

Beyond 'mental dualism'

Editorial

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The late Fr Silvano Cola was an expert on the early Fathers of the Church, a psychologist and had a great understanding of culture and history. A few weeks ago, he would have turned 95. I still have a vivid memory of meeting him in a youth hostel in the mountains of the Valais region in Switzerland during the latter part of the 1980s. Those of us gathered there were a mixture of priests and seminarians. He spoke to us about the need to overcome what he called "mental dualism".

At that time, I had only been ordained a priest for a few years and although what Fr Silvano said fascinated me with its clarity and the vast horizons it opened up, it left me somewhat uneasy. What he said did not fit in with the mental categories I had acquired during my classical formation in Catholic doctrine and even less so with the standard mentality of young people during those years when white was white and black was black: compromise was out of the question! Decades on, and with the experience of life, it is easier now to accept the wisdom, depth and truth in that talk. All the more so considering how today, in both the world and the Church, we can see polarizations flourishing; where people are easily dismissed, excluded or condemned in the name of some "truth".

As well as arguing from an historical perspective – it is enough to recall the uninterrupted succession of bloody wars and ideological battles – Fr Silvano based his argument principally on two solid theological facts. The first: God the Father, who is absolute, the All, holds the Other (the Son) in himself and creates space for another "outside" of himself (creation). And secondly: the Son, made human and who during the Passion descended into a world of sin to bring Love and establish universal reconciliation. Obviously, space remains for human freedom and a person can refuse to open themselves to accepting this gift – and herein lies the whole drama of human history. However, such a divided and non-inclusive mindset will clearly have its limits and be based on shaky foundations.

The fact is that from the macroscopic level such as politics and the Church's vision to everyday relationships, we continue to fail to understand one another, continue to exclude others and often find ourselves polarized from them. Somehow, we have still not understood that we have been made to care for others in their diversity and welcome them

into our hearts so that we can allow them to work in us and enrich us. As Christians we are called to bend over backwards with love to address those things which seem to challenge us.

Without doubt, this is a revolution – one which is mental, anthropological, categorical and behavioral and which demands a continually new “conversion” of our way of being, thinking and acting in what we have to confront. Pope Francis, the Bishop of Rome “chosen from the end of the earth”¹, has, for the past ten years, continually invited and accompanied us in this revolution, this conversion, which he sees as starting from ourselves and our own experience. In this way, then, we can bring about that reform of the Church which the cardinals called for before the conclave which elected Francis.

There is a need to be open to and accept polarity. The pluriform is part of reality and being open and accepting of it helps us to avoid falling into sharp divisions. Doing so can enable us to learn that, as a matter of course, the inevitable tensions which arise among us can actually be something productive.

It is around this topic that the focus of the present issue of *Ekklesia* revolves, with particular attention to intercultural relations and with a look also at the contribution of Asian and African world views.

It goes without saying that this issue of *Ekklesia* cannot exhaust the broad topic of polarization and intercultural relations. While we are aware of the limitation, we hope that these articles can at least open up some avenues and offer insights that then translate into ways of action.

In conclusion, a nod to the existential. Not infrequently, diversity bewilders and disturbs us, and sometimes hurts us. If we embrace it with humility, however, it can be of enormous service to us: it breaks the sense of self-absorption and opens us up to what lies beyond ourselves. At that point we can then move to another level: not one of the simple and often cold confrontation of ideas and calculated solutions, but of a relationship in the space opened up by love where the Spirit blows and which can become creative and capable of true innovation.

¹ Francis, *First greeting from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica*, 13 March 2013