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## **THE FUTURE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE : THREATS AND PROMISES**

The main threats to interreligious dialogue, if I put into one sentence, are rampant communalism, religious fundamentalism, culture of hatred and culture of violence. Under these four heads, I can gather all the clouds that are roaming large in the field of interreligious dialogue in this country. And my assertion and affirmation is that religion is the greatest force that can bind people; it is the greatest force that can touch the minds and hearts; it is the greatest force that can bring in a total change in the whole scenario of our country. And if you say that it is an over statement, I would try to prove it by an example.

In April 1993, there was a meeting of religious leaders and experts in religion at Barcelona organised not by someone, but by no less a body than UNESCO, an arm of the United Nations, and the purpose of this meeting was to find out what is the contribution that religion can make towards a culture of peace. So the very intention of UNESCO, which is not a religious body, to convene a meeting, an international gathering, to find out what the contribution that religion can make towards the culture of peace is a proof that even at the international level we are looking towards religion as a powerful force to bring in peace and justice all over the world.

Religious traditions themselves must work towards the greater credibility by rejecting radicalism, refusing to be manipulated by fundamentalists and, reading the signs of the times, bringing the spirit and power of religious conscience to bear on the democratic process. Another significant feature of this conference was that the religious leaders seemed to agree that the time has come to go beyond ethics and morality in the conduct of human affairs and to introduce a global spirituality bringing human and divine wisdom together, for healing the present crisis and for the struggle the life ahead is facing. For all the people throughout the world, founded on freedom and fellowship, justice and love,

this was the whole central attention of the international conference. That is why I would like to highlight during these few minutes, that the contribution of every religion should be to introduce a culture of life, a culture of love and a culture of peace.

Today the greatest casualty is the person. Men and women are the greatest casualty especially in our country in the background of so much violence, murder and death. In this context every opportunity is given to every religion to show of its best by promoting the value and dignity of the person. Pope John Paul II, beginning his pontificate some years ago, highlighted these concepts in the encyclical "Redemptor Dominus" where he said that man is the way to God. The centrality of man, a person, is to be highlighted. And religion can do this. Today there is so much to talk about human rights, violation of human rights, when there is total suppression of people; I mean ethnic cleansing, refugee problem and using people as an expendable commodity. It is necessary that every religion can and should affirm the sacredness of the person; that every human being is God's creation and the crown of creation.

The Second point I would like to highlight is interreligious dialogue should bring out the culture of love. I use the word culture, because these efforts should be all pervasive; it should be fundamental and it should be adapted so that we can really bring about a change in the country by abolishing the culture of hatred and violence. If there is anything that happens in the country which we detest it is hatred - looking at persons not as brothers and sisters but as adversaries and enemies. Therefore, a culture of love which is fundamental force in every religion should be reaffirmed in the context of interreligious dialogue.

And the third point is that world wide efforts and call today are for a culture of peace all over the world. If we travel down the history we may see that the most cruel people lived in this century. Never a century was so cruel as men of this century have been. Look at the World Wars and continental wars, the regional wars, the civil wars and the murder and death; no other century can boast such a cruelty. But, perhaps we may be condemned by the future generation. Therefore, before this century runs out, every religion must come forward to promote a culture of peace and brotherhood.

Peace cannot affirm without justice. Religion is a force that can affirm not only love, not only peace but also justice. The question today is how religion can exhibit on daily life the most fundamental element of love, peace, and justice centered around the men and women. As far as Christianity is concerned the fundamental belief is love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself and the parallel strength giving statement is from Lord Jesus Christ who said "believe in me I have conquered the world". That means darkness cannot overcome light. Provided all the religions shine and put forward the best foot.