

Debate papers

Culture, hospitality and relational ethics: some philosophical reflections

Marc Colpaert MA

Founder of CIMIC, Postgraduate Course in Intercultural Management and International Communication, Katholieke Hogeschool, Mechelen, Belgium

ABSTRACT

This paper is an adaptation of a lecture on Culture and Hospitality, given in Bournemouth after the events in New York now widely referred to as '9/11'. 9/11 made it clear that at least some groups of people understood each other badly or not at all. It made it clear that there are tremendous misunderstandings in communication between groups worldwide, and within groups of people, especially when they think their worldviews, values, norms and ethics are at stake. Sometimes the conflict is articulated as a confrontation between the American (western) way of life and the Islamic way of life. After 9/11 something 'fundamental' changed our common world. The dominant (western) culture could no longer impose its creeds, its methodologies, its political strategies on other cultures. There is – not only in the Muslim world, but worldwide – a lot of resistance. The dominant culture has to analyse its own self-image and must compare it with the image which the 'other' has of him (or her). Respect for the self and respect for the other have to be brought in balance.

This article starts from the necessity to reflect on the more essential features of an intercultural dialogue. Reflection and dialogue are necessary because of increasing violence between individuals and groups on earth, and because of tremendous migrations. For his analysis the writer uses the ideas of philosophers like Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas and the psychiatrist Ivan Boszormenyi Nagy. The article distinguishes between the terms 'multicultural' and 'intercultural', and invites the reader to make a choice for intercultural dialogue and relational ethics. The consequence of such choice is the acceptance of an ongoing transformation within and between persons and groups. At the same time the reader is alerted to the need for inter-religious and interconfessional dialogue proposed by Raimon Panikkar, for intercultural dialogue is not possible without inter-religious dialogue.

Keywords: hospitality, intercultural, inter-religious dialogue, relational ethics

Introduction

On all levels of our society, we are confronted with diversity and with the need to deal with differences. Healthcare and education will have to play a key role in the guidance of transformation processes. Educational institutions must take the lead to prepare the coming generations for the hybridisation of our societies. This implies that students must be equipped to be able to accept, to cope with and to live in a constantly (inter)cultural, changing and transforming society. Fear of losing identity should be guided towards and turned into the experience of the richness and humanisation that a deeper and broader understanding of

diverse cultures can deliver. But this is not possible without pain and without perhaps feelings of conflict about what is 'common sense'. Common sense is about self understanding that is always – implicitly – present in our actions and linguistic expressions. P Bordieu (1980) writes about 'the silent and spontaneous acceptance of the world', 'a practical belief, imprinted by basic learning processes whereby the body is used as a living reminder'. Common sense refers to unproblematic patterns of interpretation, immediate familiarity with a particular social and natural world. Common sense has an association

with eternal truth, but on closer acquaintance an important part of it seems to be local understanding of normality and acceptability. Common sense can differ in each culture. It has a dialogical structure (your common sense is recognised and acknowledged from outside) and is connected with the social and cultural context. That makes cultural contact a possible destabilising experience. It is this common sense that is challenged: for the newcomers as well as for the original inhabitants. Therefore, an intercultural dialogue is always an experience of finiteness, of death and loss. Only afterwards can one say that the existential changes were gains. Nurses and teachers will increasingly meet people who cannot bear the culture shocks. Depression and aggression will increase.

People should be guided with regard to their fear of new socialisation processes. We can see the future in a defensive way, but we can also think of it in terms of a tremendous chance to experience the relativity of our way of life and to deepen our own cultural attitudes and values. Therefore we do not plead for a multicultural society in which each individual or each group would live in a kind of a ghetto. We opt for an intercultural dynamism that makes questioning and 'mutual fecundity' (Panikkar, 1999b) possible. Intercultural dialogue is about meeting the other so that changes can occur. Nobody knows where this will bring us, nor how and where it will end. And it includes of course the willingness to listen to each other's life story and to each other's memories. This process of listening should be fair and bring in the ethical dimension of relationships (Nagy, 1986; Krasner, 1995). The history of our memories and lives is always interwoven and marked by meaningfulness. The desire to be meaningful for ourselves and for others is always present. In our view the intercultural dialogue is a means to recognise the other in what he/she would like to be in the deepest sense, and within the individual's own culture. Acknowledgement is the keyword in the relational ethics of Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner (1986) and Krasner (1995). The philosophers Buber (1994) and Levinas (1966) say more or less the same: to be human means to address and to be addressed by the other. Maybe this is what hospitality ('accueil') and freedom are all about. And those who invite us to be hospitable are always and first the most vulnerable, the poorest, the weakest, the least healthy.

