

Transcript IFD 2000

Tomáš Halík

Esteemed Mr. President,

Your Royal Highness, Your Holiness, ladies and gentlemen!

The joint meditation of representatives of the main world religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam - the religions, which are professed by an absolute majority of humanity today - is already traditionally part and spiritual centre of the Forum 2000 Conferences. Standing before you, assembled, here as well as in front of the face of the Highest, are representatives of five spiritual ways. In each of them millions of women and men were walking for a period much longer than a thousand years attempting to resolve the most important questions of life.

Many a time, in long bygone and recent past, people of these ways have been colliding in combats and confrontations. The end of the twentieth century - probably the bloodiest and most violent century of the human history - brings as an "omen of time" the hope, that those that belong to diverse spiritual ways, can not only live together in peace and tolerance, but can actually manage more than this: that they can mutually share the fruit of wisdom, historic experience, which had mellowed in course of centuries and millenniums. Indeed the mere fact that we are standing here one next to the other that we are listening with respect to words and music, which are expressions of so diverse spiritualities is a telling symbol and mission that stems from Prague today, the city that is dubbed the heart of Europe. We are sending a sign of hope and invitation to conciliation to all parts of our world, where fires of hatred continue to burn or are just being ignited.

We are sending them from a country, from which in the past many impulses had arisen for religious and ethical restoration, from a country, which had also gone through horrors of religious wars and experienced in a not so long-away period one of the most systematic and drastic attempt to eradicate religion from human hearts, culture and society. For more than ten years, we have been finding in human hearts and relations painful blows and tragic debris, which remained here after the collapse of the communist attempt to build a new Babylon tower, a civilization without the respect for God, religion, spiritual values. Just as it had been during the construction of the Babylon tower that we read about in the Bible, during the communist experiment the human ability to communicate to understand each other was being destroyed. The endeavour to take into human hands the direction of the nature and of history led to destruction of human freedom and dignity, damaged the natural landscape and the landscape of human soul, liquidated the institutions of civic society, paralysed culture. And exactly the suppressed congregations of believers were in this dark era one of the few islands of spiritual freedom and defense of humanity.

If we can offer anything from the experience of eleven years of transformation of the society, it is, to my mind, in the first place this finding: a free society, political and economic democracy cannot fully develop and be maintained without certain moral and spiritual atmosphere. It does not suffice only to build certain political and economic institutions. It is necessary to patiently take care of the moral climate, in which these institutions can breathe and live. The biosphere of a free society is the culture of mutual respect. The precondition of democracy is the ability to respect one another across the borders of nations, races, cultures and religions. The precondition of survival of the human kind is the courage to forego attempts to manipulate the nature and the secret of human life. The yearning for immortality, enclosed in the borders of material life, leads today to a dangerous game in the area of cloning. The yearning for the earth and heaven leads to tragic utopias or to constant overcharging of the human nature and stress and finally to frustration.

Five spiritual ways, the representatives of which are taking the floor right now, have assembled the legacy of experience how to transgress the closed nature of the world, how to liberate the human soul from the prison of prides and selfishness. Would this joint moment offer to all those who tread these ways and paths, the awareness of closeness and the readiness to understand each other better.

Miloslav Vlk

Esteemed friends, dear guests,

Ladies and gentlemen!

As bishop of this cathedral, I welcome you all - and personally I would prefer to greet each of you personally - at the place, where our spiritual and cultural history passed and which is amongst others connected with a joint holy rest site of famous personalities - saints and kings and emperors.

I greet the Forum 2000 participants and wish to the conference successful fulfilment of its objectives.

What can we - representatives of different denominations and great religions - contribute to the successful implementation of the conference subject - matter, so that it does not remain confined to meagre horizontal

level of purely human endeavour, many times split from the source of all the values, which is the God? Let us search together for a minimum of the global age, which is the love of human being to human being, to put it in the secularised form: mutual solidarity. This value can truly be called global, because each human heart has been determined and created to that end. The spiritual formation in the globalization era must necessarily concern the centre of any human being - the human heart, so that his or her education or transformation is not left begging in the framework of global development of science, technology, economy and policy.

Erich Fromm alerts: "Our civilization very rarely attempts to teach the art of love. Despite the fact that it desperately seeks love, everything else is more important to it: Success, prestige, money, power. Nearly all our energy is spent to achieve these goals and nearly none to learn the art of love." And yet love, the commandment of love, is contained in all the denominations - at least it is found in the so called golden rule: "Do to the other person, what you would have wished that they do to you".

