

IN THE SAME CHARISM....

with responsibility

**COMPANY OF ST. URSULA  
SECULAR INSTITUTE OF ST. ANGELA MERICI  
FEDERATION**

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# 50th Anniversary of the Federation



Open to the  
World

**INTERNATIONAL MEETING**

*Casa San Giuseppe*

**San Marino 22 - 26 th July 2008**

**ACTS**

## ***CONTENTS***

<b>Introduction</b>	page	5
<b><i>GREETING THE PARTICIPANTS</i></b>		
<b>Maria Razza</b>	page	7
<b><i>LET US THANK THE LORD</i></b>		
<b>Mons. Adriano Tessarollo</b>	page	10
<b><i>OPEN TO THE WORLD</i></b>		
<b>Mons. Aldo Giordano</b>	page	19
<b>Conclusions</b>	page	62
<b>The feast of the 50th Anniversary of the Federation</b>		
<b>... a few photos... past and present</b>	page	65

## INTRODUCTION

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*... as long as the world lasts*

*“Hold this for certain; that this Rule has been planted directly by His Holy hand, and He will never abandon this Company as the world lasts”.*

(Last Legacy 11, 6-7)

The President of The Federation used St. Angela’s prophetic expression **OPEN TO THE WORLD** at the beginning and at the end of the International meeting held from the 22nd to the 26th July at San Marino.

*... As long as the world lasts* the Lord will never abandon The Company that has been planted by His Hand: *let us be sure of this, let us believe it and never doubt it ...*

The Company, spread all over the world in different continents, is sustained by *The Common Lover*, and rooted in the Crucified and Risen Christ. This certainty by itself is not enough, we must also endeavour to do our duty; this knowledge fills us with faith and hope.

The Company will never know the meaning of abandonment, but will enjoy the gift of a sense of belonging and love.

*... As long as the world lasts* we must believe, hope, and have firm faith *because, undoubtedly, we will see wonderful things happening, because St. Angela knows what is being said.*

How many *wonderful things*... has The Company given us in these past 50 years, how many *wonderful things* were given to us by The Federation in these 50 years of unity in the same charism.

*... As long as the world lasts* the Daughters of St. Angela, who live in the world will be able to be open to the world, they will know how to lead a life of contemplation and activity, as Cozzano described the early followers of Angela Merici: *Living in the world, leading an active life, enjoying religious meditation, and in a wonderful way they manage to combine activity with meditation.*

*... ... As long as the world lasts* means for each and everyone of us to be able to live in a group, respecting the ideas of the majority yet maintaining our identity, to be able to communicate, to dialogue and to live.

*... ... As long as the world lasts* binds each one of us to accept ourselves as we are, live the present, without feelings of regret and with responsibility..

Our insignificant actions and our small reality can face bigger problems, great ideas. We must not retreat and enclose ourselves in our little world.

If we can manage to add The Merician Spirituality to the *good news* of the Gospel, we will be able to build a more realistic, a more beautiful and better world.

The International Meeting of The Federation was an eye opener; it has given us the strength to act and has given us a deeper insight of things.

We are grateful to those who have accompanied us to San Marino and consider the Acts of this International Meeting as an added gift, both to those who have participated and those who had to refrain from attending, a gift which will help us to leave a deeper imprint of our charism in time and in history... *open to the world...*

**My wishes for a profitable reading and a good formation!**

*Caterina Dalmasso*



## **THE WELCOMING SPEECH**

**of the President Federation  
Maria Razza**

I am happy to welcome you in this house for our International Congress. This morning we have already shared moments of fraternal greetings and also during the Mass we have recalled the 50th anniversary of the Federation and gave thanks to God. In the Sanctuary of the Immaculate Heart of Mary under the tender look of the Mother of the Lord we have remembered persons, situations, moments of joy and difficulties which have made up our history during the 50 years...and more so, if we consider the painful and yet fruitful period which preceded the decree *Vestustum et Praeclarum Institutum*.

We know very well how many hours of study and research have been done by superiors both males and females in those early years of our meetings of 1940 in Brescia and continued later, more often and more in a systematic way from 1951 to the end of 1958 the year of the "Constitutions and the approval" of the Federation and of the first Constitutions.

There have been years of intense sharing among Companies all with the desire to individualize the correct juridical form which would fit the original Charism given by God to our saintly Mother and Foundress Angela Merici. And that it would be of help for the daughters to understand better the right way to live it in fidelity according to the times.

We are grateful to all those who have worked and also

suffered for such a result.

Above all we are grateful to the Church who, without doubt, under the work of the Holy Spirit has studied our physionomy and has officially defined our belonging to the Secular Institutes.

Now we are here to recall our history...and to look ahead. With joy and admiration we observe the journey of the universality of our federated Institute which has started already for years...and we wish that this journey will continue even in the future according to God's will and promise by St. Angela, *"Hold this, for certain that this Company has been planted directly by His holy hand, and He will never abandon this Company as long as the world lasts... I know what I am saying."* (Last Legacy 6, 7-12)

Our Congress will help us to know better the dynamics, the opportunities and the difficulties that the theme of "Universality" arouses in us: as well as putting challenges and prospects for social life and relationships in our global world...

I have nothing more to say except to show the desire of the Council to plan a renewed itinerary and formation for the years ahead. For such a work the Council has retained opportune to ask for help from a person who is an expert in this field.

Mons. Aldo Giordano, with his meditated reflection in the Assembly of 2006 has already introduced us to it. With joy and competence he had offered us then, his multiple and enriching experience. He told us that his desire is, "that our reflection would not be a theoretical one on evangelization but a true experience of our encounter with the Risen Lord.

And this is what we wish to all of us in this occasion: the desire to be attentive and aware to all that is happening in the historical period in which we are living our small history as an Institute. Our call to meet the Risen Lord in every moment of our



life according to the call which the Lord has reserved for us, must not take second place.

We wish to be more open to the universality of our Institute to accept and evaluate ways, knowledge, forms and styles of life of sisters who come from other nations and who are sharing with us the same Charism: for this we ask for help to know and to understand.

Mons. Aldo Giordano has fulfilled a long service as a secretary of the European Council for Episcopal Conferences, a duty which he has now left in obedience to a new call: the nomination to be a Permanent Observer of the Holy See in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. In view of this new service he was asked to be free of other commitments which he had assumed before. But he wanted to keep the appointment with our Congress, certainly not without fatigue, and for this we thank him heartily.

We feel moved and honoured for this, his high fidelity, and we promise to remember him in our prayers so that his service for the Kingdom would be fruitful.

**WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR THE  
50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH  
OF THE FEDERATION,  
AN INSTRUMENT OF BEING OPEN TO THE WORLD**



**An introductory report  
by Mons. Adriano  
Tessarollo Assistant  
of The Council  
of The Federation**

You have answered to a particular call, that of following the Lord through the secular consecration. Today we know very well how difficult it is to give an evangelical witness in the world.

**New Evangelization**

Secular consecration makes part of the journey of the proclamation of the Gospel, particularly significant for the Church in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium in her mission to announce and witness the Gospel to humanity.

This concerns with the word `always` and the word `new` to offer it to the new demands and situations of the man and the woman of today. And therefore it is urgent to repropose the heart or the centre of the Gospel as “perpetual Good News” rich of life and sense for man as an announcement capable of responding to their expectations: the significance of freedom, the mystery of life and death, love and suffering, the work and the feast. The journey of the new evangelization must start or lead from here...to evangelize the.

Life and the the significance of life; the exigency of freedom

and of submission, the sense of one's being for the world and his relationship with others. We can rather say that "the vocation is the heart itself of the new evangelization of the threshold of the 3rd millennium" regarding the call of God to man for a new season of truth and liberty and for an ethical recondition of culture and human society.

### **New Sanctity**

In this process of inculturation of the Good News, the Word of God accompanies man in his journey and crosses him along the ways to reveal to him the plan of the Father as a condition for his happiness. And precisely, in the letter of St. Paul to the christians of the Church of Ephesus, which, although not quite visible at first sight, the Word of God leads us even today to discern that it is also an event, a gift, a new life. "Therefore, you are no longer strangers and immigrants but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household." (Ephesians 2, 19)

We need persons *capable of dialogue and of cultural charity* for transmitting the christian message through the language of our society, professionals and ordinary people capable of imprinting in the commitment of civil life, and in the relationships at work and among friends, the transparency of truth and the intensity of Christian charity *women* who discover in their christian Faith the possibility of living their feminine genius fully; new *confessors* of faith and of the beauty of belief; *witnesses* who are credible believers courageous to the extent of martyrdom, *virgins* who are not so only for themselves but to know how to indicate that virginity which is in the heart of each person and which leads immediately to the Eternal fount of every love .

Our world is eager for saintly persons so in love with the Church and with the world to know how to present to the world itself a Church who is free, who is open in dynamic, very near to the sufferings of the people, welcoming towards

everybody, promotress of justice, attentive to the poor, not worried about its numerical minority, not frightened of the social dechristianization atmosphere ( real but perhaps not so radical and general) neither of the lack ( very often apparent) of results.

Will this be the new sanctity capable of reenvangelization? Henceforth, this would demand a new approach on vocation and on vocations, on culture and the pastoral care.

### *Vocation and vocations*

As sanctity is for all baptized persons in Christ, so much so exists a specific vocation for every living person; and as the first one is rooted in Baptism, so much so the second is connected to the simple fact of existence. Vocation is the thoughtful providence of the Creator on a single creature and his ideal-plan specific and different for every living person, like a dream which is close to His heart because He is in the heart of that person. In fact the human being, is “called” to life and as he comes to life, he carries and finds in himself the image of Him who has called him.

Vocation is the divine proposal to realize oneself according to this image; it is unique and *unrepeatable* just because such an image is never exhausted. Every creature says and is called to express a particular aspect of the mind of God. There it finds her name and her identity, is affirmed and is certain about her freedom and originality.

