

(English translation)

Caux (Switzerland), 29 July 2003

Can Religions be Partners in Peace Building? Interreligious Seminar

Ladies and Gentlemen, friends, brothers and sisters,

First of all I would like to express my joy in being here today in this Center of Caux, which abounds in initiatives aimed at reinforcing the moral and spiritual foundations of society, and at promoting the peaceful encounter of cultures, civilizations and religions. I especially thank Dr. Cornelio Sommaruga who invited me to give my contribution to this important interreligious seminar.

The subject I have been asked to address today is “Can Religions be Partners on the way to Peace?”

We all know how extremely important and relevant this question is today.

Many interpret the violence of terrorism, the wars raged in response and the ongoing tensions in the Middle East as symptoms of a “clash of civilizations”. They say that it is marked and even intensified by the different religious affiliations. However, in considering the facts more attentively, this viewpoint provoked by various forms of extremism and fanaticism which distort the religions proves to be very partial.

Never as in this hour of the world have believers and leaders of all religions felt the duty to work together for the common good of humanity. Organizations such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace or initiatives such as the day of prayer for peace in Assisi promoted by John Paul II in January 2002, are a confirmation of this.

On that occasion the Pope stressed, on behalf of all those who were present, that “whoever uses religion to foment violence contradicts its most authentic and profound aspiration” and that “no religious goal can justify the practice of violence on the part of one person against another” because “the offence against the human person is ultimately an offence against God.”¹

On September 11, 2001 humanity discovered, in shock and horror, the nature of the great, enormous danger of terrorism. It is not a war like others – we still have about 40 on our planet today – which are usually the result of hatred, discontent, rivalries and of personal or collective interests.

Instead, terrorism, as affirmed by the Pope, is the fruit also of the forces of Evil with a capital “E”, of Darkness.

Now, forces of this kind cannot be opposed only by human, diplomatic, political and military means. The forces of Good with a capital “G” are needed. And Good with a capital “G”, we know, is God and all that is rooted in Him. Therefore, we can combat terrorism with spiritual forces, with prayer, for example, with fasting, as the representatives of the world religions did in the city of St. Francis.

However, we feel that we must say that prayer is not enough.

We know that the causes of terrorism are many, but one, the deepest, is the unbearable suffering in the face of a world divided in two: the rich part and the poor part, which has generated and continues to generate resentment which peoples have been harboring for years, violence and revenge.

More equality is needed, more solidarity, especially a more equal sharing of goods.

¹. John Paul II, Discourse to the representatives of the various religions of the world, Assisi, January 24, 2002.

We know, though, that goods do not move by themselves, on their own. We need to move hearts, we need a communion of hearts!

This is why we need to spread the idea and practice of brotherhood, and given the vastness of the problem, of a universal brotherhood among as many people as possible. Brothers or sisters know how to look after one another, they know how to help one another, how to share what they have.

To meet this unprecedented challenge, the contribution of religions is decisive.

Where, if not in the great faith traditions can a strategy of brotherhood start, a strategy capable of determining a turning point even in international relationships?

The enormous spiritual and moral resources, the contribution of idealities, of aspirations to justice, of commitment in favor of the needy, along with the political leverage of millions of believers, all springing from religious sentiments and channeled into the field of human relations, could undoubtedly be translated into actions capable of having a positive influence on the international order.

Much is being done in the field of international solidarity by non-governmental organizations. Now the various States must in their turn take up those political and economic choices suited to building a fraternal community of peoples committed to realizing justice.

In the face of a strategy of death and hatred, the only valid response is to build peace in justice. But there is no peace without brotherhood. Only brotherhood among individuals and peoples can guarantee a future of living together in peace.

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