

(English translation)

Berlin, 31 May 2003

**“Let us make man in our image and likeness...”**

From Chiara’s speech at the Ecumenical Kirchentag

**Chiara:** Brothers and sisters, it is a special joy for me and at the same time an honour to be able to participate in this great event which is, for the Church in Germany, the first ecumenical Kirchentag. It is not the only time that the Lord has brought me to this land of yours, so present and close to my heart. Even before the building of the wall, which for many years divided Germany in two, God’s providence had already brought me to this “lively city” – as they call it – from where the Focolare Movement then spread to the various countries of Eastern Europe.

In the years that followed I had occasion to return several times to Germany, especially for encounters and important ecumenical events as, in 1999, when the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church signed the joint declaration on the doctrine of justification.

In 1998 I came to Berlin again where, in the Memorial Church, we had sealed a solemn pact of unity with the bishops and pastors who were at that time representatives of the Churches in that great city. For all these reasons I am particularly happy to be here today and to be able to take a further step ahead with you on the journey that leads us to the full visible communion among the Churches.

The passage from Sacred Scripture that I have been asked to comment for today’s bible study is taken from the book of Genesis, from chapter one, verse 26 to chapter two, verse three. It is the splendid conclusion of the first narration of creation.

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“Then God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...’” (Gen 1:26). These words are an invitation to contemplate the wonderful design of God for humanity and to live it.

This is the subject I would like to reflect upon with all of you.

At the culminating point of God’s creative act there is the creation of human beings. Unlike what the Lord did before, it is the fruit of a divine decision which underlines its great importance: “God said: ‘Let us make man’.”<sup>1</sup>

Placed at the apex of creation, human beings appear as the “masterpiece of God”. Human beings are not only “something good”, like all other creatures. They are something “very good”<sup>2</sup>, “perfect”<sup>3</sup>.

Psalm 139:14 re-echoes the exclamation: “I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works!” God created human beings; therefore, inasmuch as they are creatures, they are completely dependent on God. This is the basic rapport that must always be kept in mind. All that human beings are and do, they are and do as creatures of God. However, in creating them, God made them different from all other creatures; he created them in his “image and likeness”.

What does this mean? It means above all that human beings stand before him, as his “you”. They are capable of a direct, personal relationship with God: a relationship of knowledge, they can know him; of love, they can love him; of friendship, they can be God’s friends. A sign of this in the text read is the

<sup>1</sup>. This plural can be in reference to the heavenly court to which God would address himself, but also to the majesty and inner wealth of God, whose common name in Hebrew is in the plural, “Elohim”. The Fathers of the Church have seen this as a veiled allusion to the Trinity: See La Bibbia di Gerusalemme, p. 36, nota a Gn 1:26.

<sup>2</sup>. G. Ravasi, *Il libro della Genesi* (1-11), Roma 1990, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>. G. VonRad, *La Genèse, Labor et fides*, Montreux 1968, p. 58.

fact that “God speaks directly only to the first human couple.”<sup>4</sup> Humans are thus presented as beings called to communion with God, capable of understanding him and of responding to him.”<sup>5</sup>

Also for the Evangelical theologian Westermann: “This special relationship with God is what constitutes being human. The relationship with God is not something added to human nature; rather, human beings are created such that their human nature is understood within their relationship with God.”<sup>6</sup> This relationship is therefore essential to human beings and it is the reason for their dignity.

The fact that it is in the very nature of human beings to establish a personal dialogue with God can be understood also in contact with our brothers and sisters of other religions. We can discover in them profound experiences of prayer, which witness to a secret, but effective action of God which urges human beings to search for him.

Now, if the essential characteristic of human beings lies in their relationship with God, to fulfil themselves they must concretely live and develop this relationship. The more their relationship with God is deepened and enriched, the more human beings find fulfilment and happiness.

But how is it possible to have this relationship with God in every moment? There is an extraordinary way within the reach of all, therefore, of us too. We cannot always recollect ourselves to pray, but we can always love God. Yes, because loving God is simply doing his will. Adhering to his will, conforming our own will to his, human beings, every person – therefore all of us too – can become that masterpiece which God, in his infinite love, intended in creating us.

And who can tell us the will of God? The commandments, for example, the duties of our state in life, or the voice of our conscience, where God speaks. When human beings walk through life following the indications that God gives them, therefore, also when we walk in line with the will of God, our monotonous life is transformed into a wonderful adventure, not thought-out and planned only by ourselves. We witness small and big events, at times truly amazing, which reveal the presence of Another: of God in our lives.

Following God and adhering to what he wants is not, as people often think, an artificial superstructure, and much less an alienation. Doing God’s will is not resigning ourselves to a destiny that is more or less pleasing to us. Nor is it submitting to a fatality, almost like thinking: this is what has been established, this is the way it has to be, it’s inevitable. Doing God’s will is something completely different: nothing could be better for human beings, therefore, for each one of us as well. If we carry out God’s will we cooperate in bringing to fruition, in drawing forth from ourselves the image of God, what he is and, with it, God’s great plan – of salvation and glorification – for all humanity.

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<sup>4</sup>. See 1:28: “God blessed them saying...”; 1:29: “See, I give you...”.

<sup>5</sup>. S. J. Baez, *L'uomo nel progetto di Dio: Genesi 1-3*, in *Antropologia cristiana. Bibbia, teologia, cultura* Roma 2001, p. 178.

<sup>6</sup>. C. Westermann, “Genesis”, 1 Teilband Genesis 1-11, in “*Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament*”, I, pp. 217-218.