

IN THE SEARCH OF THE MISSING “S”

I would like to do what much more esteemed speakers have done before me... it is the natural pride of Italians ...

When I started to write my paper I read Religion and Human rights but I really understood Religions and Human Rights....

It is not that my English failed me all of a sudden ... it is probably a SLIP that is caused by a profound belief and that really puts me at great odd with most that has been said until today.

But let me give you some reasons for listening to me.

But first of all I need to clarify that I am not a lawyer, I do not teach law or work in a Human Rights organization. I am an historian and I teach International Relation and conflict resolution.

But I have been working for almost 30 years with the other part of the equation.... With Religions. I met thousands of them from all traditions and of the most different backgrounds and level of orthodoxy.

I tried to place them into our conference and I had difficulty imaginig them fit into our group and sharing our comments or even understand what we are saying.

Of course I am not talking about the people who normally participate to conference I am more speaking about the people that Kho spoke about.... We are rightly scandalized by the comments the person of the Malaysian government said, but unfortunately he is not alone in doing it.... I can easily say that the majority of religious figures I met, especially those who have the greatest impact on their people would in some way or another share that vision.

Our friend from Norway said it regarding Cairo Declaration and Islamic scholars but it could be true also about many other religious leaders

I need to contrast what he said about not giving to religious organizations the task of human righths... sergents and corporal are important but we need the

generals as well...

Moaz rightly says that we have to convince people that there is no contradiction between religions and human rights and only then we can use religions. Of course you probably already understand that in most of the previous interventions the missing S was finally found and we moved from Religion to Religions...

I feel that Religion and religions are profoundly different one tends to be a theoretical idea while the other is made of the concrete life of individuals

Some of you may already know it but we are, in some way, fixated, with the contact with concrete reality. Often theories need to be tested by the fire of history, in order to find credibility.

While there is the need of theorizations there is also the need of being adherent with reality

One of the difficulties in engaging religions in the work for human right I think is Language

David Little spoke about "Human Right Language"... I agree with him that there is a specific Human Right Language that has its own framework of values. It appears to me that however, this "language" is mostly unknown or at least not easily understandable by "RELIGIOUS ACTORS".

LET ME DWELL A BIT ON THIS ISSUE OF LANGUAGE I think, in fact that it is here that we find one of the

Rowan Williams said:

It is important for the language of rights not to lose its anchorage in a universalist religious ethic – and just as important for religious believers not to back away from the territory and treat rights language as an essentially secular matter, potentially at odds with the morality and spirituality of believers

We need to set the framework:

Religions are not residual of but on the contrary they are playing an increasing role in defining personal and collective identities.

In spite of the theory, quite popular in the seventies, that religions were declining and would soon disappear (J. Delumeau,), today we see a revival of faith, all faiths, all over the world, in the context of different cultures and economic situations.

This is what the French scholar Gilles Kepel called “la revanche de dieu” (1991) (the revenge of God). This religious revival began in the final decades of the last century and it runs through all religious worlds, particularly Christianity – in its different denominations (Philip Jenkins 2002) - and Islam.

In our globalized and interconnected world, the circulation of goods, people, and news, makes the economic and social changes of some countries immediately affect locations that are only apparently distant.

Crisis that would have remained almost unknown are today immediately global. Facing problems of this size and scope, such as the economical crisis the long lasting conflicts, the lack of a clear ideological position (many others could be added), as Tzvetan Todorov rightly said, men and women lose their bearings (L’Homme depayésé 1997) .

A sentiment of fear stems in individuals and peoples, a feeling that seems to rule over many men and women today. It is actually an unidentified fear - Bauman speaks of “liquid fear” (2006) - rising from the loss of one’s reference points, from the individual’s dismay in front of a global world.

It is in this loss of bearing and growth of fear that the resurgence of religion takes place.

They are the answer to the feeling of loss that many are experiencing, the source of security and identity that protect from a fear that too often turns into barren policies, incapable of visions of how to make a country or the world a better place.

Until now I've just hinted at what brings religions to be so important in today's society. I think it is very crucial to understand this because the questions that are often addressed to religions are profoundly linked with what we have just been saying. This is true on many fronts: peace/violence, coexistence, development and also human rights.

In it is so much so that, as I said, we may feel that the role of Religions in so many fields may be somehow overplayed. It is surely the case on the role of Religions in conflict resolution, a field that is more known to me, and I cannot avoid thinking that there is something that needs to be more deeply understood in the fact that we so many are today speaking about the positive or negative role of religions in today's world.

It is in this perspective that we have to see the interaction between religions and HR.

Religions have their own "anthropological structures" and paths. If we analyze them with purely secular instruments, from the point of view of modern and secular social scientists we are bound to miss the point or to favor only those religious instances that agree with us, thus missing the largest part of the religious world.

