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A Centre for Cooperation

Uniting Interreligious Dialogue Efforts (Oxford International Interfaith Centre / 1993 – 2017)

> "If we can have fellowship and see beyond the label to the person behind it, and the human being with the same joys, sorrows and needs as ourselves, then this surely is true dialogue." (Mary Braybrooke)

1 Introducing the International Interfaith Centre's (IIC) role in the Interreligious Dialogue Movement (IDM)

Throughout the book, it seems clear that cooperation is at the center of almost all initiatives and organizations that see themselves as part of the "Interreligious Dialogue Movement" (IDM). Since the first interreligious events, the idea of bringing together representatives of different religions to participate in dialogue has been central to this movement. This paper, however, makes reference to one of the first interreligious initiatives (the International Interfaith Centre (IIC)) that was created in response to the need for cooperation between interreligious centres and organizations.

After three years of planning for its creation, the IIC inauguration was announced in 1993 at the congresses held to celebrate the centenary of the Parliament of World Religions. Its foundation was based upon the impression that there was a lack of cooperation among the interreligious organizations. The IIC was founded as a center with educational, support, cooperative and spiritual purposes. It was planned by Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke and Robert Traer, and it involved David and Celia Storey, Mary Braybrooke, Peggy Morgan, Sandy Bharat among other people. They wanted to build a center that would focus on conflict resolution, information sharing and should become a home and network for people who worked in religious studies or for those who were involved in interreligious dialogue. The IIC tried to reach these objectives by offering conferences, lectures, tours, publications, activities and encounters in conflict areas.

Based on interviews, as well as archival data collected on these initial years of the IIC's activities, the paper at hand presents three intertwined hypotheses:

This paper first argues that the foundation of the IIC stands for a particular step in the history of the IRDM. The 1990's were a time when the IRDM gained in visibility and increased its internal diversification. The IIC responded to the needs that emerged out of these developments. In the wider socio-cultural context, the IIC has to be interpreted with regard to the much more general processes of globalization that dominated the 1990s. In this regard, the paper presents a two-fold argument: (a) that the IIC was born in response to the need for stronger cooperation among interreligious organizations founded in the 1970s, which can be related to Vatican II; and (b) that religious pluralization and the breaking up of religious monopolies were important for this paradigm shift, thus contributing to the growth of the IRD movement.

Secondly, the IIC was founded in response to needs that appeared to be urgent for the IRDM in the aftermath of the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993. During the planning process of the 1993 events, a commission was created that gathered people from important interreligious organizations. It tried to provide information about interreligious activities worldwide, to trigger cooperation and to be a network to bring together all interreligious initiatives. As this commission would stop operating after 1993, the IIC was founded to continue with its mandate and work towards union and cooperation among interreligious organizations.

Thirdly, one of the characteristics of the IIC was the reflexivity of the actors inside the organization.[1] Its members were constantly rethinking its position in the interreligious movement to refocus its aims when they thought they were going in another direction. The importance of this approach is that it can help us think about interreligious activities today. The protagonists inside the IIC addressed central issues such as: if interreligious dialogue is an effective agent of change; what interreligious dialogue can do towards conflict resolution; and also taking into consideration the fact that some groups are against interreligious dialogue activities, whether interreligious dialogue is as inclusive and open as it is thought to be.

In discussing those hypotheses, this paper is subdivided into the three sections. First, there is a background description of the situation of religions today, seeing religious pluralism as a modern phenomenon and relating this theory to the growth of the IRDM. It also refers to opposition to fundamentalism as a key point that defines the IRDM identity. The second section explains the methods used to collect the data for writing this paper and reflects on the similarities

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1 Hans Georg Gadamer, ed. *Verdad y Método. Fundamentos de una Hermenéutica Filosófica* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1990).

of anthropology and IRDM in which knowledge is constructed in the encounter with the other. The third section presents IRDM activities and topics that inspired the creation of the IIC, the 1993 encounter that gave birth to the IIC; the preparation process of the IIC and how it was built, the structure and the way the IIC was organized, as well as the events the IIC held and the topics that guided those activities.

To properly understand these developments, it is important to take into consideration their socio-cultural context, as well as the internal dynamics that emerged from this context.

2 Background: IRDM Conditions and Concerns

As far as the following empirical analyses are concerned, the present paper argues that they cannot be understood without relating them to the wider socio-cultural context of increasing modernization and the fundamentalist, as well as dialogical dynamics that arise out of this context.

2.1 Interreligious Dialogue as a Modern Phenomenon

Some authors argue that modernity disenchants the world by processes such as secularization[2], however, according to others[3] modernity has led to the breakup of religious monopolies and with this to dialogue and religious pluralism.

What is meant by the break-up of a monopoly is that one single religious system is no longer the interpretative frame from which reality is observed. This also includes a loss of legitimacy, of a place in a faith hierarchy, and that its moral order is no longer dominant. This means that religious pluralism emerges, and that one religion is no longer considered to be the sole official faith of a society. The Brazilian anthropologist Carlos Steil says that the monopoly is broken by the

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2 Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1969); Martin, David, *On Secularization: Towards a revised general Theory of Secularization* (London / New York: Routledge, 2005).