'Inter'

Intercultural challenges are what the expression itself already indicates. Life takes place *inter culturas*, between cultures, and this brings along challenges. Living together is not just a natural event. It is above all a cultural event. Living together is not living apart together in a

kind of a ghetto. That would construct a multicultural society: a society with many groups, and every group apart in a ghetto. But this is not what we have in mind.

The word 'between' (cultures) is a striking starting point. The first one to mention this in the last century was Martin Buber (1994). He drew our attention to the fact that an isolated 'I', a detached identity, does not exist, and that life itself comes into being, transforms and makes sense by what happens between people, and between people and things. An 'I' that sees everything as an object misses the essence of reality and goes under in a well of loneliness and scantiness. A culture that acts and looks in the same way will meet the same fate. On the other hand, an 'I' that sees the other (person/thing) as a 'you' ('du') will come to life and transform. The key to any human life is the other (thing/person), the Other (Levinas, 1966 in Sperna Weiland, 1999) that gives the 'I' the opportunity to formulate an answer, to give account.

Dominant answers

Apparently strange answers have been and still are being given to the cries of distress in life. These cries of distress are always linked to unwanted and wanted suffering, traumatic experiences, material and physical shortcomings. They cry harder every day. With each passing day, it is harder to hide or deny these things. Sadly, the answers given by dominant groups of humanity are not very innovative. They prefer sending the questions back to the ones that asked them, similar to sending the asylum-seeking refugees back to the place of conflict or tracing the cause of hunger and misery in the (other) poor and not in failing structures.

Intercultural 'learning' has everything to do with dialogue, with meeting one another. You initiate a meeting, but you never know where it will end. That is rather annoying for a culture which is keen on knowing everything beforehand, working efficiently, wanting immediate results, and short-term performances. Fortunately, this is not the case for over 80% of the planet's population. And if we want future generations to be able to survive, we are obliged to initiate a dialogue with those 80%: people without white skin.

The monocultural tragedy

'Become like us, adapt to our ways, assimilate' ceased to be the solution long ago. These are, by the way, monocultural thoughts which were tried out for centuries. According to the editor in chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Ramonet, 1997), our only chance to

avoid chaos is to see the individuality of the other, to take him or her seriously and come to a dialogue. To accomplish this, you have to meet him or her. We know that the western project of modernity lies under heavy criticism (Moreels, 1999). There are more and more questions concerning this model of thought. But so far, nobody has a ready answer. We have to trust the fact that cultures are strong enough to learn from each other without killing each other. Anthropologist Rik Pinxten (1994) emphasises that cultures only die slowly, meaning also that they can transform themselves slowly, because they do not easily yield up their time-honoured 'wisdom'.

Philosophical fundamentals: Buber and Levinas

'I' exist by the grace of my being related to life, i.e. related to the other(s) ... When searching for your identity, it is not so much the differences with the other that come to mind, but your ability to enter into relation with the other. (Benoit Standaert, 2000)

Sperna Weiland and others (1999) said that for Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, there are basically only two ways to give such relationship with the other a shape. Either the 'I' creates distance and objectifies the other, and enters into an 'ich-es' relationship. Or the 'I' links up with the other, and enters into an 'ich-du' relationship. For Levinas, 'ich-es' equals 'Totalité' (and war). In contrast, 'Ich-du' means the Infinite (and possibility of peace).

The war of each totalitarian system (regime) wants to be put to an end or broken through by the 'Infini', the Infinite, the eschatology of peace. Something inside of us, no matter where we are on this small planet, tells us: 'Thou shall not kill'. Something inside of us asks us to allow encroachment, even though we are unable to capture, describe, objectify or quantify it. And this something tells us: put off war, set up peace. War is an impossible issue for all of us, yet it exists. Initially, peace seems always far away, yet it is possible, sometimes, for a short period. And apparently, this is what every culture strives for.

