

Speech of Msgr Francesco Follo
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Before beginning, I would like to thank the organizers of these days of study and philosophical reflection for having honoured me with an invitation. I will try to merit this esteem, and present myself as an academic, a diplomat of the Holy See, a religious man, under the sole patronage of the most high and great truth, which not only guarantees the coincidence of the intellectual and the spiritual, but procures for people of goodwill the interior peace necessary to seek the concrete conditions for peace, in a world too often chaotic and violent. Truth is not a possession, but that which must be served. It is not that which makes us right and the other wrong, but that which judges us together. Finally, if it is both a horizon and the path which leads there, it is because it gives and shares itself in all ways.

The multiplicity of cultures is a fact which seems to justify ethical and anthropological agnosticism; yet, people's aspiration to a unity which can overcome dispersion is also a fact, as testified to by the Declaration of Human Rights – and by the presence here of all of us. In this sense, I am glad to affirm that the Holy See is in agreement with the affirmation of the equal dignity of all the society and social groups (Art. 2.4), and it also wishes to underline, as other States, that only the cultures which accept and promote the values of peace, tolerance, justice and above all openness and respect for the other must be considered of equal dignity, because one cannot be recognized if one does not recognize - or worse, refuses - others.

Like the other States, the Holy See not only wishes for the protection and the promotion of cultural diversity but, concretely, exchange and dialogue among cultures, as moreover several operational articles of the 2005 Convention underline.

Exchange and dialogue – the practice of good relations with the other – is the only birthplace and development of peace. It cannot be imposed from the exterior if it is not at the heart of the relation. Moreover, the dangerous notion of the “clash of civilizations” must be refused and, should the case arise, talk of the “clash of ignorances” or, to use a positive notion: the “dialogue of cultures” must be continued to have a “civilization of love”.

Indeed the problem, in my opinion, is not cultural diversity as such – diversity is a fact, a given – but *inter-culturality* which is to be constructed day by day. Cultural diversity is an effective wealth if it becomes “fertile and creative diversity”. In this manner, I can say that the Holy See appreciates all the articles which speak of solidarity and cooperation (above all of the developed countries towards the developing countries). All cultures and all religions must recognize intercultural respect and also the principle of mutuality, which has been recalled several times by the speakers.

A Berber proverb says: “God has diversified people's faces to permit peace”. And in the Evangelist it is written: “Do for others all that you wish them to do for you”. This is the famous Golden Rule, which one finds in the Evangelist, but also in all other religions...it is a transversal formula. Precisely, all religions. They are a resource and not a problem.

I will give an example with a quotation from a speech of Holy Father Benoit XVI. During his apostolic trip to Great Britain (16-19 September 2010), on the occasion of his meeting with Parliament and the British Society at Westminster Hall on 17 September 2010, Pope Benoit XVI affirmed:

“The central question at issue, then, is this: where is the ethical foundation for political choices to be found? The Catholic tradition maintains that the objective norms governing right action are accessible to reason, rescinding from the content of revelation. According to this understanding, the role of religion in political debate is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers – still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion – but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles. This “corrective” role of religion vis-à-vis reason is not always welcomed, though, partly because distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism, can be seen to create serious social problems themselves. And in their turn, these distortions of religion arise when insufficient attention is given to the purifying and structuring role of reason within religion. It is a two-way process. Without the corrective supplied by religion, though, reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person. Such misuse of reason, after all, was what gave rise to the slave trade in the first place and to many other social evils, not least the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century. This is why I would suggest that the world of reason and the world of faith – the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilization.

