

VIII DOHA CONFERENCE ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

**RAISING THE NEW GENERATION WITH A FOUNDATION OF VALUES
AND TRADITION: RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES**

19-21 October 2010

Inaugural Address

by H.E. Archbishop Pier Luigi CELATA

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Vatican City*

Your Excellencies,
Dear Friends,

At the very outset, I would like to thank the Chairman of Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, Prof. Ibrahim Saleh AL-NAIMI for his courteous invitation to take part in this Conference, where I have the honour of representing the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the central body of the Catholic Church for relations with believers of other religions.

The theme of this Conference is of great importance for the entire society. As a matter of fact, we are witnessing today, an erosion of values that constitute the very fabric of any society and are truer sources of its vitality. Religions, with their specific educational capacity can make a significant contribution towards assisting the new generations to know and to make a choice of values that will render the individuals and the entire community more human.

The inalienable right to education as well as the corresponding duty to educate are enriched by faith in God because it offers motives that affect moral consciousness giving profound meaning and special strength to the engagement of those who are involved in the educational process.

The first and the most responsible persons for moulding their children are parents. Through the testimony of their love for God and charity for all human beings, they accompany them, in a unique way, towards full maturity.

Undoubtedly, adequate education requires the contribution of the whole society. It is the duty of the State, first of all, to provide suitable educational means directed to achieve the "common good" and in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

At the same time, let us not forget the valuable work carried out by non-Governmental organizations of different nature - cultural, religious, humanitarian, etc., - which may be effective in promoting important values.

Religious institutions also are responsible for formation both when offering a training specifically religious, and, particularly so when they offer suitable educational opportunities for the integral development of young people and for the

good of the society. To this end, the school remains a privileged means, but in no way the only one. In fact, the specific educational work of religious institutions takes place, in many ways: I think of the sermons and homilies in places of worship; publications and courses with religious-educational character; interventions on the media; the work of counselling etc.

As regards the Catholic Church, she is conscious – as is evident from her long history - of her rights and duty to contribute towards the integral formation of her children so that their lives may be penetrated by the spirit of Jesus Christ. At the same time, however, she offers her services to all people to promote their integral development, for a more humane world.

In the context of the young, we must keep in mind that an educational process that truly responds to their needs, must take into account the socio-cultural realities of today that they are influenced by and from where they draw ideas and behaviour patterns. I deem it sufficient to point out here only some phenomena characterizing this reality: individualism, relativism, materialism, consumerism, hedonism, technicality, recourse to violence etc.

Some of these trends are related to fundamental existential option through which human beings either open themselves up to the presence of God in their lives or shut themselves off.

The spread of these trends goes hand in hand with the growing phenomenon of secularism, in the sense of prejudicial exclusion of reference to God or even any kind of openness to the Transcendent.

Cultural operators and those responsible for the society have started to realize that, in the absence of reference to God, people become devoid of a solid ethical foundation for their living together. It is also to be noted that new attention is being paid to the religious dimension both in the life of individuals and of the society. There are also civil initiatives aimed at giving space to religions so as to attain certain positive goals such as strengthening the social-ethical behaviour, affirmation of the rule of law, commitment to justice and solidarity, overcoming corruption, combating of terrorism, etc.

Religious institutions can definitely contribute to these goals. Their services, however, will be all the more effective if they can function in due autonomy.

The teaching of religions, especially to young people, cannot neglect the importance of human reason because it is precisely this faculty that gives human beings a sound basis for accepting the gift of faith. Moreover, it is reason that can safeguard the religious experience from an excessive psychological and emotional influence, as well as from the temptation of fundamentalism and violence. Faith and reason are two gifts, from the one and the same God, that require to interact in the educational process of young generations. We must therefore not be afraid of the criticism by the youth; instead, we should encourage them so that, with the help of reason, they address their doubts while considering the call of the faith seriously.

Similarly, with regard to freedom, so longed for by young people, we must not be apprehensive about it, but rather should respect it with sincerity and, through

proper education, help them discover the truest meaning of freedom as a means towards responsible choices for truth and for personal and common good.

Lack of respect, theoretical or practical, to the freedom of each individual in adhering to the call of the religion, to the change of his or her religious choice or not to embrace any religion, would only contradict the very nature of true faith and also any genuine educational work.

Bearing in mind the realities of the contemporary world, I would like to mention here some faith based human values offered by religious education in the light of the teaching of the Catholic Church, like: the sacred character of human life; the inalienable dignity of every human being; the vocation of every person to search and to follow the truth; justice; universal brotherhood and solidarity; forgiveness and reconciliation; peace.

Our different religious traditions are called upon to take up the challenge and to draw light and strength from their specific heritage to help young people act responsibly in the society with all their potentiality.

In this context, it is worth recalling what Pope Benedict XVI noted as 'emergency in education'. He said: "it is an urgency that stems from attentive and loving care for the expectations of the new generations and the duty to those who are called by God, through their faith, to offer, with their testimony, a credible proposal of mankind based on authentic values" (*Address to the diocese and the city of Rome, January 21, 2008*).

Looking at the youth today and our shared future with them, the educational commitment in their favour strengthens our courage to look forward with sure hope.

Many thanks for your kind attention.