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Tomáš Halík

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to open this historical assembly with a Hasidic story:

Rabbi Pinchas asked his pupils a question: "When does one recognise the moment when the night ends and the day begins?"

"Is it the instant when we are able to tell a sheep from a dog at a distance?" one pupil asked.

"No," answered the Rabbi.

"Is it the instant when we can recognise a date tree from a fig tree?" asked another.

"Not even that," answered the Rabbi.

"So, when does the day begin?" asked the pupils.

"At such a time," answered the Rabbi, "when we look at the face of any person, and recognise that he or she is our brother or our sister. As long as we are unable to do this," said Rabbi Pinchas, "it is still night."

We are beginning to look back on the ending century and millennium. This year, we are also remembering the half-century anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Surely, in no other century, have the declarations of humanity and tolerance been expressed so resonantly; surely, in no other century, have they been so ruthlessly violated. The slogan of today is "globalisation" – and that is also the theme for the international Forum 2000 Conference.

We are realising the possibilities and the pitfalls of the process of the intertwining of our world. This meditative assembly of the representatives of the religions of the world here in Prague Cathedral – the spiritual heart of the Czech lands – wants to help by generating a spark of hope, hope that this process of intertwining will not occur in the dark, in chaos, where different groups of people clash with one another, filled with a dark instinct for promoting only their own interests, the darkness of prejudice towards the unfamiliar, and the fear of others. The dialogue between the religions of the world wants to bring us closer to the instance when we will be able to recognise someone close to us, our brother or sister, in the face of strangers. Who should help the consciousness of the brotherhood of all mankind the most, if not those who have become familiar – using various methods under various names – with the common God of all people and the universal higher power that knows no boundaries and inspires the hearts of people to long for goodness and love?

If we look into the past of humankind, we know and recognise that this hasn't always been the case.

Religion, despite proclaiming higher ideals, was too often abused as a power that brought conflict between people and nations. This occurs even today. All the more, we comprehend that a time has arrived in which it is critical that we come out of the darkness – each one in his own spiritual way – and begin to draw from the light and the warmth.

If the process of globalisation was to occur only on an economic and political level, it would lead to a cold world without a soul or a heart. If we were to rely on only the principles of the free market of ideas and mutual competition in the spiritual realm, it would be unlikely that the world would become a humane and peaceful home. If we were to adhere to a miserly "tolerance" only in the sense of "non-aggression", it could lead to an indifferent life spent beside each other without the possibility of honest communication, sharing, and mutual enrichment. If we wanted to quickly forget our respective differences and to create a kind of utopian single religion, the world would become poorer, and it would lead to greyness and uniformity.

We reject these versions of a common world in which the large and strong would devour or marginalise the weak. We reject a world in which the principle of "every man for himself" and remorseless competition would oust the spirit of solidarity and the respect people feel towards one another. We do not want multiculturalism to lead to a cacophony of voices trying to outshout the others, but rather a symphony of mutual harmony. The process of the intertwining of the world requires a dialogue between the religions of the world and spiritual traditions. This dialogue must not be limited to the level of diplomatic contact. It comprises the whole range of life – from mutual co-operation in the social and humanitarian realm, in the realm of caring and preserving natural richness, to also the social, cultural and spiritual environment we inherited. It comprehends mutual recognition. And we must not omit a moment of meditative silence and the opening of our hearts to the presence of the unexpressed secrets that bind us in spite of all our differences.

We want to exhibit the experience of such a festive assembly and spiritual connection here and now. I welcome all the representatives of the religions of the world who accepted our invitation. I welcome all the delegates of the Forum 2000 conference, and the distinguished guests from the public and spiritual domains of our land. And, in the name of the organising committee of the conference, I welcome everyone else who is able to participate in what truly emphasises the spirit of the conference by means of this important and, in many respects, fundamental moment.

I would now like to ask His Eminence, Miloslav Cardinal Vlk, Archbishop of Prague and the Bishop of this cathedral – as the cathedral is the seat of the bishop, and hence, he is our host – for his comments.

