



Contribution of H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the presentation of the book “The promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue as an instrument for peace and fraternity”.

Jeddah, 22 November 2020

As-salamu alaykum!

Thank you, Mr. Moderator,
Dear Friends,
Brothers and sisters,

I consider it a great honor to be able to visit Saudi Arabia and to address you in the context of the presentation of this book. At the outset, I wish to express my gratitude to you and the organizers of this important initiative, as well as the other panelists, for their contributions to this publication, which aims to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a tool for peaceful coexistence and fraternity among peoples. I would like to convey my sincere appreciation to H.E. Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the World Muslim League, for this invitation. In this occasion, I am pleased to recall your visit with Pope Francis in the Vatican three years ago, as well as the memorable and historic journey of Cardinal Jean Louis Tauran to this Country, where he had the opportunity to speak about the long process of building together a road of encounter, guided by Divine Providence. I myself had the privilege of meeting the Secretary-General in Geneva, almost two years ago, where he discussed and reflected on the meaning and importance of “just peace.”

This meeting and the presentation of this book today represent another development in bringing this path forward and moving from declaration to action. This is why I would like to take this occasion to highlight three main issues, which represent the *fil rouge* of our contribution to this volume: 1) human fraternity; 2) justice; and 3) dialogue as a tool for peace.

1. Human Fraternity

When I received the kind invitation from the World Muslim League and the United Nations University for Peace to participate in this publication and this panel, the first idea that came to mind was naturally the *Document on Human Fraternity for*

World Peace and Living Together, co-signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019.

This historic declaration not only brings closer together people of different faiths, but it also conveys a strong message to the entire world: namely, we must consider and treat all human beings as brothers and sisters. As its inspiring introduction reads: "Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved. Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures, and all human beings (equal on account of his mercy), believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need."¹

In the face of growing selfish and individualistic tendencies, it is of the utmost importance to emphasize the spirit and appeal contained in the Document on Human Fraternity which focuses on "reconciliation and fraternity among all believers, among believers and non-believers, and all people of goodwill."² We live and develop in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. Indeed, there is no society that is completely religiously homogenous. The polychromatic light of religions has illuminated this world and this light does not contrast the individual colors by putting them in antithesis to one another; rather, it combines them in a non-conflictual vision. Indeed, this is the big problem today: differences are very often experienced in terms of conflict. As was also stated by H.E. Sheikh Al-Issa during his visit in Geneva: "We have to unite and co-operate, those in all different religions and denominations; first reconciliation among us, and then show this paradigm to the rest of the world"³.

Looking at the current scenario, we realize that "brotherhood is essential". At the same time, obstacles such as nationalism, racism, militarism, totalitarianism and classism, frequently hinder human brotherhood, manifesting a spirit of faction "which opposes ideologies, methods, interests, organizations in the entire fabric of the various communities"⁴. More than 50 years have passed since this insight of Pope Paul VI. Nonetheless, these expressions, as well as the concerns they embody, do not at all appear anachronistic. Today, even more through Pope Francis' most recent Encyclical Letter "*Fratelli tutti*", fraternity is not evoked as an abstract and consolatory aspiration, but as an effective and realistic criterion of coexistence. As such, human fraternity is a political criterion in a higher sense, which springs from the history and shared awareness of common dangers on the horizon.

The inevitable consequence of abandoning a *civilization of encounter* is to resort to an *incivility of conflict*. There does not appear to be a middle way. Thus, in order to

¹ Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, 4 February 2019.

² *Ibid.*

³ H.E. Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa statement at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, 9 November 2018 <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-welcomes-muslim-world-league-general-secretary>

⁴ Pope Paul VI, Christmas Message, 22 December 1964 http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641222_radiomessaggio-natale.html.

avoid conflict, it is imperative to develop a fraternal culture of sincere exchange and open dialogue. Only in this way, future generations, “like well-planted trees, can be firmly rooted in the soil of history, and, growing heavenward in one another’s company, can daily turn the polluted air of hatred into the oxygen of fraternity”⁵. It is precisely this “oxygen” that is the pivot of the document “on human brotherhood for world peace and common coexistence”. The recognition of mutual brotherhood has the capacity to change this perspective, it can turn conflict upside down and become a strong message with a religious and also a political value. It is not by coincidence that it leads us directly to reflect on the meaning of “citizenship”: we are all brothers and sisters, and therefore all citizens with equal rights and duties, under whose shadow all enjoy justice. As rightly highlighted by Sheikh Al-Issa during his visit to Geneva, “Peace cannot be achieved without total justice, abstract justice can only lead to false peace”⁶.

2. Justice

When justice triumphs, peace reigns. “[J]ustice goes hand in hand with peace and is permanently and actively linked to peace...[w]hen one is threatened, both falter; when justice is offended, peace is also placed in jeopardy”⁷. Here, the classic definition of justice still retains its full significance, “*iustitia suum cuique distribuit*”, justice renders to each person his or her due. Since we all share the same human nature, and therefore equal dignity, justice demands rendering respect for the rights of every person. The protection of fundamental human rights of the individual, therefore, matters for the whole of society and, consequently, everybody has the duty to work towards this objective: “[i]ndividuals, families, communities and nations, all are called to live in justice and to work for peace”, “[n]o one can claim exemption from this responsibility”⁸. Respect of human dignity is just the first pillar, albeit an essential one, to build a solid basis for dialogue, first on an intercultural level and then on an interreligious one. There can be no dialogue if human dignity is not first respected.

When human dignity is protected, men and women are at liberty to devote themselves with an unhindered conscience to seek the Truth. The divine spark present in all human beings makes them also capable of receiving the Truth, which they must be free to seek and to express, both singularly and collectively. Thus, religious freedom is one of the most fundamental among the inviolable rights, because it comes from the inherent necessity of men and women to nourish their spirit. Guaranteeing religious freedom must include, among other things, the promotion of acceptance and tolerance.

