

CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION FOLLOWING ŽELJKO MARDEŠIĆ'S IDEAS

Kovačević Vlaho, PhD¹
Malenica Krunoslav, MA²

Abstract: *Following the idea of the famous Croatian sociologist Željko Mardešić (Jakov Jukić), this paper analyzes Mardešić's vision of Christian dialogue and cooperation in the context of contemporary sociology of religion. The presented vision of dialogue and cooperation in relation to various social, cultural, and religious changes calls for expanding the space for dialogue and cooperation. According to Mardešić, dialogue and cooperation presuppose the existence of opposite ideas and not necessarily identity; otherwise, they would be reduced to mere confirmation. Thus, dialogue and cooperation observed separately contain an entire program and are key to the realization of Christianity in the future. Željko Mardešić sees the future of Christianity along the lines of the Second Vatican Council, which remains the "compass" for the Catholic Church, on four council levels: establishing a dialogue with divided Christians, major world religions, non-believers, and the modern world. Importantly, dialogue and cooperation in the Church represent an unavoidable prerequisite to establishing four effective dialogues with the world. In this context, the authenticity of Christian dialogue and cooperation, according to Željko Mardešić, can be summed up in a few demanding words: kindness, forgiveness, mercy, service, peace, and the joy of hope. A person – not seen as an object but a subject of experience – is certainly changed by every dialogue because the experience itself is dialogical and open to cooperation.*

Keywords: *Željko Mardešić, Christian dialogue, cooperation, Second Vatican Council, Christianity.*

¹ Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Croatia, e-mail: vkovacevic@ffst.hr

² Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Croatia, e-mail: kmalenica@ffst.hr

Introduction

This paper will focus on Christian dialogue and cooperation following the ideas of the famous Croatian sociologist of religion Željko Mardešić. Born in a little place of Milna on the island of Brač, he spent his childhood in another little place of Komiža on the island of Vis. After that, he came to work in Split. He called himself a “social religiologist” (Jukić, 1997 p. 11), feeling the “difference and suffering of both neighboring and distant countries and people with whom he did not share race and soil, blood and faith” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 215). He researched with “intellectual curiosity, conversational consistency, and metaphysical responsibility” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 215). “He was convinced that our world is one, and all people make God’s great family of brothers and sisters who are responsible for each other and for the common world” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 215). “People need to meet and talk so as not to destroy each other, and be joyful” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 215), because “dialogue can change a lot, otherwise everything can be ruined” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 325).

In Mardešić’s understanding of religiosity, dialogue is not something inherently given and self-evident, something innate – although human is an ontologically dialogical being. The dialogue needs to be realized, which is often very painstaking. The time has come, according to his book *The Peacemaking Testimony*, when no longer one wonders “how high or true a religion is, but how consistently it is lived in reality”. Namely, “ideal principles will no longer justify evil deeds, but only good deeds will justify ideal principles”. In other words, “Religions should in fact answer what they have done for peace, forgiveness, coexistence, tolerance, understanding, how much they have helped the lonely, the sick, whether they have raised their voice in favor of the poor, the exploited, and the underprivileged, and not what they have said or signed in countless ineffective declarations” (Mardešić, 2002 p. 34).

1. Christian Dialogue and Cooperation According to Željko Mardešić

Everyday experience tells us people avoid dialogue. They do not want it because dialogue “requires, among other things, meeting the other face to face, having an open ear for the other, acknowledging our own responsibility and guilt” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 6). The main obstacles to dialogue exist on a personal level because a personal dialogue forms the basis of all other dialogues. Finally, the dialogue is always personal, concrete, and it takes two people for a dialogue. “A person, an individual, is, after all, one who understands and accepts the necessity of dialogue, or not” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 8).

The analysis of Mardešić’s work, especially his books *Face and Masks of the Sacred* and *A Split in the Sacred*, indicates that the author finds the meaning of religious dia-

logue within the limits of understanding religion and religiosity. Religious dialogue, therefore, undeniably belongs to the very core of religion and religiosity. Therefore, if nowhere else, at least in their own religion and religiosity, in their own dialogical relationship with God, people would have to find a foundation and justification, precisely the necessity of dialogue. This discovery of dialogue at the *Second Vatican Council* played a crucial role in Mardešić's life and he dedicated his life to dialogue – not only in his personal life of a believer, but also in his professional life of a scholar.