Miloslav Vlk

Mr President, distinguished guests, dear friends,

I would like to welcome you all to the cathedral of St Vitus, Wenceslas and Adalbert, in beautiful Prague, in the heart of Europe.

People of diverse religions have assembled here today in the spirit of brotherhood. It is not an accidental event, nor is it but a ceremonial gesture. Our gathering at this place is a continuation of the spirit of the road that started 12 years ago in Assisi, when Pope John Paul II invited men and women of different religions and creeds to that town – not to debate theological disputes, but to facilitate an atmosphere of brotherhood and prayer, to develop the endeavour to establish a dialogue; not, however, an impersonal, intellectual and academic dialogue, but a dialogue born out of friendship. By meeting and looking into one another's eyes, they started seeing their brother and sister in that other person. Assisi therefore no longer means facing one another, but standing side by side, asking God for peace and serenity. Assisi has thus become a great, shining inspiration at the end of this millennium, an inspiration for peace among religions as the basis for peace among nations. In Assisi, religious dialogue acquired new and creative prospects. The prophetic idea of that first gathering was later adopted by the Saint Agidio community, which wanted to put its charisma into the service of dialogue, understanding and peace. Year after year, the Saint Agidio community, with the support of many friends, Christians and followers of other faiths, continued in organising similar gatherings which were increasingly attended by larger numbers of believers. Some of you have followed that road from the very beginning.

Thus, a couple of weeks ago, we witnessed a large historical meeting in Bucharest. At the end of this assembly we would like to acquaint you with the final appeal from that meeting. The small brook from Assisi has now become a river.

During the years of our advance along the common road there has never been an intention to develop some kind of synthesis of diverse religions. No proposal for the creation of a super-religion has ever been made. The differences in faith were never concealed. It became evident that individual conviction and faith need not be a reason for division but rather a motive for understanding and for a search for unity. Indeed, the search for unity is an expression of our common conviction, and experience, that life truly flourishes when it is shared freely, when it becomes enriched by our diversity, so long as truth is at the root of our conviction.

Sharing together our humanity, the source of which is God, is the answer to the innermost desire of the human heart. Of course, somebody may now point out that religions have also played their part in initiating conflicts, in committing violence and in lack of understanding among people – yes, it is true. The history of the world is marked by conflicts, wars, lack of understanding, violence. And believers, too, have played their part.

It is namely for this reason that we, as believers, have felt the need to ask for forgiveness and to offer forgiveness for the evil that we have not forestalled, the evil that has been committed in the name of religion against mankind and, thereby, against God.

Nevertheless, what is happening before our eyes is not proof of fighting, violence and conflict. What we are seeing now is proof of peace and God. It is not the fruit of negotiations or treaties, it is rather something that could be called the triumph of friendship. If we go beyond the surface, we shall notice that what we see in front of us is a kind of image, an icon of unity in diversity – unity, but not uniformity. Indeed, faith does not divide, but unites. Faith makes it possible to work for unity. Maybe, today's picture is also a prophetic sign for the contemporary world.

The road over the years has been the road of humility. The humility of those who put their faith not in themselves but in Him who is above us all. It is the road of humility, but not of weakness. Indeed, we have found on this road the strength of responsibility, the force of prayer and the sacred responsibility binding each and every believer to love and serve peace. This discovery is a challenge to any religious person to strive for new courage. It is the force of love that transcends the rigid patterns of our own behaviour and our own traditions, the humble courage of the person who has discovered and has become increasingly aware that man cannot serve God without serving peace among people, nations and religions.

We have reached the end of the millennium. We have gone a long way together. We want to continue with this unity of hearts, albeit with diverse histories, cultures and traditions. Although we may still be at the beginning of our striving, we are witnessing the gradual composition of the harmonic mosaic of peace. We would like all people, no matter where they live, to see it – especially those people who are suffering the horrors of war and are victims of ethnic or religious hatred, especially those who are in prison and are suffering injustice. They are being rid of their freedom, sentenced to death or an undignified future. The picture which I portray today is God's gift.

This day is an act of God. Indeed, God's name is Peace.

