

Presentation

Dialogue – the Only Effective Remedy to Violence. A Global Perspective at the Time of War.

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Introduction

Contemporary world has a multicultural and multireligious character. Not only national capitals and metropolises but also cities, big and small towns are inhabited by people belonging to various cultures and religions. More and more often, schools and religious communities have a multiethnic character. The media significantly influence the attitudes of people regardless of where they live and what culture or religion they represent.

Our era has been described as the “end of history” (Francis Fukuyama) and has seen the “clash of civilizations” (Samuel Huntington) and propagation of an irrational fear of media-generated phenomena,

e.g. Eurabia (Oriana Fallaci). It is also a time of "crossing the threshold of hope" (John Paul II). The 20th century as well as the beginning of the 21st century saw the accumulation of unforgiveness, intolerance, anti-dialogue, countless conflicts (both local and global), the undermining of the foundations of the unity of all humanity. The bitter fruit of such anti-human visions of life is the destroyed dictionary of basic terms and concepts. Exceptionally intolerant individuals willingly speak about tolerance, regardless of the geographic and cultural latitude, religions and world view. Some politicians appeal for dialogue even though they themselves do not want to make any contribution to it. On the other hand, some people perceive dialogue as a sign of weakness, helplessness and thus betrayal of one's identity. Many people who willingly talk about unity and peace do not do anything to make them possible.

Various complex conflicts always have an existential dimension. Ultimately, disagreements, fighting or wars among people constitute an anthropological, existential disaster. Nursing a grudge, resentment and sense of harm or injustice is ultimately destructive to the individual harbouring such negative feelings. Only the mind can control the emotions. Therefore, we should stress the necessity of the "purification of our emotions" by "clearing our memory" as a process leading to mutual peace and true reconciliation. "True beings", aware of their own value and value of another person's life, will never disseminate hatred. Instead, they will always be the defenders of life, advocates of understanding and reconciliation. The resolution of conflicts and building of unity should take place at the level of interpersonal relationships - in the heart and mind of every human being.

1. The significance of dialogue

Dialogue, in its various forms and manifestations, is the surest means of solving conflicts and building peace. The fate of the world depends on dialogue. Without it, the world condemns itself to annihilation. Dialogue is not just a declaration. It requires responsibility from the parties that participate in it. People representing various religions and world-views have an obligation to undertake an intellectual and spiritual renewal. Without it, any change in the life of society will be a mere illusion. This approach has been expressed in many rules concerning dialogue, such as "Let's focus on what we have in common, not what divides us".

Dialogue is the only effective remedy to violence. True, talking to a terrorist will not make a big difference in the world-view of

such an individual whose one and only imperative is to kill a number of people so as to paralyze and terrorize everyone. However, talking about dialogue with children, the young generation in its formative years, can make a huge difference. Dialogue makes sense only if words are translated into actions. The most elevated verbal declarations are void if they are not fulfilled.

Our great concern is about establishing peace between all nations and countries that are not at peace, and about strengthening and developing the existing peace where it is under constant threat. Peace, in all its dimensions, is most effectively strengthened by factors associated with religion as well as the humanism of those who do not believe in God but do not fight religion and do not persecute the believers. The human attitude to God and the human attitude to other human beings brings about and multiplies peace. In its most profound dimension, peace is a matter of human heart and conscience.

In popular parlance the word dialogue means "conversation, particularly between two people". With its roots in Greek culture, the term "dialogue" originally meant "a form of expression in the form of a conversation between two or more people". The concept of dialogue was one of the cornerstones of the emerging Greek world and thus the Mediterranean, European, cultures. Dialogue was at the start of civilization. War, on the other hand, marks the end of civilization.

In the history of culture and religion, one can find quite a number of people who were precursors of dialogue and whose ideas are still fascinating today to Christians and non-Christians alike. One of such persons was St. Francis of Assisi who opened up his heart to the whole world. Being faithful to one's identity is what makes dialogue efficient and trustworthy. In modern times, Mother Theresa of Calcutta, called by the Hindus the "Saint from Calcutta", and Pope John Paul II were witnesses of interreligious and intercultural dialogue while remaining faithful to their own identity, for which they were appreciated all over the world.

Today no one should have any doubts that dialogue is one of the key concepts of European civilization and, in fact, the whole human civilisation, in a world that has become a "global village" where everyone knows one another.