The contribution of different religions to culture, to education in the era of globalization is therefore to emphasise love - not only as effort or of human performance but also as a gift of God to the heart, given to man in order that he proceeds distributing it to others. To the needs of the age of globalization corresponds the requirement of civilization of love, globalization of love.. In particular to the representatives of the religions, the globalizing world is dispatching this signal: do become teachers of the art of love. But as has been noted by the Pope Paul VI - if the world is to listen to us, we must be firstly witnesses and only then teachers.

First of all, it is possible to become witnesses of love by not ruling anybody out of it. In all the religions, love is understood as universal, as love to all and sundry, without difference and discrimination. The nature of God's love is also the fact that it takes the initiative itself, as the God always loves as first and in his love he goes to the extreme.

And we, if we intend to be witnesses, are not supposed to wait, but must take initiative in love. We have been created as gift one to the other and we are implementing our potential fully, if we give our capacity of love to the benefit of our neighbors that they take avail of it.

Our prayers at this place and mutual encouragement can therefore take the form of: Educate ourselves in the most global of spiritual values, the value of love and hand over your evidence of it to the others.

Tomáš Halík

Mr. Karan Singh, an Indian politician and a religious philosopher, will now address us on behalf of the most ancient of the represented spiritual traditions, Hinduism, and will read a verse from the Rig Veda about peace, which is concluded by the following words: "Let us have thoughts in common! Let our deeds be in common! Let there be no hatred amongst us!".

Karan Singh

Mr. President, Holiness, Eminencies, Excellencies, brothers and sisters. I am representing Hinduism - the world's oldest continuing religion going back at least five thousand years into the very dawn of our civilization. Hinduism does not have a single religious teacher or a single text or a single point of time. It is based upon the collective insights of the whole series of realized souls and the sacred texts of the Vedas which are collections of hymns to the one divine. We believe that although there is a single divinity pervading the Universe it can represent itself, it can show itself in many different forms. The verses I have selected are from the Vedas and I will recite them in the original Sanskrit which has come down unbroken for thousands of years. The prayer is to the divine in its many multiple manifestations to bestow his grace upon us to see that we can work together in harmony and peace and understanding.

May we, Devas! hear with our ears what is good
And Holy Ones! see with our eyes what is good
And, praising you with steady limbs and body
Enjoy the divinely bestowed full term of life

Blessing be on us be of far-famed Indra
Blessings on us of Pushan the all-knowing
Blessings of Tarkshya with his wheel's rim unworn;
And may Brihaspati bestow his blessings on us

O Lord of Fire, endow the earth with luster
Endow the plants with lustre, endow the heavens with lustre
Endow the Inner spaces with lustre

And may all the four directions for me be full of bliss

May the effulgence of all the pervasive divine spread in all directions
This entire cosmos is permeated by the divine, whether moving or unmoving
O Creator of the cosmos, all encompassing divine
We bow down to you in prayer.

The God of Fire, the God of Air, the Sun God, the Moon God,
The demi-Gods, Lord Shiva, the Solar Deities, the Wind Gods,
The Guardians of the World, the God Jupiter, the God of Rain,
the God of the Oceans;

May all of these bestow their blessings on us.
To the heavens be peace, to the sky and the earth
To the waters be peace, to plants and all trees
To the Gods be peace, to Bramhan be peace, to all men be peace
May peace prevail, happiness prevail! May everything for us be peaceful!

May our thoughts be common,
May our actions be common,
May we all be endowed with divine energy.
May there be no hatred amongst us.
PRECEDE
Aum peace, peace, peace.

Tomáš Halík

Most of the Christians currently live in a world that we have named the Third World. Monsignor Joseph Ganda, Archbishop from Freetown in Sierra Leone, who is not only a significant religious representative, but also a fearless fighter for human rights and has been given great credit in surmounting the violence in his country. His message will connect with the second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle's words to the Corinthians: "We are a new creation in Christ".

Joseph Ganda

Your Excellencies, my brothers, religious leaders. I want to give few thoughts on reconciliation from the Christian perspective.

The entire Bible is a long story of God's untiring effort to bring back sinful humanity into friendship with Himself. However, the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians sums up very beautifully the Christian understanding of reconciliation. I shall therefore read that text and then present a short reflection on it: From now onwards, then we will not consider anyone by human standards: even if we were once familiar with Christ according to human standards, we do not know him in that way any longer. So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see. It is all God's work; he reconciled us to himself through Christ and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean, God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

So we ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were urging you through us, and in the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God. For our sake he made the sinless one a victim for sin, so that in him we might become the uprightness of God (2 Corinthians 5: 16-21; The New Jerusalem Bible).