According to Mardešić, the flows of Christian dialogue and solidarity can serve to well-intentioned seekers of the sacred and those who analyze religion and its fate in the modern world in a serious and responsible way. In the book *A Split in the Sacred*, he points out: "Religion can be both a great evil and a great good depending on man and his free choice" (Mardešić, 2007 p.8). Thus, "the study of religion, even from a predominantly social perspective, is inseparable from simultaneous humble human openness to the immanent and transcendent" (Vuleta et al., 2005 p. 36-37). One must embark on the experience himself – especially in matters of Christian dialogue and cooperation. According to Mardešić, this is one of the preconditions for Christian dialogue and cooperation. This establishes a relationship that lays new foundations for the internal social structure of Christianity.

We can point out how Christian dialogue and cooperation also presuppose opposites between individuals. Both the opposites within the church, as well as opposites with divided Christians, the world's great religions, non-believers, and the modern world. Therefore, Christian dialogue and cooperation do not necessarily require an identity determinant (disciplinary, theoretical, individual), otherwise they would be reduced to mere confirmation. Dialogue finds its source and origin in human freedom. "We talk because we are free beings, not prisoners of ideological divisions. (...) In short, first we are free, and only then can we choose religion. Dialogue, of course, means not only a conversation out of freedom and for the freedom of the other, but also a duty to respect the other, even to actively serve them" (Mardešić, 2007 p. 128). Christian dialogue and cooperation, therefore, are neither simple nor unambiguous.

2. Mardešić and Christian Dialogue in the Sociology of Religion

The obstacle to the sacred and the secular is what helped Željko Mardešić understand Christian dialogue and cooperation both within the ecclesial and social reality in a new way (Jukić, 1997). Mardešić constantly notices the obstacles and pays most attention to them, to the boundaries dividing the secular from the sacred. The boundaries of religion and religiosity lead us to the return of the sacred, whatever it may be and however it may be realized in social terms. The development of the sociology of religion poses a great challenge for this very view, "that's why the judg-

ment about the influence of society on religion should always be completed with an assessment about the influence of religion on society" (Jukić, 1991 p. 64). "According to social phenomenology, Mardešić approaches the understanding of church and social reality, i.e. religion and the world, always as an active act that equally includes subject and object." (Kovačević, 2017 p. 769).

In his book *Faces and Masks of the Sacred*, Mardešić writes that, in contrast to nationalism and political, nationalized religion, "believers and the Church are more defended when defending human than when only the persecution of believers and the Church are seen as a violation of human" (Jukić, 1997 p. 452). These are sociological essays on political Catholicism, the relationship between religion and politics, ecclesiastics and politics, which were not seriously researched in Croatia other than in the studies of Željko Mardešić.

His incentives for Christian dialogue and cooperation come from outside the main focus of the sociology of religion. This is a phenomenological contribution that emphasizes the importance of experiential grasping of the sacred or the secular. "Because precisely the type of behavior that he (Željko Mardešić) observes as a scientist, changes depending on whether a person is in the sacred or the secular" (Ćimić, 1992 p. 7). The analysis of Mardešić's work "shows a consistently derived phenomenological orientation" (Vuleta et al., 2005 p. 36-37) of the approach to Christian dialogue and cooperation. It is, in fact, identical to the personal experience of religious destiny in the concrete world. This means that the discourse on Christian dialogue and cooperation is only legitimate, according to Mardešić, if it conveys and mediates personal experience. The experience that human gains through their understanding and absorption of religiosity, i.e. the very subject of research into religion.

One can only establish a dialogue in concrete, not abstract terms, with persons, and not purely theoretically, with one's head or mind. In scientific research practice, therefore, there is a need for a completely new method and a backlash against rational techniques of researching religion. This does not mean the sociology of religion should abandon its dominant theories and scientific techniques, but there is a need for a scientific dialogue with other scientific approaches and disciplines, here specifically with phenomenology. Certainly, this has been the legacy of Željko Mardešić, who has brought together Croatian scientists from different disciplines to this day.