Therefore, if every human being has his own vocation from the moment of birth, there exist in the Church and in the world various vocations which, while on the theological level they express the divine likeness imprinted in man, on the ecclesial-pastoral level they respond to the various exigencies of the new evangelization, enriching the dynamics and ecclesial communion. The Church in particular is like a blooming garden, with a great variety of gifts and charisms, movements and ministries. From here is the importance of

witness of communion among them. By abandoning every spirit of competition there is a need of an open mind to new charisms and ministries perhaps different to the habitual ones. The value and the place of the lay is a sign of the times which is still to be discovered. It is being revealed to be more fruitful.

These elements are penetrating progressively the conscience of believers. They are a component of the new evangelization: culture of life and an open mind for life, of the significance of life but also of death; of gratitude, of accepting the mystery of the sense of insufficiency of man together with his open mind for the *transcendent*; the availability to let himself be called by another ( or by the Other), by consulting himself through life experiences; to have trust in himself and in his neighbour, the freedom of movement in front of the gift received, in front of affection, comprehension, forgiveness, discovering that whatever he has received is always unmerited and exceed his own measure and fount of responsibility towards life.

The capacity of dreaming and desiring greatly all that is beautiful in life; altruism which is not only solidarity in times of emergency but one that is born from the discovery of the dignity of each person whoever he or she is; all this still makes part of this vocational culture.

And especially to find once more, courage and taste for great questions, those regarding one's future . *They are great questions, in fact, those that render great even small answers.*

But they are small everyday answers that provoke great decisions, like that of faith; or that which creates culture of complex values which has to pass always more from the ecclesial conscience to the civil one.

### **Christ the model of every vocation**

Christ is the new Adam that while revealing the mystery of the Father and His love, He reveals also fully the mystery of man to man, and makes him aware of his highest vocation. *Christ is*

*the plan of man.* It is only after the believer has recognized that Christ is the Lord “under the action of the Holy Spirit (1Cor12,3) that he can accept the rules of the new community of believers. “There are distinctive gifts of grace, but the same Spirit, and there are distinctive ministries, yet the same Lord. There are also varieties of things accomplished but the same God does all the energizing in them all.”(1Cor.12, 4-6)

In the light of the Spirit, gifts are the expression of His infinite *gratuity*. In the light of Christ vocational gifts are “ministries” that express in various forms the service that the Son of God has lived until the offering of His life. In the light of the Father the gifts are “works” because it is from Him, fount of life, that every being springs up his own creature dynamism. Therefore the Church reflects, like an icon, the mystery of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### **Love the vocation of all men**

Love is the full sense of life. God has so much loved man as to give him his own life and to render him capable of living and loving in a divine way. In this excess of love, a love that is from the beginning, man finds his radical vocation, that is a “holy vocation” ( 2 Tim. 1,9) and discovers his unconfoundable identity which renders him at once similar to God, “ to the image of the Holy One” who has called him ( 1Peter 1, 15).

Creating him into His image and continuing keeping him in his being...comments Pope John Paul II God inscribes in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and so the Responsibility of love and unity. Therefore, love is fundamental and every human being is born with this vocation.

### **The call of Baptism**

This vocation for life and for divine life comes from Baptism. In this Sacrament the Father bends with tender care on the creature, son or daughter of the love of a man and a woman to bless the fruit of that love and renders him his son

fully. From that moment the creature is called to the sanctity of the children of God. Nothing and nobody can ever cancel this vocation.

With the grace of Baptism God the Father intervenes to manifest that He and only He is the Author of the plan of salvation into which every human being finds his personal role. His action always precedes, it does not wait for the initiative of man, does not depend on one's merits, neither assumes its form from his capacity or dispositions.

Christian life thus acquires the significance of a response experience: it becomes a responsible response to grow in a daughter/son relationship with the Father, and a fraternal relationship in The big family of the children of God. The Christian is called to favour through his love that process of being a resemblance with the Father which is called theological life.

### **The Son calls to follow Him**

If man is called to be a son of God, per consequence no one better than the Word Incarnate can “speak” to man about God and represents the successful image of the son.

For this, the Son of God, coming on this earth, has called to follow Him, to be like Him, to share His life, His word, His Easter of death and Resurrection, really His sentiments.

To what does Jesus call? To follow Him to be and to act like Him. More, in particular, to live the same His relationship towards the Father and towards men: to accept life as a gift from the hands of God to “lose it” to pour out this gift on those whom the Father had entrusted to Him.

Every person who is called is a *sign* of Jesus: in some way His heart and His hands continue to embrace the little ones, to heal the sick, to reconcile sinners and to let himself be crucified for the love of all. To be for others with the heart of Jesus is the mature attitude of every vocation. Therefore, it is the Lord Jesus the *formator* of those He calls; He is the only one who

can mould in them His own sentiments.

Every disciple, responding to His call and letting himself to be formed more by Him, expresses the more true features of the proper choice.

### **The Eucharist: the consignment for the mission**

In the beginning of the Christian community, in all the catechization the centrality.

Of the paschal mystery is evident, announcing Christ dead and risen. In the mystery of the broken bread and the shedding of blood for the life of the world the believing community Contemplates the supreme epiphany of love, the life, given by the Son of God. For this, in The Eucharistic celebration ( apex and fount) of the Christian life is celebrated the most Revelation of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world; but at the same time the identity of The ecclesial community convoked to be sent, called for the mission is also celebrated.

### **Attention for all vocations**

The discernment and the care of the Christian community must be offered to all vocations whether those who have been enlisted in the tradition of the Church as well as those with the new gifts of the Holy Spirit: religious consecration in the monastic life and in the apostolic life ; the lay vocation, the charism of the Secular Institutes; the society for apostolic life; the vocation for marriage, the various lay forms of aggregation-associations joint to the religious institutes; missionary vocations; the new forms of consecrated life.

A Church is alive when the expression of different vocations is rich and varied in her. In years gone by as well as today, times in need of prophesy, it is wise to favour those vocations which are a particular sign “ of that which has not been shown “ ( 1John 3,2) such as the *vocations with a special consecration*; but it is also wise and indispensable to favour the prophetic aspect typical of every Christian vocation, including the `lay`



so that the Church in face of the world would be more a sign of the future things, of that Kingdom which is “already here and not yet”.

### **Mary, mother and model of every vocation**

There is a creature in which the dialogue between the freedom of God and the freedom of man happen in a perfect manner, in such a way that the two freedoms can interact realizing fully the vocational plan; a creature who is given to us because in her we can contemplate a perfect vocational design, that, which must be fulfilled, in each one of us.

It is Mary who is successful the image of the dream of God on the creature. In fact a creature like us, a small fragment in whom God could pour out all his divine love; hope that is given to us, because seeing her, we also can accept the Word, so that it would be realized in us.

St. Bernard commenting on the message of the archangel Gabriel in the annunciation says: “This is not a Virgin found at the last moment, neither by chance, but she was chosen before The centuries; the Most High has predestined her and has prepared her”. St. Augustine echoes his words when he says, “Before the Word was born of the Virgin, he has already predestined her as his mother.”

Mary is the image of the divine choice of every creature, a choice which from eternity she is supremely free, mysterious and loving. A choice which regularly goes beyond what the creature can think of herself , who asks her the impossible and the question is only one thing, the courage to entrust herself into His loving care.

But the Virgin Mary is also the model of the *human freedom* in the response of this choice. She is the sign of that which God can make when He finds a creature free to accept His proposal. Free to say her `yes` free to walk along the pilgrimage of faith

which will be also the pilgrimage of her vocation as woman called to be Mother of the Church. That long journey is fulfilled at the foot of the cross, through a `yes` yet more mysterious and is generating painful which renders her mother fully; and then once more in the cenacle, where with the Spirit it and continues still today the Church and every vocation.

Finally Mary is the perfect realized image of the *woman*, a perfect resume` of the feminine genius and of the phantasy of the Spirit, who finds and chooses the bride, virgin, Mother of God and of man, daughter of the Most High and Mother of all the living. In her every Woman finds her vocation that of virgin, bride, mother.

In the educational sphere of our communities two important points must be kept in mind; from one side all those persons who are already called to work in the community with children and youth (priests, religious and lay) must render their conscience explicit and vigilant for vocational education. From the other side *the educational ministry of the woman* must be encouraged and formed because woman is a figure to be referred to and a wise guide with young people. In fact woman is fully present in the Christian community and the intuitive capacity of the feminine genius, her great experience in the educational field ( family, school, community groups) are very well known. All that woman brings is to be kept rather precious if not to say decisive, above all in the world of feminine youth, not less that of masculine. This is so, because there is a need for a careful and specific reflection above all regarding one`s vocation. To help each young person to discover his/her `vocation`, that is the right way of being a believing woman in Christ, being able to refer to other feminine figures, both personal and with others, capable of being concrete to models and values.

## **OPEN TO THE WORLD<sup>1</sup>**



**A report by  
Mons. Aldo Giordano  
a special envoy  
and permanent observer  
of The Holy See  
at the Council of Europe  
in Strasburg**

In July 2006, in Rocca di Papa, I had the pleasure of meeting the participants of the assembly of the Society of Saint Ursula. I am happy to have this new opportunity to have an experience of communion together. The reflections I will offer in these days continue, in more detail, some themes I already referred to on that occasion.

I'll try to clarify the meaning of the theme we are going to deal with. We have to keep the horizon open and wide in our search into what the presence of Christian witness and religious life is capable of giving as a future to Europe and the world. In fact, if deal with a specific problem by bringing it closer to our eyes, the problem itself will become even more exaggerated, to the extent that it fills the horizon of our vision. The light begins to fade. If instead, we know how to distance the problem from our eyes, to position it in its rightful context, the problem becomes smaller and relative since it is placed in the context to which it belongs. In this way, our gaze remains free to see where the real roots of the problem and its possible solutions are. The horizon at stake today is Europe and the world,

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<sup>1</sup> This is a provisional text, a speaking aid.

because of the historic and ecclesiastical problems we must face.