Tomáš Halík

And now I would like to ask Mr Kóei Kani, who is present on behalf of His Holiness Eshin Watanabe, Patriarch of the Tendai school of Buddhism, to address this assembly as the first of the representatives of the world religions.

Kóei Kani

Allow me to say how moved I am on this occasion and also to express my deep respect for all who have participated in the preparation and organisation of this year's Forum 2000, in the first place to the person who has initiated the whole event, President Václav Havel. Unfortunately, the Patriarch of the Tendai school, His Holiness Eshin Watanabe, could not this time come to Prague in person. I have therefore been asked by him to represent him at this assembly.

Saicho, the founder of the spiritual centre on Mt Hiei – which is called the “Mother Mountain” of Japanese Buddhism – taught that the “treasure of the nation are people inspired by the spirit of the road” and that “supreme compassion is to forget oneself and serve others”. The cultivation of this, the most precious national treasure, has been considered by Saicho a key mission in life. For more than 1,200 years, monks of the Tendai school have been striving to observe this legacy through traditional forms of spiritual practice. The most common examples are probably the Twelve-year Recluse and the Thousand-day Pilgrimage Circumventing the Summit.

The monk who decides to undergo the Twelve-year Recluse must not, for a whole 12 years – not even by a single step – leave his hermitage on the mountain and devotes himself mainly to study of theory and to its practical application. The Thousand-day Pilgrimage Circumventing the Summit is a special form of ascetic exercise during which the candidate walks 30 to 85 kilometres daily, in perfect unity with nature on the Sacred Mountain, along steep animal tracks.

Buddhist teaching draws on the revelation made by Shayamuni while meditating under the Tree of Awakening. He experienced the unity of the essence of Man and Nature or, to use the words of ancient Indian wisdom, of brahma, or substance, the spirit of the universe, and atman, the eternal core of the personality – of the individual – as one. The idea that “even the most modest small flower, like the trees, rivers and mountains, has a Buddhist substance” is the natural continuation of this revelation. Not only all living beings, but also the mountains, rivers, and even the dust of the Earth are all being continuously transformed in harmony with the great Law of the Universe. From the point of view of this Law, there is nothing high nor low, since any existence is possible only in relation to the existence of other things. As such, this existence is based in self-control, mutual respect and compromise; it is imbued with respect and gratitude to the other. It could be said that Buddhism is the teaching of symbiosis.

The wisdom that all kinds of existence in the universe have their Buddhist nature could also be expressed by the words: this world is the embodiment of Buddha's grace and, as such, it is not impossible to treat it without deep respect. Yet, is it not true that we are depleting, day after day, the very same nature that is the embodiment of this grace? Have we not long forgotten what it means to approach nature with religious respect, has not respect for the spiritual pillar of all existence not slipped away from our hearts? We should realise that we are not living due to our own endeavour, but are rather “left to live”. And it is not possible to live at the expense of other beings.

I am convinced that such progress of civilisation – which is not linked with the awakening to the Truth which for us, in the present age, is the embodiment of the Buddha's teaching and his view of nature – does not provide adequate support for life. It is namely for the purpose of coming closer to the mystery of Truth that we have, for centuries, practised the spiritual life that I described at the beginning. It is, in my view, a vital mission of every man: to learn truth and to live the truth.

Before indulging in debates on issues of peace or the global environment, we should always remember that we have been “allowed to live”. That, too, is the spirit in which we may join in common prayer.

Allow me, at the end, to express the deep hope that Forum 2000, organised thanks to the initiative of President Václav Havel, will bear much fruit. Thank you for your attention.

Tomáš Halík

And now I would like to ask Rabbi Albert Friedlander of the Westminster Synagogue in London, and Dean of the of the Leo Baeck College, for his comments.