“Religion, in other words, is not a problem for legislators to solve, but a vital contributor to the national conversation. In this light, I cannot but voice my concern at the increasing marginalization of religion, particularly of Christianity, that is taking place in some quarters, even in nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance. There are those who would advocate that the voice of religion be silenced, or at least relegated to the purely private sphere. There are those who argue that the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas should be discouraged, in the questionable belief that it might somehow offend those of other religions or none. And there are those who argue – paradoxically with the intention of eliminating discrimination – that Christians in public roles should be required at times to act against their conscience. These are worrying signs of a failure to appreciate not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square. I would invite all of you, therefore, within your respective spheres of influence, to seek ways of promoting and encouraging dialogue between faith and reason at every level of national life.”

Nevertheless, even from a simply anthropological point of view, it cannot be denied that the relationship with the sacred and/or different forms of transcendence is part of the human as such. Therefore, religion is an important aspect of cultures. His Holiness the Pope John-Paul II affirmed that if faith does not also become culture – if it does not express itself in the language of mankind at a specific historic moment – it is not a mature faith. All cultures have a religious origin, even cultures which no longer believe in a Supreme Being. And there is always something holy in the links which unite the members of a culture, and the vision of the world which is proposed to its own and to others, even in the most secular cultures.

The cultural and artistic expressions with religious connotations – we are thinking of popular holidays, holy music, etc. which are moreover cultural content which generally escape from an economic type of approach, they are difficult to classify as “goods and services” – but nevertheless they must be safeguarded. In this sense, as I have already had the opportunity to say previously, the Holy See shares the preoccupation of certain states concerning the current risk of the marketing of culture.

The market can content itself with individuals, while culture needs persons, and links between persons; and thus the links which form living communities: I completely agree with the fact that one must take into account the collectivities which create and enjoy culture, while speaking of creative subjects and cultural identities. The aim of each culture is the well-being (in its widest possible sense) of the human being, to be educated as a person who has obligations towards others, and not only rights.

Indeed, the principal stake concerns education. Thus, I will allow myself to add my voice to that of all those – numerous – who underline the importance of the promotion and protection of cultural diversity. In this regard, I would like to specify that the question of education must be considered – and promoted – in two distinct and complementary manners:

1. First of all, there is education as an introduction to total reality, as an opening to the Infinite, as communication of meaning (in its triple sense: direction, signification, a taste for life). Consequently, education must be before all the transmission of the meaning of life and, after, the vehicle for knowledge of learning, of cultural diversity: one only really respects that which one knows, and that which we know ceases to be considered as “barbarous”. This education, which renders a person capable of promoting cultural diversity, is thus an education for peace, for recognition, for respect to the point of welcoming the other as a gift, wealth, and complementarity.
2. However, there is also education in the sense of the right of the individual and the community to receive – or to give itself – an education according to its own cultural, linguistic and religious membership, and its own tradition. One cannot go towards the other if one does not leave one’s own place, if one does not have the possibility of forming one’s own cultural identity, according to one’s own convictions and values. One must constantly educate to meet the freedom of the other, which enriches us because of what it is and the values which it carries and expresses.

Allow me an observation on the factor of language, a factor of identity par excellence, as it is the concrete symbol, the most immediate and tangible, of cultural diversity, even here, in this assembly which has seen many wise comments on this subject:

I would like to underline the importance of the concept of translation, not only as a contingent practice, but also as a style of managing cultural diversity, as a “philosophical” approach of diversity: instead of opposing one another, of shutting oneself into one’s own cultural and linguistic positions or houses, the Holy See suggests seeking a “creative strategy of coexistence”, as said UNESCO’s 2001 Universal Declaration on cultural diversity; putting people in the place of others, as far as possible, accepting the risk of misunderstanding, but having confidence both in that which brings us together and the truth which we share.