Above all, the wide open horizon we have to keep is the Gospel and ecclesiastic life of the communion of believers: I hope our meeting will not be a mere theoretical reflection on the world and the role of Christianity, but will also be a true experience of being Catholic Church (universal) and of being Christians. The Risen One promised to “go before us into Galilee”, which means to precede us to where we find ourselves living and going. Therefore, let’s have this great certainty that the Risen Lord is here among us today and is already there where the world is called to go in the future: The Risen Lord precedes us and awaits us.



## I.

### EUROPE AND THE OTHER CONTINENTS

I'll deal with this topic from a European viewpoint.

#### 1. Europe and the global village

It is not easy to say what Europe is. Does the word Europe have a geographic or historic or political or economic or cultural content? Neither is it easy to say what a united Europe is: historically we have already seen some attempts at

unification: from Charlemagne, to Napoleon, to Hitler himself, but we know too its failure or danger.

1. Europe is extremely varied. I am always surprised by the variety of languages we have on our continent. When we hold the annual meeting for the 36 Presidents of the European Bishops Conference we note that they speak at least 30 different native languages. There are around one hundred European languages (taking into account major and minor ones) and this expresses the great cultural complexity that we have here.

2. We discover more and more that Europe is defined by its boundaries, its borders. Europe has always lived with its limits: between Greece and Asia, between Athens, Jerusalem and Rome, between North and South, between East and West, border by North and South America, Asia, Africa... In reality, today, no-one knows exactly where the borders of Europe are. It is not exactly clear what countries belong to Europe. Just think of the debate going on about the admission of Turkey to the European Union and the relationships of the EU with its new neighbours, starting with Russia - which considers itself to be European, but, if it is not accepted, will go elsewhere, perhaps Asia - and then moving on to the Balkans, to North Africa, as far as Israel.

3. Up to a few years ago a dramatic “border” divided East and West Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall was an enormous historical novelty. The recent enlargement of the EU towards Eastern Europe has made it politically realistic to think of Europe with “two lungs”, but, to bring about the “common good” between East and West Europe is still a task that has yet to be achieved. The great majority of the people in the countries of Central Eastern Europe quickly became aware that

the fall of the communist empire did not mean immediate entry to the “promised land”, but, rather the beginning of 40 years in the desert. Certainly, a difficult journey in freedom is better than slavery in Egypt.

Eastern countries feel that, especially at home, the problem of justice has not yet been resolved. The goods and property confiscated by the communist powers, in reality, have never been simply given back to the people, but, in the majority of cases have ended up in different hands. At the same time, the property-less people of these lands have to face the logic of the free market and capitalist competition based on property. This situation has created a small group of winners who have managed to get on the bandwagon of the new economic situation, but, many losers, the weaker ones, as usual, have been left behind.

In addition, in the majority of eastern European countries fear is widespread of what will happen to their own values and traditions as they meet the modern western lifestyle and secularized culture which the enlargement of the EU brings with it.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 allowed a passage of people between east and west which had been impossible before then. The flow of a large part of the eastern population into the west in the numbers expected did not take place immediately after the fall. However, in recent years it has become decisive. Today, in practically every western European country there are, for example, notable Romanian and Ukrainian communities.

4. Speaking of boundaries means thinking of Europe not as a fortress, closed in its interests for its own good, but, rather, as a continent which is becoming more stable which can better

bring about an exchange of goods with the other regions of the earth and contribute to world justice and peace. In an age of universal mobility and global connections, Europe can understand itself only in its connections with other continents. The real point of interest is “universal common good” and not the exclusive good of a single continent.

The most impressive and significant unknown factor is Europe’s comparison with Asia which is rapidly becoming the leader on the global geo-political-economic scene, due to the demographic growth of world population. It is sufficient consider countries like China and India. One and a half billion people live in China. In India, there are around 50 million university students. The future of history and Christianity too is linked to Asia. We are facing a comparison with cultures which are thousands of years old and very different from our own.

Half of the Catholics of the world live in Latin America. I took part in the first days of the V General Conference of the Latin American Episcopato which began in Aparecida, Brazil, on May 13<sup>th</sup> 2007 with the presence and address of Benedict XVI and finished on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Thanks, above all, to Christianity there are close “family ties” between Europe and Latin America which should be developed today. The churches in the two continents face common challenges: both feel challenged by the globalization process, by immense poverty and social injustice, but, above all, both are questioning themselves about the risk of creating a society without God, about the way to know and announce God, about the role and the face of the Church, about the formation of believers, about the meaning of putting the poor first, about the relationship between the Church and politics, about their presence in the

media. These are the questions the Pope dealt with in his historical inaugural address to the conference in Aparecida.

I was in Africa three times in 2007. I understood how much the Africans desire to be the makers of their own history and to reach economic autonomy, as a Church too. During a meeting a Nigerian bishop stated: “the day will come when we Africans will be able to enjoy the marvellous assets that God has given to our land and I will see that day! This great aspiration has to compete with the continuous need for solidarity from the other continents but also with a certain international political and economic cynicism that seems ready to let Africa die while the world goes peacefully ahead, or better while it is ready to exploit African riches without letting the Africans decide what to do with their belongings. Bishops from some African countries note that while their people are still suffering from the effects of the old colonization, they are not aware that they are already falling into a new form of colonization: a Chinese one.

In November 2004, in Rome, we held a European and African bishops’ symposium dedicated to common responsibility, especially with regard to evangelization. Now, we are strengthening collaboration through a series of seminars on themes of common interest: slavery, migration, and evangelization.

Europe has to deal with the world because the world is coming to Europe as a result of the demographic crisis on our continent. Migration is changing the face of all our countries.

In the recent European Ecumenical Assembly held in Sibiu (Romania) from September 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, attended by 2,500 delegates from all the European countries, I understood in a new and clear way that, the world, is the decisive question



today. In the previous Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, ten years ago, in 1997, this dimension was not as evident as it is today. I don't remember, for example, that in Graz we spoke of China or terrorism or climatic change in the same way as we are dealing with these topics today.

In short, we can say that our world is reducing space quicker than ever. At one time, there was great space and the world was large, now it is becoming always "smaller": the famous global village. Technical development, communications media and migratory phenomena are reducing the space. This is creating a type of paradox: when the world was very large, differences between people and cultures existed, however, this didn't create fear because they were far away. They did not affect us directly and there was space for everyone. The differences appeared "small". In times past, we Europeans didn't even know that China existed, therefore, China was not a problem. Today, the markets and the politicians know very well that China exists because the world has become small and therefore we find China in "our own back yard" as we are in theirs. If Muslims were a people who lived in a world far from ours, they would not create questions. Instead, today, we live in the same house and so we discover how distant we are from each other, how different. The paradox is in the fact that being so close allows us see how far we are from each other, how different. For this reason the challenge of fraternity has become more urgent today than it was yesterday. In a very large world we could have remained less fraternal. Today, we have an absolute historic urgency to re-discover fraternity, otherwise, we are running enormous risks. Risks of terrorism, clashes of civilization, catastrophes of war, hunger, energy crises, monopoly of water supplies.....

## 2. What type of fraternity between peoples is needed?

But what type of fraternity do we need? I will try to explain the problem by using a classical tale. It is a page by the famous Greek author Aeschylus, from the work “The Persians”. It presents the emblematic dream of Queen Atossa. Two women of imposing height and unequalled beauty appear. There is a battle going on between them that Serse, the great king, is not able to end. He yokes both of them to a cart, but, one docilely accepts the bridle, while the other rebels, destroys the harness, breaks the yoke and throws Serse out of the cart. The woman dressed in Persian clothes who follows the lord, the great king, is Asia; the woman dressed in Doric clothes is Greek freedom – Europe – subject to no one. There is an enigmatic “stasis” (war) between them. Asia and Europe are not only beautiful and divine, but are really blood sisters, from the same lineage. They live in different lands, but, the source is one only: absolutely distinct is also inseparable-one.

On one side, the Greek world does not tolerate the imperial yoke of the One alone which merges everything, where the various voices and faces cannot be distinguished so, uniforming violence, a destroyer of freedom, dominates.

On the other side, the affirmation of one's own freedom and autonomy, tearing oneself away from every yoke, throwing every king from his command, inevitably leads to inhospitable separateness, to deadly anarchic enmity.

In Aeschylus' opinion, Asia is sleeping, as she submits to the yoke of the Great King (the indistinct and total One), who prevents freedom and autonomy, but, Greece (Europe) is also sleeping if she forgets her origin, the common logos (reason), because she misses the chance to build a polis, a life in common.

This myth of the foundation of Europe indicates the problem which has continued through the centuries and appears unresolved still today: how is it possible to think of unity and distinction together, the harmony of opposites? On one hand, how can our faces, our form, be prevented from being dissolved in the indistinct and, on the other hand, how can the “stasis” (war) be prevented between liberty and its anarchic fragmentation.

The Europe of today and centuries past has certainly tried the way of diversity, freedom, pluralism, but, has also suffered and dramatically suffers fragmentation. We struggle to understand each other and live together because of the variety and diversity of languages, history, cultures, churches, politics, economies, knowledge and values... How can we find a way so we don't fall into incommunicableness, non sense and violent conflict? The immediate answer is another temptation, that is, to follow the example of the sister who submits to the great king: totalitarianism seems capable of overcoming fragmentation and civil conflict. If the small wolves tear each other to pieces (*homo hominis lupus*) it is necessary to entrust ourselves to a “big wolf” who has the absolute power to prevent our reciprocal destruction (Hobbes). But, the great beast builds lagers and gulags to eliminate diversity and freedom! True dialogue must put unity and distinction together, or better, to build unity that is not destruction but true distinction.