3 Carlos Alberto Steil, "Pluralismo, modernidade e tradição – transformações do campo religioso" In: *Revista da Associação de Cientistas Sociais do Mercosul* 3 (2001): 115–129. Alejandro Frigerio and Ari Pedro Oro, "'Sectas Satánicas' En El Mercosur: Un Estudio De La Construcción De La Desviación Religiosa En Los Medios De Comunicación De Argentina Y Brasil," in *Horizontes Antropológicos* 4 (1998): 114–50.

growth of secularism and religious diversification that became visible when the religion is separated from the state. Steil (2001, 116–117) argues:

> This is how, loosening the state's control, which would have guaranteed social exclusiveness and reproduction, introduces a structural transformation that redefines the religious role in modernity (...). Plurality and religious transformation, then, are the result of modern dynamics. Secularism multiplies religious universes, in a way that its diversity can be seen as internal or structural of the modernity process. Secularization and religious diversity are directly associated to the same historical process that made it possible to have societies that could work and exist without being founded into one only religious order.
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> (...) In this way, we think that the religious tolerance that characterizes modern society also allows a revitalization of traditional and/ or individual rituals and beliefs that were withdraw by the dominant system.[4]

The Argentinean researcher, Susana Bianchi, examines the main historical events of the 20th century mentioning what happened after the Second World War (WWII) (2007). According to her, after WWII, a new world order was established under the influence of the USA and the USSR. The Cold War was a consequence of this division of power and was symbolized by the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. This is also seen by the huge arms race between both world powers that brought several actions among the world's population to reject these countries control and attitude. On the one hand, different international and civil organizations got together to answer to what they considered a threat to peace. There were, for example, special commissions of the United Nations (UN) that started working during the Cold War. Organizations such as Amnesty International (1961) also appeared on the scene. On the other hand, third world countries reacted through independence and decolonization movements, but these also often had violent consequences.

In some countries, confrontations among religious groups appeared. Christianity was seen, in several cases, as a religion submitting to politics and economics and this was the reason some religious traditions were embraced as nationalist symbols in the fight for emancipation. It was in this context that the Vatican II (1962–1965) took place. This was an inflection point since it changed the Catholic Churches attitude towards other religions, towards political and social involvement and towards modernity. In Marianne Moyaert's words, the Church went "[f]rom the age of monologue to the age of dialogue" and she assures

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4 Carlos Alberto Steil, "Pluralismo, modernidade e tradição – transformações do campo religioso" In: Revista da Associação de Cientistas Sociais do Mercosul 3 (2001): 115–129.

that dialogue "is rooted in the modern ideals of equality, freedom of religions, respect of otherness, and tolerance."[5]

These socio-political developments have triggered dynamic developments that can be further characterized with reference to the relationship between fundamentalism and dialogue.

2.2 Interreligious Dialogue in Opposition to Fundamentalism

In his final publications, the late Peter L. Berger has proposed a concept of interreligious dialogue that *inter alia* juxtaposes IRD and religious fundamentalism[6]. Along those lines, fundamentalism is sometimes thought as a way of preserving identity and tradition.

Under these conditions, Interreligious dialogue has been criticized for bringing what Traer calls a 'religious bazaar', in which each religious expression tries to promote its own faith. According to Sandy and Jael Bharat, people who enter into interreligious dialogue "wonder if their faith will be compromised by contact with others or if they have to promote their own religion at interfaith events."[7] Braybrooke says that "too easily we find ourselves imposing our presuppositions on the conversation" and to participate in dialogue we need to "allow our deepest convictions to be questioned". For this reason, he thinks that those venturing into interreligious dialogue need to "be secure in their own faith."[8]

Another strong interreligious activist who wrote for Bharat's book is John Taylor who thinks that:

> Dialogue does not necessarily hide or weaken one's own sense of identity but it may reveal complexities of indebtedness and of new possibilities of openness. Dialogue is not an exercise of compromise or dissimulation but an adventure in discerning truth wherever it is to be found. Dialogue with our neighbor can lead us to a deeper dialogue with One whom we may address as God or to a deeper awareness of the Ultimate.[9]

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5 Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, eds. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195.
6 Peter L. Berger, *Dialog zwischen religiösen Traditionen in einem Zeitalter der Relativität* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).
7 Sandy Bharat and Jael Bharat, *A Global Guide to Interfait: Reflections from Around the World* (Winchester/Washington: O Books, 2007), 59.
8 Bharat and Bharat, *A Global Guide to Interfaith*, 12.
9 Bharat and Bharat, *A Global Guide to Interfaith*, 182.

Today, there is still distrust in interreligious dialogue and tension between closing oneself off to preserve tradition and opening oneself to others with the possible threat of losing identity. Aware of this problem, Traer said that the IIC should stand against violence, propaganda and syncretism to achieve true interreligious dialogue. The IIC, besides promoting dialogue and contributing in this way to peace, shared information about religious traditions, about interreligious initiatives and events, so that people involved in the IRDM could work together and organize dialogue encounters in conflict areas to build understanding. Before expanding the information about the IIC, I will explain which methodologies were used for this research.