After the dramatic events of the twentieth century - the October Russian Revolution, the Nazi era, the Second World War, the time of the "Iron Curtain" and the absurd "Cold War" - dialogue has become one of the necessities of modern times and humankind. It challenges religions and cultures to leave their comfort zone and overcome

distrust and complexes. Dialogue makes it possible to understand the past and the future in a spirit of openness. It helps remove the threat of self-destruction. Dialogue means creativity. Fruitful dialogue requires respect for one's identity and the identity of the other party engaged in dialogue.

Finally, those participating in dialogue need to touch upon some uncomfortable, possibly painful subjects. Dialogue is not just about saying what the other party wants to hear, but also about issues that the other party would rather ignore. It is necessary to point out these aspects of dialogue as they pave the way to a better understanding and bring people closer together.

"Society cannot give its citizens the happiness that they expect from it unless society is based on dialogue" (John Paul II). The participants in dialogue include social groups representing various political, economic and other interests. The task of such dialogue is to oppose any form of injustice. Dialogue between political powers is necessary for the normal functioning of the nation since it prevents the government from abusing its power.

Another kind of dialogue takes place at the international level, between nations. In order to make real dialogue possible, the domination of a strong country over a weaker country has to be avoided. Furthermore, we have to overcome ideological barriers often built by political systems or groups opposed to any form of dialogue. According to John Paul II, dialogue between peoples and nations has to be conducted regardless of the economical, monetary and material inequalities between them. "Neither economic nor monetary superiority, material goods and natural resources, or technical advancement, can justify political, social, cultural or moral superiority of one nation over the other" (John Paul II). No nation can pursue its goals at the expense of another nation. The principle of justice lies at the basis of dialogue between nations. In such a dialogue, "there is a gradual overcoming of artificial inequalities, past burdens, and antagonism between political systems" (John Paul II).

International dialogue should focus on subjects such as human rights, economy, disarmament, and peace - "a common international good". The goal of dialogue conducted to promote peace is the eradication of aggressiveness on an international scale. That dialogue requires us to be open and sensitive to the real problems of others, and to acknowledge everything that defines the subjectivity and uniqueness of partners in dialogue so as not to reduce them to a mere object (John Paul II). Political dialogue demands openness and the ability to accept

and reciprocate. In short, there cannot be dialogue that promotes peace without accepting justice.

2. Conditions for Dialogue

The existence of dialogue depends on a number of elements. The essential condition for dialogue to occur is the appreciation and affirmation of the subjectivity of the other party. This pertains to dialogue both between individuals and between smaller and larger societies. Every partner in dialogue cannot and “will not attempt to reduce the other party to a mere object, but should recognize the other party to be an intelligent, free, and responsible subject” (John Paul II).

All human beings are brothers and sisters! We are all in some kind of relation with each other, and thus we should not look at our brothers and sisters with indifference. Accepting the subjectivity of our partners in dialogue allows us to see them as fellow human beings and not as opponents or enemies. Taking such a stance does not mean the blurring of differences and the unique character of either party engaged in dialogue.

Another essential condition of dialogue is “being open” to the partner in dialogue. On account of dealing with difficult and complex problems, dialogue requires decisive openness that creates a spirit of understanding. Openness goes hand in hand with trust and goodwill toward the other party as well as trust in the genuineness of their intentions. Openness is a sign of authentic dialogue.

Respect for the other party is a condition for dialogue to take place. It simply means appreciating everything that dwells in the heart of “that other” and taking into consideration the entire being of the partner in dialogue, namely his humanity, rich experience, subjectivity and identity.

Another condition for the existence of dialogue is the conscious willingness to share the responsibility for the truth. Truth is the goal of dialogue which may not be used for utilitarian purposes. The parties in dialogue should not impose their own opinions, use hidden violence and pursue their narrow interests. Dialogue flowing from an honest heart should promote truth and should be free from “competition, betrayal and deceit”. Everyone entering into dialogue should clearly distinguish truth and falsity. Dialogue requires preparation, a true conversion meaning a change in thinking, judgment and perception of the world and people. Dialogue means overcoming selfish tendencies on an individual and group basis. Authentic dialogue “breaks down the walls

of selfishness, misunderstanding and aggressiveness". Furthermore, "a change of heart makes people apt to support universal brotherhood; dialogue helps to achieve this goal" (John Paul II).

3. Forgiveness and reconciliation

Forgiveness plays a key role in the vision of solving conflicts and building peace and unity. It is extremely difficult to talk about forgiveness and reconciliation at the time of war because individuals, communities and entire nations remember the wrongs they have suffered. In the not so distant past, there was a custom of family revenge, i.e. retribution for the disgraceful acts committed against a member of a particular family. The accounts would sometimes be settled by paying back with evil, instead of forgiveness.