Within their own spheres of competence, human and natural sciences provide us with an inestimable understanding of the diverse aspects of our existence and help us to better comprehend the mechanisms of the physical universe which can then be mastered and thus procure a great advantage to the human family. Nonetheless, these disciplines do not and

cannot respond to the fundamental question, as they operate at a completely different level. They cannot satisfy the deepest aspirations of the human heart, they cannot fully explain to us our origins and our destiny, why and for what aim we exist, and also they cannot provide us with an exhaustive response to the question: “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

The quest of the sacred does not devalue the other domains of human research. On the contrary, it situates them in a context which enhances their importance, as so many possibilities to exercise a responsible management of creation. In the Bible we read that, when the work of creation was completed, God blessed our first parents and said to them: “Be fertile, multiply yourselves, fill the earth and subdue it” (Gn 1, 28). He entrusted us with the task of exploring and dominating the mysteries of nature to contribute to a greater good. What is this greater good? In the Christian faith, this explains itself in the love of God and the love of one’s neighbour. And therefore we involve ourselves in the world, unreservedly and with enthusiasm, but always with the aim of contributing to this greater good, as otherwise we risk disfiguring the beauty of creation in exploiting it for selfish reasons.

It is thus that all authentic religious belief orients us, beyond the immediate and utilitarian aspect, towards the transcendent. It reminds us of the possibility and the imperative of a moral conversion, the duty to live in peace with our neighbour, the importance of leading an honest life. It encourages us to cultivate the practice of virtues and to join others with love, in the greatest respect for religious traditions different to our own.

Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Catholic Church has particularly underlined the importance of dialogue and cooperation with members of other religions. In order to be fruitful, this dialogue, whose foundation is the dignity of each human being, demands reciprocity on the part of all the partners of dialogue and members of other religions. I am thinking in particular of the situations existing in certain parts of the world in which cooperation and dialogue among religions demand mutual respect, the freedom to practice one’s own religion and to take part in public religious acts, as well as the freedom to follow one’s own conscience without being subject to ostracism or persecution, even if one has converted from one religion to another. Once this respect and opening is established, people of all religions will effectively work together for peace and mutual understanding, and also give a convincing account to the world.

This type of dialogue needs to be installed at different levels, and must not limit itself to formal discussions. The dialogue of life necessitates that one live simply beside one another and that one also teach one another to grow in knowledge and mutual respect. The dialogue of action brings us closer together in concrete forms of collaboration, while our religious intuitions inspire our efforts in favour of full human development, peace, justice and a responsible management of creation. Such a dialogue can encourage us to explore together the means of defending human life in all its stages and to assure the non-exclusion of the religious dimension of individuals and communities in the life of society. Then, at the level of official conversations, it is necessary not only to exchange from a theological point of view, but also to share our spiritual riches, to speak of our experience of prayer and contemplation, and to bear witness to one another of the joy of our meeting with the love of God. I am above all pleading for cultural dialogue. Authentic cultures are not closed in on themselves and neither are they petrified in a determined point of history, but they reciprocally fertilize themselves. Even if our origins are far from each other, strangers from a geographical, historical and cultural point of view, no distance, no diversity can create a total extraneity between us: we are all human beings: we are brothers and sisters in humanity. In this context, I am happy to

note the numerous positive initiatives undertaken in many countries to promote such a dialogue at different levels. One must therefore encourage the growing acceptance of the need for dialogue and respect at all levels of society between the world of reason and the world of faith. Believers or non-believers, all are encouraged to collaborate in the full human development of peoples (from the local situation in which one lives), which is too important to be doomed to failure.

I do not wish to be too long and suggest, to finish, five decisive areas in which strategies will be useful in order to bring cultures closer together to construct peace: 1) the decisive role of politics, with its legitimate authority, in such a manner that no religion substitutes it; 2) the importance of the alliance of faith and reason; 3) the importance of the search for truth; 4) the importance of the other who is a wealth, a resource and not a problem, and finally 5) the holy character of the duty of education and freedom of conscience, which are two essential factors of democracy.

