

**Presentation by the Co-ordinator of the Youth Council for religious and cultural pluralism.**

**UNICRI Tourin 17-18 of April 2008**

Dear Colleagues, Dear Guests,

It is for me a great honour to chair this session of such an important seminar, which is taking place in a very beautiful place. I would like to thank Mr. Calvani for having invited me. Moreover, I would like to apologise for my very poor English, but I am sure you will show a very diplomatic patience.

I would like to speak, about the experience of the “Italian best practice of the youth council for religious and cultural pluralism”.

I would like to do it starting from an extended context, as a reflection in progress, starting from the reason why we’re here today.

The famous sociologist Zygmund Bauman wrote an essay in 2001 titled “Missing community”. The first phrase of that essay says: “We miss the community, because we miss the security”. I believe this phrase could be more realistic if it be overturned. I would say: “we miss the security because we miss community”.

The community is that kind of circle some people feels to belong to in virtue of something that belongs to everybody, that is shared and that is in common.

The entire set of the thing we have in common, is the thing that create a Community and it is our Identity. So, Community and Identity are at the same tome inside and outside the same reality. Let’s start from here.

On 15th of December 2006, when the Italian Minister of the Interior Giuliano Amato and the Minister for Youth Giovanna Melandri created the Youth Council for religious and cultural pluralism and appointed me as co-ordinator, neither I, nor the other 15 members of the Council knew exactly what was lying ahead of us.

We did not know, then, that we were doing something of unique in its kind, something that would have soon aroused an intense and widespread interest. For this interest, for your attention I wish to thank you.

Probably not even the Ministers knew it, but they had had the intuition and the courage – and I repeat “the courage” because in this Country when you make such choices as a so-to-speak “junior politician” of fifty years of age you need courage– they had the courage, I say, to issue a challenge. They issued a challenge to old practices, to the old way of thinking, to the new problems of our society.

This challenge consists in giving the task of analysing integration forms and practices not only to experts and scholars but also to a group of (young) citizens who will have to sound the very depth of living together. It is a full relief challenge.

It is a challenge against easy forms of syncretism that recognise only the fascination of religions far away from the dynamics of reality.

This is a challenge against the “prophets of doom” who find in their identity only the round for a clash of civilisations.

It is a challenge to make more flexible the somewhat rigid national and international systems, which, both in practice and in doctrine, often struggle to keep at pace with a contracted and rarefied society.

This challenge takes place in Identity-Community debate.

We do not have pretensions to give an answer and even less to teach a lesson. We are only trying to find a new communication channel. A new key that would help us to better understand today’s reality in order to better govern tomorrow’s society.

Let me briefly deviate from the main topic of my speech.

Up to the Seventies the mathematics and the euclidean geometry could positively measure the extent, length, and variation of linear functions, thus exactly predicting what the status of a system would have evolved in a given point of space and time. It could happen, though, something that would have the system deranged, so to say, in

which case the old logical tools were useless. In other words, we would have entered in an area of turbulence or «chaos». This happened mainly in the realm of physics and its application, for instance, to the analysis of atmospheric, or economic phenomena.

In the Seventies, the advent of the computer allowed for the first time to simultaneously master a wide range of data. Thence, the theories of chaos and complexity begun to spread, since it was at last possible to prove that the chaos, stemming from the input of a great number of variables into a linear system, was not the mere absence of internal logic. Instead, it had its own logic, albeit one that could not be measured by traditional methods.

The concept of “chaotic stability” allowed the sciences to understand, perhaps only to grasp, several mysteries of the universe. But the real revolution was in the essence epistemological. The scientific community realized that reductionism reflects a dumb approach to reality, that euclidean geometry does not fit every space, that mathematics sometimes is an opinion.

I am saying that because the theories concerning discontinuity and complexity have been successfully applied to social sciences, from sociology to politics to economics, and I believe that they could be useful for us. As turbulent, chaotic and deranged our society may appear to us, a society where identities crumble away and build up again in schizophrenic and conflicting ways, perhaps has just grown up a complex system, i.e., a system whose variables are more, and more diverse, than those experienced until now.

The models we were used to apply to human and intercultural relations look exhausted. Even the law, national and international, is unable to regulate the new relations. We must find out a formula for expressing the dynamic stability of the apparent chaos which surrounds us. We might even discover in it a fascinating and coherent rationality. I have just come about this topic, and I am trying to write something on it.