What type of relationship between people, what type of politics, what type of fraternity is capable of giving an answer to the question posed by this tale? We need fraternity that, on one hand, can make us live together, a polis, a single city, but, on the other hand, is capable of building a non totalitarian “polis”, that is a city where the person is respected, is free and

each one can fulfil himself. We need fraternity that makes us a social body, a family, who together bring about freedom. This type of fraternity is a great novelty, because in history we have too often experienced the failure of fraternity. Even the Bible is well aware that fraternity can fail and that brothers can kill each other: Cain killed his brother Abel; in Jacob's family, the brothers plotted to kill their brother Joseph and then they sold him. Any type of fraternity will not work. We have experienced it recently in Europe. In recent years I have frequently been in the Balkans, in Sarajevo. What happened in these lands? First, a collectivist ideology, guided by Tito, held together the different ethnics, but, freedom was negated. At a certain point the liberty of the individual peoples (Croat, Slovenian...) attempted to rise up, to break the totalitarian power, to overthrow the "great king Serse". But, instead of the celebration and the dance of freedom, a war of fratricide began. We can see in our minds the image of the tragedy of Srebrenica and many other countries. This happened in our Europe, it happened inside our house. Also other regions of the world know tragedies like these. Think of the region of the great lakes in Africa. Fraternity can fail; we need a qualitative leap in fraternity.

### **3. To get back to searching together.**

Faced with this question it is once more urgent to start searching again.

There is a very well known two act play in Europe called "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett. It tells of Vladimir and Estragon who are waiting for the mysterious Godot on a desolate country road. The two men, two poor wretches, dressed almost like beggars, continuously complain of the cold,

hunger and pain; they argue and think of going their separate ways, they even contemplate suicide, but, in the end they never do anything because they are waiting for Godot, whose arrival is said to be imminent. Days and weeks pass, but, Godot never comes. Besides the two leading characters who passively spend their time waiting, there are two other characters: Pozzo and Lucky. These two, instead, continuously travel aimlessly to prove their existence. Pozzo, who describes himself as the owner of the land where Vladimir and Estragon are waiting, is a cruel man, who treats his servant Lucky like a beast, even keeping him on a lead. So, together, with events and personalities alternating, they wait for Godot, but Godot doesn't arrive. One day a young man arrives who says: "Godot is coming tomorrow". So, they come back the next day, but, Godot is not there; the young man who says "Godot is coming tomorrow," returns, but, Godot never arrives. The months and years pass, the two become more wretched: one becomes blind, the other dumb, but, they continuously come back to the same spot. Godot never comes.

This seems to be a comic play because of its absurdity. But, as you read it, little by little, instead of laughing you feel the need to cry. This work could be a bitter metaphor for humanity, ourselves, perhaps: who are we waiting for? What do we do to fill this waiting time? The two wretched men are waiting for someone, but who is Godot? Why waste life senselessly?

Maybe our humanity is searching, but, it does not know who to look for or what it means to live waiting for someone or something. The impression is that in recent years this search has increased, above all to answer the historic drama that the mass media have made into a planetary phenomenon.

People are looking for the "verum", the "bonum", the "pulchrum", the "unum", that is truth, love, beauty, unity.

People are looking for the aim, the sense, joy, happiness, beauty, love, good. They are looking for God. To avoid pointlessly waiting for Godot it is important to let the question that are inside us emerge. Who are we? Where are we going? What are we doing in life? Who are we waiting for?

In our search, a piece from Genesis 32, 23-32: could be of help. It is Jacob's battle with God.

*"The same night Jacob arose and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the break of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob". Then he said "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel," for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "tell me, I pray, your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peni'el, saying "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose"*

In this extract we find some ideas that connect with the question about European culture today:

- the night: it seems we are living "a dark night" in Europe. Today, we perceive a widespread sense of delusion, of feeling lost, of worry, of sadness. Some speak of a sunset of our culture. We cannot pretend that nothing is happening; the west is living through a deep crisis. The last book of André Glucksmann, a contemporary French

thinker, speaks of the “third death of God”. We are facing something that has never happened in history before: a whole culture that is tempted to live without God. We are not talking only of individual people who live “without” God, as happens in all cultures, but, of a type of historical night. It was John Paul II who spoke of an “epocha dark night”, referring to western culture. Could it be that now we too are living, in a collective way, in epochal dimensions, the night of the spirit that individual saints, the mystics, have lived?

- the battle: it seems that culture, humanity is battling and searching, perhaps without knowing who they are fighting against. And yet, God is present, God wounds us; He transforms us, as He wounded and transformed Jacob into Israel.
- Tell me your name: We have the task to meet God and recognise Him: for our part we are living dramatic dark moments, we live in a difficult, at times, hostile, culture. However, we have to think that it is a culture, history, humanity in battle, which God wants to meet and He wants to give it His mark and blessing.





## II.

### THE INTER-RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN EUROPE

#### 1. Religious Pluralism in Europe

The new search for truth, beauty, love and unity is taking place in Europe within a clear religious pluralism.

##### Christianity

The great majority of Europeans are Christian (approx. 707 million, including the European parts of Russia and Turkey) - (560 million: 285 million Catholics; 161 million Orthodox; 77 million Protestants; 26 million Anglicans; 11 million: others)<sup>2</sup>, but, we know the complexity of this fact. Europe saw the continental inculturation of Christianity and had a fundamental role in the evangelization of other regions of the earth. The middle ages were a time when Christianity established itself. Europe was also the location of the internal divisions in Christianity which were subsequently exported to the other continents. The development of modernism has brought with it the “crisis” of Christianity: from secularization, to secularism, to atheism, to nihilism, to the “death of God”, to the current return to the religious question. East Europe has lived through decades of state atheism.

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<sup>2</sup> Since the borders of Europe are not clear, the statistics themselves are not clear. These refer to 2003. See the UN Demographic Annual 2003. See also the Statistics Annual of the Catholic Church 2003.



With the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 the European ecumenical scene has also changed: the crucial questions are to be found in the relationship between history, culture and the tradition of the east and west. Some painful questions, inherited from the past and which today have forcefully re-emerged, such as proselytism or the relationship between the Orthodox churches and the Greek-Catholic churches, bring us back to this comparison between the Latin tradition and the eastern tradition. The churches of Eastern Europe in general are critical of the modern culture typical of the western world and they fear this meeting: what will happen to the eastern tradition with its values and spirituality, if it ends up in the grip of a modern, secularized, relative west? This comparison with secularization seems to be what the churches of the east have identified as the new problem to be faced. At times, this criticism regards churches and eccleasical communities of the west who have adapted to this secularized and relativist drift. It seems to me that a very important “ecumenical” contribution to illuminate this new situation lies in east and west, together, facing up to the question of secularization.

From a catholic viewpoint, we experience a type of paradox in ecumenical relationships: with the Orthodox there is great spiritual-theological closeness. The greatest theological difficulty relates to the Primacy. In reality, there is a cultural, historical and psychological distance. This is revealed in incomprehension regarding questions about proselytism and the relationship between Orthodox and Greek Catholics. Instead, with the churches of the Reformation, there is greater cultural and historical closeness while there are greater theological difficulties, especially of the ecclesiological type: the Primacy, apostolic succession, ministries (the ordination of women) and the sacraments (the Eucharist). Frequently,

ethical questions too, separate us, especially those regarding bioethics or the family.

A global phenomenon to be considered in the global and European Christian panorama is the spreading of Pentecostal Christianity, Evangelical Churches and Free Churches. This involves all the continents but is accentuated in Latina America and Africa. Statistics speak of 150 million Pentecostals in Latina America, not including charismatic movement members. These communities and groups are frequently dynamic, have a missionary strength or proselytism capability and in various countries their members come from the Catholic Church. From 1991 to 2000, in Brazil, the membership of the Catholic Church dropped from 83.3% to 73.9%; the evangelical churches increased from 9% to 15.6% and “people with no religion” increased from 4.7% to 7.4%. Naturally, the Pentecostal spectrum is very wide and complex, extending from real churches to a fundamental experience, even including sectarian churches.

*In our reflection on the situation of Christianity in Europe it is worth noting the debate in recent years about the Christian roots of our continent during the laboured working out of the constitutional treaty of the EU.*

It was a particularly lively debate, interesting, but, from a Christianity viewpoint it indicated a basic problem. Why was there not a consensus in mentioning God or Christianity? Some thought it was a question of privileges, as though there was a cake to be divided. Some maintained that mentioning Christianity would be to do wrong to other religions, especially Islam. Others felt it would have been a danger to the secular world...others still, defended the theory that religion is an exclusively private fact.

The question we have to ask ourselves as Christians is: “Did Jesus Christ come on earth because of privileges? Is a God who dies on a cross out of love a risk for our Muslim brothers? Is a gospel that distinguished clearly between what must be given to Cesar and what must be given to God a danger for the secular world? What is the meaning of the words Christianity, or God or religion today in Europe? Why does the word Christianity sound like a threat to some in Europe?

Consensus on this question was looked for by using a minimum common denominator instead of a maximum one. It can be admitted in an anonymous way that Europe has religious roots, but, nothing more. The debate did not take sufficiently into consideration the seriousness of the question of truth and meaning. Can we build a Europe which has no space for the truth and meaning?

### Judaism

Judaism is part of the historic roots of Europe (2.5 million). The relationship between us is complicated by the enormous tragedy of the Holocaust and the current situation in the Middle East. It is necessary to re-launch an authentic theological dialogue.

### Islam

There are countries in Europe with distant Islamic traditions such as Turkey, Albania, Bosnia, Herzegovina, but, the new fact is the growing presence of Muslims, because of migratory phenomena and refugees: around 35 million (in 1991 there were 12 million). France speaks of 5 million Muslims.

The relationship with Islam took on a serious political dimension after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Middle East crisis, terrorism, the attacks in Madrid and London, and the violent reaction to the satire on Mohammed.

There is also a clear pluralism in the “European” Muslim world. Classic pluralism: Sunnite and Shiite; pluralism related to the country of origin (Turkey, Maghrib...) Today, pluralism comes from the different way of relating to modern society: representatives of Muslim reform or “enlightened” Islam see the possibility of Islam inculturating itself into the European culture, but, the majority of Muslims see western culture as something hostile or debase which should be fought against.

