

By the Light of Faith

make an even more committed contribution to the building of a well-ordered society in which peace reigns.

Prayer is the bond which most effectively unites us: it is through prayer that believers meet one another at a level where inequalities, misunderstandings, bitterness and hostility are overcome, namely before God, the Lord and Father of all. Prayer, as the authentic expression of a right relationship with God and with others, is already a positive contribution to peace.

Interreligious Dialogue

Prayer cannot remain isolated and needs to be accompanied by other concrete actions. Each religion has its own outlook regarding the actions to be accomplished and the paths to be followed in order to attain peace. The Catholic Church, while clearly affirming her own identity, her own doctrine and her saving mission for all humanity, "rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy" in other religions; "she regards with respect those ways of acting and living and those precepts and teachings which, though often at variance with what she holds and expounds, frequently reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens everyone" (*Nostra Aetate*, #2).

Without ignoring differences or playing them down, the church is convinced that, in promoting peace, there are certain elements or aspects which can be profitably developed and put into practice with the followers of other faiths and confessions. Interreligious contacts and, in a unique way, ecumenical dialogue lead to this. Thanks to these forms of encounter and exchange the various religions have been able to attain a clearer awareness of their considerable responsibilities with regard to the true good of humanity as a whole. Today they all seem to be more firmly determined not to allow themselves to be used by particularistic interests or for political aims, and they are tending to assume a more conscious and decisive attitude in the shaping of social and cultural realities in the community of peoples. This enables them to be an active force in the process of development and thus to offer a sure hope to humanity. In a number of instances, it has become evident that their activity would have

proved more effective had it been carried out jointly and in a coordinated manner. Such a way of working among believers can have a decisive effect in fostering peace among peoples and overcoming the still existing divisions between "zones" and "worlds."

The Path To Be Traveled

There is still a long way to go to reach this goal of active cooperation in the cause of peace: there is the path of mutual knowledge, assisted today by the development of the means of social communication and facilitated by the beginning of a frank and wider dialogue; there is the path of generous forgiveness, fraternal reconciliation, and collaboration in areas which though limited or secondary are nonetheless directed to the same cause; finally, there is the path of daily coexistence, sharing efforts and sacrifices in order to reach the same goal. Perhaps it is on this path that individual believers, people who profess a religion, even more than their leaders, must face the hard work and at the same time have the satisfaction of building peace together.

Interreligious contacts, together with ecumenical dialogue, now seem to be obligatory paths, in order to ensure that the many painful wounds inflicted over the course of centuries will not be repeated, and indeed that any such wounds still remaining will soon be healed. Believers must work for peace, above all by the personal example of their own right interior attitude, which shows outwardly in consistent action and behavior. Serenity, balance, self-control, and acts of understanding, forgiveness and generosity have a peacemaking influence on people's surroundings and on the religious and civil community.

It is for this reason that on the next World Day of Peace I invite all believers to make a serious examination of conscience, in order to be better disposed to listen to the voice of the "God of peace" (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:33) and to devote themselves to this great undertaking with renewed trust. I am convinced that they — and, I hope, all people of good will — will respond to this renewed appeal of mine, which I make with an insistence which matches the seriousness of the moment.



'(R)igorous respect for religious freedom, and for the corresponding right to it, is the source and foundation of peaceful coexistence.'

Building Peace in Justice

... Peace is a fundamental good which involves respecting and promoting essential human values: the right to life at every stage of its development; the right to be respected, regardless of race, sex or religious convictions; the right to the material goods necessary for life; the right to work and to a fair distribution of its fruits for a well-ordered and harmonious coexistence. As individuals, as believers and even more as Christians, we must feel the commitment to living these values of justice, which are crowned by the supreme law of love: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

Once more I wish to emphasize that rigorous respect for religious freedom, and for the corresponding right to it, is the source and foundation of peaceful coexistence. I look forward to the

time when it will be a commitment which is not merely affirmed but really put into practice both by political and religious leaders, and by believers themselves ...

... It would be a mistake if religions or groups of their followers, in the interpretation and practice of their respective beliefs, were to fall into forms of fundamentalism and fanaticism, justifying struggles and conflicts with others by adducing religious motives. If there exists a struggle worthy of man, it is the struggle against his own disordered passions, against every kind of selfishness, against attempts to oppress others, against every type of hatred and violence: in short, against everything that is the exact opposite of peace and reconciliation.

A Call to World Leaders

Finally, I call upon the leaders of the nations and of the international community always to show the greatest respect for the religious conscience of every man and woman and for the special contribution of religion to the progress of civilization and to the development of peoples. They should not succumb to the temptation of exploiting religion as a means of power, particularly when it is a matter of opposing an adversary by military means.

Civil and political authorities ought to accord the various religions respect and juridical guarantees — at the national and international levels — ensuring that their contribution to peace is not rejected, or relegated to the private sphere, or ignored altogether.

Again I call upon public authorities to strive with vigilant responsibility to prevent war and conflict, to work for the triumph of justice and right, and at the same time to support development which benefits everyone, and primarily those oppressed by poverty, hunger and suffering. The progress already made in the reduction of arms is worthy of praise. The economic and financial resources hitherto devoted to the production and sale of so many instruments of death can be used from now on for man and not against him! I am certain that millions of men and women throughout the world, who have no way of making their voices heard, share my positive judgment. ...

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