

The Experience of a Dialogue of Life –Reflections of a Muslim, Jewish and Christian Student of their Experience of Living in the Student Community at the Lay Centre

Radwa Thabet, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt (A Muslim Perspective)

I was fortunate to stay at the Lay Centre last year during my study of dialogue between religions at the Gregorian University and I am strongly convinced that my accommodation at the lay Centre help me to practice real dialogue even more than my academic study at the university. The students who lived at the same period with me are from different religions and backgrounds, but we lived as one family, we shared our religious and spiritual experiences throughout our stay. Also at the Lay Centre I had the opportunity to live in the same place with a Jewish student and this was the first encounter I had of living with a Jewish person. This was a useful experience especially for me because as a Muslim woman from an Arab country it is very rare to deal with Jewish people because of the tensions surrounding the political issues surrounding Palestine and Israel, but my accommodation at the lay Centre let me realize that if I am looking for a true dialogue then I should separate the political from the religious, because I think people have to recognize one another and discover areas of strength in each other. This calls for openness and connectivity and builds bridges of communication and dialogue. After the five-month experience at the lay Centre, I gladly realized that my experience of interreligious dialogue taught me to understand people's differences and not only respect these differences, but love them. Finally, I strongly agree with the following quotation about the meaning of dialogue: "instead of talking about each other we should be talking with each other", and that was what we really always did at the lay Centre.

Reuven Kiperwasser, Hebrew University, Jerusalem (A Jewish Perspective)

From February to June 2008, I was fortunate to hold a Skirball Fellowship at the Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies. From every perspective, these months constituted a very fruitful and enlightening period for my research, full of discussions and academic exchange with scholars from a wide range of fields. Apart from the obvious academic opportunities provided by the fellowship, it was a great pleasure just being in Rome – a very important place for every scholar of Late Antiquity – and I learned a lot from the environment in addition to what I did from the books, too.

Living in Lay Centre, which is located in the heart of the historic city was a very special and unforgettable experience for me. Exploring Rome with my new Lay Centre friends and cohabitants (Roman Catholics, Turkish Muslims and a Slavic Orthodox), in an ancient city in which the different strains of a very rich pagan, Christian and Jewish past complement each other in a very impressive multicultural panorama, was a very unusual and enriching experience. Besides that, I found in the Lay Centre a very warm and friendly atmosphere –with a lot of empathy and true intentions to make this place my home for the several months of my stay in Rome.

The community of the Lay Centre, which included people of different religious backgrounds, enriched my studies in Rome with an experience of knowing other religious people from a very close and intimate point of view. We have shared coffee, refreshments, and fabulous conversations about being religious in the post-modern world during informal gatherings. I had numerous conversations in the kitchen, in the garden, or out at dinner (once a week Donna supplied me with kosher food that made my participation in communal dinner possible), and many informal discussions over a cup of coffee, when people became very frank and open about how they felt about various theological features of their religion. People shared how they related to different religious norms and laws in a very direct and unapologetic way. I would like to thank the people of the Lay Centre of Foyer Unitas and the Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies for the fruitful semester.

Andrea Ponzzone, Italian student of Canon Law, Pontifical Lateran University

Living at the Lay Centre with an Ashkenazy Jew has been a really interesting experience, especially for someone like me who knew little of the Jewish religion, apart from what was taught at school. First – I must admit – I was quite sceptical: they observe many religious laws and some are really difficult to follow, especially in a mixed Christian and Muslim community. For example, not only must the food be kosher, but it has to be cooked in special pots and divided in definite ways. Furthermore, the respect of the Shabbat requires a ban on the use of electricity and because our house has only an electric gate, this required considerable coordination between us in order to guarantee the opening and closing of the gate for the

student! But welcoming others is the first rule of the Lay Centre, so that community life can thrive. Having found a solution to those challenges, living together became quite interesting.

As a Catholic, the Jewish world has taught me a lot about the time of Jesus and the meaning of some of Jesus' expressions in the contemporary world of Palestine at that time. But perhaps the most interesting ideas were generated by reflecting on the figure of Saint Paul, a Pharisee, who certainly acknowledged the Christ as the Messiah, but at the same time remained a Pharisee who followed the Law of Moses. In fact, even Cardinal Kasper said that the Church needs to study further the Christian message towards the Jewish people.

On another point, I have seen great interest about the city of Rome and the centre of Catholicism by this Jewish friend. He was fascinated by the integration between different people in Rome, both in the past and in the present, and especially by the Jewish community which has been here for more than 2000 years, long before the arrival of the apostles Peter and Paul.

Finally, living with a Jew at the Lay Centre has been a unique and fruitful experience and I really hope that other Jews will come to live with us.