Albert Friedlander

My dear friends, we are all awake now, awake to the reality of shared prayers and concerns. This is a multireligious assembly and it doesn't need theology, liturgy or ritual. It's enough that we recognise, as President Václav Havel said last night, that faith transcends the religious dimension, that it is found in other places, not just in church, temple, mosque, ashram or synagogue. It is part of a way of life. Henry Kissinger reminded us this morning that in politics, and in religion I would add, there must be a moral truth present. Now, in this cathedral, seeking an absolute insight and experience, we turn back to our roots. The Bible is common to many of us, the Book of Psalms particularly so. It is very proper to recite something in Hebrew in a cathedral.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restored my soul: he lead me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me...”
(Psalm 23)

Perhaps that is at the heart of our deliberations, not only the awareness of something beyond us but the

knowledge of the dark valleys of the shadow of death through which we walk these days. It does not matter whether we are referring to the areas where there is so much grief and pain and death. Perhaps in our own land, and in any land, there are place of darkness and death. And there we need that naivety we also discussed this morning – the naivety of faith, which is essential to us. That's how we pray together, towards God, to each other. My own prayer is not one that comes easily accepted in a community, but then any community. It matters to me because I reach out to my neighbors and find through my neighbors the reality of God. We find God through others and then we can find it in ourselves. There is so much that matters in this way that we walk. Crown Prince Hassan sent us a message last night that we should move from civitas towards humanitas. It's such a long way to go. Remember, Robert Frost – "But I have miles to go before I sleep/ I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep/ Miles to go before I sleep."

We have such a long way to go together through valleys of darkness, past, present and future. Yesterday, the Pope sanctified Edith Stein as a saint. He said that she was a reminder to the world of the suffering of Jews in the concentration camps and also, of course, a Catholic saint. Her faith was Jewish. When she was taken from the convent, the nuns around her did not go. But there is no point in trying to claim grief for oneself alone, or to claim that the Holocaust was a unique experience for only some of us. The smoke of the chimneys of Auschwitz is as much part of our existence today. We breathe it in as the poison from Chernobyl, which still feeds the atmosphere and destroys the world around us. We have to share, we have to learn, that darkness is something in the past and present, something that cannot be denied. I know the expression of Marx: Religion is the opium of the people. Actually, it was meant as something positive, that in times of pain it can give health. But in the drug culture where we live, whether it's Prozac or the new wonder-drugs that will make us more than human – in many other ways they say – the point is that religion is here to make us feel pain, to make us aware of the sufferings of the world, to let us reach out to the Mitmensch, to the other human being who is and must be part of our own lives. It's the way in which we can learn from each other and the way in which we come closer to God.

I think I heard Herman Cohen quote that he is after all a neo-Kantian, and you can take it that he spoke good things about the reasons that are important in making religion aware of the need to be rational, of recognising that there are universal goals that can and should unite us. In the end, it's not so much philosophy that informs us; it's our heart. It's what we can do with each other in these moments. I was here last year and was deeply impressed by what the cardinal and our other colleagues said. I was even more impressed by all of you who were there. Something reaches out from a congregation. One cannot with authenticity if there is not that link, if the ideals and hopes that are outside of religion as well as in religion are not combined and joined together in that quest for something that rises out a world of darkness, out of these broken shards of our culture. We seek peace. Quietly, in silence, let us pause for a moment, and in our own way reach out towards each other and reach out for peace.

The Lord gives strength to his children. He blesses them with peace. Amen.

Tomáš Halík

And now we shall hear the voice of Islam. This gathering will be addressed by Mr Fawzy Fadel El Zefzaf from Cairo. Mr Fawzy El Zefzaf is the secretary of the Al Azhar university and represents His Eminence, the Great Imam, the Sheikh of Al Azhar. It is a great honour to be with you on behalf of His Eminence, the Great Imam, the Sheikh of Al Azhar.

Fawzy Fadel El Zefzaf

Your Excellency, President Havel, distinguished assembly, esteemed Forum,
Peace be with you, and God's Mercy and Blessing.

I consider it a happy circumstance that this conference is taking place at the kind invitation of the President of the Czech Republic at the time when we are bidding farewell to the 20th century with all the events that have been so painful for mankind, events to which millions of innocent people fell victim in the aftermath of two world wars, regional conflicts and the expansionist and hegemonic aspirations of certain states.

It has been a century in which territories have been seized from peoples with legitimate rights to them, in which rights have been denied, in which whole nations have been expelled from their homes with the knowledge or even support of certain superpowers, the same superpowers that extend rights to be enjoyed by their own people yet deny the same to other nations.

