

Transcript IFD 1999

Tomáš Halík

Esteemed Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen!

A year ago I have, on this occasion and in this venue, cited the words of an old spiritual master, who had embarrassed his disciples by having posed the question, how to discern the moment, when the night comes to an end and the day commences. Ultimately, he provided the answer himself: it is the moment, when we are able to identify the face of any human as our brother or our sister. Until we are able to do so, we are groping in the darkness, it is still the night.

Allow me to introduce the meeting today by a similar thought, which I found in the mystical commentaries to the biblical Song of Songs. The heroine of this love poem has been taken to the royal court, where she suffers so much from being homesick, that she starts to ask the question, whether her former life and her love were not a mere dream. Just at that moment, there is a knock on the door. Shulammitte hurries to the door, confident that it is her beloved. But there is nobody behind the door. She could have thought that it was an illusion. But instead the knocking so strengthened the hope in her heart, that she can no longer forget or deny her love, gets out in the dark and does not cease seeking.

A meditation gathering like this present one, gives us the opportunity to put aside the noise of the world and to capture the sound of the quiet knocking on the door of history. When we have left this Cathedral, the walks of life will admittedly not change by dint of what we have lived through together. But something could still change within ourselves: this experience of the mutual proximity can enhance our hope and determination to seek a way out of the long night, in which people of different cultures and religions did not understand each other, felt alien and even held animosity towards each other.

For the third time already, this joint meditation of the representatives of the four main religions of the world- Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, professed by the overwhelming majority of humanity- is part of the conference Forum 2000. It creates a sort of a spiritual centerpiece of this gathering of thinkers of all the continents, which are united by the awareness of responsibility for the destiny of our planet, by the concerns and questions regarding the direction, that humanity adopts towards the future. We are gathering in the most holy place of the Czech land, standing on top of the graves of the Czech kings and saints. "Forum"- an open space- gains, at this instant, further dimensions. It is namely the dimension of history, which is inscribed in the walls of the Cathedral, the history of the country, which has been so often in the past ravaged by religious wars and quite recently by the attempt to efface the faith in God from the conscience and hearts of the people. But we also feel the treasures and the weight of the history, that are brought to this gathering by the individual religious traditions, which have, each of them, gone through a much longer way than our own one thousand years. We are concurrently aware of the, relatively brief and delicate, history of friendly gatherings of the world religions, in which an important part has been played by the gathering convened on the initiative of the Pope John Paul II in 1987 in Assisi or the follow-up annual meditation on the Hiei mountain in Japan, the history, in which these our Prague gatherings have already gained an unprecedented position.

Here enters also the dimension of width, because at this very occasion the inhabitants of Prague come here, to meet, at this moment of quietness, the conference delegates to manifest their spiritual support to the endeavour to seek the answers to the questions, which concern all people. At this point there also comes in the dimension of silence and peace, because not only by words, but also by music and meditative silence we want to respond and answer to the quiet knocking on the door of history to the blowing of the spirit, which gives the hope, that it makes sense to meet across the borders of nations and continents, cultures and religions, to accept our mutual plurality and variety not as a threat but as an enrichment. In the very silence of meditation, we may find the so much needed ability to discern, which values need to be transferred to the foundations of the civilization of the future for it to be firmly grounded so that it is not a fragile structure built on sand. In the very silence of meditation we may gain inner freedom, and we may obtain the strength to reject that, what would encumber us and enclose us within the narrow limits of prejudices, within group selfishness and mutual mistrust and malice.

In the silence of meditation, our "forum" becomes a truly open space, because it is opening to the sacred secret of the Absolute. We, here in the Czech Republic, could provide shattering evidence on the destructive power of those, who held nothing sacred. The century, which is drawing to an end, may be viewed by us as a large battleground, spread with bloody debris of relative things, which people used to consider as absolute. He, who loses his sense for the Absolute and turns to absolute things relative, becomes their slave. I believe that one of the things, which is a nexus between great religions, the representatives of which have gathered here tonight, is the incessant combat against idolatry, against the

attempts to substitute for the Absolute relative values.

