

Address at the opening session of the 4th Doha Conference
on Interreligious Dialogue

General theme of the Conference:

THE ROLE OF RELIGIONS IN THE CONSTITUTION OF HUMAN BEING

Theme of the paper:

**Religions and the building up of the collective human
person**

Doha (State of Qatar), 25-27 April 2006

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The truth religions proclaim and live is not primarily the truth that one believes and formulates, and that one tries to establish by argument and proof. Religious truth is in the first place the truth that one does (cf. Jn 3,21: "*Whoever does the truth comes out into the light, so that what he is doing may plainly appear as done in God*").

Hence we are called to take the truth and the moral values of our own religion as the basis for obtaining the objective of founding friendly relations and of establishing with others a fruitful collaboration between the religious communities.

In a little more detail this means concretely:

(1) To avoid the unjust treatment of others

Almost everywhere one finds gross and rude attacks on the opponent. Rarely does one meet with the readiness to

understand what the partner is saying first before one moves to judge and even condemn him or her. As soon as one has the impression that the doctrine is different from the one held by oneself, this doctrine is condemned as false or even idiotic, and the believers of the other religion are abused as misguided persons lacking reason. There is hardly a readiness to refrain from denouncing immediately as wrong and misguided what is different; to look first at the other position as something simply different and perhaps to try to place it into a broader frame of reference, so that in the event it may become clear whether it is true after all or at least contains elements of truth.

Also the mechanisms of defending one's own religion can quickly alter into mechanisms of destroying others: Self-preservation by means of the suppression or the destruction of others.

(2) To overcome persistent prejudices

A few examples from the area of relations between Christians and Muslims may be mentioned here – they probably could, *mutatis mutandis*, be found in the field of relations between other religions.

– Christians have a tendency to hold the religion of Islam responsible for the backwardness of Islamic countries in the fields of science and technology, organisation and general civilisation.

- Muslims constantly confuse the West with Christianity, as if the Christendom of the Middle Ages had not been replaced long ago by the secular state.
- Christians have a tendency to consider especially the fanatic militant Muslims who are linked to acts of terror as the true representatives of Islam. They deliberately overlook the peaceful and peace-loving majority of Muslims in the world. Islam and the sword, Islam and acts of terrorism are constantly associated with one another.
- Muslims insist upon accusing Western society as a decadent society without taking the trouble to look more closely at this society in its various components and to consider also its critical phenomena in an effort to arrive at a fair assessment. Or, they suspect almost everywhere in the "Christian" West traces of a crusader mentality.

(3) To pursue shared objectives of humanisation

What is badly needed is a new orientation in the light of the ethical values of Christianity and other religions, ethical values that they largely share.

A humane social order is needed that would be based upon the inviolable dignity of the human person and on the full implementation of the basic human rights, including active and

passive religious freedom and which, translated into practice, should lead to the following consequences:

- brotherly justice
- compassionate implementation/administration of rights and duties
- giving priority to the rights of the weak and the marginalised;
- readiness for reconciliation;
- a positive offer of reconciliation to the other religious community with which one lives;
- the cultivation of peace instead of violent striving after power and supremacy.

(4) Standing for, and speaking up, for brotherly justice

It is of the greatest importance for the future of humankind whether we succeed in building a global society that is based on fraternal justice.

The Second Vatican Council says, first of all in addressing Catholic Christians: "...in exercising their rights individual men and social groups are bound by the moral law to have regard for the rights of others, their own duties to others and the common good of all. All men must be treated with justice and humanity." (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 7). This justice informed by humaneness, inspired by justice must govern not only in political life (*Gaudium et Spes*, 73), but also in the economic

realm: "God has destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 69).

In addition, Christianity and, I presume, other religions too, contain following principles:

- Fundamental equality of all human beings as creatures of God.
- All creatures of God, here especially human beings, belong together, all are created for and depend upon the realisation of world-embracing communication and collaboration.
- All human beings form one great family; they stand with one another in one comprehensive solidarity and are linked through a universal brother- and sisterhood.
- Solidarity and *Geschwisterlichkeit* are obligatory. They imply responsibility of all for all. Hence they are as principles of social and political order the basis of a world-embracing fraternal justice.
- This is the imitation of the justice of God, the measure of which is his mercy. "If God loved us so much, we too should love each other" (*1 John 4,11*).

(5) Practical collaboration

Dialogue between religions must make possible and further a practical collaboration. The attitude here no longer would be

only that of partners in conversation, who sit in front of one another and speak about their mutual relations, differences and common points. The attitude is one of partners in conversation, who sit with one another and consider together the problems which concern all of us.

- Everyone must ask himself and his religious community as to his/her/its contribution to the solution of these problems and must demand this contribution.
- Everyone must ask the partner concerning his/her contribution and the contribution of his/her religious community and call for this contribution.
- Both sides must make an effort to make their own contribution,
- and finally to make their shared contribution with one another, together.

(6) Objective of individual and of corporate perfection

Truth and tolerance, dialogue and collaboration are meant to open human persons for one another and bring them closer to one another. They should enable them in the one world of today to experience the solidarity of all with all, the universal brother- and sisterhood.

In relation to the many different cultural and religious systems this means that they have to find the path from the opposition of systems, via the mere side-by-side, towards the one-with-the-other of the systems.

In other words: In the galloping process of contemporary globalisation we can no longer be one against the other and deal with one another as opponents.

We may no longer live merely side by side like strangers and consider one another as competitors.

We must act with one another and be truly partners.
And we should succeed also in this: to exist for one another and thus to become friends.

All this will be a gift from, and a gift for, God, to His greater glory and honour. Irenaeus of Lyons, the outstanding Christian theologian of the second century (CE) stated:

*"Gloria enim Dei vivus homo,
vita autem hominis visio Dei."*

"The glory of God is the human person fully alive.
The life of the human person however is the vision of God."