It is a century unique in the advance of science and its practical applications, but also in its destructive, deadly multitude of arms and operations so alien to the morals and principles of the divine religions that prohibit unlawful murder of human beings and proclaim human dignity and liberty and appeal for the use of all things on this planet, on Earth, in the seas and rivers, in the air and heaven, in the service of humankind and for the welfare of man.

Whoever shows pride in this century and boasts of its scientific miracles, advanced technologies, conquest of space and discoveries of new galaxies, should be rather overwhelmed by shame on hearing that this has been the century of the discovery of evil weapons, weapons of mass destruction, and the century that has experienced racial segregation of states and of people descending from one father and one mother.

Mr President, your noble invitation to this world Forum 2000 has arrived at an appropriate time, a time

when we are welcoming the 21st century and demanding the remedy of human affairs in order to achieve a state of freedom, justice, security, peace, happiness and welfare for all peoples of the world without exception and without preferential treatment of some in the division of common goods.

This cannot happen without a return to the morals of divine religions and without the implementation of human rights as proclaimed by these religions; not, however, as decreed by organisations swaying under the wishes and manipulations of powerful nations.

The implementation of human rights as proclaimed by the divine religions will lead to the introduction of justice and equality among people, because God is One and He is the Lord of All Creation. In front of God, all people are equal in their rights and duties.

The implementation of these noble goals will depend on the harmony between scientific progress and the principles and values of divine religions, which will guide science to offer its discoveries to the service of the general good, not evil, which will guide science towards development, not destruction, towards the promotion of human happiness, not deprivation.

This last statement points to the significance of the dialogue between heavenly religions and to the duty of the clergy to come closer to their counterparts and to co-operate in spreading the shared virtues of their religions and to appeal for love and brotherhood among all people and for the observation by the followers of all religions of God's commandments.

Success is granted by God.

Peace be with you, and God's Mercy and Blessing.

Tomáš Halík

The last speaker, Monsignor Václav Malý, Consecrating Bishop of Prague, will speak on behalf of Christians.

Václav Malý

Much is being said today about peace, much is being written about it. Peace is also the issue of many negotiations. Peace does not mean only peace of arms, only an environment free of hatred, aggressiveness, or only a state without war. Nor does peace mean the development of great visions. We know very well about the failure of many great visions in this century.

The great peace of the world starts in the heart of every man – by accepting Creation as his home, Creation as a great gift he has not deserved, yet one which has been entrusted to his care, by expressing respect and modesty, preferring to serve rather than master. We live in an age that appreciates performance; peace in one's heart means that man is delivered from performance, that he does not derive his identity from what he has achieved. And from what he alone wants to call attention to, or from what others are calling attention to. He is free who does not hold on to his work, but who is capable of submitting it. That is the person who has peace in his heart.

Peace in one's heart means reconciliation with oneself. Every one of us has some weakness, shortcoming, at times every one of us finds himself in the dark, feels insecure, experiences failure, and sometimes even loses hope. To accept oneself with all one's weaknesses is the prerequisite for peace in one's heart. To free oneself from having to prove to oneself or to prove to others.

Peace also means reconciliation with others – not only tolerating them, but perceiving the others as an enrichment of one's limited horizon, one's limited view; to take seriously their otherness and to welcome this otherness, not to transform the other person to one's image but to let that other person develop in his essential being. At the deepest level, peace in one's heart means reconciliation with God – not to place oneself in the centre of all events, not to adore oneself, deify oneself, but to know how to live by a gift and by gratitude for the gift.

What is asked of us is awesome, but we are not alone. God does not owe us anything. He came in Jesus Christ to commune with us, to accept our history as his own. He does not behave like God, requesting, indicating and commanding. But he is a God who has accepted our weakness, who transforms our weakness into strength – as long as we are capable of accepting the road of accepting ourselves in our weakness. God in Jesus Christ has permeated our humanity. He is not a remote God, God somewhere, but the God among us and in our hearts. And to serve such a God means having peace in one's heart. Only thus do we reach the threshold of true freedom and true human maturity. That is where all of us who recognise the sovereignty of God can meet – where we do not perceive one another as competitors, as people competing for the favour of those who know nothing about God, yet where together – not only side by side, but together – we serve the dignity of man. And when we try to reflect and invite others to join us on this road to God who is the bearer of peace. Because we cannot create prerequisites for peace in our hearts; God alone can give peace.