3 Approaching the Object from an Anthropological Point of View

For my research, I combined different qualitative methods. As my academic training is in anthropology, I tried to meet my interlocutors, not only by reading papers (accessed through the archives), but through live interviews. Although what actually characterizes anthropology is fieldwork, my approach to the "object" could not be through fieldwork because the IIC was barely active during the time I was doing research.

It might not seem important to mention my academic orientation, but the anthropological viewpoint has much to do with interreligious dialogue. The Argentinean anthropologist Pablo Wright wrote that "[a]nthropology would be the only social science in which the researcher is existentially involved in/between its interlocutors; this approach is the central part of its activity. Then, the subject-ethnographer is its own instrument of observation, register and 'data' analysis."[10] Wright describes anthropological activity as an "ontological displacement"[11] and he explains this by saying "it is the context in which knowledge is produced in the active encounter between the researcher and its interlocutors."[12] Interreligious dialogue has to do with an ontological displacement itself where knowledge is constructed with others.

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10 Pablo Wright, "Etnografía y existencia en la antropología de la religión," in *Sociedad y Religión* 16/17 (1998): 180–193.

11 Wright, "Etnografía y existencia en la antropología de la religión."

12 "Etnografía y existencia en la antropología de la religión," 182. Translations by the author. The original text is in Spanish.

Additionally, anthropology is an encounter with otherness, and it demands an effort for "familiarizing with the exotic and make exotic what is familiar".[13] This approach characterizes interreligious dialogue since it also demands openness and decentralization from our own principals to be able to really encounter the religious other.

For this reason, I not only use anthropology to reflect on interreligious dialogue, but also as a way of approaching this "object". Although initially, the research was planned to solely be based on archival work, I was able to combine different qualitative methodologies to study the case of the IIC. I worked in the archives at Southampton University, but also interviewed those who were implicated in the creation of the IIC and those who worked in it. Meeting these people aided my research since they had material that was not in the archives such as some IIC documents, as well as books that they wrote about their experiences or on interreligious dialogue and video records from the different interreligious events in which they participated.

I was able to contact those who were part of the IIC before 'going into the field'. This was also useful because I could interview them before working in the archives. This helped me understand more about the IIC before looking through documents. They also helped me select the material that I wanted to use for my research as it was a huge amount of information and the material that I should use was related to some specific issues about the IIC. It was also helpful to meet them because they were the ones who created the IIC. The guided in-depth interviews sought to understand the reasons why the IIC was created; when, how, where and by whom was it created; which ideas inspired its creation; what the objectives were; and how the founders managed to reach them. There were several opportunities to interview the Storeys, the Braybtookes and Bharat, which helped clarify the information I had. These interviews allowed to add new information to what I found in the archives.

The combination of these sources tells us much more complete picture since sometimes one method cannot provide all the pieces of information. I was able to gain more information about the IIC by combining different sources and analyzing them in a comparative way. The combination of these two main sources helped me reconstruct the IIC's beginnings.

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13 Roberto Da Matta, "El oficio del etnólogo o cómo tener 'Anthropological Blues'," in *Constructores de Otredad: Una Introducción a la Antropología Social y Cultural*, eds. Victoria Arribas, Mauricio F. Boivin, and Ana Rosato (Tres Cantos: Siglo XXI, 2004): 172–178.

As Gaillet recommends,[14] I also "asked questions" regarding the archive survival, categorizing the information I got there after I stayed in the field. The IIC material had been delivered years ago but cataloguing had not been completed. After my first visit, work resumed and after my first week in England, I was able to go through the IIC's material.

I went over different documents related to the IIC. Some of the documents belong to the Braybrookes and others were IIC archive material. Marcus Braybrooke's documents were useful for me to understand how the IIC was created, planned, conceptualized and organized since I could read through the creation process. I saw how the different interreligious events that had happened since the mid-eighties influenced the creation of the IIC. I was also able to see how he got in touch with different interreligious dialogue leaders to plan the IIC and how they built it.

4 Towards the Establishment of the IIC

Due to the growth of the interreligious dialogue movement during the 1970s, there were several encounters and events between 1985 and 1990. Some of these were significant for the creation of the IIC. I focus on some of these events that settled the aims that the IIC would then try to achieve. This will primarily be told from the point of view of one of the main actors during this process, Marcus Braybrooke, who was invited to the meetings I will refer to and was also involved in the creation of a few interreligious organizations including the IIC.

First, it is important to mention the Ammerdown[15] meeting in 1985 that began the planning process for the Parliament of the World Religions centenary celebrations. Those who attended the meeting were determined to concentrate on cooperation among interreligious dialogue organizations. In his book about the interreligious dialogue movement, Braybrooke says that during the meeting they recognized "the need to strengthen links between interfaith organizations"

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14 Lynée Lewis Gaillet, "Archival Survival: Navigating Historical Research," in *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*, eds. Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa Mastrangelo (Illinois: Sothern Illinois University Press, 2010): 28 – 39.
15 This meeting was arranged by the WCF in the Ammerdown Conference Centre near Bath in 1985 and gathered representatives of different international interreligious dialogue organisations.

and that after this recognition "communication between interfaith organizations increased."[16]

One year after the Ammerdown meeting in 1986, Pope John Paul II organized an event named Assisi World Day of Prayer for Peace that took place from 27–29 November. Several high-level religious leaders participated in this event, as well as some representatives of the IRDM. While the prayer was being organized, Braybrooke wrote some letters in response to the invitation and presented the idea of founding an "international committee for interfaith cooperation"[17], a body to gather the efforts of the interreligious initiatives around the world. In these letters, he mentioned his wish to create a center that would function as a network helping interreligious dialogue organizations cooperate among themselves and improve communication.

