



Testimony and/or Dialogue

JC2033 is an invitation to renew witness to the risen Christ. Witness is a major "value" of JC2033 which is defined as follows:

"So the World will know! Imagine every disciple of Christ proclaiming together: "He is Risen indeed!" A common witness between Christians will be credible and impactful if we love each other in the Holy Spirit! This Jubilee of the 2000 years of Christ's resurrection (and its preparation) is a historical opportunity to share in words and in actions the Love of God to the ends of the earth".

But what is the relationship between dialogue and witness? During the Anafora meeting in Egypt in September 2021, this question arose strongly in the context of Islamic society, where most of the participants came from. <https://jc2033.org/en/news/blog/535-global-gathering-2021-anafora.html>

Witness requires attention to different contexts. The democratic West lives in a very different situation from the Middle East where a Muslim confessing Christian risks his or her life, and from the Asian world with its religious diversity.

Schematically, one could say that the "historic" churches (Catholic and members of the World Council of Churches), especially in the secularized context of the northern hemisphere, emphasize dialogue, with the risk that the trumpet sounds confused. The Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, on the other hand, place more emphasis on witness, with the risk of proselytizing. Some even oppose them: between the two, one should choose! In this article, we would like not to oppose them, but to articulate them in the light of the Gospel.

Jesus, faithful witness, and person of dialogue

Indeed, meditating on the life of Jesus, we find a key. Jesus was both a person of dialogue and a "faithful witness" (Rev 1:5). He was not an armchair philosopher but walked the roads and let himself be approached. He was interested in people, listened to them, asked them questions, did not exclude anyone, was willing to change his mind. Sometimes he questioned them, and with some he bore witness to his inner life and his constant dialogue with the one he called "Abba", his father.

Neither dialogue nor witness is therefore an ideology or a doctrine but consists in following a person whose life has been a constant dialogue, in both its horizontal and vertical dimensions. And to follow Jesus is to live his words. By living the Gospel, one becomes imbued with the art of dialogue and the witness of Jesus. The key is sensitivity to discerning

what love in Christ calls in each circumstance, based not on a preconceived plan, but on an actual relationship with whom one is in conversation.

An art of dialogue

It is in a framework of friendship that witnessing is lived. By meditating on the life of Jesus and living his words, we train ourselves in an "*art of dialogue*" which can have the following characteristics.

1. Dialogue according to the Gospel means, first of all, ***excluding no one***. It is addressed to all and does not discriminate in any way. If, as Jesus says, God cares for everyone, making his sun rise on the good and the bad alike (Mt. 5:45ff), we must show equal concern for all.
2. This art of dialogue then consists in ***taking the first step***, without waiting for the other to take an interest in us, like Jesus who took the initiative to love us, while "*we were still sinners*" (Rom. 5:8). To dialogue is not to ask the other person to be open to dialogue, but to try to live it before talking about it, and always to start again when it is difficult
3. To dialogue means to ***consider the other as oneself***. It means living the "Golden Rule". This rule is found in one way or another in all religions, also in humanist, non-religious thought ("the principle of humanity") and which Jesus gave in this form: "*Do to others as you would have them do to you*" (Luke 6:31). It is a good basis for dialogue and should be recalled often. It means making yourself small before the other person. Considering them more important than yourself.
4. To dialogue means to remember our common humanity. Before being a Christian, I am a human being, made of the same substance as a Jew or a Muslim, a Buddhist or a Hindu, an agnostic or an atheist. The Bible refers to our humanity as being created in the image of God. To dialogue, then, is to ***encounter the image of God in the other***. The image of God is the thirst for relationship and friendship that God has placed in us, for He is in Himself relationship (Trinitarian) and friend of humans.
5. To dialogue is to ***welcome the richness of the other***, the "seeds of the Word" (as the Fathers of the Church say) scattered in him, the "joy" that God pours into the hearts of all (Acts 14:17). To dialogue is not to go in search of an emptiness of God in the other, but to seek to discover, with discernment, what God has deposited in him or her by his "*common grace*".
6. To dialogue is to ***look at the other without judging them***. The gaze can be a terrible weapon that ignores the other, but it can also become a force that resurrects him. In ancient Greece, slaves were called *aprosôpos*, 'those who have no face'. To look at another person without seeing them is to deny their personality. When meeting a different person, one can be filled with prejudices and fears. This internal interference blurs the encounter. It is a question of being attentive to what is inside us. How do we look at the other? How did Jesus look at the other? He makes people special through the confidence that emanates from him. "*Jesus looked at him and loved him*" (Mark 10:21)
7. Dialogue means ***respecting the identity of the other person***. It means not putting pressure on them, nor locking them into our own categories. It is to recognize the