Tomáš Halík

This assembly today, however unique, is but a single step on the long road, on the long road on which individual religions meet, strive for understanding, strive to understand the otherness of the other person as something which may be an enriching rather than threatening experience. The frequently mentioned

gathering in Assisi, convened due to the initiative of John Paul II, was the apparent beginning of this process of a dialogue of world religions, in peace, understanding and mutual complementarity. This was followed by annual assemblies. Finally, the last step before the current gathering was the large meeting of representatives of world religions in Bucharest in August this year.

And now I would like to ask Mr Mohammed Amine Smaili, professor of Islamic Studies at the university in Rabat and adviser on religious matters to the King of Morocco, who has covered the whole road, to remind us of the individual stops on this road. Following his remarks, Bishop Malý will read the declaration of the Bucharest assembly.

Mohammed Amine Smaili

Praise be to the one and only God.

In this place of worship, where we have convened to receive God's blessing, I am thinking about the history of peace among the religions of the world. In 1980, Pope John Paul II addressed a meeting of representatives of world religions; I read that speech in Assisi. At that time, Henry Kissinger was putting the final touches to his concept of peace in the Middle East according to the principle "slowly, slowly but surely". Religious globalization is something we have now been learning for 11 years, and my own resolve was born in Brussels, because globalization, whether economic, political or social, can never bring peace to man. Only God can give peace, because peace is a sacred gift. I may be rich, very rich, I may be powerful, very powerful, still I may not be happy. Only God can give me pride if I preserve my identity yet give up my race and the colour of my skin. Such gifts may be seen in Jerusalem, where I looked at the Cathedral, full of warmth and activity, as God had wished it – to see, in Jerusalem, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, side by side. It was a co-existence that maybe not even Dr Kissinger could have imagined while preparing the peace plan for the Middle East. The Orthodox, the Catholics, those who could not find their place on Earth, were looking for it above. Leaving the Cathedral, I thought about myself, a Muslim, one born in that southern, very poor and illiterate continent – and whom did I find by the door of the Cathedral? There I found a Muslim holding the key to the Cathedral. I felt pride; only God could have arranged that. That is true peace, Dr Kissinger, the key in the hand of a Muslim standing by the door to all Christendom. The Arab Christians have invited the Muslim among themselves.

I looked into the eyes of the Chief Rabbi of Paris. He saw tears in my eyes because I was so happy about this co-existence of religions. In Assisi and Brussels, the Pope said that the only co-existence, the only globalization that could prevail in the future would be due to God's will, not due to the economy. When he looked in my eyes, the Chief Rabbi understood, because he answered the question "Where is the Jewish element?" by saying that the Temple is in the neighborhood of the Cathedral. And the peace that will prevail will come not "slowly, slowly", but because it is God's will. We, he and I, and the Christian, we, sensible men of religion, are very timid. It is true that sensible people of religion are very timid. Why is it so? It is because they seek peace through small steps. And that is the only thing that is certain. This experience was repeated several days ago in Bucharest. I, who have had the privilege to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to see the Al Aqsa Mosque, the great Cathedral and the Wailing Wall, have also been to Bucharest. I perceive this as a privilege, because the main guests were Catholics. It was a great pleasure to witness the Catholics visiting the Orthodox. It has not ended yet. Divine peace is so awesome and wonderful: the Orthodox have invited not only Catholics, but also Jews and me, a Muslim. I feel that John Paul's appeal in Assisi met with a large response not only in Jerusalem, but also in Bucharest.

And today we are in Prague, in this cradle, where President Havel is trying to lead his people away from the fall of the Berlin Wall, showing them, in small steps, slowly, slowly but surely, the road to peace, to religious globalization, which brings not chaos of mind, but endows the nation with peace.

