A diplomacy of small steps to build trust

Interview* with Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States within the Holy See's Secretariat of State

Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher during the reception in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary Queen of Palestine at Palazzo della Rovere, the headquarters of the Grand Magisterium of the Order in Rome, last October. Here in the picture with Msgr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa and Msgr. Antonio Franco

The Order of the Holy Sepulchre works hard to be at the service of education and peace in the Holy Land, notably through supporting schools and universities where Muslims and Christians study together in a tangible dynamic of interreligious dialogue. In your view, what does this pontifical institution represent and what do you expect of it during the coming years?

The Order of the Holy Sepulchre continues a great mission of support, both practical and spiritual, for the works of the Church and the Catholics present in the Holy Land. Through the activities of its members over the years it has shown the Church's concern for the faithful in the Holy Land. In the current context, we all know how much interreligious dialogue is essential. In particular, it is crucial to educate towards a serene dialogue and coexistence to ensure a durable peace for the generations to come. The educational efforts which enable both young Christians, who already come from diverse ecclesial realities, as well as young people from other religions, to grow-up together, to learn, to share and to evolve in a dynamic of harmony, are the true seeds of hope. Without doubt these efforts do not make the headlines, but they lay the foundations for the future and already witness to true fraternity in diversity.

What is your episcopal motto and what does it reveal about your diplomatic mission in service of the Church in "undoing the knots" between nations?

“To walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8), this is my episcopal motto. It corresponds to the third part of the prophet Micah’s response to the question from the people on what the Lord expects of him.

This motto invites us, first of all, to “walk”, to advance and to look ahead, because we are all on a journey, a path that leads us towards the fullness that God wants to give each of us. This path cannot be undertaken without God, nor can it be undertaken without others, without those men and women entrusted to us, sent to us by the Lord. It is also a journey and a growth in fraternity which demands great humility. In the diplomatic domain in particular, humility is essential, not only in favouring and constructing a true dialogue but it is also indispensable for continuing to work without tiring of building trust, all the while acknowledging the achievements obtained which, by definition, belong only to God.

The Palestinian State was recognised by the Holy See one year after the historic visit of Pope Francis to the Holy Land. How could this recognition tangibly stimulate peace in the Middle East?

For many decades, the conflict in the Middle East has not ceased to cause suffering, doubt, lack of understanding, division and isolation. Time only worsens the situation and its wounds. Yet stability and peace must necessarily lie in justice, the recognition of the rights of each person and the security of all. The two States solution has presented itself for a long time as the best remedy to the conflict and to guarantee a future and a stable peace for the people who are directly affected. It is based on safety, justice and the rights found at the heart of the internationally recognised borders. Enacting such a resolution certainly demands courage, “the courage of peace”, as Pope Francis says. It also demands determination and consistency. In the long and difficult Israeli-Palestinian peace process, it entails, above all, recognition of the fundamental needs of individuals and peoples. Evidently, the resolution of such a conflict will constitute a fundamental step in favour of peace in the Middle-East.

What is your position on the subject of the resolution adopted by UNESCO last October concerning the holy city of Jerusalem and “occupied Palestine”?

A complex controversy that has been ongoing for a long time, has resurfaced following the resolutions adopted by UNESCO last October. We note that the question, in its basic outline, was essentially treated from a cultural point of view and from the point of view of international rights. The decisions taken by the States must of course be respected. However, we can only reiterate, as the Holy See has already highlighted, the importance of the sacred and universal character of the city of Jerusalem for the three monotheistic religions. In this sense, the recognition of a special statute for the city on an international level is, clearly, necessary. It is to be wished that no party should be deprived of its own historic links with the city of Jerusalem and a realistic solution should be found, which would reflect the identity and the vocation of the Holy City.

Personally, as a man of the Church, where do you draw hope in these obscure times of “a piecemeal war”, and what promising signs can you give regarding a “peace in little pieces” which advances as well, without making the headlines?

That’s a very beautiful question! At times, it can seem difficult to cultivate hope whilst we are witnessing multiple acts of violence, touching most often innocents, children, families, people who cannot defend themselves. The blind violence, which characterises this “piecemeal war”, according

to the term used by Pope Francis, has dramatic consequences, as well as causing suffering and injustice. The Apostle St Paul exhorts us to be men and women of hope, hoping, like Abraham, “against all hope”. And so he charges us to work humbly in our daily life, through little acts of peace, of fraternity, of humility and of reconciliation which are seeds that are indispensable to the construction of a true and enduring peace in which we must never cease to believe in and aspire to. Peace is a gift to patiently look for and which “becomes handmade in the hands of men” – as Pope Francis recently said. The Holy Father himself often makes reference to “diplomacy of small steps”. To some extent, we already have encouraging signs in recent events relating to Cuba, the Central African Republic or Colombia. Here we can certainly also speak of a “peace in little pieces”, a peace which is rooted in the communal consciousness that we are all brothers in humanity and which is fed by faith in Christ Redeemer and Prince of Peace.

Can you speak to us about the vision and engagement of pontifical diplomacy concerning the migrants and refugees of the Middle East? Among those issues which Pope Francis considers priority; can you reveal some of your recent actions?

As you know, the plight of the refugees is an object of particular attention for Pope Francis. He has often expressed his concern for these people through concrete signs and gestures. The Holy See is committed on a diplomatic level in favour of the peace process in the Middle East and for the resolution of problems which are at the origin of migrations. At the same time, the Catholic Church is engaged in aiding refugees and migrants in numerous ways. Through the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, which supports and coordinates the initiatives of different Catholic organizations and charitable associations, the Holy See looks to respond notably to the concrete needs of refugees present in numerous countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Cyprus and Egypt, without mentioning of course the aid brought to the populations of Syria and Iraq who live in dramatic circumstances. Since September 2014, a central point of information on Catholic agencies has also been put in place – for those who are helping the Iraqi-Syrian humanitarian crisis – in order to facilitate cooperation and the exchange of news among the different Catholic agencies engaged in humanitarian aid for this crisis. In 2016, the ecclesial network rallied more than 200 million dollars which enabled aid to be brought to more than 4.5 million people; a number which remains too small, taking into account the great need, which demands greater mobilization. I would add that from January 1, the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* constitutes one on the principal centres for the new Dicastery for integral human development. In that respect, we can highlight that the Pope himself wanted to reserve the management of the future department for the migrants and refugees, which once again reflects the commitment, on all levels, of the Church in supporting these populations.

*translation from the original interview in French

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