Let me try to explain: Religions can be extremely important actors on the field of human rights, but they are also very difficult players to understand and deal with if we are not able to use the correct categories.

We can talk about that later, and I also know that I may be discovering hot water (it is an Italian way of saying that I may be just say something stupid) but I strongly feel that there is a complexity in dealing with Religions, that needs to be made evident, understood, and supported.

We need to avoid religions to be a sort of new toy. Only in this way we can be able to harvest the full potential of religions also in the field of human rights (and in many other fields as well).

There is a language that is proper to religions as there is the language of HR. This language is as foreign to the secular world as that of HR is foreign to most of

religions.

We often think that look for a language that is too often similar to that of the NGO's, that are tuned to the requirements of what we know best.

But while we do this we blunt the power of justice of religions.

Because there is a power of justice, the profound longing to rights in religions. We may not always see it.... Let me make a couple of examples that I met very recently that can help us understand what I am trying to say:

1. There is an Imam in Sinai who works with those poor people who flee Eritrea and end up in the Sinai kidnapped by Bedouins and used as slaves or worse as body parts. His name is Awwad Mohammed Ali Hassan, he is 32 and he belongs to a Salafite current of Islam. He came to Rome recently and SE is collaborating with him to save these refugees from the hands of their torturer. He does not shake women's hand with great scorn of some journalist who immediately judged him unworthy of being received in our "advanced" world. But this man puts his life on the front line because he says that slavery and human trafficking is not Islam and that true Muslim have the duty of welcoming and helping those who flee from war and persecution even if they are, as they normally are, not Muslim. It is true he may not really respect women, as much as our developed societies do, but he is surely fighting against one of the worse plagues of the world. Surely a mixed message that upsets our easy made models and that forces us to reflect even more.

2. Even clearer is the very recent case of the issue of the military intervention in Syria that has seen a very patent strong opposition from Pope Francis. Some in the international Community, and in the Human Rights

community, were asking for a military intervention. The pope was completely opposed. Two different conceptions of justice clashed here: on the one hand we have a retributive justice that calls for punishment of those who have perpetrated a crime. On the other we have a religious leader that expresses the point of view of religions: "Peace is the true great justice".

It is clear that there is a problem here. We cannot say that the pope is not sensitive to the plight of the victims or that he supports the Assad regime. But the language spoken by the international community and by the church are so different that it appears they are not able to communicate. Punishment of the guilty, retribution, "what makes credible the opening of Damascus" is that they take place under the threat of military intervention... on one side on the other the words that are used are Mercy, Forgiveness, Reconciliation, dialogue.

In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue, and peace is spoken (Pope Francis Vigil of Prayer for Peace Sep 7th 2013).

Still both sides cherish peace (at least we must assume they do). The issue is how to reconcile these languages, but even more: is there the need of reconciling them or should we rather accept that different entities express their desire for justice in different ways and that we should respect and support them? Shouldn't we be smart enough to understand that we can long for justice in different ways and that, for example, for Christians the justice of God is rather unjust if measured with the standards used by the IJC.

To conclude:
Difficulty in elaborating models and theories
I do not know if it works in English but I think we need to understand that there is here a

need to have a “de-structured approach” that may build on various foundations....

Dialogue

Grass-roots and rootedness in the reality

Religions, a reservoir of spirituality and humanity.

In this world, ruled by fear for the other, by materialism religions are a reservoir of the spirit. Men and women of faith withdraw from the dominion of materialism, and within them they preserve a spiritual dimension. They can give a soul to societies that lose it fuelling contraposition and hatred.

Men and women of religion, as far as they are rooted in the true roots of their faith, can be men and women of peace justice and reconciliation.

Men and women who put human beings in the centre, not profit or competition; mercy and mutual welcome, instead of contempt and conflict. Men and women of faith are the keepers of humanity.

A great Christian Orthodox spiritual man, Saint Seraphim of Sarov (who by the way knew very little of HR issues), used to say: “obtain peace within you and thousands around you will find it”. And the great Jewish Rabbi Hillel (He too quite non used to HR) said : When you see no one “human” around you strive to be human”

The Mishna and the Gemara in tractate Sanhedrin teach us the truth in this context: "Man was created as a single individual to teach us that anyone who destroys a single life is as though he destroyed an entire world; and anyone who saves a single life is as though he saved an entire world," since the entire world and its contents were created from Adam, who was a single individual.

There are common values, which we can work on and commit ourselves to together.

Religions are an energy of peace, a barrier against the

violent drift of the world, they can
truly be a soul for a too soulless world.

And only the soul can deal with the profound wounds
that conflict, injustice generate. It
may take a minute to sign a paper of to express a
general principle but it takes
generations to heal centuries old wound and fears. Syria
is again an example of this.

Prophecy Beyond Human Rights