other as other, as they are, as a subject and not as a being to be conquered. Wanting to change the other means a lack of love. The path of dialogue is, on the contrary, to renounce changing the other... but rather to transform myself. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to transform... And others can be transformed to the extent that they see that I am willing to acknowledge my limitations, my mistakes, or my wounds.

An ever-possible horizon of dialogue is that of the cross: love is not loved. How did Jesus react? Well, in the face of refusals, Jesus continued to maintain an attitude of dialogue. To the very end, Jesus maintained this dialogue. In the face of contempt, he either kept silent or asked for respect, and in the end he asked the Father to forgive those who crucified him and did not know what they were doing. (Luke 23,9, 34; John 19,23).

This is what we also must do: ask for respect.

Jesus also expressed emotions, frustration, or anger. His "cry" on the cross – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" - is not silence, but a cry of anguish. His "why" might also contain some of these rawer and more visceral emotions as well.

In the face of injustice, violence, and all kinds of exclusions, we have also to make room for a prophetic dimension. There is a time for everything: and sometimes it is time to protest. But it is also true that many people do not know how to link this need with a spirit of reconciliation, to clothe themselves with charity and to pray inwardly, before, during and after difficult encounters.

8. To dialogue, too, is to "**become one with others**". The apostle Paul is our master in this art, he who gave himself entirely to all, making himself Jew with Jew, strong with strong, fragile with fragile, Greek with Greek (1 Cor. 9:19-22). It is a question of trying to reach the universe of the other, to perceive his inner music, to understand him in his sufferings and joys in order to serve him concretely. It means entering the shoes of the other person.

Here too our model is Jesus, who in order to reach us "*emptied himself*", as Paul says (Phil. 2:7). By emptying myself, for love of Jesus, I create a space in myself where the other is welcomed. This is not easy and requires constant training, because our affections, our ideas, our desire to be right or to defend ourselves stick to us. We don't always have the categories to fully understand each other, so there will also be unintentional missteps and misunderstandings. But this emptying out of ourselves is the secret of a dialogue that can lead to a profound encounter. So, dialogue is not only about sharing knowledge, but also about sharing our life experiences and our inner life.

9. To open one's heart to the other is also to **share one's spiritual experience**. To dialogue is in fact, after having listened, to propose what our faith says on a given subject, without imposing anything, without a hint of proselytism, solely out of loyalty to God and to ourselves and sincerity towards our neighbour. For Christians, it means sharing the hope that animates them following the death and resurrection of Jesus (cf. Acts 4:20; 1 Peter 3:15). It means saying who Jesus is for us, how he can bring us fully into communion with God and with human beings.

Dialogue leads to witness, but it is also true that a challenge is that it may be perceived as proselytizing, even if we have no intention to proselytize! Our witness

may indeed be received by others as such, because of their sensitivities. What does it mean to build enough trust to get beyond these kinds of challenges?

10. To dialogue is therefore, in the end, **also to deepen one's own identity**. The more we open ourselves up to members of other churches, religions, cultures, etc., the more we also need to root ourselves in what is at the heart of our Christian identity. Encountering others simplifies us and brings us back to ourselves; it helps us to get to the core of our faith. It does not destroy the truths of the Christian faith but underlines them. In particular the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, who died and rose for our salvation. Today, as in the past, it is not easy to be a witness to a "*crucified Messiah, a scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles*" ...and to a Messiah "*risen for our justification*", as Saint Paul tells the Corinthians.