First point: I plead for a reflection, once again, because the problem is complex and recurrent, on the articulation of the religious, the social or civil society and of politics. The religious authorities here make a great contribution when they accept to be neither instrumentalized by nor indifferent to politics, and doubtless their role is simply to remind one of ethics in politics, while themselves remaining examples and guarantors of these ethics. I think that it is necessary to have a public space where all cultures and religions can meet one another. To have this, we need a redefinition of the role of the State. In the Western world, at least, since the beginning of the 19th century, the educational, the social, the institutional, the religious and the economic are strongly interlocked in the nation-state. Yet, despite the emergence of the phenomenon of globalization, above all economic, we are attending a restructuring of the role of the State as regulator and guarantor of social cohesion. In effect, globalization tends towards casualizing and blurring its role. J. Louglin, in *Regional Autonomy and State Paradigm Shift in Western Europe*, *Regional and Federal Studies* 10 (2), 2000, pp. 10-34, distinguishes three stages in this regard. The first is that of the welfare state. The second stage is that of the neoliberal state. The hold of the nation-state over the economy, but not only over it, is called into question. The contributions of the central state diminish and the regions must thus rethink their economic development in an endogenous manner by mobilizing their interior resources. This is the period of the reassertion of the value of local and regional languages and cultures. Finally, the third stage is that of the contemporary state, which combines neoliberalism and social values. The state plays a role of stimulator and regulator. One speaks from then on of “subsidiarity” and “governance at multiple levels”. The regions become actors it is not possible to ignore, including in cultural and educational policy, the integration of migrants and social cohesion.

Second point: the extreme importance of the inseparability of faith and reason in the struggle not only against violence, but above all for the construction of a culture of peace. Advocating an absolute which would suspend the critical mind is not advocating the absolute, but raising, consciously or unconsciously, in any case unduly, its own conceptions of the absolute. A mystic who is not critical does not merit the name: the word covers all sorts of irrationals. You will understand, I plead here for theology, as the reflection of faith in reason, by all the scholarly and cultural mediations available. Faith, as faith, has nothing to fear from reason (I did not say rationalist and positivist distortions). No question is to be feared if the first to pose fundamental questions to humans is God Himself, in general in two forms: who do you say I am?, against all idolatry, and: what have you done to your brother?, against all violence. The

challenge is to find the right position in the public space of theology. This is not easy, but neglecting this contribution will be a certain lack in the search for peace.

Therefore, I will allow myself to propose a suggestion of Pope Benoit XVI, who proposes: “to enlarge the horizons of rationality. But this must not simply be envisaged as a new orientation of theological and philosophical thought, but must be heard as the request for a new opening with regard to the reality to which the human person is called in his uni-totally, overcoming old prejudices and simplifications, to thus also open himself to the way towards a true comprehension of modernity. The desire of a plenitude of humanity cannot be disappointed: it is awaiting adapted responses. The Christian faith is called to take charge of this historic emergency, by involving all men of good will in a similar enterprise. The new dialogue between faith and reason required today cannot take place in the terms and the manner in which it has taken place in the past. If it does not want to reduce itself to a sterile intellectual exercise, it must depart from the concrete situation of mankind, and it must develop on this a reflection in which must be gathered ontological and metaphysical truth.” (Benoit XVI, speech to university professors, 7 June 2010). This point of view helps us to understand that philosophy is the possible ground for entente and dialogue with those who do not share the faith, because faith does not present itself as destructive to philosophy, but as the highest possible integration for it.

Reason and faith are two sources of knowledge, neither identical nor competing: one is an exercise of our intelligence, and the other is the opening to the mystery of life, the welcome of transcendence. However, one must also be attentive to the autonomy of reason and faith. The former professor (Benoit XVI) knows it very well (cf. his speech delivered at the university of la Sapienza in Rome in January 2008), and I am sure that all of you agree that it does not mean confusing the levels. It does not mean, for example, to put a little piety into science to save reason or to make good theology and philosophy. Concordism and fundamentalism endanger faith and reason. The Pope recalls that the true greatness of reason is to seek truth, including the truth concerning religion. Truth cannot be sought except through dialogue and work, in a climate of respect and liberty (Conc. Vatican II, Declaration “Human Dignitatis” on religious freedom). It is there that human reason appears in all its scope and that it reveals its potentials. There is a stake not only for the believers, but also for all in a secularized society who risk no longer asking themselves essential metaphysical questions. One must keep the sensibility for the truth alive and “invite reason to set itself to seek the true, the good, God”, without which it loses its greatness and denatures itself.