⁵ Pope Francis, Address to the participants in the International Peace Conference, *Al-Azhar Conference Centre*, 28 April 2017.

⁶ H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mahammad Al-Issa statement at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, 9 November 2018. <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-welcomes-muslim-world-league-general-secretary>.

⁷ Pope John Paul II, Message for the celebration of the XXI World Day of Peace, 1 January 1998, n. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, it is necessary to distinguish between religious *tolerance* and religious *freedom*. When tolerance is based on mutual respect for human dignity, it can be an important step towards ensuring peace among peoples. Nonetheless, mere tolerance is not enough! This is because tolerance, in itself, has a negative connotation of “putting up” or “suffering” with the other rather than appreciating the differences and expressing a mutual respect of each other’s religions. As such, it may be more fruitful to facilitate better relationships among religious traditions on the more dynamic concept of mutual brotherhood, because this affords the ability to render an account not only for actions made, but also for those omitted. In this regard, we are called to more than peaceful coexistence, but also to strive for mutual enrichment through dialogue.

In turn, acceptance and tolerance derive from a deeper knowledge of the other, which is possible only through dialogue. “Dialogue between members of different religions increases and deepens mutual respect and paves the way for relationships that are crucial in solving the problems of human suffering. Dialogue that is respectful and open to the opinions of others can promote union and a commitment to this noble cause. Besides, the experience of dialogue gives a sense of solidarity and courage for overcoming barriers and difficulties in the task of nation-building. For without dialogue the barriers of prejudice, suspicion and misunderstanding cannot be effectively removed.”⁹

3. Dialogue

Dialogue, in its very meaning, underpins two fundamental activities: listening and speaking. In order for dialogue to enrich both parties, there must be a reciprocal attitude to give and take: the parties must have both the right to speak and, consequently, the duty to listen to what the other says. These essential components of any authentic dialogue arise from two intrinsic characteristics that every human being possesses, namely, that each person is the bearer of human dignity and shines with “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men”.¹⁰ The latter derives directly from the act of creation by God. In Christian terminology, this universal reality is described as *imago Dei*, the image of God. Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God in their moral, spiritual, and intellectual and bodily composition. They are part of His plan and, therefore, must not be deprived in any way either of their humanity, which is the source of one’s dignity, or of their right to seek and express Truth. While human dignity is the premise that allows a dialogue among different cultures (also non-religious ones), the pursuit of Truth permits an authentic encounter between various religions confessions. As Pope Francis has summarized “[God] has created us in His image and likeness. In this way He has given us a unique dignity, calling us to

⁹ Pope John Paul II, Address on the Occasion of the Meeting with the Exponents of Non-Christian Religions in Madras (India), 5 February 1986, n. 4.

¹⁰ *Supra*, n. 4.

live in communion with Him, in communion with our sisters and our brothers, with respect for all creation".¹¹

Since the human person is created in the image of God, its dignity is inalienable. This truth lies at the foundation of all social life and determines its operative principles. In contemporary culture, perhaps the closest reference to the principle of the inalienable dignity of the person is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is a "milestone on the long and difficult path of the human race", and as "one of the highest expressions of the human conscience".¹² The direct and most relevant corollary of dignity is equality, both with regard to rights as well as duties. Every human being, as the bearer of innate dignity, enjoys inalienable rights, which give rise to concomitant duties. "These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable."¹³ What follows is that dialogue is not only *an* instrument for peace and fraternity, but it is the *main instrument* to achieve them. The fruit of dialogue is unity among people and the union of people with God, who is the source and revealer of all Truth and whose Spirit guides human beings in freedom when they meet one another in all honesty and love. Through such dialogue, we let God be present in our midst, for when we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God. To this end, we should use the legitimate means of human friendliness, mutual understanding and interior persuasion. "As followers of different religions, we should join together in promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human brotherhood, education, culture, social welfare and civic order. Dialogue and collaboration are possible in all these great projects."¹⁴

In conclusion, dear friends,

During this challenging time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the temptation we all face is to isolate ourselves as a way of protecting our physical health. In this context, it is all the more important not to lose sight of the principles that unite us on a spiritual level. As highlighted in our contribution to this book, and listening to the insights of the other speakers, peace is neither a dream nor a utopia; peace is possible. We will listen to a series of reflections on peace and the encouragement to remain committed to its search. The construction of peace is not restricted to the corridors of political institutions, or around negotiating tables, necessary as those efforts might be. Peacemaking also must be rooted in everyday, tangible relationships, which enable us "to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother." Without such fraternity, "...it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace." It is only with "an authentic spirit of fraternity" that we can overcome "the individual

¹¹ Pope Francis, General Audience, 12 August 2020.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, I, n.9.

¹⁴ Msgr. Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, 'Una lettura dell'enciclica "Laudato si'": il senso di un'ecologia integrale'.

selfishness which conflicts with people's ability to live in freedom and in harmony..." In facing this great cultural challenge, one that is both urgent and exciting, we - Christians, Muslims and all believers - are called to offer our specific contribution: "We live under the sun of the one merciful God... Thus, in a true sense, we can call one another brothers and sisters... since without God the life of man would be like the heavens without the sun".¹⁵ May the sun of a renewed fraternity in the name of God rise in this land, blessed with an abundance of sunlight, to be the dawn of a *civilization of peace and encounter*.¹⁶

Al Salamò Alaikum!

¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Address to Muslim Religious Leaders*, Kaduna (Nigeria), 14 February 1982.

¹⁶ Cfr. Pope Francis, *Address to the participants in the International Peace Conference, Al-Azhar Conference Centre*, 28 April 2017.