In 1988, a second Ammerdown meeting took place as a follow up to the one in 1985. After this, cooperation between interreligious dialogue organizations appeared to be an urgent necessity, as well as the building of a new international interreligious dialogue superstructure since there were an increasing number of interreligious dialogue organizations that existed but had no or virtually no contact among themselves. Braybrooke participated in this meeting where he promoted cooperation and closer relations among international interreligious dialogue organizations by writing a paper entitled "Future for Cooperation".[18]

During this meeting, a group called International Inter-religious Co-ordinating Committee (IIOCC) was established collaboratively by members of four organizations: The World Conference on Religions for Peace, World Thanksgiving, the World Congress of Faiths and the Temple of Understanding. The IIOCC was a network that did not want to have power. Rather it aimed to bring together religious bodies, interreligious organizations and networks and provide information about their activities. The IIOCC worked towards the events in 1993 to increase cooperation among interreligious dialogue organizations and religious bodies, with one important point: it was agreed from its inception that the IIOCC would stop operating after the 1993 events.

The emergence of the temporary IIOCC coincided with another process. In 1990, the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) hosted its 27th congress where it started preparing for the 1993 celebrations. There they dis-

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16 Marcus Braybrooke, *Widening Vision: The World Congress of Faiths and the Growing Interfaith Movement* (Oxford: Braybrooke Press, 2013), 239.

17 Marcus Braybrooke letter to the Vatican on October 7, 1986. Harley Library, University of Southampton, MS212 (A814) Box 24. (The boxes are quoted according to the guidelines of the respective archives.)

18 Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS265 (A895) Box 21/1.

cussed the themes, the objectives of the events and how it would be organized. The IARF's declaration expressed that religions should work for peace, freedom and justice and that they "welcome a higher cooperation among international interfaith organizations."[19] It was decided that a network to share information about interreligious dialogue activities would be created.

Although building a body to coordinate interreligious efforts were needed, this objective became more visible and urgent during 1993, the Year of Understanding and Cooperation. This was the episode that immediately determined the creation of the IIC and its main aims.

4.1 Giving Birth to the IIC: 1993 Events

In order to understand the events of 1993, it has to be mentioned that the first Parliament of World Religions convened in 1893 and there "the suggestion was made that the next parliament should be convened in India in 1900."[20] Despite these early plans, such a follow-up never took place in India. So that is why the IIOCC decided to prepare its main event to take place there. In between the 1893 Parliament and the various centennial events that were being prepared for 1993, the IRDM had grown to include many international interreligious dialogue organizations. Due to this growth, more dialogue among these organizational initiatives was needed. The IIOCC, which was in charge of organizing the centennial celebrations in India decided to call 1993 "the Year of Understanding and Cooperation" to try to link the centennial celebrations that were being organized in Chicago, but also in Laos, New Delhi, Bangalore and other places around the world to celebrate the 100 years of the IRDM.

From 18–22 August 1993, there was a meeting in Bangalore, India that took the name of "Sarva Dharma Sammelana."[21] This meeting was characterized by discussions about interreligious dialogue in the next century (Programme I), about religious and interreligious cooperation (Programme III), the objectives of religious institutions and religious traditions (Programme II). The importance of using spiritual energy for peace, freedom and compassion and for ethnic and

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19 27th IARF Congress Declarations (1990). Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS212 (A814) Box 13/1

20 Marcus Braybrooke opening speech (1993). Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS265 (A895) Box 1/1.

21 "Sarva Dharma Sammelana" means "Religious People Coming Together." It was a three-day international conference coorganized by the IIOCC and IARF, to coincide with the latter's Congress.

religious conflict resolution seemed urgent – an objective that would be later assumed by the IIC – and the clear future of interreligious dialogue was geared towards understanding and cooperation.

Before the Bangalore meeting, Braybrooke had written that "[c]ooperation between interfaith organizations is still only an *ad hoc* basis. Adequate structures for greater coordination and cooperation are required. There is an urgent need too for a center of information about worldwide interfaith work."[22] Braybrooke gave the opening and closing speeches encouraging the participants to show commitment and have hope. He remarked that there should not be competition among religions but cooperation and universal acceptance. In the opening ceremony, he said: "[o]ur work may 've been for a particular faith organization, but I hope in being together we shall sense that we are all part of a world- wide movement of the Spirit and that we both contribute to and are enriched by the larger whole."[23]

This was in line with some of the general ideas presented in the Declaration towards a Global Ethic and the new world spiritual and moral principles for union and the complement of energy that concluded the Centennial of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in late August, 1993, which also inspired the reaction of IIC. The many 1993 celebrations marking the centennial of the first parliament in Chicago were not only a commemoration of the first formal modern interreligious dialogue encounter, but also an inspiration to many people involved in these activities. It was during these events that the creation of the IIC was announced, responding to IRDM needs.