### Buddhism

There is a growing interest in Buddhism in Europe in recent years (2.5 million / in 1991 there were 270,000). Travel to the Orient in the 70’s and 80’s brought Buddhism to Europe. These trips brought numerous teachers from Asia to our continent. Recently, however, the number of teachers born in the west is increasing. One consequence of this is the springing up of new forms and traditions of Buddhism inculturated in a European context. The numbers of European Christians attracted by Buddhist thought and practice are growing. Phenomena such as syncretism or dual membership are becoming apparent.

### Alternative religions

The so called return of religion or the sacred in its various expressions; esoteric, Gnostic, archaic, vitalist, pagan, Pan worship, and mythical, is another important element of our culture and history. Forms of neo-paganism and philosophical (humanistic) movements that are organised practically like religious communities are spreading and asserting their rights.

If we try looking at the future (without being prophets) we can see that the religious pluralism dimension will be always stronger, considering especially the trends of global

demography and the development of migration phenomena and globalization.

## 2. The growth of Relativism

To enhance our look at the religious situation in Europe I would like to examine a phenomenon that has started to make its ghost like appearance on the streets of Europe and the west in recent times: relativism. In reality, its roots are more distant. We are faced with a new type of trap that all of us risk being caught in. It is a challenge that we have to take seriously as the truth itself is at stake.

Relativism is an ideology that sustains that nothing exists that is absolute and unchanging, but, that everything is “relative” to people, times, places and concrete situations. That is: there is no universal and absolute valid true or false, good or bad, but, good or bad, false or evil can mutate (change) or be different in as much as they depend on the epoch, the circumstances and especially the free decision of the person. “A dictatorship of relativism is being formed that recognises nothing as definite and that as the final measure has only its own self and its wants”<sup>3</sup>.

This ideology has become a way of life, a praxis, which is present in many areas and has various expressions.

1. The first area where relativism emerges is the moral or ethical one. Are good and evil objective, absolute, unchangeable or are they “relative” to the changes in history, to our freedom and decisions? Think of the very delicate debate going on regarding the topic of life: embryonic staminal cell experiments, cloning,

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<sup>3</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Homily “ Pro eligendo Romano Pontefice”*, 18 April 2005

the possibility of generating hybrid embryos or chimera (a cross between a man and animals), abortion, euthanasia. Is human life a good in itself, objective, absolute, non negotiable, or is the value and dignity of life relative to human freedom? Is it human freedom or the practical conditions of life that decide when the dignity and the value of life starts and ends? These are questions where the very future of the human person is at stake. I've taken part in many meetings of European bishops and have seen that this is a primary worry.

2. If we move to a political and social context the question that emerges is: do rights and duties, which are the basis of social living together, have an objective, absolute and rational base or are the contents lost in the anarchy of interpretation because they are "relative" to different religions, cultures, philosophies, ideologies, or economies? Are rights and duties relative to the pragmatic needs that man has to agree on shared rules so as to make life's journey more tolerable with the least amount of possible incidents? Do rights and duties have a value in themselves or are they relative to the legislator's decision? What could a universal organization like the UN be founded on if values, rights, stable and universal principles which have the same content for all humanity do not exist? How can we continue building a united Europe if we don't have values, rights and principles that are valid for all European countries? How can we find a basis that obliges Europe to assume its responsibility for the great planetarian challenges like the environment, peace and hunger?

3. Even the question of human existence can disappear in relativism. In Europe today the basic existential questions are again clearly audible: does life and history have an objective, stable, absolute meaning or does "the meaning of life" not exist? Are there only various, small, short meanings which are

relative to the outcome of life, to pleasure, wants, emotions, fortune, and destiny? Is there truth, good, beauty that I can entrust my life to and which is capable of answering my absolute desire for life, happiness, celebration, affection and eternity or have I to be satisfied with the short, fleeting, relative moments of happiness and love that life reserves? Are suffering and death the last word for man and as such are they the way to make relative my every desire in as much as they demonstrate the final non sense of life? We should not forget that each year 50,000 people commit suicide in Europe and that in a dozen European countries the highest death rate among young people is from suicide. If the meaning of life is “relative”, is it worth living when life reveals itself to be hard?

4. Relativism poses a radical question for the world of learning and knowledge. Is human reason capable of discerning the truth about reality, to know things as they really and objectively are or is knowledge of reality relative to the viewpoint of the individual, of subjects, interpretations, sensations and currents of thought? More radical still: is the truth about things relative to a single science that claims it contains the whole truth about reality? Think about the great challenges regarding the concept of man that come today from the neurosciences that study the workings of the human brain and explain the brain as a collection of neuronal processes. There is no difficulty with the fact that these sciences explain the brain in this way, on the contrary, they offer an important contribution to knowledge of the human being from a biological viewpoint. The problem arises when these sciences do not accept that they are only one contribution to the knowledge of man and leave space for other areas of knowledge, but claim that they contain the complete vision of the human being. Behaving in this way, the neurosciences become neuro-philosophy or also a neuro-theology that claims

to contain the total truth about man. It is this neuro-philosophy, which reduces the brain and the person to mere biological processes, which wants to convince (us) that there is only a naturalistic and materialistic vision of man, that the self does not exist, that the transcendence of the person is non-existent, that man is “measurable” and “manipulable”. Man is a machine that works like this because he is made like this. In this vision freedom, blame and responsibility become pure illusion. Overall, faced with these challenges we are speaking of “new anthropological questions”: man, himself, is under discussion.

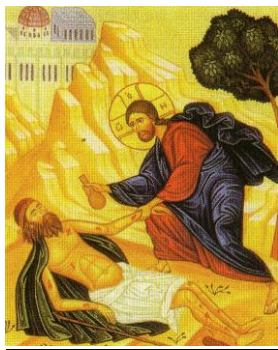
5. The media is an evident area of the realm of relativism. Do facts, reality, values, truth exist objectively or are facts, reality, values, and truth relative to the media in as much as they are created by the media? Are the media at the service of facts or the creators of facts? I was very impressed when I recently read a book given to me by a friend last November in Nairobi. In it, a girl from Rwanda, Immaculée, tells her experience of surviving the 1994 holocaust when, in 100 days, a million people were wiped out in violence between the Hutu and Tutsi. What type of fact was the Rwanda tragedy for us Europeans? It was completely marginal because it remained on the margins for the media. What version reached us? Only the story of the slaughter. Instead, Immaculée’s book tells also another story: the story of her forgiveness for those who assassinated nearly all the members of her family and tried in every possible way to kill her too. Above all, Immaculée tells the story of her relationship with God during those days of the apocalypse. I had exactly the same experience in Nairobi: during dinner I asked the lady seated opposite me where she came from. She was from Kigali, the epicentre of the Rwanda massacre. Immediately, I mentioned that tragedy, but, the young lady replied: it is true that Kigali was hell, but, I want to tell you



another story that happened in those days in Kigali. She began telling me of people who instead of killing, let themselves be killed or in order to save someone's life went to their own death. In Kigali, too, the true story was that of love. The story of hatred was a false story.

6. We cannot ignore the fashion world as a privileged place where relativism affirms itself. It seems to be a very harmless and banal world, but, how many times must we note that our actions do not depend on rationally guided choices of what is beautiful, true and good, but, it is decided by fashion: it is "relative" to fashion. How many times do we realize we are like stupid sheep that follow the herd of fashion and then ask ourselves why we have been so stupid? I was told about a Swiss girl's courageous and intelligent experience. She went to buy a dress. The shop assistant insisted on a certain type of dress and in front of the girl's hesitancy, even her friend sided with the assistant. Finally, they asked her why she didn't want to buy that dress which fascinated them so much. "I don't want this dress because I respect my body and because I love my neighbour and don't want to be provocative" was her reply.

7. To conclude this summary of environments where relativism emerges, we have to recognize that another area of relativism is in reality the area of religious pluralism that we have examined. In some way, there is a competition building up between religions to demonstrate who holds the truth and who has the true God. Is the truth and God Himself relative to the different religions?



### III.

#### **CHRISTIANITY AS** **“THE GOOD NEWS”** **FOR CULTURES AND** **RELIGIONS.**

In this situation what path should we embark on for the future?

I attended the funeral in Rome of John Paul II. I was in the delegation of different nations, in the first row. A sacred atmosphere was created when the coffin arrived in the square. It was placed between the crucifix and the Easter candle: the Pope seemed to have disappeared and what remained was only the crucified and risen Christ. A copy of the gospels was placed on the coffin. The wind continuously turned its pages and then closed it on the side of the Pope's heart. All of us recognized the challenge to start again from what is essential and which remains.

The Easter of the risen Christ is at the heart of Christianity. We can start again from there to “live” our European culture and to give again content to truth, beauty and love. Following Christ we find we are able to live in any type of culture, even in that marked by the death of God and its consequences. Christianity, in fact, has “a death of God” at its centre, a (dark) night – of the crucified One – which goes much further than any cultural proclamation of nothingness or of the “death of God”. In the ‘why’ of Christ on the cross (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) we find all the ‘whys’ of man. The great news of the Resurrection is at the heart of Christianity: death has been overcome, the ‘whys’ and the

waiting of man have a reply; the Risen One “remains among us until the end of time”.

### **The crucified Christ**

*“And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “E’lo-I, E’lo-I, la’ma sabach-tha’ni?”*

*which means, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “Behold, he is calling Eli’jah.” And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and give it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Eli’jah will come to take him down.” And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”*

*(Mark 15, 33-39)*

Europe needs to re-discover Christ crucified.

In the 80’s I visited a concentration camp for the first time: Dachau, hell. As I passed through the rooms of the museum that witness the atrocities of the Holocaust, silence descended in me. As I came out of the museum, a girl who was with me, asked: “But, where was God when all these things happened?” I didn’t even try to answer her as we came out onto the clearing of the camp where the barracks of the deportees once stood and we crossed that enormous space in silence. I can still hear the sound of our footsteps on those white stones. We entered the monastery of the enclosed order which now stands at the end of the camp and we recited the hours. It was Friday and the introduction to the first psalm was “*he had no form or*

*comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him". (Is.53, 2)* It was followed by Psalm 22 which begins with the phrase *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* the psalm of Christ on the cross. I remember the girl and I exchanged glances, we didn't speak, but, we realized where God was when these things happened: God was crucified at Dachau.