Religious and spiritual traditions have accumulated in course of the millennium great treasures of experience, how man can communicate with the secret of the Absolute, how to keep, in the midst of relative things, human hearts free and open.

Now we stand side by side, in order that we, in mutual respect and in respect to that, which transcends us, share what we have been entrusted with.

Jaroslav Skavarda

In the name of cardinal Miloslav Vlk, who is presently away on a sojourn in Rome, and in my own name, let me wholeheartedly welcome you, esteemed ladies and esteemed gentlemen in our Prague Cathedral. Whoever enters it, cannot but succumb to its charm. Its towers, high above the city reach up to the sky, as the symbol of the transcendence of man, searching for the import and aiming to the object of his existence. Having been consecrated to Saint Vít, Václav (Venceslas) and Vojtich-Adalbert, this Cathedral reminds us of the history of this country. The Czech kings buried in it, headed by the Cathedral founder, the Czech King and the Roman Emperor Charles IV, witness to the openness to Europe and to the world. This is why the Cathedral is a worthy tabernacle, in my opinion, also of this gathering of you, the representatives of different cultures and nations, who have flocked to our city to debate the most fundamental issues of human coexistence. Let me welcome you most cordially!

Representing my religious community, I take the liberty to cite one passage of Gospel of Luke (10, 29 - 36): One expert in the law said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In reply Jesus said: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you have."

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

"The expert in the law replied. "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

This simile continues to be topical nowadays. It is well possible to replace the unfortunate man with East Timor or some of the regions, where oppressed people continue to yearn for freedom in vain. Ten years ago, this nation of ours was one of them. More difficult nevertheless is the question, who to envisage in the boots of the callous priest and the Levite. And who who would be today the merciful Samaritan?

In the course of this well nigh extinct century, we have unfortunately seen far too often canny and middle-of-the-road stances of the new-age priests and Levites, who did not want to see oppression and misery of enslaved nations. Fortunately merciful Samaritans also did not die out. The fact that the world public does not remain absolutely indifferent to the destiny of such oppressed unfortunates and that in recent years clubs of assorted countries managed to intervene several times already for their benefit, is a hopeful step forward. It is a sign, that human conscience is being aroused. It would be impossible to establish that human conscience is alive, if there was not at least a subconscious conviction that all members of the human family belong together, that they have the same dignity and that they have inalienable rights for the simple reason of being human. The biblical retort of Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gn 4,9) does not have and may not have the justification that each man is personally responsible for his neighbors. This conviction, it seems to me, is the manifestation of what the Second Vatican Council in its Pastoral Constitution on Church in current World calls the conscience.

Section 16 of this document says: "In the depth of the conscience, man discloses the law, that he does not impose himself, but which he nevertheless has to obey. (...). The observance of this law constitutes his dignity, and according to it he will be judged. The conscience of man is his most sacred center and his holy of holies, in it he is alone with God. (...) Fidelity to conscience is what unites the Christians with the other people in search of truth and in truthful solution of many moral problems, which arise in life of individuals and in social coexistence.

This conscience was not heard sensitively enough, when the atrocities of holocaust swept Europe, this

conscience remained deaf, when in the Soviet empire the phantom of gulag was on the rampage. Now it seems, that conscience is slowly waking. Kosovo and East Timor are the telling testimony thereof. And this, certainly, is a good omen. Would that this promising beginning led to ever deepening understanding between individual cultures, would that it led to a status whereby all the enmities between races, nations and followers of different religions were overcome, would that it awakened in all and sundry the sensitivity of human consciousness, that we have mentioned, the awareness, that we all have the same dignity, with inalienable rights.

"Who is my neighbor?", this is what we have asked at the beginning. And the evangelist simply gave us an unequivocal answer. Each man, that I encounter, is my neighbor. "Am I my brother's keeper?" asked Cain. And our conscience answers: "Yes, I am his keeper, all of us are responsible, each for the other." We are responsible for each sister and for each brother, because we have a joint Father. This Cathedral, consecrated to this Father, is the tacit, albeit more than telling, witness thereof.