As already mentioned, the IIC was first conceptualized in the 1980s, but since this was being done while various preparations to celebrate the centennial were being carried out, t it can be said that the IIC was a child of the 1993 events. During the celebrations in Bangalore, Braybrooke together with Traer, announced the "Plans for an International Interfaith Centre at Oxford."[24] As they proclaimed in their paper, it would function as a network, coordinate interreligious activities, gather academic material and publications, support interreligious activities and also be a spiritual centre. They thought it was important for it to be international so as to share information on the interreligious dialogue movement around the world. Their interventions made the creation of the IIC

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22 Paper written by Marcus Braybrooke for the 1993 events on May 24, 1992. See more on *Visions of an Interfaith Future* (1994).

23 Marcus Braybrooke's opening speech (1993). Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS265 (A895) Box 1/1.

24 Braybrooke's and Traer's paper (1993). Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS389 (A3060) Box 2/4.

possible, but also the topics treated and the necessities that emerged during celebrations were some of the matters that inspired the IIC. In one of the leaflets that the IIC used as promotional material, they explicitly said that "[t]his is intended to be a continuing legacy of the 1993 Year of Understanding and Co-operation."[25]

4.2 What do we need the IIC for? The Preparation Process of the Centre

The person who decided to build the IIC was Braybrooke. "Marcus went to Yogaville[26] in the USA and thought that it was a place that symbolized what interfaith dialogue movement should be."[27] He started planning the IIC and with this aim, he contacted Celia and David Storey. He had met them around 1985, while working towards the 1993 Bangalore event. They had entered the interreligious dialogue movement in the 1970s as they had a New Age Centre where they learned about the healing power of meditation and were inspired by the Braybrookes to work together to create the IIC.

The IIC was supposed to be a place for cohesion. The IIC founders wanted union between those involved in interreligious dialogue activities because they felt that too often results were not shared between IRD organizations. They also realized that there were groups that felt isolated. The existing organizations needed to know about others' work. The IIC thus emerged from the lack of shared knowledge about interreligious dialogue activities worldwide. They noticed that interreligious dialogue organizations took jobs and resources away from each other, sometimes due to personal disputes. There were different events that showed the tension among organizations, that there was no cooperation, and that each one cared only about its own activities. In his paper "Is interfaith activity an effective agent of change?" Braybrooke said, that the "lack of coordination means that some of the energy and resources put into Interfaith work are wasted and that the message is not heard distinctly by a wider public."[28]

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25 "An International Interfaith Centre at Oxford," promotional leaflet in the Storeys' personal archives.

26 Yogaville is a spiritual community situated in the USA. For more information see: Yogaville, ed. *Yogaville:* http://www.yogaville.org/. (accessed: 24.5.2020).

27 Celia Storey and David Storey, interview at Petersfield, June 6, 2014.

28 Marcus Braybrooke's paper (N.D). Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS265 (A895) Box 1/1.

The founders of the IIC wanted a physical center "for leaders and scholars of all religions to stay, study, meet and talk together."[29] The IIC would be a safe place to meet people of different religions. They would be trusted and would not be a threat to other organizations because they would work for cooperation. They would not be competitive, and they would not have political positions. The IIC would promote universal values, fight fundamentalism, understand different religious traditions, share about different faiths and teach in global faith.

The planning process of the IIC took three years. During this period, they discussed the organization of the Centre, the topics they would treat, the objectives they wanted to reach, the structure, its name, location and other details. The idea of placing the IIC at Oxford arose after contacting Kenneth Wilson from Westminster College. He said that they could use the college's library for placing their material there, the IIC guests could stay at the campus and they could design and construct a building on its lands. Westminster College had religious study courses, so it was also good for them to have a close link with the IIC. Oxford was "an intellectual center, people would go there for free as it is a prestigious place" and "you could reach it fast from the airport as there is a direct bus so the access was easy." Oxford was also an important religious center and an international city.[30]

In 1991, while Traer was settled at Frankfurt working for the IARF[31], Braybrooke sent a letter to him asking for IARF support in the creation of the IIC and telling him that he had already the support of the World Congress of Faiths (WCF). It was this same year that they started the planning process. They decided that the IIC would be independent, work as a charity organization, coordinate, share and give information about interreligious activities, be a network, create databases, hold meetings, work with leaders in conflict areas and be a spiritual and educational centre. It would work for the union between religious communities, would have fluid contact with libraries and universities and give strength to the interreligious dialogue movement. The centre would work towards interreligious cooperation around the world by being an "organizational and communication center."[32] The building they projected was meant to have guest rooms and a special space for prayer and meditation. They wanted to give accommodation

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29 The Rt. Rev Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford quoted in "Four Million Pound Appeal for Centre" in *The Newsletter of the International Interfaith Centre at Oxford*, January 4, 1996.
30 Both earlier quotes and the information in this sentence come from Celia & David Storey interviewed at Petersfield, June 6, 2014.
31 Braybrooke's correspondence (1991) Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS212 (A2000) Box 3/2.
32 Robert Traer's letter to Marcus Braybrooke, March 12, 1992. Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS389 (A3060) Box 3/58.

for researchers and representatives of different religions. The IIC gained the support of several religious organizations, intellectuals, interreligious activists, religious leaders and others.