Brief Reflection: The foundation and the raison d'etre of Christianity is the work of reconciliation God accomplished on behalf of humanity through his beloved Son Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Moved by love and compassion for sinful humanity, God took the initiative to re-establish friendship with men and women. We Christians believe that the climax of this divine project of reconciliation was in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, when God "made the sinless one a victim for our sins" (Corinthians 5:21; cf. Romans 5:6, 8). That is what Saint Paul says in the passage read.

It was God's work of reconciliation in Christ that brought the Church into being, and it is the same divine work of reconciliation that inspires the Church's worship and mission of evangelisation. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, promulgated by Vatican 11 in November 1964, says that: "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity" (Lumen Gentium 2). Therefore Christians who constitute the membership of the Church cannot be indifferent to the work of reconciliation.

The Catholic Church, of which I am an Archbishop, carries out the ministry of reconciliation in diverse ways. For example, we have the Holy Eucharist, which is a liturgical celebration of God's work of reconciliation in

the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Related to the Eucharist, there is the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, by which sinners experience the loving mercy of God and are sacramentally reconciled to God and the Church. More examples of the ministry of reconciliation within the Church could be mentioned. It is to be noted, however, that the Church's ministry of reconciliation is not limited to her members alone. God's desires that all men and women may be drawn into unity, so that they may live with each other in peace, as brothers and sisters of the divine Father.

As the four corners of the world draw closer to each other through the processes of globalization, new challenges and therefore fresh opportunities are presenting themselves for the Christian ministry of reconciliation. For instance, in a religiously pluralistic society, it would require active collaboration with people of other religious traditions in the work for peace and reconciliation. We have already begun to see the fruits of such inter-religious collaboration for peace and reconciliation in my country, Sierra Leone. In the ten-year civil war in Sierra Leone, it was the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL), composed of Christian and Muslims, that took the initiative to contact the warring factions in order to convince them of the need for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and for reconciliation as a guarantee for lasting peace and stability. The IRCSL persuaded the leaders to see reason and talk peace. When eventually the warring factions opted for dialogue and a negotiated settlement, the IRCSL accompanied the peace talks, first in Abidjan, in the Ivory Coast, and later in Lomé, Togo, and has been very instrumental in the monitoring of the implementation of the accord signed in Togo in 1999. We shall not relent in our efforts to ensure that peace and stability return to our country.

In many parts of the world, people of different religious traditions find it difficult to live together, let alone collaborate for the promotion of peace and reconciliation. We are rather fortunate in Sierra Leone because people of different religions are living together in harmony and we are able to work together for a common cause. Our basic conviction and source of inspiration is that we come from the same God and we are going towards the same God as our eternal destiny. This God desires that all men and women live in peace and work together to enhance his creation for his glory and for the sanctification of the whole of humanity. May our participation in the conference help us all to be God's active ambassadors of peace and reconciliation in this global village.

Tomáš Halík

As in previous years, Rabbi Albert Friedlander, currently officiating at the Westminster Synagogue in London, will now address our gathering with his kind wisdom on behalf of Judaism. His message begins with the words from the book of psalms: "Every event under the skies has its time". There is a time of struggle and a time of peace and it is concluded by a verse from David's Psalm: "How good it is to be delightful, when the sisters and the brothers remain together united".

Albert Friedlander

My dear friends. Our programme commenced on Monday morning with a silent prayer for all those who have died violently in these tragic times. In these troubled times, we need religious visions. In our Bible, Ecclesiastes teaches:

Lakol z'man, v'et l'chol chefetz tachat ha-shamayim: et laledet, v'et la-mut; et livkot, v'et lis'chok ... et l'vakesh, v'et l'abed ... et lea-eahov, v'et lin-snoh. ... et milchama, v'et shalom.