There is therefore a certain tension between dialogue, which welcomes the other, and witness, where we share our Christian roots. This tension arises from the discontinuity introduced by the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and by his resurrection from the dead. But this witness to our spiritual roots is also part of the dialogue. If we hide our roots, there is no real dialogue. It is our roots that allow the tree to spread its branches high and bear much fruit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to open hearts to Christ and to witness to the truth of his person, life, teaching, death and resurrection.

Witness in words, deeds and relationships

It is also good to keep in mind, in the context of JC2033, that the Gospel witness has a triple dimension to be held together. Evangelization is not only verbal, but also includes incarnating a reality in actual relationships and actions. This core idea should enter in our understanding and could be a very helpful bridge between Christians.

- ***In words***, through the proclamation of the "*Kerygma*", the witness to the death and resurrection of Christ: "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Mat 28:19-20). Faith is produced by the announcement of the encounter with the Risen One: "*What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you*" (I John 1:3). (I John 1:3) "*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the word of Christ*" (Rom 10:17).
- ***In deeds***, "*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*" (Math 5:16). In particular the "*works of mercy*" done in the name of Christ for the most vulnerable, the sick, the prisoners and the strangers: "*Whatever you did for the least of my brothers, you did for me*" (Mat. 25,40).
- ***By relationships***, we have with each other as followers of Jesus: "*By the love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples*". (John 13:35). Jesus emphasizes the aspect of reciprocity: it is mutual love that distinguishes the community of disciples. It is rooted in the divine life itself, in the Trinitarian dynamic into which we can enter through the Son of God.

The "profile of Mary of Magdala"

JC2033 highlights the "Profile of Mary of Magdala" in the Church, namely the importance of the announcement of the resurrection, but this profile goes hand in hand with other profiles: Petrine profile (Peter and the ministries), Marian profile (Mary and the life in the Holy Spirit), Johannine profile (John and the relationships of love and unity in the community), Jacobean profile (James, shepherd of the Church born of the circumcision, the importance of obedience), Pauline profile (Paul and the call to justified believers to welcome one another) .

The testimony embraces two inseparable paths: the implicit and the explicit, salt and light! The implicit witness of life through actions and relationships is symbolized by the salt of the earth, (also the leaven buried in the dough); and the explicit proclamation of the Word of the resurrection is illustrated by Mary Magdalene...and the other women, "apostles of the apostles". They are light on the mountain.

These forms of witnessing have often been contrasted, but they should be distinguished and articulated: evangelization is both a witness of life and a word to be proclaimed, even if there are different charisms: "There are different gifts, but it is the same Spirit". (1 Cor. 12:4)

If, however, our witness in words is not supported by the witness of life, our words are useless: "*If I do not have love, it is of no use to me*" (1 Cor 13)

Two proposals

- **Sharing faith journeys**

During the Nyon Gathering (November 2018), we experienced this fruitful proposal of the Global Christian Forum, which consists in sharing our personal encounter with Christ in small groups according to the Global Christian Forum method. Recently, several JC2033 actors have also experimented with this method during the French-speaking Christian Forum (October 2021). <https://romandie.forumchretien.org/christian-forum-of-french-speaking-switzerland-let-us-share-our-faith-stories> .

This approach allows us to practice witnessing in a context of dialogue and to build trust and friendship between members of very different churches. Consideration should be given to the appropriateness of introducing such a process into each JC2033 gathering.

We are pilgrims, like the disciples on the "road to Emmaus", who share their story by giving space to Christ among us. His presence gives us confidence and humility to open our hearts to one another.

- **A book on witnessing**

One of the projects of JC2033 is to publish a book of faith stories that illustrate the power of the resurrection of Christ. We invite believers of all ages, backgrounds, and churches to submit their stories in response to the question: "*What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to you - in your journey, your church or your engagement with the world?*"

Would you be willing to share your journey in 750 words?

Martin Hoegger – 3 August 2022