When we started the Second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops (October 1<sup>st</sup>. 1999) John Paul II gave an opening homily which impressed me in this piece: *"He, Emmanuel, God-with-us, was crucified in the gulag and the lager, He knew suffering under the bombardments, in the trenches, He suffered wherever man, every human being, was humiliated, oppressed and violated in his indefeasible dignity. Christ underwent the passion in many innocent victims of war and conflicts that bloodied the regions of Europe. He knows the serious temptations of the generations who are getting ready to cross the threshold of the third millennium: the enthusiasm provoked by the fall of ideological barriers and the pacific revolution of 1989 seems to be, unfortunately, rapidly deadened by the impact with political and economic egoism. The dispirited words of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus are on the lips of many people in Europe: "We had hoped..." (Luke 24, 21)."*

Since I was a child they have spoken to me about Jesus Christ and they always spoke about the cross: it was normal for me that God on earth should be put on the cross. When I started to study philosophy this idea shocked me: How is it possible to think of a God on a cross? How is it possible that the omnipotent, eternal, creator of all things can be identified with the cross? How is it possible to say that the son of God is on the cross? From a rational point of view we are faced with an immense scandal! And so, I thought if Christianity believes

that the Son of God was crucified, it means that this is the heart, the secret of everything and that we have to start again from this point to understand and have the light.

Jesus died on the cross for love of neighbour. In this way he reveals to us that our being is formed by the relationship with the other person. My ego is not the measure of all things, because, in its essence, my ego is the relationship with you. In place of relativism it is necessary to rediscover relationship, relation. The commandment of Jesus has a relationship, a bond as its aim: "love one another..." Today the field is free of ideological absolutes; it is the moment to choose love. The Christian truth cannot ally itself with forms of violent power; it cannot give space to deviant fanaticism, integralism and fundamentalism. Therefore, it cannot frighten anyone, because at its height this truth reveals itself as the crucified Son that lives the abandonment for love of neighbour. The truth of Jesus coincides with giving his life for each person, it coincides with love. No one is afraid of someone who gives his life for him.

Jesus dies on the cross for love of the Father. It is impressive that the centurion at the foot of the cross understood that Jesus is the Son precisely at the moment of the abandonment and death. Jesus lives his freedom as an absolute gift to the Father because this is the being of God and God lives like this: God is Trinity, a relationship of Love, where each person is a gift without reserve for the other. The Abandonment of Christ on the cross lived out of love reveals to us that God in himself is gift, love. The Son freely decides to live for the Father because this is the way to be himself, to be "son". God is a dialogic truth, interpersonal, not a lone being, static, immobile. In God there is pluralism, a diversity that generates unity. The Trinitarian dogma affirms that God is a unique nature (ousia) in three persons (ipostasi). Trinitarian

love is the place of the realization of diversity, of individual freedom, of the pluralist richness of what is real.

We have to ask for the gift of having eyes to recognize the presence of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken. The Son on the cross enters the tears and the darkness of humanity and takes on himself the pain and darkness to the point of giving his life. The Son met humanity there where it found itself. If Europe has fallen into the temptation of separation from God, the Son has not abandoned this Europe, but has met it precisely in this abyss. On the cross he experienced the abandonment of the Father in order to take on himself the abandonment experienced by European man. Christ has already given his life for our Europe. To have the eyes of the Crucified One means to recognize his “crucified” presence in all the sufferings, the nights, the betrayals that we are living. He is already there. He is inside secularization and relativism and is bringing about a conversion of our way of acting and thinking that will bring its own newness. In an epocal dark night God is not absent, but is present, crucified.

I remember another experience: before I became secretary to the Council of the European Bishop’s Conference, I worked in my diocese – I taught philosophy – and I asked the bishop’s permission to live together with two other brothers and a priest who suffered from multiple sclerosis. He was a sportsman, we went climbing together, but, the illness, over 15 years, was progressively blocking him. I remember Father Gianni one day said to me: “I want to start a collection of owls, the birds of the night, because I read in one of the Fathers of the Church that owls have such large eyes that they are able to see during the night”. Now he has around 2,000 owls. News about his collection spread and all those who travel the world, as I also do, bring home a handcrafted owl for him. To have eyes to see when night has fallen, to discover that the night has its colours, has the stars. In daylight we cannot pick out the

stars, but, at night, if we have the courage and the strength to raise our eyes we can see them. Again, this is a symbol of who the crucified Christ is: he, who becomes night, becomes darkness to give us the possibility of seeing the stars even when there is suffering, forsakenness.

To discern a way forward let's try to learn from Christ on the cross. We are invited to follow in his footsteps.

The first step is to have the courage to follow Jesus there, outside the walls, right to his cry of abandonment, where heaven and earth appear separate. You cannot stop and look at problems, wounds, non reconciliation, from the outside like spectators or arbiters, but it is necessary to enter the divisions, the failures to "understand" them fully.

That God, who enters the wounds, becomes himself, separation and wound. Christ welcomes into himself the wound; he absorbs it and thus blocks it. When conflicts explode, normally, one transmits the conflict to the other person, unloading the responsibility onto the other person. Christ on the cross did not look for the guilty party, but, he took on himself the division. He didn't look for a solution in mere legal justice. Conflict is interrupted only when one does not transmit it to the other nor look for the guilty person, but, when he consumes it in himself and re-creates unity with forgiveness.

The crucified One, who takes on himself the separation and wound, becomes an immense open space which can accommodate everyone, above all those carrying the cross in life and also those who are far from God. People, too, who follow Christ and take on themselves the fractures, become a place that offers welcome without reserve. We are called to become this dwelling place without limits.

The culminating step that emerges from the cross: in the end violence and injustice are not able to steal away the life of Jesus because Jesus had already offered that life as a gift of

pure love and you cannot steal what has already been given. Christ reveals that the meaning of life is in giving it. The grain on the ear of wheat is beautiful, but, if it does not die it remains alone. If it dies (gives its life out of love) it bears fruit and communion is born.

## **The Risen Christ**

The Risen Jesus tells us that he is the truth, that what he said before dying is true and that nothing has ended with death.

1. First of all, the Risen Lord appeared to the women, going early in the morning to the sepulchre, worrying about how to roll back the large stone. They arrive at the tomb and find it empty. The first question they ask is “where is he?” The look for his body, they don’t ask themselves where he, the living one is, even if they see that the stone has been rolled back, the sepulchre is empty, the cloth folded, those figures – who prove to be angels. The gardener’s question is meaningful: “Who are you looking for?” As if to say: “who are you waiting for, what is the deep question in your life?” If you are looking for the crucified one, he is not here. Death was not able to steal away life. If you want to meet him don’t stay near the sepulchre, but, go to Galilee: go where there is life, where the people are with all their problems. Jesus himself has pre-announced it: “I will go before you into Galilee”: this is the light! Jesus goes before us, always, he is already there where we are called to do nothing other than serve him.

2. The Risen One shows himself to his own, to the Eleven (John 21): the apostles are on the shore of the lake, disorientated. Peter suggests going back to their old trade as fishermen. He takes them to the lake, it is night, and they don’t



catch anything. Dawn breaks and they see Jesus, the teacher, on the shore of the lake. Jesus welcomes them and with great concreteness and familiarity, prepares a banquet for them – which, in reality, is the Eucharistic banquet. Our temptation to go and fish by ourselves is great, but, suddenly, we become aware that we are immersed in the night and that we have to go back to the dawn, to the shore: which means to the Risen One, where he is.

Meetings with the Risen One are always passages from restlessness to peace, from unbelief to belief; all of us are marked by doubt that is clarified and we open up to faith.

3. The Risen Lord founds the Church, lays his hands on the disciples, gives the Holy Spirit to Peter and asks “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” (John 21, 15). The disciples are sent by the Risen Lord to announce the Gospel and to baptise in the name of the Trinity.

4. Another message of the Risen Lord is: “Peace be with you!” This is not a theoretical announcement of peace, but he says “peace be with you, I am peace and I am with you”. Therefore, peace exists, for your heart, for your people.

5. This Risen Lord solemnly promises: I will remain with you, in history, to the end of time, until history has been fulfilled.

We have to ask for the gift of having eyes to recognize the presence of the Risen Jesus. The Risen One has promised to “remain among you to the end of time” (Matthew 28, 20). To have the eyes of the Risen One means then to see His presence and His work in Europe where His Word is proclaimed, where His Eucharist is celebrated, where two or three people unite in His name (Matthew 18, 20), which means to be ready to live that reciprocal charity which is the place of His presence,

where there are people who live love and fight for justice, solidarity, peace, forgiveness, reconciliation... The Risen One is the Christian truth. The Risen One is the contents of the truth, beauty and good expected by the human heart.

The Risen One is the truth, the good, the beautiful; the one looked for and expected by humanity.





#### **IV.**

### **WHAT DIALOGUE IS POSSIBLE?**

The presence of the Risen Christ among us brings about dialogue in a complete way. It is time to deepen this experience.

#### **Why have dialogue?**

1. Dialogue is first of all necessary for the question of peace and living together of peoples. The historic events that we are living and have already mentioned, - September 11, 2001 in New York, the never ending crisis in Iraq, the Darfur tragedy, the tsunami of south east Asia at the end of 2004, the terrorist attacks in London of July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005, the satire against Islam and its violent reactions at the beginning of 2006, the famine that affects entire populations ... - show in a new way the grave responsibility of finding ways of meeting and dialogue.
2. Also the current process for the unification of Europe is unthinkable without new dialogue, above all among the religions, Churches and ecclesiastical communities.
3. But there is another very serious question that demands an explanation from the Church and asks for dialogue: what is the meaning of life and of history? How can we answer the question of meaning from many people, if, as Christians and

men of religion, we show ourselves to be incapable of dialogue and are even in conflict among ourselves?