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die ... a time to weep, and a time to laugh ... a time to seek, and a time to lose ... a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

We know all this; we have experienced it. We were born, and we will die. We have wept and laughed, found and lost, loved and hated. Now we live in a time of war, and we need a time of peace. Oh, how we need peace today. This Cathedral has been filled with many prayers of a noble tradition; and it has opened itself, now and in other years, to the prayers of other traditions. We must learn from all of them. Alongside of them, there is something even more important in which we share now. In Judaism, call it "avodat ha-lev: the service of the heart." For these 3 years, when I have stood before you, I have listened to the silence emanating from you. It has instructed me more than any of the prayers we recited from this pulpit. Et l'vakesh, v-et l'abed: a time to seek, and a time to lose. When we seek God, we must lose our self, must become part of humanity yearning towards the ultimate. Yes: we recite our various prayers. There is a Hasidic story:

Everyone was assembled in the synagogue on the Day of Atonement, reciting one prayer after another. A little boy, sitting with his father, grew more and more agitated. Finally, he took a whistle out of his pocket, and gave an almighty blast. The service stopped, and all glared at him. "How COULD you?" asked his father. "I wanted to do my part!" the boy said sheepishly; but the adults remained upset. Then their rebbe, the great Baal Shem Tov, stopped their murmuring:

"This boy," he said, "made the most important contribution to the service. All of the prayers you recited, and

thousands like them, were stuck in the ceiling of this building. The boy's whistle opened the roof to heaven itself, and all of the prayers finally came to God."

I have not heard you whistle. Yet I can tell you this: The prayers we recited from this pulpit could not leave this sanctuary if they were not carried by your silence and profound devotion which can storm the very gates of heaven.

Et milchamah, v'et shalom we read from the Bible: A time of war, and a time of peace. We cannot wait for peace to descend from heaven and cover this troubled, troubling world where death surrounds the sanctuaries of many nations. We must carry peace upwards, towards heaven, through our actions and our concern, through our love for humanity and our love for God. Then, truly, we can say the words of the Psalmist:

Hineh mah tov u-ma-nayim, shevet achim gam yachad.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for all, brothers and sisters, to dwell together in unity.

May that day come soon.

AMEN

Tomáš Halík

His Eminence Sheik Abbas Mohajerani, currently officiating in London, will now address us on behalf of Islam. He will sing a prayer from the Koran which expresses devotion and faith toward one God, who is recognized by Abraham's children, Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Abbas Mohajerani

O, mankind! reverence

Your Guardian-Lord,

Who created you

From a single Person,

Created, of like nature,

His mate, and from them twain

Scattered (like seeds)

Countless men and women;-

Reverence God, through Whom

Ye demand your mutual (rights),

And (reverence) the wombs

(That bore you): for God

Ever watches over you.

Sura iv, Nisaa, or The Women, Verse 1

O, mankind! we created

You from a single (pair)

Of a male and a female,

And made you into

Nations and tribes, that

Ye may know each other

(Not that ye may despise

Each other). Verify

The most honoured of you

In the sight of God

Is (he who is) the most

Righteous of you,

And God has full knowledgeable

And is well acquainted

(With all things).

Sura xlix, Hujurat, or The Inner Apartments, Verse 13

God commands justice, the doing

Of good, and liberality to kith

And kin, and He forbids

All shameful deeds and injustice.

And rebellion: He instructs you,

That ye may receive admonition.

Sura xvi, Nahl, or The Bee, Verse 90

In most of their secret talks

There is no good: but if
One exhorts to a deed
Of charity or justice
Or Conciliation between men.
(Secrecy is permissible):
To him who does this,
Seeking the good pleasure
Of God, We shall soon give
A reward of the highest (Value).
Sura iv, Nisaa, or The Women, Verse 114
God doth command you
To render back your Trusts
To those to whom they are due;
And when ye judge
Between man and man,
That ye judge with justice:
Verily how excellent
Is the teaching which He giveth you!
For God is He Who heareth
And seeth all things.
Sura iv, Nisaa, or The Women, Verse 58

Be quick in the race
For forgiveness from your Lord,
And for a Garden whose width
Is that (of the whole)
Of the heavens
And of the earth,
Prepared for the righteous,-
Those who spend (freely),
Whether in prosperity,
Or in adversity;
Who restrain anger,
And pardon (all) men,-
For God loves those
Who do good;-
Sura iii, Aal-I-Imran, or The Family of Imran, Verses 133-134

Our Lord! and whom Thou
Dost admit to the Fire,
Truly Thou coverest with shame,
And never will wrong-doers
Find any helpers!
Our Lord! we have heard
The call of one calling
(Us) to faith, 'Believe ye
In the Lord', and we
Have believed. Our Lord!
Forgive us our sins,
Blot out from us
Our iniquities, and take
To Thyself our souls
In the company of the righteous.
Our Lord! grant us
What thou didst promise
Unto us through Thine Apostles,
And save us from shame
On the Day of Judgement:
For Thou never breakest
Thy promise.
Sura iii, Aal-I-Imran, or The Family of Imran, Verses 192-194