'Ich-es' reduces life

In 1923, Buber (1994) had already pointed out an increase in the 'ich-es' relationship. He warned us about its dangerous consequences, about how an increase of an objectifying 'I-it' relationship automatically brings along a diminishing capacity to enter into an 'I-you' relationship. And this, in turn, brings along more 'system', more 'totalitarianism' which reduces

reality. Every educational system, every political system, every welfare system, every interpretational system is always under the threat of becoming a 'Totalité', which does not allow and even banishes every form of being different. For life to continue and be fertile, a continuous 'breach' of the 'Infini' (Infinite) or the 'du' in each totality or system is necessary. Consequently, the perfect system that western philosophy and sciences have been frantically looking for during centuries does not exist, and can and shall never exist. A so-called perfect system will always create war and needs to be interrupted.

Strangely enough, the 'Infini' (Infinite) always penetrates us from the outside. And it is always linked to something/someone unknown and vulnerable: the poor, the orphan, the widow, the refugee, the ill, the dying, the prisoner, the Other ...

About family and the dimension of relational ethics

Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy (1986, 1987) discovered that a family system through generations is potentially a system of 'totalité', where people – with good intentions – try to put things 'in order'. Nevertheless, loyalties and connections signal time and again, and sometimes unexpectedly, pain and injustice inside this system. They communicate a lack of balance in giving and receiving. People try to bring order to reality, but this order never corresponds to the 'human order'. In each relationship, there is an ethical dimension present that tells us: this is good, that is not good; this is just, that is not just; here is 'earned merit' or not. 'Earned merit is gained through contributions, care, and direct address offered to another – whether or not they are acknowledged or reciprocated. Merit is an attribute of relationship, coinage through which entitlement is gained and indebtedness is balanced.' (Krasner, 1995).

And just as for Buber and Levinas, for Nagy there is only one way to find out if justice in the relationship is done: communicate, enter into dialogue. It is the other one that can tell me if I have taken notice of his/her appeal in a just way. It is me who will tell the other if his or her offer or intervention answers my real need, necessity and desire.

Communicating puts off war and preserves me from betrayal that consists of not doing good.

Hospitality

Each meeting invites us not to commit betrayal. It means we have to keep on fighting the urge to make

the different other equal ('le même', the same) to ourselves. If we fight this urge, peace will emerge. If we do not fight it, war threatens and we lose the opportunity to experience life as the 'joyeuse force qui va' (Levinas, 1966 in Sperna Weiland, 1999), life as a joyful force, an energy that makes me walk.

One of the basic skills that contributes to happiness is hospitality and a warm 'welcome'. You could almost say the other is there to give me the opportunity to practise and put into practice hospitality. And the best exercise to accomplish this is to temporarily become a kind of nomad yourself, so you know what it feels like to be the 'unknown', the stranger, and learn from it to be a host.

Violence versus 'désir métaphysique' (metaphysical desire)

It will be necessary in the future to investigate whether the mechanisms of the micro- (family) world can be partly extrapolated to the macro-world. To say the least, we have to examine to what extent the shortcomings of our micro-world relationships cause effect (and affects) in our surroundings and the macro-world. What are the consequences of a worldview, where quantities, control, distance and objectivity are commonplace? How do people feel when they have been misled in their need to connect and meet with one another? How does a planet evolve when part of its population can no longer trust the other part, due to traumas, piled up grief, and violated trust? And how can peace be 'restored' in such a place? And, in that context, what do internationalisation and globalisation mean? Is internationalising a new act of violence, following in the steps of all previous forms of colonisation, but this time – as an Indian Jesuit told me – a colonisation of the mind?