In 1992, they discussed where the IIC should be located. They rejected the idea of locating it in London because "it would get lost."[33] Birmingham was considered to be a good option since it was an important religious city. The Planning Committee contacted academic institutions for developing the IIC. Some of these institutions were the University of Bristol, Harris Manchester College and Mansfield College in Oxford. The idea of settling it in those places was discarded because some did not have space for the building, others did not have libraries, there was no space for guests, or they were not interested.[34]

During this process, a paper entitled "Why an International Interfaith Centre is needed" was written that discussed the specificities that the IIC would have. As the founders and former employees said during interviews with them "the IIC didn't have power or prestige, this was not its aim."[35] It just aimed to promote understanding and cooperation among the growing interreligious dialogue initiatives. It would share information and be a "home" for those interested in interreligious dialogue. There were many interreligious activities but,

> [n]o Centre holds information on all this varied and creative activity. The need is for an International Interfaith Centre which hold information about the different efforts being made around the world to encourage inter- religious understanding and cooperation. The establishment of one super organization is not the answer, just because the activity is so varied (N.D; 2)[36]

The IIC was conceptualized as a promoter of religious freedom, a place for meditation, worship and prayer that would also develop teaching methods and educational materials. Braybrooke announced its creation in 1993 for union, joint work against conflict, to stimulate interreligious activities and learning about other religious traditions.

In 1993, the trust deed was signed, and it outlined techniques for charity, the money needed for the first three years of work and delivered who would govern the centre and how it would be coordinated. The Deed of Trust declares that the

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33 The Rt. Rev Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford quoted in "Four Million Pound Appeal for Centre" in *The Newsletter of the International Interfaith Centre at Oxford*, January 4, 1996.

34 Robert Traer and Marcus Braybrooke correspondence to Manchester College (February 25, 1992), Mansfield College (April 21, 1992), University of Bristol (March 10, 1992), principals (1992) Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS212 (A2000) Box 3/5 – 3/8.

35 Marcus Braybrook and Mary Braybrooke, interview at Oxford, June 8, 2014.

36 "Why an International Interfaith Centre is needed" (N.N, N.D) in Storey's personal archives.

IIC's objectives are: "[t]o advance the education of the public world-wide in its understanding of the different faith traditions and various faith communities and how they might live together in harmony."[37] It aimed to promote interreligious understanding, cooperation, religious respect and freedom by being an educational, support, coordination and spiritual centre. The IIC would be:

> 1) An Educational Centre to promote research into ways of developing interreligious understanding, mutual respect and co-operation. The Centre will help to relate the academic study of religions to interfaith activity, promote research into teaching methods and encourage the production of educational material.

> 2) A Coordinating Centre to facilitate cooperation between people and groups actively engaged in interreligious work and to be a source of information about interfaith activities worldwide.

> 3) A Support Centre to strengthen personal contact between those engaged in interfaith work and the study of religions. The Centre would gladly offer advice to those who consult it.

> 4) A Spiritual Centre to provide opportunities for learning about prayer, worship and meditation in the world's regions.[38]

It is important to mention that the IIC was thought of as a center and not as a formal organization because it wanted to gather and be a source of information about interreligious dialogue activities around the world. It aimed to function as a network of the religious and interreligious dialogue movement. One of its characteristics was that members did not want to have any type of power or prestige in order to avoid being a threat or in competition with other organizations.[39] Another distinguishing feature was that the IIC had members all around the world that helped create it and participated in its activities. All of these different elements constitute the initiative called the IIC.

4.3 IIC Structure and the Functions of its Members

The IIC trustees' legal document was signed on 6 December 1993 at Westminster College. It was settled at Oxford by the IARF, the WCF and Westminster College. The IIC had strong and close relationships with other organizations, reciprocally participating in each other's activities and events.

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37 Deed of Trust signed on December 6, 1993 in Storey's personal archives.
38 Letters & Leaflets Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS212 (A2000) Box 3/2–3/3.
39 Deed of Trust signed on December 6, 1993 in Storey's personal archives.

The provisional structure built during the planning process consisted of an Executive Committee Council, an Advisory Committees, the Friends of IIC and the Programme Working Group[40]

The document also explained that the Executive Committee or Board of Trustees would represent the IIC by law and propriety. The Council would be composed of people from supporting organizations and they would supervise the Centre's work. The Advisory Committee would be built by people recommended by members. The Friends of IIC would contribute donations starting from £25 a year and would receive the IIC's publications. The Programme Working Group would implement the projects.[41] The IIC's final structure was made of the International Consultant Team, the Advisory Committee, three patrons and approximately ten Trustees, friends, two staff members and three volunteers, each one with his or her particular role.

To build the IIC, they first consulted international interreligious dialogue practitioners and religious leaders. These people were called International Consultants. Although they wanted diversity inside the group, they were mostly from English speaking countries. They were asked to recommend people and suggest things for the IIC to do. They were also invited to form the Advisory Committee (there were people who could not accept because of their positions on the institution they belonged to). The Advisory Committee members that eventually accepted assisted the IIC by offering resources to give tours, hold conferences, conduct research, create publications, newsletters and other activities. Despite the religious variety in its composition, its membership remained limited in terms of linguistic outreach (most members were limited to English) and geographical spread (most lived in England).

