

Dialogue That Opens Us to Others' Religious Experiences

An interview with Dr. Cinto Busquet

*A book in Italian on Rissho Kosei-kai's Founder Nikkyo Niwano titled **Incontrarsi nell'Amore (Encounter in Love)** was published in September 2009 by Città Nuova, Rome. Rissho Kosei-kai invited the author, Dr. Cinto Busquet, a Spanish Catholic priest and a member of the Focolare Movement, a Rome-based worldwide Catholic lay organization, to lecture at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters on September 5. After the lecture, DHARMA WORLD interviewed Dr. Busquet on the content of his new book and his thoughts on interreligious dialogue.*



Could you briefly explain the content of your new book, *Incontrarsi nell'Amore*, which we learned is based on your doctoral thesis on Founder Nikkyo Niwano?

Four years ago, I was asked by the Focolare headquarters to take a doctorate in Buddhism at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. I specialized in interreligious dialogue from an academic point of view, and speaking with my professors there, I thought that the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Nikkyo Niwano, would be a very good topic to choose as the focus of my research. That was because, as Paul Cardinal Poupard [former president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue] says in the preface of my book, Nikkyo Niwano was one of the most eminent Buddhist representatives who have entered into dialogue with the Christian world, as well as other religions, but specifically with the Christian world. During the last decades of the twentieth century, he was one of the most prominent Buddhist leaders who engaged in interreligious dialogue.

As you know, there are a lot of misunderstandings among people engaged in interreligious activities, because Buddhist categories and Christian categories in this case are not the same. People misunderstand concepts or words because they do not mean the same in the categories of the two religions. One of the main aims of my research and my book, therefore, was to try to understand and to explain to Christian readers a few of such important religious concepts in Buddhist categories.

Cinto Busquet was ordained a Catholic priest in 2001 and has been working at the International Center of the Focolare Movement in Rocca di Papa, Italy, since 2003. He received a theology doctorate from the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome in 2008 and now teaches fundamental theology at the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome.

One such concept is Ultimate Reality. Buddhists do not speak about God. That is because they have other categories of words, such as the Buddha, the Dharma, and so on, to express that Reality that is beyond all phenomena of our world. It does not mean that Buddhism is an atheistic belief.

One more thing is about man—the anthropology of Buddhism through the teachings of Founder Niwano, about how he is seeing man from a Buddhist point of view. By studying Founder Niwano's teaching and his understanding of man and Ultimate Reality, I tried to understand why he was so deeply engaged in interreligious dialogue and collaboration, and why he was so proud of proposing it to many people, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. And in my research, another aim was to try to understand what we can learn from this, from a Christian point of view.

You lived in Tokyo and Nagasaki for seventeen years, from 1987 to 2003, as a member of the Focolare Movement and engaged in dialogue with religionists in Japan. What are some of the fruits of your experience in Japan?

Many things, of course. But from the religious point of view I will say one thing. As you know, most Japanese people do not identify with a specific religious organization or a single religious group. That is a typical situation for most of Japanese families and individuals. But at the same time, I think the Japanese people are a very religious people. They have a religious heart, which is called in Japanese *shukyoshin*. People are very sensitive to one another, and Japan has a long tradition of cultivating that sensitivity and of sharing a general sense of harmony with other people and with nature. I think that is a religious attitude, a very important and a very deep one.

The fact that many Japanese are indifferent to religion and

do not trust organized religion may be because there were incidents such as the sarin attack in the Tokyo subway by Aum Shinrikyo in 1995. There is this strong mistrust among the general public toward religious organizations because the public generally thinks that religious organizations focus too much on material things, power, money.

Rissho Kosei-kai, on the other hand, stresses religious experience, living religiously, putting into practice religious teachings in daily life, in being useful to society and other people. In the Focolare Movement also, while being a Christian institution, a Catholic one, we are open to people of other religions and we stress living in a religious way. I think from my experience in Japan, one of the things that I understood through this experience of collaboration with people of Rissho Kosei-kai is that the important thing is to show a religious experience and propose a religious experience. In that way people can open themselves to the deeper dimension of reality.

Mainly from my experience in Japan, I was able to experience at a very deep level that if we live as religious people and if we sincerely put into practice what our respective religions teach, then we can deeply meet each other in that spiritual dimension, in which we realize that we are really one. It is an experience that comes from my engagement in the Focolare Movement for almost thirty-five years.

I had a lot of opportunities to meet and work with members of Rissho Kosei-kai, and because of that, for me it is not just a question of diplomacy or an external collaboration, but as religious people we are making something possible together.

In general, what do you think is the current status of interreligious dialogue, especially between Christianity and Buddhism? And what are your expectations of it for the future?

As you know, in the Christian world, especially in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965, there was a boom in interreligious dialogue. There was a very strong interest in interreligious dialogue, and I think it is possible to say that the Catholic Church was at the forefront of it.

After twenty or thirty years, however, people started to realize that there were not many concrete results. And at this present moment, I think that in the Christian world—and I would say specially in certain sectors of the Catholic Church—there is a kind of disappointment in what we can achieve through interreligious dialogue, except for the area of cooperation in the social field and things like that.

But, on the other hand, there are also very enlightened people with farsightedness who think that in this great encounter between East and West when globalization is going on, in which neither East nor West is self-sufficient, with all the means we have at our disposal, we are able to encounter in a deeper and more concrete way. I think in such

an age it's a challenge and a great chance to meet as religious people.

I prefer the expressions “religious dialogue” and “religious exchange” to “interreligious dialogue” because I think if we meet as religious people, as people who live and try to give importance to the spiritual dimension of ourselves, then we will be able to meet on a very deep level on which we can make together a religious experience without renouncing or denying our own religious background and identity.

As a Christian and as a member of the Catholic Church, I can meet with you, who as a sincere Buddhist is open to the truth, open to the light that comes from that dimension in which all of us can really deeply meet. And here is that truth, I will say as a Christian, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. God himself is working there, in the fact that we meet



A new book by Dr. Busquet on Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

together with love, respecting each other, trying to understand each other, open to the religious experience of each other, when I am giving out of love my own experience to you and receiving you sincerely as a gift to me.

In this moment there is something new that has happened. It is not just an exchange of ideas or beliefs or experiences that enrich us mutually. It is something new that we are experiencing together through the fact that we are just encountering each other in this way. And as a Buddhist open to the truth, you have the same experience—a deeper understanding of this enlightening experience of the Dharma, and you are also receiving something. We are open to that Mystery, to the Universal Law, to God, who is giving himself to us in the very moment of encountering each other in love. □