4. More radically still: the churches and the religions are not credible in their announcement and witness of God (of the gospel) if they present themselves as being incapable of dialogue. They even favour the manipulation of the name of God for violence and injustice. As men of religion it is very painful to feel how public opinion today frequently unites the word religion with the word violence.

5. And lastly, Christians have to remember that Jesus Christ revealed to us a God who is Love/dialogue, he generated a single Church, and he showed us a single universal family of sons of God. The following are some of the most authoritative documents in the catholic world that witness that meeting and dialogue is the irreversible way of the church. The second Vatican Council (“Unitatis Redintegratio”, “Nostra Aetate”...), the encyclical “Ut Unum Sint” (1995), “la Novo millennio Ineunte” (2001) and “Ecclesia in Europa” (2003)

### **What dialogue is not.**

In my opinion, another step that seems useful is to clear the horizon of much confusion and clearly declare what dialogue is not.

Dialogue is not a tactical approach which has judged the position of the other and knows where it wants to lead him. It is not mere tolerance, idealized by the lay, enlightenment, rational culture. What does “tolerate” the other’s position mean if I consider it to be true? A true position is not “tolerated”, it is adhered to! And what type of friend would I be if I tolerated the other’s position when I consider it to be

mistaken. I don't let a friend fall from a cliff; I do everything possible to save him! The relationship understood as tolerance does not face the truth of the question and this is decisive. Dialogue is not even compromise: if I have to sacrifice the truth (or part of it) or make it relative in order to agree and arrive at a standardisation or syncretism or an equalization that does not save the interests of truth, identity and individual differences and freedom, then, we are following a way that is violent. It is not to give to each his own: even cannibals agree to divide the prey so as not to tear each other to pieces!

### **Towards a “Christian” understanding of dialogue.**

To understand dialogue with the light of revealed Christianity, we have to look to a very high level, that is, to the Trinitarian life of God himself as it has been revealed in a culminant way by the Easter of Christ. Christ lives like this because God lives and is like this. God is Love, which is reciprocal and total gift of himself or dialogue. The Father is a gift for the Son and the Son is a gift, without reserve, to the Father. This mutual giving of themselves generates the Holy Spirit, the true third person, true “common good”, capable of guaranteeing the diversity and freedom of the Father and Son, but, together to bring about their full unity. The life of God is a continuous generation of transcendence, of something new. God is together truth and love, identity and dialogue, being and relationship, unity and diversity, freedom and truth because he is a Trinitarian “being” where the diversity between the Father and the Son is lived totally as a gift.

A first step to bring about dialogue is to be conscious of your own identity. A new fact that we are noting in Europe in recent times on the interregioious and ecumenical scene is the need to clarify, save and defend the identity and truth of our own

religion and Church. This need corrects the risk of relative drifts, and positions that are too irenic: true dialogue is only possible if one is conscious of one's own identity and if a method of expressing the truth is established. Nevertheless, there can be hidden behind this strong need to save identity, a risk of new closures in one's own isolated and self sufficient fortresses and a suspicion of dialogue or even of love. How can we reconcile or not contrast identity and dialogue, truth and dialogue, truth and love? How do we reconcile the task of evangelization, of being missionary and dialogue? How can we harmonize faith in Jesus as the only Saviour and the universal saving will of God? How can we reconcile the absolute singularity of Jesus of Nazareth and the existence of various religions? These are questions presented with great seriousness in "Dominus Iesus".

A second step to bring about dialogue is the discovery of the other. For this topic I will briefly refer to Emmanuel Levinas, a thinker who died recently, Jewish, a survivor of Auschwitz. I met him on a few occasions and I read his works. Levinas "thinks" after Auschwitz and he asks himself how it is possible to think after this hell. Auschwitz is the result of a certain type of western thought. If we don't wish to fall into a similar abyss again we have to change our way of thinking, learn to think differently. An "ego-logic" thought led to the Lager, that is, a thought unilaterally centred on the ego (I, self). The self never goes out of itself, but, always absorbs the other into itself. Auschwitz was the extreme consequence of a self ( a Fuehrer, a race, an ideology) that attempted to swallow up the other. If the other does not agree to enter the self, he is eliminated, violently, if necessary. It is necessary to exit the ego-logic to find a new way. Ego-logic is represented by the myth of Ulysses who leaves his island Ithaca, travels, but at the end of the day he returns to Ithaca: ego-logic starts from the self and

always returns to the self, always absorbing the world in itself. The bible version of Abraham's story is different. Abraham too has to leave, but, to go towards a different country that he does not know, without returning to the self. In Levinas' opinion this mysterious and unknown country is the other person, "one who you do not know". Therefore, the new thought has to substitute the sovereignty of the ego with the other. Levinas has written some wonderful pages on 'the other person': the other appears immediately in the splendour of his face; the greatness of the other and also the poverty of the other appear in his face; the face says that the other is original, is unique. If you kill the other, in reality, you kill yourself because I am created by the other, it is not I who creates the other, but I receive life always from the other. This can be understood immediately: none of us were born of himself, none of us decided to be born: others gave us life. The other is a constitutive element. To understand who I am, I have to know that there is another. If I am a child, it means there were parents: my origin is with others. From Levinas I heard this comment on the bible extract which narrates the story of Jacob finding out that his brother Esau – from whom he had stolen his first born son by trickery - was coming with 400 armed men. The text says that Jacob is surprised by fear and anguish at the news that the armed men are coming. Levinas asks himself: Why does the bible say that Jacob was afraid and anguished? According to existential philosophy there is a great difference between fear and anguish. Fear is always fear of something definite: fear of an identifiable object: a lion, a person, a fact.... Anguish, instead, is fear without an object; it is fear of nothing, the perception of possibly sinking into nothing. Why does Jacob experience fear and anguish? Jacob is afraid because he knows that he can be killed in battle: he is afraid of dying. But, he is anguished because he knows that he can kill his brother in battle. He is afraid of being killed but he

is anguished that he may kill his brother: killing his brother coincides with falling into nothingness. The other is a constitutive element of me. It is necessary to put the other, the face of the other, in the place of the ego, the fortress of the ego. The other is my partner; the other is a constitutive element of me: interacting with the other is my chance.

But, dialogue reaches fulfilment only when reciprocity is arrived at. In the Greek word dia-logos, „dia“ indicates distinction, difference, separation: the distinction is necessary for true dialogue, we should not be afraid that differences exist at all levels. But in dia-logos differences do not become conflict: the relationship between us becomes the space where the „Logos“ happens. The logos is a new conversation, it is a relationship, but in the last analysis, the Logos, as the prologue of John sustains, is the Son of God who has become flesh. The Logos is the Risen One who “remains” among us. So, the dia-logos is a true ontological event, it is the place where the truth itself happens. It seems particularly urgent to me that we must overcome the dualism between truth and dialogue so as not to fall into an integralist position in the name of truth or into a position of relativism in the name of dialogue. There is an exemplary page from the Gospel to describe this event of dialogue in truth: the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). Two people, despite the disappointment, still have the courage to stay together and are walking towards Emmaus. They are questioning themselves about Jesus’ death: they have crucified him, it is over and we had hoped for so much. Their faces are sad and they are not able to shake off their sadness. They are “desperate”. They believed, they had hoped, but, now they are despairing. Then something different, new, happens: a third person starts walking with them, commenting on the word of God (diermeneusen) and he invites them to eat. This third person helps them to understand: it is not enough to have good



theology! When the third person, the truth, God himself, begins to walk with them and “is theology”, the light arrives. The two return to the community and re-discover themselves to be church. Dialogue, the “dia-logos” took place between them. The „dia“ between them was the place where the Logos spoke. They lived an experience of truth and this truth coincided with love. This is what they then communicated to the others!

I would like to repeat this theme on dialogue that I have tried to communicate to you by speaking about games. Essentially, dialogue is like a game. What do you need in order to play a game? – think about chess or football or any type of game. Above all, you must want to play and have the freedom to play: if you are not free, but, are forced to play, it is no longer a game. Freedom is fundamental for the Christian prospective, too. Second: you have to know how to play. You need an identity. If you don’t know how to play chess, for example, you may want to play, but it won’t be possible. It is necessary to learn and the better you know how to play, the more interesting and higher the level of the game will be. But, we cannot stop here. Another decisive element to have a game is the presence of another person. You never play alone. Even if today, many prefer a computer as “the other person”!

The same criteria of being free and knowing how to play are as valid for the other person as they are for me. If the other is forced into it, it won’t be a good game and if the other doesn’t know how to play, then first of all, he has to be taught the game. But we have to pay special attention here because, perhaps the other person knows how to play in a different way and has a style and rules that I have to learn. Frequently, we are proud and consider ourselves the only ones able to play. Only when the two players are on the same level is the game interesting and amusing. A last step: we finally discover that it

is not we who have invented the game, it existed already. If, together, we freely decide to play the game, it will happen for us, that is, we will become the place where a game that already exists happens. We are taken into a game that is greater than us: it is the “game” of truth itself, of the presence of the Risen one among us.

### *Consecrated life as a workshop of dialogue and love*

1. Dialogue and love create a single family among all peoples, cultures, ethnic groups.... The universal family of believers is Catholic. In its widest sense, Catholicism is the possibility to create universal communion, unity without any type of boundary, in a way that the differences are not cancelled out, but, are fulfilled in their true identity. Catholicism means universality. It is urgent to deepen this belonging to the Christian universal family to correct the nationalistic drift and to give answers to the challenges of globalization and peace.

2. Dialogue and love is the real engine of ecumenism. There is not sufficient sharing of the faith today between churches and ecclesiastic communities to be able to celebrate the Eucharist together, but, nothing stops us from living the gospel, charity, collaboration, solidarity, with each other. We create space for the presence of the Risen One among us in this way. Despite the difficult situations that we are all aware of, we see the Risen One at work. Ecumenism has moved out of the institutional structures, the faculties, the restricted circles of pioneers and is becoming a need for many Christians in Europe. It is a “normal” fact and this indicates a new phase of going towards reconciliation has started. If Europe has exported the divisions to the world, now it is responsible for exporting newly found reconciliation.