The trustees represented persons whose respective organizations were supportive of the IIC. They gathered together in meetings where they talked about what they did, what they would do and how to raise and spend funds. There were six main trustees and some guests who were religious leaders, academics and cultural leaders. The staff and volunteers worked at the office and administration. Among its members were Celia Storey and Sandy Bharat and three volunteers who worked as secretaries, as well as bookkeepers and friends who donated money. Bharat was the primary full-time member of the staff and Storey helped her as a part-time volunteer. The three volunteers assisted them with the work they did in the office. Years later, Jael Bharat took over most of the

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40 According to the Structure Proposal from March 12, 1993. Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS389 (A3060) Box 1/1.

41 Deed of Trust signed on December 6, 1993 in Storey's personal archives.

work that Storey did at the IIC. The staff was also involved in event planning, organized or participated in interreligious events in several places and was engaged in fundraising.[42] It is important in the case of the IIC to understand its organizational structure to then make sense of its mission and activities. The IIC was founded responding to IRDM needs in the 1990s, but as the movement vastly increased in the following two decades, it became harder for the IIC to maintain its work, which was based on donations and volunteer work.

From its beginning in 1993, the IIC registered in the Charity Commission. Those who worked for the IIC contacted institutions for material for their library by contacting people from different religious traditions, religious bodies, interreligious groups and networks to create a complete database. These activities show the IIC's interest to promote cooperation and be a source of information about IRDM. They also contacted people for funding and donations: friends provided a regular and steadily influx of funding. But in the office, they also appealed to great funding bodies and organizations to support programs and projects. One year after its foundation, they finished defining the functions of each group that comprised the IIC.

In 1995, the Westminster College at Oxford offered possible sites on its lands for building the IIC. When they were about to start building in October, the "planning permission for the building was refused on the grounds of the new Green Belt restrictions around Westminster College (...) In the view of the high cost of planning appeal, the trustees decided not to go ahead with the proposed building."[43] In spite of this frustrating situation, they continued working in an office at 2 Market Street, Oxford that they shared with the WCF, IARF and a Japanese organization called Rissho Kosei Kai.

4.4 Interfaith Encounters: An Effective Agent of Change

The IIC offered activities such as lectures, annual conferences, meetings and workshops. They also had information, databases, newsletters and contacts with interreligious organizations and religious leaders that made it possible for them to give information and answers about different topics to those who requested such information. The IIC coordinated interreligious activities with aca-

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42 This information was collected during several interviews (Storeys June 6, 2014; Braybrookes June 8, 2014; Sandy Bharat July 8, 2014). It was revised and corrected by the IIC members.
43 IIC Annual Report (1996) in Trustees reports. Storey's personal archives.

demic research exchange and also had a theological perspective in its lectures/conferences.

The activities they hosted took place at universities and colleges as they did not have their own building and their office was not big enough. The work dynamic consisted of forming small groups to encourage people to deepen dialogue and share personal experiences. All their efforts aimed to reach peace, promote dialogue, learn from each other, empower people and push as many people as possible to get involved in the interreligious dialogue movement. They were supportive of what other organizations did and they would promote and share what others did since they were in touch with many interreligious dialogue initiatives.

Responding to the needs of their time, they also held seminars and dialogue encounters in conflict areas. The topics of these events were mainly dialogue, world conflict resolution, and energy for unity. Through many activities, they also tried to show the richness that existed in diversity and religious pluralism. Braybrooke wrote in an IIC magazine that "[t]he first step in ending religious hostility is to dispel prejudice and ignorance by teaching about the religious beliefs and practices of other people and by providing opportunities for members of different religions, especially young people, to meet and get to know each other."[44]

In 1994 and 1995, the IIC offered talks about obstacles to interreligious dialogue and its goals, religious minorities and how to speak for a religion, showing its members the capacity to express reflexivity. The 1994 conference was called: "Religious Practice, Justice and Transformation" and the theme was about how different religions can work together for a better world. They agreed that: "it should begin by acts of service to the local community, but then go to ask questions about what caused the conditions which required relief."[45]

The IIC's objectives in 1996 were to develop strategies for tolerance and mutual understanding between different religious traditions. To follow this aim they held a conference that was called: "From Conflict to Dialogue" in which they asked: what can you reach through interreligious dialogue in places with tensions because of having different faith communities? Or in Braybrooke's words: "what interfaith organizations could do in areas of conflict." (2013: 245) During this event, they focused on interreligious achievements and initiatives around the world. Also, in 1996 the Centre published "Testing the Global

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44 Marcus Braybrooke, "What is Interfaith?," in *Seven Years IIC Magazine* (2002). Braybrooke's personal archives.

45 Marcus Braybrooke, "Religious Practice, Justice & Transformation," in *The Newsletter of the International Interfaith Centre at Oxford*, April 1994.

Ethic", showing again its close links to the Chicago 1993 centennial event. This book wanted to see how far these commitments had become true by asking people of different faiths.