Jaroslav Suvarský

1 Corinthians 13, 1-13

Love

I may be able to speak the languages of men and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains - but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned - but if I have no love, this does me no good.

Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not illmannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail.

Love is eternal. There are inspired messages, but they are temporary; there are gifts of speaking in strange tongues, but they will cease; there is knowledge, but it will pass. For our gifts of knowledge and of inspired messages are only partial; but when what is perfect comes, then what is partial will disappear.

When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am a man, I have no more use for childish ways. What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face-to-face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete - as complete as God's knowledge of me.

Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.

Albert Friedlander

Over the past years, it has been our tradition to commence our meditations with a citation from our sacred books. By now, we have come to know one another so well that we could quote from the sacred texts of our neighbours. And that is as it should be. We have come to realize that we listen to the same God, that we walk along the same way.

So prophecies Micah:

V'haya be'acharit ha-yamim:

"And it shall come at the end of days, that the mountain of LORD's house shall be established as the top of the mountains." In that vision, swords are beaten into plowshares, and spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more. And the vision concludes with a word to us"

"For let all the peoples walk each one in the name of its god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever" (Micah, 4.5)

Truly, we each have our own way to walk, and all our ways lead up to the Holy Mountain. We have our faith, and our faith leads us to the righteous actions, the way in which we climb the holy mountain with all the anguish of that journey. Just so, the psalmist sings to us:

Hineh ma tov u-ma-na-yim shevet achim gam yachad - behold, how pleasant it is for us to dwell together in unity.

And yet, if this sufficed me, I would neglect the duty all of us have been given. These are the last moments before the Millennium. For our Christian friends, it is a date with a deep religious connotations. The rest of us work with different calendars - but we live in the same world, yearning for peace and a compassionate society. Is that task only given to us? Some years ago, President Havel's New Year Address to the nation stated:

"The common denominator of the important tasks we should concern ourselves with now is the creation of a genuine, open, and multi-layered civil society."

Notice this: Václav Havel spoke of a civil society. As the spokes-persons of religion we sometimes forget that all humanity is bound together by social contracts where religion is not given automatic authority: we have to earn it. We do NOT possess the monopoly of ethical insights. Yet we do possess the balm to be placed upon our suffering society. We can pray; and this is the strength of religion which has not divorced itself from ethical action, which is genuine, and open, in all the lands from which we come here to join in our prayer.

Let us say it again: God listens to prayer. To all prayers. And here I come to the Hassidic story often retold by my teacher, ElieWiesel.

When the Great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening his people, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished, and misfortune averted.

Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezrich, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Ruler of the universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer". And again the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

Then, it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhin to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to god: I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story. And this must be sufficient. And it was sufficient.

God made us because he loves stories.

Well, here we are: god's children who love stories. We come to a place in the dark forest of the world, we light a fire, say a prayer, and ask for Divine help. And if have forgotten everything, there is still the story. The last line, of course, is Elie's special teaching for us. In a world of cultural amnesia, of consciously forgetting the darkness around us, and the darkness within us, we can still reach out, as a company of seekers, and ask God for help. Then, God will bless us and keep us; God will turn the Divine Face towards us, and the Light will shine upon us. And God will give us the peace for which we yearn, which we all seek.

Amen.

Abbas Mohajerani
SURA LXXXVII

A'la or The Most High

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

1. Glorify the name of thy Guardian-Lord Most High.
2. Who hath created, and further given, order and proportion;
3. Who hath ordained laws and granted guidance;
4. And Who bringeth out this (green and luscious) pasture
5. And then doth make it (but) swarthy stubble.
6. Thy degrees shall We teach thee to declare (the Message) so thou shall not forget;
7. Except as God wills; for He know what is manifest and what is hidden.
8. And We will make easy for thee to (follow) the simple (Path).

