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SOURCE  
AN ESSAY  
ON INTERCULTURAL  
DIALOGUE

Translation  
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*If you want to reach the source, you must go upstream, against the current...*  
John Paul II, *Roman Triptych*

This essay is devoted to the perspective of understanding, often referred to as reconciliation, or even communication. It should be noted, however, that this is not a manifesto calling for the adoption of specific views in a political, religious or economic perspective. It is also not a handbook for establishing contacts properly, because it does not give ready examples of understanding others. We leave this up to the reader, for whom this book can be at most an inspiration. That is why I do not promote a utopian vision of the world without misunderstanding, a characteristic of totalitarian regimes. Here I only suggest how to cross them, indicating that the only proper reference is to refer to Dialogue as sources of the value of each and every person, without excluding anyone.

Here we find the answer to the question about the possibility of entering into an interpersonal, inter-religious, and intercultural Dialogue. This Dialogue trespasses all the boundaries of differences and divisions arising on their basis. It is like a merciless fire consuming all bridges constructed over the chasms of mutual aversion. Through it, we attempt to answer the question: how to do we conduct a Dialogue and strive for reconciliation? How can we enable the joint existence of cultures that are not quite next to each other, because this can be done by violence? We want to be together with all our civilization wealth, which is a viaticum for culture, and at the same time its measure. The solution to this puzzle, from which the source of each *I* flows, should be first revealed to *Thou*. By discovering yourself, we always go against the current...

*Helsinki, MMXVI*

## Source

What is a source? It is the beginning, from where water flows, where the world as we know it begins, because a source connects things. That's why we can say that it is a meeting, actually containing the idea of a Dialogue. It is an opportunity for reconciliation despite differences, and thus it is also a desire that allows us to get to know ourselves, to understand the meaning of something. A source is not a place nor a specific proper name. It is a dream that everyone has, although sometimes not everyone is aware of it.

Therefore, we should say that a source means intentions, and therefore, it is the path we follow, even though we sometimes do not understand its purpose. This is because intentions begin with everything, but intentions are also an end. However, this is not the usual path that we normally imagine when we think about the journey that we have already left behind, the one we return to in our memories and whatever is still unknown and ahead of us.

A source is an attitude, it is an obstacle overcome by our thinking, it is an attitude towards *Others*, and therefore towards ourselves. Perhaps this is why finding the answer is to understand what is *Other* in the sense that it cannot be reduced to the same identity. The source contains not only a note of such natural curiosity, but it also brings about understanding

and enrichment thanks to knowledge about the *Other*, so much so that it becomes the basis of one's identity.

A source is the start of a meeting, which gives us the opportunity to learn, but it is still only a possibility, because the rest depends on the intention. After all, we only get to know someone when we meet them personally, in a variety of ways. Only then do we also get to know ourselves as we are, sometimes discovering someone we didn't expect to see.

A source is also a choice that we must always make. After all, we cannot think about nothing, because even then nothing becomes something, as Parmenides said.<sup>1</sup> In addition, discovering a source, which is a meeting, brings hope. Yet, it is also a challenge, it is a path and a goal, a great opportunity and space for the word that opens us up when we speak.

If existing only means meeting someone, what do we know about ourselves and *Others* without a meeting? What will *Others* know about us? We are the meeting and the words (*logoi*), the words spoken in it. Nowhere can one experience the intention as clearly as through words. We're talking about a world made up of words, and this by no means is a philosophy of language.

History is the words we are waiting for, words to be spoken, words carrying some contents. There are no words without contents, nor intentions without a purpose, and even if they were pointless, they would then become the goal. Words are all the encounters that always take place in different, sometimes completely unexpected contexts. We meet on battlefields and use words such as *kill!* We meet in completely trivial perspectives, when we give the price for a loaf of bread, or if we want water or use more direct words, such as those in a *Dialogue*.

Silence is also a word, because we cannot narrow a word down to words. Silence also has contents that are sometimes more meaningful than a flood of meaningless words. The history of these meetings will help us to understand, it can unleash the stupidity hidden in stereotypes and repeated lies, and thus teach wisdom, because the words spoken are not always what we expect to hear.

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1 G. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, vol. 1-5 (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1975).

Hence, the experience of words is invaluable, showing their value. They are words we expect to hear the most, and also those which we should avoid. Words other than our own can be heard only from beyond the horizon of our world, because they are a testimony, as Karol Wojtyła puts it. It is the testimony of someone we expect from beyond the sea, someone who lives in the world outside ours. This testimony comes from the outside, just like spoken words come from the outside. So what are words?

Words are so very important because they are meetings in which we also get to know ourselves, who we are towards the spoken word, how will we behave, or whether we will respond with a hateful word to hatred? But we only learn this in being with the *Other*, looking at words, because the less we know about what is over the sea, the less we know about ourselves. It is *Otherness* that allows us to understand ourselves and discover where we come from.

The ancients desired to sail overseas in search for answers. They sought an *Oikoumene*, the spring, to learn about *otherness* and understand themselves, in search for the source. We need someone to whom our word will be addressed, otherwise we will only be leading a monologue, asking a rhetorical question: *to be or not to be*? But to whom do we say these words if there is nobody there, and we are not even looking for anyone there? We do not even know ourselves, therefore, the word *I* is only possible towards *Thou*. Value does not come only from the *I*; this would be a dangerous kind of selfishness.

There is real value in a meeting, because this is also where *I* begin, just as *Thou* also begins. Only then is *self-awareness* possible, and, according to Martin Buber, *I* can only be in the face of a meeting with *Thou*, in the face of a word without which *I* am unnecessary, because who would *I* be if *Thou* were not?<sup>2</sup> Let's leave this rhetorical question up to the reader and think about whether the source is also footsteps that we leave behind, or maybe it is the footprints that we follow.

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2 M. Buber, *Ich und Du* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008).