

15th Eurasian Economic Summit
The Marmara Group Foundation
Session on
Intercultural Dialogue: Culture of Peace

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First of all I would like to earnestly thank the Marmara Foundation for the invitation to participate in this important Summit; and especially for asking me to take the floor in this session devoted to *Intercultural dialogue*.

It is particularly meaningful to me to be able to briefly speak on this subject in 2012, for this year marks the opening of the Second Vatican Council. This is an important anniversary for the Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council truly defined the last fifty years in the life of the Church. All of its Bishops gathered together in four annual sessions to create the so-called “aggiornamento”, an updating and renewal of the Church itself. One of the main documents elaborated in the course of the Council - the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* - gave birth to the Vatican Dicastery of which I am Under-Secretary, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. And this constitution specifically elaborated upon the theme of culture.

One of the compilers of that document was Pope John Paul II, then the Archbishop of Krakow. He went on to draw inspiration from it for the drafting of his own definitive speech on culture given during his visit to UNESCO in 1980.

Taking my cue from that memorable address I would like to present some brief remarks upon this theme.

Unity of culture and plurality of cultures

Broadly speaking, all means whereby man develops and perfects the manifold capacities of his body and soul in order to administer Creation in such a way as to make social life more humane are ‘culture’¹. And when man communicates and endows his works with his experiences and spiritual aspirations, he ultimately lives a truly authentic life thanks to culture. In short, culture makes man more fully human.²

1 Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n 53.

2 John Paul II, *Address to UNESCO*, 1980, n 7.

Through these remarks I hope to express that this essential definition of culture characterizes the life of each human being in every part of the world and in all ages.

Within this unity of culture, however, is rooted the plurality of cultures – cultures as developing in different regions where peculiar geographical elements intertwine with specific ethnic and historical traits. Thus the “uniqueness” of each culture is defined by the continuous series of inputs and contributions of its bearers, all of which give life to particular forms of social and political coexistence, economic development, and religious ideas.

Human rights - the measure of the authenticity of each culture

The authenticity of each human culture, the value of the *ethos* it conveys, namely the solidity of its moral orientation, can somehow be gauged by its being for man and for the promotion of his dignity at all levels and in all contexts. As man is a unique, complete and indivisible, a spiritual and material being, as well as a relational being, the authenticity of each culture is measured by its capacity to respect human rights. These include the right to life and its related rights, including that of the fullness of life from the spiritual viewpoint - namely the right to religious freedom. In fact, the right to religious freedom - both in its private and public dimension - manifests the unity of the human person as both a citizen and a believer. It also legitimizes the fact that believers have a contribution to make in the edification of society"³.

Such right is asserted by the international legal order that recognizes the same status to the right to thought, conscience and religious freedom as to the right to life ⁴ and to personal freedom. At the national level it is very important that the governments should effectively ensure and promote the observance of religious freedom. This is especially true when, alongside a great majority who follow one religion, there exist one or more minority groups of other faiths.

When faced with dramatic examples of religious intolerance, such as the ones we have recently witnessed on Easter Sunday in Nigeria, one cannot create a sort of scale of degrees of this intolerance. Unfortunately such a scale is frequently to be found, precisely in regard to acts of discrimination against Christians - which are often considered less grave and less worthy of attention from governments and public opinion⁵.

³ Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass in Plaza de la Revolución*, in Havana, Cuba, 28 March 2012.

⁴ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at its article 18 states: Everyone has the right to freedom of thoughts, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change its religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

⁵ cfr. Benedict XVI, *Address to the members of the Diplomatic Corps*, 10 January 2011.

The dialogue between cultures for a culture of peace

Thanks to the prodigious progress in science and technology and the phenomenon of globalization, the modern world is facing the problem of migrations - one of the biggest challenges of our time. The exodus of large masses from one region to another of the planet - a dramatic human odyssey for all persons involved - entails the intermingling of different customs and traditions with considerable repercussions both in countries of origin and destination.

Legal instruments at the disposal of nations and the international community seek to secure the rights of migrants, especially of migrant workers and their families, and also to preserve a “cultural equilibrium” in host countries. These instruments are essential, but are not sufficient enough to prevent unrest and conflicts in these host countries. As so often happens in the present day, living together turns into living against one another. And this will continue unless men learn to accept one another and genuinely commit to finding an effective way to coexist⁶. Thus it is necessary that a true culture of peace be established, which can only be achieved through a serene dialogue between cultures. And this in turn will only be possible if ‘culture’ is considered in its broadest, unitarian aspect as that which makes man, every man – regardless of what part of the world he may come from – more fully human.

