

Introduction



The Oman Conference

Candido Mendes

The 28th Conference of the Academy of Latinity aims to give an answer to the questions gathered during the entire course of our meetings, questions relating to what it means, in these postmodern times, to truly acknowledge our collective identity and the dialectics derived from it. The cardinal points confront globalization and its new non-hegemonic dimensions; the impact of terrorism; the struggle for difference within multiculturalism; the advance of citizenship and human rights; and the new challenges for democracy faced with representation and the emergence of direct forms of re-vindication and collective protest. Another motion to debate entails the universe of virtual communication: the significance of the new dynamics of consensus and the course taken by mobilization born of postmodernity.

In the wake of almost fifteen years of work, the Academy contemplates the awareness of multiculturalism vindicating more and more—beyond the various rhetorics of dialogue—bolder endeavors to truly understand otherness, beyond its reductionisms and *simulacra*.

At the same time, assimilation is widely recognized not to be a solution: we need to move beyond mere tolerance. However, it remains a challenge to accept the fact that diversity, rather than a hindrance to cohesion, undeniably enriches humanity.

12 Such a new scenario arises together with the wane of metapolarities, as set forth by the center-periphery relations characteristic of colonial dependence. One may speak of a new matrix of differentiation, as opposed to the formerly hegemonic profile of globalization. Pluralism is no longer a simple rule of coexistence but a real praxis, moved by the sense of *otherness* and the rise of a genuine *ecumene* of recognized collective subjectivities.

This encounter sets out to reveal the core of the issue, which necessarily—given the presupposed sharing of values of cultural pluralism—involves two key questions, namely: the conditions for dialogue, and the limits of whatever *universal* may imply in terms of this same (yet variable) essential characteristic of contemporary difference. At the same time, searching objectively for the limit-conditions of the present historical process includes perusing the amplitude of its democratic involvement, as well as the objective challenge of governmental actions in the face of the determination and projects of the models adopted.

Significantly, the reflection of this seminar has been its clear epistemological connotation. Engaged in an ever syntagmatic search for dialogue, it challenges the true conditions of its relevance, inseparable from its delving deep into the question of the modern or postmodern. And it is in this same dimension that reflection emerges on the very limit-conditions of multiculturalism, objectively confronted by the inequalities of our *Dasein*, or the interrogation concerning the hermeneutic value of interpretation.

Meditation also will be forced to seek out the “becoming” of cosmopolitanism, within the framework of a new global awareness.

Also within this hermeneutics, spatial connotation claims its counterpoint in what might be the possible twists and turns of postmodern East and West. 13

But extreme caution concerns the very permanence today, at this turn of the century, of this presumed coexistence of cultures, where the pluralism of differences seemed to have settled. This is the result of the advent of the Islamic State, the radical diachronies in the design of national States, and of the definitive rupture of the profile of the other by virtue of strict repetition of ipseity. Where, in this hermeneutic emerging, can be found the very condition of social recognition, and in what terms can one question the survival of contemporary pluralism? And—assuming that this possible *vis-à-vis* survives—in what terms can the imperative of human rights assure this irremovable platform? This extreme dialogue reclaims the search for the counterpoints that subsist in Islamic culture, such as the Omanis

in their untouched pluralism, or their resistance and affirmation within the sphere of expatriate communities in Europe or Latin America.

Ever in search of rediscovered new extremes in this dialogue, one looks, for example, for new spaces in an East-West encounter of contemporaneity. Or else the advance of the critical mark in the limits of representatives of collectivities, such as the questioning, for example, of an evasive identity of the Andean world in history. Nonetheless, this epistemology spurs itself on to find relevant knowledge, where it is always liable to the risk of the rhetorics of authenticity, challenged by the constant *caveat* of demystification. In all this surging of postmodern thinking, we may only be at the true
14 unveiling of axiological values—the veritable *Dasein*—perhaps, as suggested, in order to go even deeper into the heuristic quest for an anarchic hermeneutics.

The full amplitude of the Oman Conference lies in realizing the threat of what was thought at the beginning of the century to be, at last, the pluralism and acknowledgment of differences, beyond dominating civilizatory illuminism. The Islamic State is here to show how far the very sentiment of—and respect for—the other are affected in this contemporary coexistence, and to what extent this sentiment and respect intrinsically call out for dialogue and respect for difference in these days of ours.