Or is there a depth factor in this irrepressible internationalisation? Does it not hide – especially among the youth – the 'desir métaphysique' (Levinas, 1987), i.e. a desire for the unknown, the Infinite, a desire for what does not control, dictates or orders to death? In other words, a desire, an attraction towards the (o/O)ther, as well as a desire to be desired by the (o/O)ther. It is the desire to be peace for the other, the longing for the strange unknown. It is not the desire to grasp the existence of the other, but the wish not to make war. It is the relationship of a subject to an absolute different other, to *the face* (Levinas, 2003a) of the other. It is the face of the other that is looking at me ('autrui me regarde'). The other is a human being and therefore I am there for him/her. Levinas says, 'philosophy is about the humanism of the other man' (Levinas, 2003b).

According to Levinas all human beings have a desire, a longing for peace beyond all wars, a longing for the infinite, for the other. It makes us think of dissatisfaction with everything we have, the restlessness that can be suppressed but will not disappear, the invisible threshold from 'to have' towards 'to be'.

If this is the case, an internationalisation – that is not based on war and competition – can offer an enormous opportunity to 'learn how to communicate' (= dialogue) and not to remain in silence (= war). It would be a good path to follow, away from 'world apartheid' and terrorising everything that is different. *Only then can the conversation be about 'doing' justice.*

Intercultural dialogue and doing justice

Globalisation today is, at its worst, the not-always clear demand of one dominant culture towards other cultures economically to adapt themselves to the dominant culture, to utter the same words, to read reality and the world in a mostly neo-liberal economical way. The world is already paying for this demand.

A better attitude would be – and is luckily gaining ground all the time – no longer to see people as objects that need to be helped out, but rather listening to how they interpret our centuries-old relationships and how they translate them into economic terms. This means that our democratic demand as a standard for 'development' needs to be converted into a democratic conversation. Anthony Giddens (1994) even talks of an 'emotional democracy of the dialogue'. This means that we need to listen, in a compassionate and curious manner, to the other's association with life and death, with fear and sadness, with everyday 'sense'; in other words, having respect for the diversity in the cosmos of which everyone is part. This also means that international co-operation should never start from an urge to keep oneself 'busy' with the other; that this co-operation does not serve to (exotically) fill one's emptiness by the other; that one's travelling to learn does not mean travelling to gather knowledge and convert this knowledge into 'power'. The only sense internationalising makes, the only way in which it is worth the cost is to create peace, i.e. to put off war by allowing and tolerating the o/Other. Because in one way or another, we are all foreigners. Dorothee Sölle (1996) adds: 'every man "der Sehnsucht", everyone who knows such "homesickness" is a foreigner, everywhere'.

'Interculturalising' then means bringing up that homesickness internationally. This asks for mutual understanding and 'metanoia' or radical change, what the philosopher and theologian Panikkar (1999a)

means by 'arise/resurrect'. (Born into two major traditions, Catholic-Christian and Hindu, Raimon Panikkar has concerned himself since his earliest years with the interplay of traditions and disciplines. He is a philosopher and a theologian, with doctorates in chemistry, philosophy and theology. He was for many years professor of religious studies at the University of California in Santa Barbara.)

Transformation of and emancipation from patriarchal rules

According to Giddens (1994), it all comes down to this: appropriating traditional values in a non-traditional way. Western man is a modern man who has known the Enlightenment ('Aufklärung'). He will never have the same personality again as people in ancient civilisations. This man can honour his achievement of being an individual. He has become used to living under a social tyranny no longer. But now man has to decide about nature: what are we trying to preserve, what will be sifted out? He refers to marriage as a training school, in which partners both have to learn to live with the 'unknown', and work hard to set up an emotional dialogue, i.e. extending the antennae that discover and determine which urgent needs in society should keep politicians busy. This type of democratic functioning requires an emancipation from patriarchal rules of life, both the premodern and the modern ones with organisational patterns from above. Social innovation can only exist when pressure groups from the base ask attention for 'diversity', for those whose rights are at risk of being trampled upon. So, it all comes to handling tradition judiciously, taking on the parts that innovate and getting rid of the ones that oppress (De Schrijver, 1998).

Decoding the other and the nomadic truth

Migrants and immigrants, foreigners, and refugees are not in the first place a 'problem'. They are here, just like life is here; they announce themselves, just like life announces itself. They announce themselves for various reasons. It is our duty to decode and interpret these announcements. And this process of decoding brings about a lot of feelings, both to us and to the other. The other one says: 'I am sick', 'I am hungry', 'I am scared', 'I have been imprisoned', 'I have killed', 'I have raped', 'I have lost all my loved ones'. And as I say

the same things to him/her, I am the other one for him/her.