There is only one affliction in the world. And what is this affliction?. It is not the person who has lost a foot or an eye who is afflicted, nor the women for whom you are working, Madam Hillary. No, that is not a true affliction. True affliction affects the man without a soul, the man with chaos in his mind. Why is the Pope the only person who is extending his hand to us, Muslims and Jews? Because he comes from Warsaw. He has seen so many Jews being sent to death. And these Jews had religion. The reason for their suffering was not their different race, but the fact that they stood by their religion. We, too, want to live our religion, we want to live in peace and dignity. That is true globalization.

Thank you for your attention.

Václav Malý

We are the people of diverse religions and we come from many parts of the world. We have met in Bucharest to ask God for the great gift of peace. During these days, God has endowed us with a deeper awareness of the sacred price of peace. God loves peace and abhors war. The Almighty is, essentially, the God of Peace, and different religions can never justify hatred, violence and war. Whoever abuses God's name to hate and kill other people has departed from pure and undefiled religion. God's name has never meant war and hatred. Yes, Peace and Serenity are the true names of God. These sacred names bind us to disseminate peace with love, justice and understanding. It is impossible to serve God without serving peace. This conviction binds us, Believers, to serve, with greater courage, the cause of Peace within our

communities.

It also binds us to open our hearts and the hearts of our brothers and sisters to faith and love. Indeed, war and peace start in the heart of every man. It may seem at times that the memory of injustice and suffering, coupled with endeavour to assert oneself, may justify division, rivalry and conflicts. The future, however, does not lie in wars and division. Misunderstanding leads to conflicts, and the cult of hatred gives birth to violence. The future, however, lies only in peace.

Let us leave to the generation that will come after us a world free of hatred and war, a world abounding in peace. We came here as people searching for peace. We are not driven by any material force or means of coercion. We are Believers. We believe that faith is the source of peaceful force which is capable of changing the world. The strength of religion is in faith and love. In this love, we declare, there is no place for Holy War; only Peace is holy.

To speak in religion about war is absurd, and it is blasphemous against God. We appeal to all who make war and kill in God's name: Stop! Do not kill! Let us talk together and God will show us light. We appeal to those who are trampling on human beings and Creation and demand respect for every creature and for everything that has been created. Let hatred, destruction and mutual conflicts never find a motive in religion.

When the world conflict ended, and also later after the fall of the Wall, mankind hoped that the time of peace and justice had arrived. The end of this great and terrible century is, however, marked by new conflicts, new suffering, new walls. Strengthened by the wisdom of faith and by the experience of so much pain, we declare that war is lunacy and that the destruction of others can never be the source of triumph. War is always the defeat of man and an offence to God. If only we could achieve growing awareness of the truth that the pain of one people anywhere in the world is an impoverishment of the whole planet!

No hatred and no conflict is able to resist prayer, forgiveness and love. We therefore ask for forgiveness and we, too, forgive. That is why we have spent these days as a school of dialogue. Indeed, the remedy of dialogue allows the healing of so many different kinds of misunderstanding and conflicts among nations and religions. Dialogue shows that war and misunderstanding are not invincible. Nothing is lost with dialogue. Everything is possible in peace and tranquillity. So – no more war! We pray for God to give the world, through prayer of all Believers, the miraculous gift of peace and tranquillity.

Ceremony of lighting candles as symbol of reconciliation and hope

Tomáš Halík

And now I would like to ask the representative of the Saint Agidio movement, Mr Leonardo Emberti, to bring the lit candle. The flame, too, is a symbol of hope and understanding and reconciliation. I would first like to ask the present representatives of world religions to light the flame.

Next, I would like to ask the representatives of the Forum 2000 conference, coming from diverse civilisations, continents and nations, to light a candle as a symbol of their determination to keep alive the flame of hope in this world tortured by hatred and prejudice.

Mr Václav Havel
Mrs Hillary Clinton
Mr Henry Kissinger
Mrs Hanna Suchocká
Mr Karan Singh
Mr Gareth Evans
Mr Serguey Kovalyov
Mr Osvaldo Sunkel
Mr Martin Bútora
Mr Mehmet Aydın

Let the light of hope that we have lit today shine in our minds and hearts, and never die.