When religions are NOT a cause of violence...

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Letter to friends - Qiqajon di Bose n. 80 - Transfiguration 2026

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Dear friends,

For far too long now we have been hearing ‘talk of wars and rumours of wars’ (cf. Mt 24:6) and we find it increasingly difficult ‘not to be troubled’, resigning ourselves to the fact that this is how things have always been since the world began. There is far too much waste of life and an even greater abundance of contempt for life, of offences against human dignity, and of indifference towards the common good. There are now far too many innocent victims, guilty only of belonging to a particular people or ethnic group, of living in a disputed land, or of remaining faithful to their own identity and way of life. Far too many people are forced to migrate in search of land, a home, work and the dignity that comes with them. The squalid and inhumane prisons are far too overcrowded. Too many hospitals are prevented from fulfilling their role of caring for bodies and minds. Too many aspirations for freedom are stifled in bloodshed. Too many girls and boys are deprived of a future, if not of parts of their own bodies, of family members, or of their very lives.

For believers, moreover, there is an even more bitter realisation: all too often, faiths seem to contribute – or do in fact contribute – to the escalation of conflicts, the postponement of solutions, and the rekindling of hostilities. All too often, opposing sides include in their ranks people who ought to belong to the same community of faith or to worldviews characterised by solidarity. In this sense, we look on in dismay at instances of genuine betrayal by religious figures and church leaders, and at the failure of prophetic voices to honour their universal ethical mandate. One is tempted to agree with Jan Assmann, who states: ‘Gone are the days when religion could be interpreted as the opium of the people. Today, religion presents itself rather as the dynamite of the people’.

We know that all this is the result of deeply culpable and unwarranted exploitation of religions, as well as of the hearts and minds of so many men and women. Such exploitation is carried out by those who propagate a pseudo-god whose universal fatherhood they deny, attributing to him the traits of a bloodthirsty pagan god who blesses wars and takes pleasure in seeing his creatures die in the frenzy of shedding fratricidal blood ‘for him’.

Unjustified exploitation… which, however, risks becoming increasingly widespread and shared as a ‘common sentiment’. This is why, on the eve of the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, we wish to share with you two parallel initiatives that refute this sentiment. Two initiatives which, in recent months, have reached a point of no return in their long-standing journey of dialogue: on 23 January in Bari, during the ‘1st Symposium of the Christian Churches in Italy’, a ‘Pact between Christian Churches in Italy’ was signed, whilst on 25 June at the Ara Pacis in Rome, the “Religious Confessions and Traditions Present in Italy” signed a similar pact, entitled “The Italian Path to Interreligious Dialogue. Religions in the Public Sphere and for Social Cohesion’. Although each has its own specific focus – ecumenical for the first and interreligious for the second – these commitments both mark the culmination of a long shared journey and, at the same time, the starting point for a daily commitment to social cohesion, civil coexistence and dialogue between people of different faiths.

It was by no means a foregone conclusion that we would be able to achieve this: from too many quarters, old and new causes of division are tearing our societies apart, starting precisely with the faith one professes. Static and caricatured conceptions of others’ identities, religious language and imagery exploited for the sake of power and money, and a retreat into pseudo-religious extremism and simplifications that exclude the other, the different and the stranger, pollute the climate of coexistence even in our country and undermine both its internal cohesion and its ethical spirit.

Instead, thanks to the initiative undertaken with firm commitment by the Italian Bishops’ Conference through its Office for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, patient work aimed at mutual understanding, trust given and received, attentive listening and frank discussion, and a shared submission to the spiritual dimension of the human condition have produced two texts that can help defuse the violence of conflict and set in motion paths towards understanding and reconciliation.

An identical statement characterises both Pacts, affirming the irreversibility of the commitments made: “The option for dialogue is a path to be pursued with determination even when positions diverge and when internal or external pressures fuel divisions and discord amongst us and could drive us apart”. And the Interfaith Pact further clarifies: “Should the development of dialogue prove difficult to sustain, we nevertheless commit ourselves to ensuring that the fundamental values shared in the Pact are preserved”. A little further on, the text lists among the commitments undertaken that of “combating all forms of prejudice, oppression, discrimination and extremism: taking firm and clear stances, both within our faith communities and beyond, against hatred and persecution on religious grounds, such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and any other form. Similarly, to promote authentic, responsible and respectful narratives, committing to be vigilant regarding our use of language even within the Round Table itself’. This is a sign of sound realism, of a clear-eyed assessment of what happens every day in our country, and of an awareness that the temptation towards hostility is always lurking. But it is also a firm conviction that the path we have taken is not directed towards the past but towards the present and the future: if it has been possible to come together, understand one another and hold one another in high

regard amidst a climate of extreme polarisation, it will be possible to cherish the dialogue we have begun as a precious treasure.

Another feature common to both Pacts is the explicit reference to Article 4, paragraph 2, of the Constitution of the Italian Republic: “Every citizen has the duty to carry out, according to their means and their choice, an activity or function that contributes to the material or spiritual progress of society”. The Pact between the Churches links this constitutional provision to commitments “to respect the freedom of conscience of every person” and to the pursuit of “religious freedom for every person”, whilst the Pact between religious denominations and traditions sets out the scope of social cohesion envisaged by the Constitution as follows: “We undertake to promote the freedom and equal dignity of every Christian denomination and religion in relation to the State through a critical and constructive dialogue on the relationship between religion, secularism and politics in the Italian context, in the knowledge of the contribution that religions can make to the material and spiritual progress of society”.

In this spirit, the religions that have signed the Pact recognise that *“every religious tradition brings with it values, roots, experiences, practices, behaviours and a quest for the Sacred, in which space is given to the centrality of God, to prophetic messages, to sacred texts, to the experience of Transcendence and to the various forms of the ultimate meaning of existence” and are convinced that “listening to them can help to foster a climate of respect and mutual understanding and to create opportunities for encounter and collaboration*”. The path undertaken broadens the scope of dialogue from relations between Christians of different denominations and between believers of different faiths to civil coexistence within our society. It is no coincidence that the signatories share *“an appreciation of the value and complexity of being believers and practising members of different faiths in a post-modern, secularised, multicultural and multi-religious society, wounded by conflicts and extremism – including pseudo-religious forms – stemming from ethnocentric, domineering, closed-minded attitudes and cultural and economic colonisation”, as well as “the importance of acting together for the common good*”.

These are words that do not merely seek to ‘neutralise’ the alleged potential for conflict inherent in religions. Their message goes much further: the two ‘Covenants’ affirm that religions possess within themselves the capacity to foster social cohesion, and that each can contribute to deepening the spiritual journey of those who follow a different religious path. It is in this spirit that, for some years now, as brothers and sisters of Bose, we have been organising weeks of shared living for young people belonging to different religions and Christian churches. These are young men and women who now share the same cultural context – the Italian and European one – in all its forms and manifestations: in their daily lives they study or work side by side, face similar challenges, enjoy themselves together, and nurture dreams that are similar… yet they set aside their religious experience, assuming that in that space they have nothing to share and, worse still, believing that any attempt to share their faith might lead them to two equally dangerous risks: a religious relativism that would devalue each person’s own path; or the exacerbation of differences that would spark pointless conflicts. Sharing life for a week, however, leads them to discover how, far from any form of syncretism, listening to one another and to each other’s religious experience is an essential dynamic for building a new way of living together and nurturing that social fabric which they, as the new generations, are called to build, whilst becoming even more aware of their own faith.

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The brothers and sisters of Bose
Bose, 30 June 2026
Apostolic College