Tomáš Halík

In conclusion, from the depths of Buddha's noble wisdom, one of the most significant religious representatives on our planet will address our gathering, the supreme spiritual leader of Tibet, His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Dalai Lama

Spiritual brothers and sisters, I am very, very happy to be here in this magnificent church and sit together with representatives of all the people of different traditions and pray together, speak from one platform. I feel that this is something very useful and meaningful. I am here as a representative of Buddhism. So let me say few words about Buddhism. Of course, my knowledge of Buddhism is limited. I practice as much as I can. My broken English has a very limited vocabulary, too. But I will try to say just a few words.

I think that the essence of bodhidharma, Buddhism, are two sentences: If you can help others, do it. If you can't - at least restrain from harming others. So that is the essence of bodhidharma. It is the practice of non-violence. Non-violence is, I think, a kind of manifestation of love, compassion. But non-violence is not just absence of violence, it has much deeper meaning. The sense of caring and compassion is the foundation of non-violence. Then, there is a sort of philosophical explanation: why we need love and compassion, why we should not harm others?

The Buddhist view of philosophy is based on interdependence or interconnectedness. So, according to the law of causality "cause and condition lead to result" and it will always be so. So harming others creates pain to others. That's the cause for painful experience to oneself. If you do good, result will be good to oneself. If you do bad things the result will be suffering or painful. That's the law of causality. Then also the interconnected, interdependent view widened our perspective. Through that sort of view we can see very clearly - me, we and others, human beings, as well as other species of mammals and certain beings of the environment - all these are interdependent, interconnected. And our actions today, our thinking today will very much shape our future. So this interconnected view has broadened our mind, which is very helpful. So these two things are the essence of bodhidharma.

Then, as a believer, I want to share one of my fundamental beliefs. When we talk about religion, the first is to examine ourselves - whether we really did follow or practice our own belief or our own tradition very sincerely or not. That's very important. In that respect, we should take the essence of the traditions, the ceremonial things or reciting some words - it is of course very good, but these are not essential - the essential thing is the message or the practice. That is: the practice of love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment, self-discipline. These are the essences. So if we take these essences, then there are hardly any differences between Christianity or Islam, or Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Judaism.

Prayer and even short meditations (of course, you can pray or meditate for a whole night or a whole day) but then it is the practice of compassion, the practice of contentment, the practice of forgiveness, the practice of tolerance that is important. Whenever some circumstances arise and we are about to loose our anger, at that moment we must remind ourselves: I am a believer, I am a follower of such and such a religion, I must practice my tolerance, or forgiveness. And when our desire comes - I want this and I want that - then during that moment we must remember: I am a follower of this religion, I must practice contentment. So then the religion is truly very much irrelevant in our deepest life. So that way we can improve ourselves. Of course, I recite certain mantras or certain prayers, I think a hundred thousand, but my improvement is very limited. But when I think and practice, then, there is a sign of some improvement. So that is what I want to share with you.

Whether we partake of religion or not, that is up to the individual. Yes, certainly, without religion we can manage, we can be happy people but still if we accept religion and practice to implement it faithfully then eventually you really gain some inner stand, some inner value. But once we accept the religion, we should take it seriously, sincerely, and honestly. Then some transformation within our mind, within our emotion will take place.

Thank you very much.

Tomáš Halík

His Holiness the Dalai Lama appealed to us that we should first of all practice love, compassion, tolerance and reconciliation. And that we should, faithful to our own traditions, take religion honestly, seriously and sincerely.

We have listened to words of five men representing five spiritual ways. Words ensuing from the depths of millenniums, words coming to us from deep silence. Music of different traditions brought us to this quiet contemplation. Let us now, towards the end, make a symbolic gesture that has already become a tradition

at these gatherings. Representatives of different religions and of different cultures will now light a candle. May the light of these candles become a signal of hope, sign of our faith that spirit shall overcome darkness, that love shall overcome indolence and hatred. May this become a message to all dark and painful corners of our world - message of hope and reconciliation.

May this light of hope and conciliation, which we light today, never die away...

Candles light by:

Miloslav Vlk
Karan Singh
Joseph Ganda
Albert H. Friedlander
Abbas Mohajerani
Dalai Lama
Václav Havel
El Hassan bin Talal
Lee Teng-hui
Frederik W. de Klerk
Sergei Kovalyov
Mário Soares
Peter Gabriel
Yohei Sasakawa