Granted, there is a lot to be learned during this process of decoding: the language of the other, the religious world of the other, the history of the other, the 'mould' in which he or she has been born. It goes without saying that the 'other' is being symbolised by the Moroccan, or the Turk, or the African. And the higher the number of others we see appear, the more frightening this Other seems to be. Nevertheless, there is no cause for worries or despair, since there is one truth (the 'verité nomade', nomadic truth) that each and every one of us carries inside. This (nomadic) truth says: 'Thou shall not kill'. It is the basis of every culture, because each human being wants to be treated with respect for his or her life.

This is something we have to take into account as well through education: every human being deserves respect and – as Buber says – wants to be freed of dullness, apathy, blindness, depressing moods, sickness of the soul, so that he or she may shine and be happy. The main point is to create justice in relationships. But this justice will only appear if I allow myself to be addressed by the difference of the other.

There is more to tell than 'what is better?'

Intercultural dialogue has nothing to do with altruism, idealism, or being nice to the migrants, the others. On the contrary, intercultural dialogue starts with the acceptance of the fact that everyone is influenced by the other. Secondly, it is a pragmatic experience of the basic human value that you cannot kill the other. Or even symbolic: you cannot eat the other. A society collapses, if it is reduced to the attitude 'it's me or him'. Groups of people organise themselves everywhere with the best intentions in order 'not to be lost'. And when a group can feel or see the benefit of it, it will not avoid conversation with the other, the new one, the stranger. Even assimilation takes place, if there is internal and external agreement about what is better.

But most of the time there is no definitive agreement because conversation and communication deal with more than material things. Apart from the gap between the rich and the poor, apart from the scandalous forms of neo-colonialism, there is more to tell about a living society. You need the other, even to become aware of what is 'better' for yourself.

Therefore it is possible that the confrontation with the migrants will save us and will save our culture. But it can mean that this economical, psychological, sociological transformation or 'mutation' will cause enormous loss and grief, for both, for 'us' and for

‘them’. The ‘third’ –the result of this transformation and the meeting of I and Thou – is what will come.

Religiosity and relational ethics

The debate (Colpaert, 2002) about what is ‘better’ and the agreement that follows belong to the intercultural dialogue. It is impossible to get through this process when there is no ground from which you can communicate with the other. This ground is always a ground of trust. This ground is in a sense also always a religious one.

There is no dialogue without commitment, no commitment without being open for everything strange. But there is one condition: there should be ‘earned merit’ or ‘merited trust’. And in order to know whether there is ‘merited trust’, you have to inform (= speak). If you want to know whether there is no trust at all, you have to ask why (= speak again). The number of people who do not speak with each other is tremendous. That means that the self-willed silence on earth is enormous. It becomes therefore very difficult to have an intercultural dialogue if one of the partners is living isolated, fragmented, in decay with him/herself. The pathology of not being able to communicate with the other can end in diseases and an absence of wellbeing.

The whole question of ‘religiosity’ is *de facto* a question of relational ethics. There should be an inbuilt willingness to relate with the other without the effort to make him/her equal to me, in the sense of ‘be my friend, so that we can get along’. The mission is not to become friends, but to live together in a way that we can deepen our own lives. This assignment (order) to discover the deeper sense of our own and common life sometimes sounds strange for western people. But the refusal to do it can hurt non-western people.

Inter-religious dialogue

‘We lost the plot as far as religion is concerned’, said Karen Armstrong (2001). Talking in Europe about religion or religiosity is not without danger. We should not mix up personal beliefs and (public) matters of the state, it is said. Being religious is something reserved for believers. During the historical process and context of the last centuries we arranged ourselves in camps: Protestants, Catholics, New Age people, Hindus, Muslims ... and non-believers. And some of us concluded that if the newcomers will not understand or accept our frames of references, our thoughts, then they should leave. But this is not beneficial and it is a lost opportunity. I cannot enter into dialogue when I refuse to try to listen, to know, to see, to understand

the meaning of life for the other. And the meaning of life is always about life and death. By listening to the other, I can come closer to my own (meaningful) experiences of life and death. A human being will always try to connect and to be connected with her own life, with the life of the other, with the lives of animals, plants, with nature, with the cosmos.