3. Christian Dialogue and Cooperation in Modernity

Mardešić's view of solidarity, his sociological insights on religion, on Christianity motivated the changes that occurred in the overall position of the Catholic Church at the *Second Vatican Council*. His writing was especially encouraged by sufferers whom we must not ignore. That is why he spoke, wrote and acted so much out of Christian responsibility for the world. A world that is increasingly globalized, net-

worked, but also shared and conflicted, has led him to dialogue and testimony for human.

In the book *A Split in the Sacred*, Mardešić points out: “The presence of dialogue takes place through the testimony of goodness in the world. Therefore, another feature of the relationship between the Church and modernity is manifested in the active commitment of believers to their neighbors who live in modernity” (Mardešić, 2007 p. 126). The understanding of the contemporary social role of the Church is argued in the book in such a way that “there can be no ideological controversy, much less a philosophical defense of Christianity, which was unfortunately abundant in the past. (...) Dialogue never refutes the opinion of others, but seeks the availability of humanity in oneself and in others. (...) The dialectic of truth in faith is different from that of wisdom. Therefore, Christianity does not grow from the lies of others, but from the truth of its own” (Mardešić, 2007 p. 127). In his discourse on dialogue, from the one in the closest environment to the social dialogue and dialogue among members of other religions or with people who declare themselves atheists, Mardešić does not advocate any deviation from the truth. Better said, he advocates a joint search for the truth.

On the other hand, in the book *The Peacemaking Testimony*, he points out: “even today, we prevent, remove or suppress the peacemaking words of God’s people, suffocating them in the noise of our fears, or in the cacophony of voices of false peacemakers and reconciliators”. And our time is the time of traders, not prophets, as the great peacemaker Željko Mardešić would say. A time in which both “the state and the Church raise their adherents in a spirit of conformity because this gives the best results in the area of usefulness” (Mardešić, 2002 p. 38)

In another book *Responsibility of Christians for the World*, Mardešić emphasizes that “Christianity differs – or at least it should differ – from other worldviews because its martyrs do not hate their tormentors but try to forgive them” (Mardešić, 2005 p. 52). It is important to keep this in mind when we, as Christians, engage in dialogue with Christians of other confessions, with non-Christians, with non-believers, and with the world in all its pluralism. Dialogue, and especially Christian dialogue, is “not self-understandable”. It should be wanted, should be taught all our life, and Christian dialogue “requires preparedness and making sacrifices”. Christian dialogue is an “expression of practical unbelief or practical of faith” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 113).

Conclusion

We can say that Christian dialogue and cooperation “contain a whole program and a key to the realization of Christianity in the future” (Mardešić, 2005 p. 101). “The dialogue is an ongoing and uncertain adventure, which is always at the beginning” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 323). The beginning of the epochal dialogue at the *Second Vatican Council* with divided Christians, the great world religions, non-believers and

the modern world marked not only a great turning point in relations between the Church and the world, but above all in relations within the Church itself. In the book *A Split in the Sacred*, Mardešić points out that: “the fundamental and first dialogue should be established with the modern world, because it includes divided Christians, non-Christian believers and those who do not believe at all” (Mardešić, 2007 p. 128).

“We can conclude that an open and (self)critical intra-church dialogue is a prerequisite for a credible dialogue of the Church with the world. Conversely, the dialogue with the world enriches and strengthens the dialogue within the Church itself. Unfortunately, such dialogue in the Church is largely lacking” (Šarčević, 2021 p. 314), as confirmed by Mardešić. “Both because of the monopolization of the Church by the hierarchy and church officials, and because of the chronic ignorance of believers” (Šarčević, 2021 p.313-314). Believers who are mostly on their own. And who often distance themselves from the Church or imprison themselves in smaller groups of a spiritual-proselytist or conservative-militant type” (Šarčević, 2021). Often with a hostile view of the world. In this regard, Mardešić did not hide his personal experience of the turning point, and especially he did not hide all the resulting good and desirable consequences for Christian dialogue and cooperation.

