards reciprocity, from dependence to independence and to cooperation, with the aim of transforming differences into complementarity.



In this process, we have the impression to be in front of a new culture, a new vision of human development. This experience of sharing allows men and “new peoples” to experience the universal dimension of love. The model of the human person emerging from this new culture is that which has gone beyond the ordinary level of “*homo politicus*”, “*economicus*” and has reached the status of *homo integrus* (integral man / world man), capable of giving and receiving and above all, capable of a self-renewal.

The characteristic of the “new man”, *homo integrus*, is really that of affiliation to a world without boundaries and I think the United Nations is able to make this possible. Becoming citizens of the world, each individual will become aware of the importance of a proper presence and active participation in the building of society at all levels.

It is certainly, in this way that one can interpret the world in terms of universality, of internationality, of globalization, liberty, of equality, of responsibility and of interdependence, since each person is a part of a “whole”.

A multicultural society needs a proper lexicon with a plurality of meanings through which it will arrive at a new language capable of facilitating communication, peaceful and intercultural living amongst its citizens. This is why it is necessary to arrive at a new definition of those concepts as culture, race, ethnicity, people, community, citizens, since the subjects to whom they were formally referred to, have changed.

A new dictionary will liberate each and everyone from all forms of ignorance on questions about identity and diversity, helping everyone to consider any individual as an irreplaceable and essential member of the human family.

To conclude, I am suggesting that, a delegation of the Human Rights department of the United Nations visits Fontem and establish a centre of observation of this singular experience which is contributing in changing the face of the African vision of the world, presenting itself as a model of relation and dialogue between cultures.

I believe that solidarity, reciprocity and interdependence are today, the criteria of any intercultural community and society, the weapon of the “world citizen, of *homo integrus*.”

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