3. Dialogue and love are capable of making religions meet. This theme has been dealt with for years in the Church, but, the novelty is that now it is being dealt with by politics, governments and civil society. This can have a positive side, but, it also contains the risk that religions may find their dialogue is imposed, following political criteria, and so external to religious facts. In light of its vast experience, the Church has to take this dialogue in hand again. The moment has come to go in depth so as to make this happen without ambiguity or dangerous superficiality. If, among people of different religions, we deepen our knowledge, esteem, collaboration, our own identity and charity, the Risen One can act.

4. Despite the many interrupted, lost and deviant paths that Europe has undertaken, it has been enormously productive in the field of culture, thought, science and art and has been the place where culture has let itself be renewed by Christianity. There are crazy ideas in Europe, but, there are ideas! Our responsibility is to give order, unity, and meaning to these ideas again. Consecrated life can inspire the great educative and cultural work of giving order to European ideas again.

5. If lived charity is the place where the Risen one dwells among us then our countries, our families, our lives will remain serene. The Risen One tells us that eternity, paradise exists and therefore life has to be considered in light of eternity and not only in the years we pass on this earth. Paradise is our true home. This prospect of eternity gives a very new light to our whole life and our service.

I was in Rome the day before the funeral of John Paul II and I went to the Vatican to see if I could get in to pray beside his body. I was in front of Saint Ann's door when a young black

girl came up to me and said: “take me to see the Pope!” I smiled and replied: “there are perhaps two million people who would like to see the Pope” and I may not be able to get in. She insisted: “I love the Pope and I want to see him and I can’t stay in the queue any more, you can take me inside!” I was surprised by her naivety and her “faith” in me! I told her and her friend to try to follow me: we managed to get through the security checks of the Swiss guards and into the basilica. Moved, they thanked me. I said to them: “perhaps we will not meet again on this earth, but let’s make a date to meet again in paradise”. They looked at me, surprised and happy and replied: “ok, see you in paradise! You will certainly go to paradise because of the gift you have given us today!” Paradise completes our experience of truth, beauty and good that we already experience on this earth.

6. In a prayer, written by Chiara Lubich, in front of a tabernacle, she asks herself: “Why did you God, who found a way of leaving us your son in the Word, in the Eucharist, not find a way of also leaving Mary for us? And I had the impression that a voice from the tabernacle said to me: I didn’t want to leave her because I want to see her again in you. You will be mother of humanity; you will continue the work of Mary on earth”. This is valid above all for consecrated people in the world. Mary is not physically present on the earth, but God looks at concentrated people and says to us “I want to see her again in you”.

“When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (John 19, 26). Jesus on the cross, with his last words entrusts the

disciple to Mary and Mary to the disciple. Even if we sometimes forget to take Mary “to our home”, we can be sure that Mary does not ever forget to take us to her home. This “Woman, behold, your son!”, is something serious for Mary.

Mary is the woman, disciple, the woman of faith, believer, she, who more than anyone, lived God as truth, love, beauty.

I wish for each one of you to be mothers like Mary and to know how to create workshops of paradise to bring back to the Father this piece of the world that has been entrusted to us.





## CONCLUSIONS

### The Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Federation Council

The title of our meeting was *Open to global reality*

- A secular institute is called to live in a given place and time, as a graced place and time. Each one lives her own salvation history in her own time and her own place. Then let us assume a positive attitude toward our time and place, in which the Lord has placed us to live.
- Monsignore Giordano's proposal dealt principally with Europe, but, although Europe is not the whole world, in fact today the whole world (races, cultures, languages, and religions) is appearing in Europe.
- Together, hearing about the problems, we have discovered that diversity and plurality touch all spheres: human groups, languages, thought and religious experience. We find ourselves living **within this "global reality"** that touches all aspects of human life. Today these aspects live together even here with us, and we live at the crossroad of this plurality.
- The speaker placed at the center of this reality **the Gospel message of Christ** crucified and risen, **as the criterion for understanding** sufferings, problems, struggles, encounters and even the disagreements that characterize today's plurality. Let us take as our point of reference the Logos-Verbum-Word that is Christ—Truth made visible. Therefore it is necessary to rediscover ever more fully the identity of of our faith, which is the identity of the face of Christ, in order to be able to face the plurality of today's culture and to suggest in a sure and serene

way that it offers a personal encounter with and configuration to the Person who is Christ.

- The tool that this morning's speaker presented to us for addressing plurality, with serene awareness of our own identity, is **dialogue**. And we will be able to depart with this starting point that Don Aldo has given us. We say that it is possible to love each other, to be together, **even** if we are different. Today we should have realized that it is possible to grow and mature **precisely because there is diversity**. Dialogue with one who is different is therefore an opportunity for constructive maturation.
- We will be able to leave, then, keeping in mind the two figures that Don Aldo has spoken to us about, referring to the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, figures that represent two different ways of relating to diversity: **Ulysses and Abraham**. To play the role of Ulysses means always trying to bring the other to ourselves. Our dialogue then becomes an effort to convince the other to be like us, to act like us, and to think like us. To imitate Abraham, on the other hand, means going forth from the self to see and encounter cultural and religious diversity, a diversity of thought, of education, of tradition; and this encounter stimulates us to grow, to mature: *"Go forth from your territory, from your house, from your homeland, and go to a land that I shall show you"*.
- We now turn homeward more aware that we have great problems even if we are returning to live in our own little world. Nevertheless, our own little daily world is involved in these great problems, and great ideas can be realized through the small deeds with which we construct a diverse world, and thus perhaps we may be able to learn a new way of being in the world. As was proposed to us, we must find points of departure for being advocates of the new evangelization that seeks new attitudes adapted to the new situations that we find ourselves living in. Where there is diversity there is **a place for**

**conversion, for growth, for renewal.** And we should be pleased, because that is above all the place and time for us all to be converted and renewed, constructing new relationships, presenting the Gospel to all.

Don Adriano Tessarollo

### **The President of the Federation**

I said in my initial greeting that we were here in the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the Federation to recall and to ... look forward!

Now I feel able to say that our meeting has been wonderful; “sisterhood” was in the air, in a peaceful atmosphere. We have experienced the presence among us of the Risen One, the Lover of us all, who gathers us here each time as a family around our Mother Saint Angela.

We have been enriched by the reflections that Monsignore Aldo Giordano has offered us, with involvement and skill. I am sure that, once we have gone home, we will make opportunities for further reflection and deepening within our Companies, desiring to be those “workers at dialogue” that Monsignore Giordano recommended to us.

So, thanks to each and all: the presence of each one of you has enriched this meeting!

Very special thanks to Monsignore Giordano, to whom we promise our accompaniment in prayer.

Heartfelt thanks to Don Adriano for his valuable presence ... indeed an Assistant!

And all of us leave to accompany and support and ... console one another, in our return home, according to the words of our holy Madre and Foundress:

“Hold this for certain: that this Company has been planted directly by his holy hand and he will never abandon this Company as long as the world lasts. I know what I am saying”.

Maria Razza



# THE FEAST OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FEDERATION ... A FEW PHOTOS... PAST AND PRESENT

## *Past...*



La preparazione: Brescia luglio 1951  
Primo convegno delle Superiore



SACRA CONGREGATIO  
DE RELIGIONIBUS

### DECRETUM

Veneratum et praeclarum Institutum quod v. nomine  
"COMPAGNIA DE S. ANGELA" vocatur, tanquam matrem suavitatis et funda-  
trix eius Sanctae Angulae Merici agnoscat, quae seculo saeculo XVI  
provinciis nostris in Barchina constituit et in hoc pia religione  
que adalitate sanctorum condignetur altitudo, vitam perfectionis et  
apostolatus in ipso saeculo gerere cupientes.

In hac familia praeclarissima, venerabilis matris, multum per-  
sisterunt religiosi coetus quasi a virtute stipe qui, vetustate  
hanc fructus, ad nostrum usque tempore floribus et fructibus equi-  
lari videntur.

Institutum Trevisanum, a Summo Pontifice Paulo III, per  
Nullam diei 9 Junii 1544 approbatum, post novissima doctrina, quae  
saepe gentium opera dei obsequium valent, Palatium sanctae, sanctae  
clausurae, opulentia pervenit ad cito in plurimum diuinae diffundit  
et propagatum, hanc enim in pontificis documentis, praesentibus  
Sanctis XIII et Pauli XIII, illatis cum honore mentionibus, decretum  
est.

Nature vero praeclarissimi Instituti, arte proseruata qua  
ipsum ortum habuit, pensatae semina apparuit, et ipsa omnia ele-  
mentis saltem habebatur quibus, se venerabilis traditione, vita reli-  
giosa in suo esse constituebatur; et nostra etiam diebus, in quibus  
vita perfectionis evangelicae vivitur in sua nobilitate salvatilis  
confirmari, S. Angula Merici, quod inspirata divinitus et prae-  
sente apparuit resuscitatio illius formae vitae perfectionis quae in  
Instituto Barchinensi optime configuratur videtur.

Praesentibus S. Angulae optime iure per sancta personam  
alibi habuerunt se in vitam perfectionis evangelicae et religiosae  
consistere, per observationem S. Angulae et Normarum seu v. "Boni Ordinis"

### DECRETO

"Vetustum et Praeclarum  
institutum"  
che costituisce e approva  
la Federazione delle  
Compagnie  
delle Figlie di S. Angela Merici  
come Istituto Secolare  
di diritto pontificio



I primi  
incontri...

14 ✓  
*Desenzano al Brudakro  
9 Luglio 1959*

*Per la prima volta nella storia,  
le Superiori delle Compagnie di  
S. Angela si riuniscono nel luogo della  
„visione profetica“.*



Castelgandolfo 1966 Udienza di Paolo VI

## *Present...*





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