However. A complex society showing different colours and scents. Different languages are spoken and rhythms from remote countries are danced. But a complex society has different faith, cultures and thinking style into it self.

All of this is changing our Country (a bit late compared to other countries). Italy is becoming a kaleidoscope where the different coloured pieces do not mix, but together form a new pattern of colours.

This magic we believe it to be a complex society. What makes a society complex is not the number of factors, nor the range of overlapping problems. If this were the case, it would only be a complicated society.

We say that a society is complex when all these elements, ambitions, fears, hopes, languages, values and faiths are intertwined and change the true aspect of the society the very way in which society perceives itself.

In order to do this, we need to think with new tools, aware that they are sometimes gross and imperfect but at the same time heartened by the fact that the greatest explorers had nothing more than compass and telescope.

As the encyclopaedists of the Eighteenth Century – who had to start rewriting the lexicon to express their ideas to face a new world and a new way of perceiving the world – our first effort must be that of abandoning old patterns and identifying the concrete terms of dialogue.

We too must start by re-defining ourselves, by specifying our identity.

By now, all scholars agree that it is in the identity crisis (be it personal, cultural or social) that lies the wound in the fabric of Western societies where the microbes of various fundamentalisms take root. The attacks to the London and Madrid undergrounds and the increasing alarm of recent weeks prove it.

It is necessary to develop a new system of values and laws which would not mortify, but support individuals in keeping their sense of belonging to their nearest group and then create bridges to link these different social realities coexisting in the same

territory, peacefully because serene. This system should be free from any suspect of proselytism, cultural colonialism and mean overpowering.

It is necessary to understand that cultural and religious identities in the same cohabitation area cannot be segments of divisions, but pieces of the mosaic of pluralism, which is the basis of our democratic society; moreover: actually it is the basis of our own identity.

While developing a new lexicon able to tell ourselves, the State and the States cannot ignore the intrinsic dynamism of identity factors, but must attract them, harmonise them and arrange them in a single far-reaching system.

The cornerstone of this system must be the principle of the “Laic State” that is evermore the breath of every democracy. This secularism must not be against or in favour. A “harmonising secularism” to accept, promote and support dialogue in the interest of the entire society.

What does all that mean for our Council?

Well, I think it is meaningful, since the idea of the Council was putting all these factors in a test-tube, as it were, and trying to having them react. It was like a laboratory experiment to test an hypothesis.

The analysis was: our is a complex society.

The hypothesis is: in order to find a chaotic stability we need to struck a balance between two contrasting forces: the first commands us to affirm, protect, promote diversities (of languages, religions, gender, cultures, etc.), the other requires us to streghten social and civil cohesion.

The main chemical reagent are: deep identity, meaning religious identity and youthness. Why these and not others? Because religious identity is part of the identity of each and everyone, even if we are not always aware of it. And youthness because my generation is the first generation which was born and educated in a totally new cultural and political space. I mean a space designed by the EU, the Euro as a common currency, the Erasmus project, the You-tube, the Inter-rail, and so on. But it

is a space hit by a new form of terrorism, too. Al Qaeda is very different from the terrorism of the last century as Red Brigades or ETA.

So, in the Old Continent, scratched by centuries of parochialism, struggles for independence, wars of religion, this is the first generation which has experienced the thrill of living, studying, making sports, in a word growing up side by side someone very alike and at the same time very different. Framing these identity differences in the shared space of daily life is what we do.

Our Council was created for this purpose and is already shaped this way. In the beginning, I used to speak about our inspiring principles and purposes, but now, after one year, I am speaking about what we already are. I should say, how we live, work and enjoy ourselves together while we eat, work and joke everyday.

Being together on a daily basis, each one with his/her own identity, but all wanting to learn, to get to know each other and support one another, proves that integration is possible, although it is difficult to fully achieve, but it is already there.

The creation of the Council is the will of a Government that is re-thinking itself. It shows the will to overcome old ideological, cultural and political taboos and to create a secular institutional forum to promote the exchange of views and build a plural society. Moreover, we are betting on the “healthy protagonism of the youth”.

Personally, I would say I have learnt that through this experience to know better the man who lives in our society. I have experienced our human condition. More than ever, each and everyone of us is mirrored in a beautiful verse of the Odissey, reciting

“*we sail over the wine-dark sea to men of strange speech*”. (Odissey 1st Lib. Line, 183)