The issue of Christians dialogue becomes the daily activity of Christians where we ask what could be done to bring social communication back to its essential tasks of freedom and truth? This relationship is not possible at the cognitive-theoretical level of the relationship between the subject and the object, but through the relationship of dialogue as a relationship between subjects. So, we think that this relationship is not, in essence, a dialogizing opinion that is a matter of the mind (Ćimić, 2005 p. 178). Everyone must step in front of the other. Each other personally, as individuals, with their whole being, their existence. “That is why God can not be revealed to the mind as a participant in the dialogue, in all its reality as a whole” (Ćimić, 2005 p. 178). This does not mean that a person must remain in a monologue with himself, but that he should start a dialogue with others, to go to a higher level and that he (re) establishes his life on new foundations, that in the future mutual relations are based on completely different foundations. So, the fundamental motives in the creation of dialogue are not found at the level of social forms, but in the vital transformation of people to sustain themselves in the nightmare of life with uncertain origins and socially threatening challenges. It is only through personal communication of belonging, not through dialogic thinking, that communion (Latin *communio*) is established between people.

Perhaps no one better understood that a person should not be part of a multitude, a mass and herd than the Danish philosopher S. Kierkegaard. Today we would say part of a mass social communications and technological changes. Changes that lead to an understanding of life that is associated with the loss of uniqueness, identity, personality, merging into the uniformity of the mass. “A good and fruitful dialogue is conducted by believers with a strong character and proven identity, who

do not gamble with the truths of their faith, nor do they represent them authoritarily or condescendingly" (Šarčević, 2021 p.92). That's why we started talking about identity when we stopped talking about community - today we start talking about community, because we've been up to our necks in identity. In such circumstances, it is certainly more and more difficult to understand ourself and the Other. This is especially evident in contemporary modern society, where religion once again has the public function of a powerful and political ideology.

Željko Mardešić sees the future of Christianity along the lines of the Second Vatican Council, which remains the "compass" for the Catholic Church, on four council levels: establishing a dialogue with divided Christians, major world religions, non-believers, and the modern world. Importantly, dialogue and cooperation in the Church represent an unavoidable prerequisite to establishing four effective dialogues with the world. "The meaning of dialogue for Christian practice should consist in the exercise of Christian love" (Vuleta et al., 2005 p. 385). In this context, the authenticity of Christian dialogue and cooperation, according to Željko Mardešić, can be summed up in a few demanding words: kindness, forgiveness, mercy, service, peace, and the joy of hope (Topić, 1991). A person – not seen as an object but a subject of experience – is certainly changed by every dialogue because the experience itself is dialogical and open to cooperation.

In postmodern society, community still exists, but in its fragile and changing way of new forms of community. Despite all these, the community proves to be very clear and devoid of major doubts, and it is impossible to establish it without dialogue. Community, as formulated by Day, refers to "those things that people have in common, that connect them, and that give them a sense of mutual belonging", which is certainly "a fundamental aspect of society, perhaps its very core" (Day, 2006 p 1). Here, of course, we should not forget that, as Day warns, the community includes, but at the same time excludes. Because defining a community inevitably means drawing the boundaries that divide it from that and/or from those who are not part of it. But despite this exclusivity (which is only the inevitable flip side of its inclusiveness), the community - in that unquestionable part of its meaning - refers, as Robert Nisbet formulates it, to "something that goes far beyond a mere local community". In doing so, he refers to "all forms of relationships characterized by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral duty, social cohesion and continuity in time", from which, in his opinion, it is not an exaggeration to conclude that "of the fundamental ideas of sociology, community is the most fundamental and the most far-reaching" (Nisbet, 2007 p. 69). This need for belonging, despite its importance, seems to be most radically challenged in the uncertain conditions of modernity, in today's "popularity" (of idea and practice) of community, which should be recognized first of all as a response to the crisis of solidarity and belonging, which is aggravated and at the same time caused by globalization.

In other words, we could say that Christianity, through dialogue and cooperation, has a place for those who are rejected, destroyed, trampled by others.. This is not

easy. The quality of communication creates the quality of communion. The richer the community, more open and comprehensive, the more it becomes a sign and testimony that humans establish diverse – vertical and horizontal, individual and social – relationships. They confirm their vitality in a variety of communications (dialogues) thus testifying to the realized communion. Christian dialogue and communication ask what is happening below the surface, where tectonic disturbances in people's consciousness and society are still happening today. Renewal of Christian dialogue and communication and their redefinition and revaluation become a historical imperative in the trials of communion. It is up to us not to ignore this request, which has a decisive meaning and significance.

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