This urge to relate and to connect is indicated as ‘*religare*’ or ‘*relegere*’. The Latin word ‘*religare*’ means to connect. The Latin ‘*relegere*’ means try to read, solve your puzzle, explain. Each person wants to connect and to read his/her own life story. Therefore they need the other. We need each other. In that sense there is also religious atheism, and religiosity is not reserved only for the ‘believers’.

As a consequence, real intercultural dialogue will always be at the same time an inter-religious one, because the big questions arise: who is the other, who am I for him/her, and why did he/she come on my path? All human beings – especially in times of grief and suffering, in times of existential crisis, in times of physical vulnerability – would like to reveal the depth of our existence, the deeper reason why we are here for each other. In that case the dialogue will have to do with acknowledgement and this acknowledgement is about ‘justice; especially justice in the relationships, thus about relational ethics. Theologian and philosopher Raimon Panikkar (1999a,b) advocates ‘a more evangelic, ecumenical, and mystic religiosity’.

A more evangelic religiosity

This is about the joy to live. The Sermon on the Mount (St Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 5) proposes a radical change of culture: not the agriculture of the past, not the technological culture of the present, but the culture of the mind, the echo of humanity and the whole cosmotheandric reality, i.e. the affect of cosmos–God–human. We find ourselves in a moment of mutation of humankind. Without a new and authentic religiosity, inertia will drag us into catastrophe. We have to continue tradition, but without necessarily repeating it. We have to create it anew, but in a way it has not existed yet throughout the processes of the resurrection.

A more ecumenical religiosity

Panikkar fills this in a way more feminine than masculine, more passive than active. Ecumenical means changing oneself by opening up towards the other, by being influenced and fructified by the other. I renounce myself, in a way deny myself, in order to

transform. Christianity renounces itself and resurrects. If we lose the sense of things' quality, and only retract ourselves in a quantitative vision, and only interpret the universal in a quantitative way, theological difficulties and political calamities will rise. If we cannot observe and receive the sense of the unity of things, if a friend is not unique to me, or if a religion, or a son, or a country is not unique, then I lose the sense of each thing's uniqueness. One can only learn if knowledge is essentially one with love. You do not want to change your son with another one, even if the other one is more beautiful, better, richer, because you love your own son.

The problem is not Muslim, Hindu, Orthodox. The problem is enjoying the rainbow and seeing that without green there is no red, and without red there is no green; every colour is unique. It is the man from the Age of Reason who thought he could judge all religions. That is how comparative religious studies originated. 'La Déesse Raison' (the Goddess of Reason) could then judge all religions and classify them. But in life, some things can just not be classified and categorised. Religiosity is not expressed completely in one single religion. And each religion will be more itself if it develops its personality better. *Diversity is universality's form itself*. Nikolaus von Kues talks about one single religion with a diversity of rites, '*religio una in rituum varietate*'. I participate in the others by deep acceptance of this diversity. An ecumenical religiosity means a deeper religiosity.

Universality is the expression of the uniqueness of what each one of us discovers. What is needed is mutual fecundity. Ecumenism means precisely to open oneself to the other.

A more mystic religiosity; transformation

Every moment has a 'goût d'éternité', a taste of eternity. It is not about mysticism. It is about a third dimension. A third eye: the experience, the loss of fear, because I live my life to the fullest every single moment. Simeon the New Theologian says: 'He who does not live the eternal life now, will never live it afterwards'. That is the experience of Easter. Every moment – as in a symphony by Beethoven – has its beauty and its sense. That is surpassing of time. A mystical religiosity lives in real hope because it has the experience that that hope is not from the future: hope is from the invisible. Hope makes us live that other dimension, and allows us to live in peace. The Christian message is: do not puzzle your head over things, do not suffer, live to the fullest, with more joy, more depth.

Religious mystics also have a practical and immediate conscience: politics. It is in action that mystical life cultivates, grows, and finds its criterion of authenticity. Mystics find their criterion for authenticity in social and political engagement.