9. Therefore give admonition in case the admonition profits (the hearer).
 10. The admonition will be received by those who fear (God):
 11. But it will be avoided by those most unfortunate ones,
 12. Who will enter the Great Fire,
 13. In which they will then neither die nor live.
 14. But those will prosper who purify themselves,
 15. And glorify the name of their Guardian-Lord and (lift their hearts) in Prayer.
 16. May (behold), ye prefer the life of this world;
 17. But the Hereafter is better and more enduring
 18. And this is in the books of the earliest (Revelations-
 19. The Books of Abraham and Moses.
- SURA III

'Al Imran

64. Say: "O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not from amongst ourselves lords and patrons other than God." If then they turn back, say ye: Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God's Will)."

199. And there are certain among the People of the Book, those who believe in God, in the revelation to you, and in the revelation to them, bowing in humility to God; they will not sell the Signs of God for a miserable gain ! For them is a reward with their Lord, and God is swift in account.

200. O ye who believe ! Persevere in patience and constancy; vie in such perseverance; strengthen each other; and fear God; that ye may prosper.

Kukuhan Enami

Mysterious teaching,
 The deepest of the deep, which cannot be surpassed.
 Hundreds of thousand myriads of beings
 Listen to it in earnest.
 Thus I have heard,
 Would that you understood the true meaning
 Of the words of the Sublime.

Treatise on Heart of Perfect Wisdom
 (Ppradžná-páramitá hrdaja súra)
 Merciful bódhisattva Avolókitéivara
 (He who listens to cries of the World)
 Having devoted himself to deepening of perfect wisdom
 He had the clear insight, that all the five components of being are void
 And all the endeavour is painful.
 Turning to the disciple Shariputra, he said:
 Listen Shariputra, form is not distinct from voidness,
 Whilst voidness is not other than form.
 Form as such is voidness itself
 And voidness is ultimately identical with form.
 And the same holds for feeling, reception, imagination and knowledge.
 Listen, Shariputra, voidness is an attribute of all things manifest.
 It is not born, nor does it die,
 It is not stained nor is it pure.
 It does not grow, nor does it decline.
 Hence, the form does not abide in voidness,
 Nor does feeling, perception, imagination and knowledge.
 There is not eye, ear, nose, tongue, body nor mind in it;
 Neither shape, voice, smell, taste nor anything tangible or conceivable.
 There is no world, that might be captured through sight,
 Neither a world to be perceived by thought.
 In none of these worlds evidently is there any being.
 And evidently there is not non-being either.
 There is no old age and no death
 But there is no negation of them either.

There is no suffering ,neither destruction,
There is no wisdom, no achievement nor failure.
Bóddhisattvs, aware of the true essence of perfect wisdom,
Their hearts are devoid of darkness,
As there is nothing to obscure them.
There is nothing to terrify them,
They are aloof from any confusion.
Devoid of delusion, they attain perfect completion.
All the buddhas of all the worlds
Persist in this perfect wisdom.
Insight of perfect wisdom
Enabled them to achieve the supreme Awakening, which cannot be surpassed.
The Word (dháraní) of Perfect Wisdom
Is penetrated by sublime divine force,
The Word of perfect wisdom
Is endowed with magnificent shine,
No word is more noble,
Nor is any equal to it.
It has the power to put an end to all the suffering,
It is the word of truth, not a word of lie.
This is the teaching of Perfect Wisdom,
The disciples of which invoke the Truth saying:
Gaté, gaté, paragaté, parasógaté,
Bóddhi svahá.
This is the secret of the Perfect Wisdom.

I give up all virtue and blessing rooted in deeds -
I do not desire anything for myself.
May the blessed might of the Word of Wisdom
Be disseminated amongst all beings,
So that they jointly attain the Way of Awakening.

And now, I would like to suggest, that we listen together to the voice of liturgical chant Tendai Šomjó. The liturgical chant Tendai Šomjó is in effect sūtras put to music, by means of which monks pay tribute to Buddha and praise him. In Buddhism, there exists the term "Šomjó džóbucu", verbatim "become Buddha through chanting". This liturgical practice is also rooted in Lotus Sūtra, where it says, that bóddhisattvs, who gave sacrifices to Buddha by chanting, have themselves become buddhas. These verses are clear witness of the enormous might of music, which uplifts human spirit.