

DIALOGUE

Wings of unity:

effective and affective dialogue

The group 'Wings of Unity' met again for the fourth time. (See New City June and July 2017)) There were about twenty Roman Catholic Christians and Shi'a Muslims at the Sophia University Institute of Loppiano. As in the past, we experienced a moment of great cultural richness, but above all of spiritual richness. The topic chosen was 'Revelation' – certainly not the easiest one. Islam and Christianity differ profoundly on this theme, and if each theological position is not put into the context of an environment of peaceful exchange and deep listening, they tend to become rigid and even end in conflict.

Instead, as on prior occasions, even if diversity was not lacking, we lived an experience of effective dialogue because there was the affective dimension that was the result of many days spent together. This is not to say that it was sentimental – far from it! The affective part is born precisely from a long experience of mutual listening, acceptance, and the capacity for dialogue that welcomes the other, even if they are different, and without any pretension or expectation of modifying positions or points of view. In effect, this experience of dialogue is the experience of living before being an intellectual experience.

This was evidenced during the evening before our closed-door seminar in front of about one hundred and fifty inhabitants of the city of Loppiano, coming from different countries and nationalities. We shared the progress made over the last eighteen months and were able to communicate the deepest aspects of this experience. Even if the evening was completely improvised, what emerged with clarity was the vital dimension of this style of thinking entitled Wings of Unity. We spoke of the summer school which was held last August in Trent, but also of our personal experiences and theological and philosophical understandings that are emerging both on the individual and communitarian levels. In the hall there was a great warmth. The atmosphere took my breath away, and I imagine that those who were present also felt the same way. For two hours everyone listened intently and was deeply involved.

The impressions I heard at the end of the evening were quite different from the clichés we gather every day from the mass media on the relationship between Muslims and

Roberto Catalano reports on the continuing experience of Muslim, Christian dialogue: Wings of Unity which has been taking place in the Sophia University Institute at Loppiano, Italy.



Professor Piero Coda (left) with Dr Mohammad Shomali

Christians. The message that has been communicated through these common experiences of living and thinking is that dialogue is possible even when faced with the differences and difficulties that seem to block this spirit of unity.

Still, the strongest experience was once again the one lived with Mohammad, Mahnaz, Israa, Shahanaze, Hanieh, Sharazad, and so on. It was the experience of discovering that before anything else we are brothers and sisters – even before being Christians and Muslims. This does not mean giving in to an attitude of confusion. The characterizing elements of each one of those present were well-defined and clear. What makes a difference is the atmosphere of fraternity that was created thanks to this attitude of brotherhood. In fact, even brothers and sisters remain very different from one other. It is an experience that is difficult to describe unless one lives it. But once it has been witnessed, it is impossible to forget and dialogue becomes real. 

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Extracts taken from an article first published in 'Islam Today'