Third point: the importance of seeking truth, which always unites. It is not in renouncing the truth that the meeting of religions and cultures is possible, but in engaging in it more deeply. Scepticism does not bring people together, no more than simple pragmatism. The two things only serve as an entrance to ideologies which next present themselves with so much more assurance. Renouncing truth and one’s convictions does not elevate mankind, but delivers it to the calculation of profit, depriving it of greatness. What must be demanded is respect for the faith of the other and the availability to seek, in the foreign elements which I encounter, a truth which concerns me and which can correct me and lead me further. What must be demanded is to be ready to seek in perhaps disconcerting manifestations the deeper truth that hides behind them. What must be demanded is in addition to be prepared to break out of the narrowness of my understanding of the truth, to better enable me to hear that which is my own good, in understanding the other and in letting me place myself on the way of God most Great in the certainty that I never have the whole truth about God to hand and that, in front of this, I

am always an apprentice, and that it walking towards it, I am always a pilgrim whose path never ends.

If this is so, there is the fourth point, because one must also seek the positive in the other and that, in this respect, the other is also necessarily an aid in the pursuit of truth, nonetheless does not signify that the element of criticism can and must be lacking. Religion offers, so to say, a shelter for the precious pearl of truth, but it also ceaselessly dissimulates, and it always again runs the risk of failing that which makes up its own nature. Religion can fall sick and transform itself into a destructive phenomenon. It knows and it must lead towards truth, but it is also capable of cutting man off from it. The criticism of religions in the Old Testament has not lost its subject by a long way. It might be relatively easy for us to criticize the religions of others, but we must be as prepared to accept this also for ourselves, for our own religion. Karl Barth distinguished in Christianity religion and faith. He was wrong in that he wanted to totally separate the two, seeing a positive aspect only in faith, while he considered religion as a negative factor. Faith without religion is unreal; religion is part of it and it is in the nature of the Christian faith that it is a religion. However, he was right in the sense that even for the Christian religion can fall sick and become superstition, that concrete religion in which faith is lived must thus be continually purified from the truth which manifests itself in faith and which, on the other hand, allows, in dialogue, the recognize its mystery and infinity in a new manner.

Finally, the fifth and last point or the decisive area, finally linked to the “need for the other” without whom no society can construct itself in peace: the recognitions of the sacred character of the duty of education (I am particularly thinking of the education of girls, a priority duty among us) and freedom of conscience (to be placed among the first foundations of a peaceful society, as where this freedom is not assured, one or other of the human rights will end up being weakened). Tocqueville wrote one day that there is no democracy without two conditions for the vote, that is, education and press freedom. He wholeheartedly pleaded for the capacity to pronounce an informed and responsible speech. I will go even further; the culture of debate is fundamentally of to major activities which impassion peoples: science and politics, knowledge and power. Religions should verify that they demand, beyond knowledge, learning, and, without closing down or confiscating power, which is one of the keys to the possible, that they favour the transformation of power in to service. However, as one must begin with the beginning, what is in the capacity of religions is the lofty and sacred idea which they have of education, as the promotion of the human being and its dignity to be informed and responsible, and not only trained to enter the chain of production-consumption, and to encourage with all their inspiration absolute respect for freedom of conscience, in order that we may all pass from tolerance to respect, and from respect to recognition. Indeed, education is not only to assimilate something, but is above all to allow one to meet someone in freedom. Authentic education aims to make the whole man greater, to enlarge his view and his heart, in order that he does not impoverish himself in withdrawing into himself, and that he turn to God and to his brothers, to humanity.