

THE FUTURE OF OUR INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUES

A Post Torda450 Event Reflection

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The year 2018 is already behind us, the year when we celebrated the 450th anniversary of the Edict of Torda. I am forever grateful for being given the chance to get involved in the rounds of Torda450 theological dialogues. They have managed to highlight at the same time the diversity and similarities of U/U theological traditions around the world – Transylvania, India, Burundi, America, and Indonesia.

Now, where do we go from here? For me, it depends on where we want to go. What is the core purpose of all these international theological dialogues on U/U global faith? A simple answer may be: to keep our faith tradition vibrant and relevant. It is very easy to fall on that trap of routines, doing the same things over and over, thinking the same thoughts over and over. In this world where entropy works – both in literal and metaphorical meanings – anything that doesn't grow up will automatically deteriorate. And growth always needs constant energy, effort, attention, grit.

Thus, the most exciting part of the rounds of Torda450 dialogues we held in Nepal, New York, Kansas, Kolozsvár, and the online ones is the way theologians challenge each other's stance. Although we have roots in the same theological idea of religious freedom, we really differ in details of tenets and rituals to the point that we may have opposite views on some important issues. But the great thing is we can dialogue in a healthy and constructive way because at heart we are all lovers of Truth and humanity.

What I love most about having this kind of dialogues is the legacy of written reflections. In daily life, we normally don't exert ourselves too much in thinking over difficult questions. Besides, in daily life, we normally don't have the luxury to have highly thoughtful individuals to become our discussion partners. The "pressure" to reflect on specific, challenging issues and then to put our thoughts about them into words to be read and commented by fellow theologians whose competence you admire, these really result in papers of worthy ideas. Papers like these should be studied further and elaborated.

Meeting fellow theologians in person, face to face offline, that's really a blessing. Nothing can replace the excitement of direct encounter. But in the long run,

considering that U/U congregations are spread in all continents, the online mode of dialogue will be more sustainable. To dig out some really precious theological treasure, we need consistent, long term programs, involving as many representatives of diverse U/U theological traditions as possible, enabling them to write as much worthy thoughts as possible. Creating such a program I believe is essential to keep on exploring and deepening our U/U global faith.

During the Torda450 rounds, we just only started discussing some fundamental issues. Due to the limited time available, we couldn't go very deep yet. We still leave unexplored the questions about how Unitarian and Universalist traditions merged and whether they are really compatible to each other, whether there is any limit to religious freedom itself, what kind of social justice we should pursue, etc. For me personally, I really hope that later on U/U theologians worldwide can explain solidly how U/U theology can be expressed in actual works in real world to promote love and banish injustice.

As we all must have been aware of, in the future we face some shuddering threats. We are heartbroken by atrocities induced by religious sentiments. Two of them that took place recently were the mass shooting of Moslems at mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and suicide bombings aiming at churches and hotels of Colombo, Sri Lanka on Easter day. In my country, problems of intolerance are also on the rise. People are scared and suspicious toward one another. Instead of being celebrated, religious or cultural differences are despised and used as a weapon of discrimination and hate-policies.

The spirit of truth-seeking, peace-building, social justice-fighting of U/Us are much needed now more than ever. But first we must have some commitment to further mutual understanding among ourselves. Only after we figure out our common answers to core theological issues, we can be strong in our theological identity. And then that clear theological identity in its turn will become the common ground for us to pursue further collaboration in creating a better world.

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