The role of religions in the creation of a culture of peace

Religions bring a fundamental contribution to the development of a culture of peace. This conviction prompted Pope John Paul II as well as Pope Benedict XVI to invite to Assisi the representatives of all religions to reflect and pray for peace. These gatherings took place on three different occasions - in 1986, 2002 and on the 27th of October of last year. For the same purpose, the Community of Sant’Egidio organises its annual meetings of inter-religious dialogue for peace in various parts of the world.

These are events of great importance and carry a high symbolic value. However, in order to truly bring about this culture of peace, religions must commit themselves to nurturing in the soul of men the awareness that, though cultures may be diverse, they share common values upon which a peaceful and harmonious coexistence can be built. These common values are deeply rooted in the human spirit and I will refer to some of them here.

⁶ Benedict XVI, Message to the *Archbishop of Munich on the occasion of the International Meeting of Prayer for Peace*, 1 September 2012.

Firstly, the value of life. Human life cannot be seen as an object that can be used arbitrarily, but rather must be viewed as the most sacred and inviolable reality present in the world. Beside bright models of dedication and service to life, our time also features entirely different examples. One is not entitled to invoke peace if one despises life whether through abortion or euthanasia, by the deportation and traffic of women and children, or through torture or irresponsible practices of genetic engineering.

Secondly, the value of truth. Before a society can be considered well-ordered, creative, and consonant with human dignity, it must be based on truth. The same can be said about mutual ties between nations. Peace must be built by works of goodness, and this demands that truth be prioritized in order that individuals, groups and nations refrain from losing confidence in one another and consenting to new episodes of violence. Restoring peace entails defining acts of violence in all their forms, even verbal ones. This is why we cannot but protest the opinion recently expressed by Saudi Arabia's highest religious authority that all the churches located on the Arabian Peninsula must be destroyed⁷.

Thirdly, the value of justice pursued in a spirit of solidarity. Owing to the nature of globalization, the world is characterised by imbalances and inequalities existing within and between countries. Next to those living in opulence are many injured in dignity and deprived of the necessary means for a decent existence. These intra-generational inequalities, along with environmental degradation caused and accelerated by the irresponsible use of natural resources, create further inter-generational disparities. All of this jeopardizes peace and cannot be amended unless by cultivating the value of solidarity. This solidarity is not a vague feeling of compassion fulfilled at most by giving superfluous means to the needy; but is rather the inner conviction of a common responsibility toward all human beings.

Fourth, the value of education. In order to achieve a culture of peace, all ethnocentric selfishness must be overcome. Attention to one's own identity must be tempered with an understanding of others and a respect for their diversity. The responsibility of education is therefore to transmit the awareness of one's own roots while at the same time an interest in and a respect for other cultures. This acquaintance with other cultures leads to a greater awareness of both the values and limitations of one's own culture; and also reveals the existence of an inheritance common to all mankind.

The high road of forgiveness

⁷ *AsiaNews*, 21 March 2012.

Ultimately, the high road is that of forgiveness, of reconciliation. Without this movement of the human soul, no culture of peace is possible.

Being aware of this truth, in the year 2000 Pope John Paul II desired to celebrate the “Day of Pardon”, asking Christians to repent and purify themselves of error, unfaithfulness, incoherence and delay committed with regard to different cultures and religious traditions. Shattered order cannot be restored unless by asking for and granting forgiveness. Yet reconciliation must combine forgiveness with justice, as forgiveness is in no way opposed to justice; but it does firmly exclude resentment and revenge.

Forgiveness may seem a mark of weakness, but instead denotes strength and courage. It lies deep in the heart of man - a personal choice that goes against the spontaneous instinct to pay back evil with evil. As man is a relational being, forgiveness is also necessary at the social level, forming the basis of all projects for a future, fairer society. Failure to forgive entails heavy costs to human development - costs that result in military expense, economic retaliation and conflict.

The road of forgiveness is, ultimately, also the way of reason, as forgiveness represents a positive form of the “golden rule”. When man fully realises his own frailty and needs that others be lenient with him, then and only then will he be lenient with them.