Revenge has been regarded as evil unworthy of a human being subordinated to God's will. God never takes vengeance on the evil-doer. People, however, suffer the consequences of their decisions and moral choices. A human being devoted and subordinated to God will not persecute others and will not be guided by hatred.

A plea for forgiveness addressed to a person whom one has wronged (and expecting that forgiveness) is morally valuable. Forgiving is "much greater an attribute and virtue". Forgiveness is closely interlinked with virtue – a peculiar inclination to do good to another human being even if they have sinned. When explaining the "methodology" of forgiving, we can quote an adage known not only in the Christian world: "To err is human, to forgive divine". When we receive forgiveness, we ultimately become a new being, a new person. We amend our life and revise our past ignoble behaviour. What is more, we return to our essence and find ourselves again.

Humans guided by hope for forgiveness rise towards the light. Forgiveness lifts them up, as if on wings, towards the truth about themselves and other people. Those who forgive also receive forgiveness for nobody is without sin. The lack of forgiveness is an act of idolatry. Overcoming idolatry in our own conscience is the surest path towards forgiving others. Forgiving is as ancient as humanity. The greatest figures in the history of the world, those who have determined its fate, have been guided in their life by the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Each case of a plea for forgiveness and the response to such a plea requires an examination of the injustice and harm done to the aggrieved party. We should view forgiveness as a key that opens

people's hearts harbouring fear and suffering, bad memories, thirst for revenge, moral chaos and disorientation. We have to forgive ourselves and others in order to understand ourselves and others. Forgiveness holds an important place in the process of purifying memory.

It has to be stressed that the future is built not only on the present but also on the past. In the past, not only individuals (including those who believed in God) but also entire societies and states were inspired by evil. One group vilified another, speaking words of hatred. That is why reconciliation and tolerance are so important today. Today's tolerance means cleansing the past of memories of animosity, hostility and prejudice that divided people and turned them into enemies. Tolerance is a sign of all-human brotherhood. It is a manifestation of care about the future of the entire humanity, not only the parties to a conflict.

Forgiveness, reconciliation and tolerance are the cornerstones of dialogue. Tolerance is a manifestation of openness to the otherness of another individual and group, including the adherents of other religions. This openness should not imply rejecting one's own creed and ethos of one's own group. Someone who is truly tolerant is aware of their identity and value, and is not susceptible to manipulation.

Conclusion

Summing up these reflections on dialogue, we have to observe that it constitutes a complex reality. The general nature of dialogue, its characteristics and the conditions in which it can take place indicate that, most of all, we should understand dialogue in personalistic categories, i.e. through the parties involved in dialogue and the form that it assumes. Dialogue is carried out by various parties, individuals, smaller and larger communities as well as nations, states and religions. Dialogue takes various forms such as conversation, exchange of ideas, cooperation, daily coexistence (the so-called dialogue of life) and prayer.

Thus, the first most important conclusion is that true dialogue takes place when one's own identity is respected as well as the identity of the party in dialogue. The second conclusion is that dialogue is the only effective remedy to violence and war.

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**Dialogue – the Only Effective Remedy to Violence.
A Global Perspective at the Time of War****Abstract**

The text recognizes dialogue as a complex reality. It provides a general description of dialogue, its nature, forms and essential conditions. It calls for understanding of dialogue in personalistic categories bringing attention to the necessity of affirming the subjectivity of the other and stressing the importance of respect of one's own identity and the identity of the other. It also refers to forgiveness, reconciliation and tolerance as the cornerstones of dialogue. Finally, it recognizes that the fate of the world depends on dialogue seeing it as the surest means of solving conflicts, and building peace and unity among people.

Keywords: dialogue, cultural and religious identity, subjectivity, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace.

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**Dialog - jedyne skuteczne rozwiązanie problemu przemocy.
Perspektywa globalna w czasie wojny****Streszczenie**

Tekst uznaje dialog za rzeczywistość złożoną. Przedstawia ogólny opis dialogu, jego charakter, formy i zasadnicze warunki. Wzywa do rozumienia dialogu w kategoriach personalistycznych, zwracając uwagę na konieczność afirmacji podmiotowości drugiego i podkreślając ważność poszanowania własnej tożsamości i tożsamości partnera dialogu. Tekst odnosi się także do przebaczenia, pojednania i tolerancji jako fundamentów dialogu. Wreszcie uznaje, że los świata zależy od dialogu, który jest postrzegany jako najpewniejszy sposób rozwiązywania konfliktów oraz budowania pokoju i jedności między ludźmi.

Słowa kluczowe: dialog, tożsamość kulturowa i religijna, podmiotowość, przebaczenie, pojednanie, pokój.