We have to surpass cultural schizophrenia in which religion is one case and politics another, as if they were two separate worlds. Intellectual distinction is not the same as existential separation. A mystic dimension is present in all things. According to Panikkar, it is transformation that is lacking. And that is a task of the mind: 'People of Galilee, why are you staring at the sky. Do not fear!' (*Acts of the Apostles*, Chapter 1, Verse 11).

Conclusion

Intercultural dialogue is not altruism nor idealism, but a very realistic attitude that can save human beings on this planet earth, if it is exercised in a good manner. 'Inter' does not mean 'multi'. The intercultural dialogue assumes that all human beings need each other and that they are transforming continuously. But the dialogue about that transformation takes place with respect for rhythm, time, space, and the history and memories of the other, and his or her loyalty within his/her own culture. The dialogue will – in a sense – confront monocultural traditions, because it is obvious that no single dominant culture can rule the planet any more. All of us have to talk together – in solidarity – about the future of the planet, the future of our children and grandchildren.

In considering intercultural dialogue, we can find a deeper vision and reliable philosophical and psychological thoughts with Buber, Levinas, Nagy and Krasner. Raimon Panikkar links these ideas with the religious dimension. He pleads for more ecumenism and for more feeling for the mystical aspects of life.

Essential for the possibility of an intercultural and inter-religious dialogue is the fundamental recognition or acknowledgment of the different other. Our meaning of life, even the reason for our existence, depends on that.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong K (2001) DNW Rooksignalen uit de nieuwe wereld, *Vanaf de grond opnieuw*. Interview with VPRO Dutch television after 9 September 2001.
- Bordieu P (1980) *Le Sens Pratique*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, pp. 113,115.
- Boszormenyi-Nagy I (1987) *Foundations of Contextual Therapy*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

- Boszormenyi-Nagy I and Krasner B (1986) *Between Give and Take: a clinical guide to contextual therapy*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Buber M (1994) *Ich und du*. [I and thou]. Gerlingen: Lambert Schneider.
- Colpaert M (2002) Interculturaliteit is interreligiositeit. *Noordzuid Cahier, De kracht van diversiteit*. Brussels: Wereldwijdmediahuis.
- De Schrijver G (1998) *De Hemel op Aarde?* [Heaven on Earth?]. Leuven: Davidsfonds.
- Giddens A (1994) *Beyond Left and Right. The future of radical politics*. Oxford/Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Krasner B (1995) *Truth, Trust, and Relationships*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Levinas E (1987) *De Totaliteit en het Oneindige*. [Totality and Infinity]. Baarn.
- Levinas E (2003a) *Het Menselijk Gelaat*. [The human face: essays of Emmanuel Levinas]. Amsterdam: Ambo.
- Levinas E (2003b) *Humanism of the Other*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Moreels R (1999) *De Mens: een remedie voor de mens. Ontwikkeling ont-cijferd. Een politiek manifest voor menswaardigheid en interculturele dialoog*. [Man: a remedy for man. Development deciphered. A political manifesto for dignity and intercultural dialogue]. Tiel: Lannoo.
- Panikkar R (1999a) *Réflexions sur la religion et l'Europe. Quid pro Quo 34:4*.
- Panikkar R (1999b) *The Intra-religious Dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Pinxten R (1994) *Culturen Sterven Langzaam: over interculturele communicatie*. [Cultures are dying slowly]. Antwerpen: Hadewych.
- Ramonet I (1997) *Géopolitique du Chaos*. Paris: Editions Galilée.
- Sölle D (1996) *Mutanfälle. Texte zum Umdenken* [Fits of courage. Texts to rethink]. München: DTV.
- Sperna Weiland J (1999) *De Mens in de Filosofie van de Twintigste Eeuw*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, p. 341.
- Standaert B (2000) *De Jezusruimte. Verkenning, beleving en ontmoeting*. [The Jesus space. Exploration, experience and encounter]. Tiel: Lannoo.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Marc Colpaert, Arnhoutstraat 4, 9111 Belsele, Belgium.
Tel./fax: 00 32 3 772 46 75; email: marc.colpaert@skynet.be

Received 10 January 2005

Accepted 12 July 2005