The events organized in 1997 were mainly related to conflict resolution. They had a programme linked to this problem, as well as one about community building. The IIC worked in places such as Bosnia and Ireland. It also held meetings about integration from different religious perspectives. These events encouraged participants to think about how dialogue could solve conflicts. Topics such as nationalism, reconciliation, identity, interreligious dialogue and effectiveness of dialogue were predominant.[46]

As already shown, the main concerns of the IIC events reflected IRDM limits (reflexivity), supported other interfaith initiatives (cooperation) and conflict resolution (interreligious dialogue as an alternative to religious extremism). The above are just some examples of IIC work. Through this variety of activities offered and topics treated, the IIC members got involved with interreligious dialogue and took it seriously as they considered (and showed) that these kinds of encounters could be effective agents of change.

5 Concluding Remarks

The IIC was barely active while the research took place. It still helped charitable causes and projects of social service, but it was not working towards the aims it held in the beginning. This might be related to the fact that they achieved their main objectives. It also needs to be considered that from 2000 to 2010 the IIC coordinated the International Interfaith Organizations Network (IION), which linked the main interreligious bodies to each other. Due to the rapid increase of interreligious work around the world, the task of trying to coordinate activities became too big for a largely voluntary group with limited fundraising capacities. That is probably why new initiatives that appeared on the scene were very welcome.

The present analysis proposes that the IIC – in its search for understanding and unity – was able to gather people from different interreligious dialogue organizations, religious groups and worked hard to bring together people in conflict areas where the religious other was considered an enemy. The activities they organized sought for true dialogue encounters and that is why they thought that

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46 Marcus Braybrooke, "The Place of Dialogue in Helping and Healing Conflict," in *The Newsletter of the International Interfaith Centre at Oxford*, July 1997.

learning about other faiths was important. Besides providing information about interreligious activities, they shared information about different religious traditions promoting religious studies and research. The IIC also organized trips, lectures, conferences, seminars, symposiums, workshops, online courses, publications and other events.

These overall aims also influenced the processes inside the Centre. As mentioned in this paper, the IIC was founded to try to build dialogue among interreligious initiatives. When the IIC members asked themselves about their mission and their distinctive characteristics, they said that they should remember that their main ideal was working towards cooperation among organizations. Everything should be about cooperation among religions for the same purpose. The IIC wanted dialogue among religions – as sometimes there were some traditions excluded from interreligious activities – dialogue among all interreligious organizations – that in lots of cases competed for resources instead of fighting towards their shared objectives – and dialogue between people of other faiths to achieve encounters beyond differences.

This has much wider implications. The importance of studying the IIC lies in the fact that its objectives were original, and they answered a need that had not been attended to within the interreligious dialogue movement. Instead of being an organization, those who planned the IIC thought it should not be established as an organization because it could be seen as a threat to other interreligious initiatives. As their main aim was to coordinate and give information about the interreligious movement, they decided that by being a center they would be able to accomplish their objectives in a better way, having no power or hierarchy.

In addition, the creation of the IIC inspired new initiatives in the interreligious dialogue movement and was related, since the beginning, to numerous interreligious events and organizations. Some of the main international interreligious dialogue organizations supported and were involved in the creation of the IIC (IARF, WCF) and important academic institutions, such as Westminster College were also implicated in setting it up. The idea of the IIC arose from the events that took place from 1985 to 1993, which inspired the idea of a union inside the interreligious dialogue movement. The main episode that can be named as the one that "gave birth" to the IIC was the Year of Cooperation and Understanding. At the same time, the IIC inspired and promoted international interreligious dialogue organizations and initiatives such as networks to gather these organizations together.

This has to be put into context. The common causes that could threaten religions were also part of the reason why dialogue increased. Working together against poverty, protecting the environment and promoting human rights are some examples of causes that can unite people. Fighting against secularization,

fascism, and communism also make believers get together in spite of differences, for example. Today, one of the main concerns of the interreligious dialogue movement is fanaticism, fundamentalism and religious extremism that is and was responsible for many world conflicts and wars. Some of these common aims and threats already inspired the initiatives that emerged during the seventies and also the ones that guided interreligious dialogue encounters that have taken place since the nineteen-eighties. The IIC, which was created to respond to this growth, also shared these aims and fights, which was demonstrated in many of the topics treated in their events.

This paper tries to contribute to the aim of learning about the history of the interreligious dialogue movement by presenting the IIC as a case study. The IIC is just one example of what interreligious dialogue is about and it shows the importance of networking for the IRDM. Since the IIC started operating, its founders enhanced cooperation among interreligious dialogue initiatives and organizations. However, due to the IRDM growth in the last two decades, its organizational structure did not allow them to continue working towards this aim. Other strong international interreligious dialogue organizations have since appeared on the scene and some of them continue working towards these objectives. Although interreligious dialogue has many difficulties and limits – mainly related to fear of otherness and losing distinctiveness, to power and to religious, social, ethnic or gender inequality – it has proved to be an effective agent of change by encouraging true dialogue encounters among people from different faiths. According to Braybrooke "deep interfaith fellowship has the potential to heal the world's division and to help us create a world of lasting peace and justice."[47]

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