

Some additional speeches.



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**THOUGHTS
FOR OUR TIME**

V

*On University Education
and Human Rights*

THOUGHTS

V

On Human Rights

Your Imperial Highness, Madam President:

This is belatedly the first official opportunity that the delegation of the Holy See has had to express to your Highness our personal congratulations upon your election to the presidency. You not only bring competence, experience and dedication to this high office, but as the distinguished delegate from Pakistan has already said, you adorn the office. Our delegation is also delighted to be meeting in your wonderful country where, as we have seen, the glories of the past are being matched and excelled by new human developments in agriculture, in literacy, and in inspiring leadership by women of whom your Highness is a wonderful example.

Fellow delegates, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, our delegation does not wish to repeat the many fine thoughts that have already been so well expressed in this assembly. May it suffice to say that it is heartwarming for us, five persons of five different nationalities, to be present on this historic occasion, in this very historic location, with so many delegates representing both the diversity of our humanity and the unity of our common concern for what is certainly the number one item on the agenda of all mankind and of the United Nations today: the human situation, what it is, and what it might yet become even in our times.

There is little that I can add to the words of our Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, read at the opening of this session, to demonstrate the deep and compassionate concern that he personally feels for the successful outcome of this conference. Pope Paul gave the world his own thoughts on the intimate and organic connection between economic, social and cultural rights on the one hand, and political and civil rights on the other, in his recent encyclical: "Populorum Progressio"—On the Progress of Peoples. Man is a unity and his rights must be developed in unity and harmony.

His predecessor of happy memory, Pope John XXIII, outlined these many rights in close reflection and creative expansion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in his classic encyclical: "Pacem in Terris"—Peace on Earth.

All of the Catholic bishops of the world meeting in Vatican Council II left no doubt, especially in their document, "The Church in the World Today," that all the moral and spiritual strength of the Catholic Church must be aligned on the side of all men everywhere who suffer deprivation of their universal, inviolable and inalienable rights. The Church is also prepared to say clearly, again and again, to the powerful and the rich of this world who generally look out for their own rights, that they must now join the human race and become concerned for the rights of the weak and the poor.

Our delegation, then, welcomes the growing list of declarations, covenants, conventions and protocols that have emanated and continue to emanate from the United Nations and its many agencies and commissions. The Holy See will do everything in its power to give full moral and spiritual support to all of these efforts to elevate, inspire and mature the conscience of mankind in the total field of human rights and human development in our times.

Our delegation is especially intrigued by the imaginative Costa Rican suggestion of a high commissioner for human rights who might become a world wide ombudsman, especially if this post could be filled by someone recognized everywhere for his personal integrity and high moral leadership. With the help of a committee universally chosen for high competence, with adequate national and regional support, governmental and non-governmental, with ultimate juridical support from national, regional and international courts. The commissioner could indeed become the personal and living focus for the problem that so concerns us here in this conference. The problem of human rights is so universal that it transcends all other problems that face humanity and the United Nations. It is obvious to our delegation, as to all of you, that this conference will not reach a successful conclusion if we do not agree on some realistic mechanisms to translate words into deeds,

ideals into reality, hopes into achievement. The strong agreement of this conference on the necessity of a high commissioner for human rights would seem to be a minimum first step in this direction.

One cannot speak of hopes without underlining the fact that the younger generation, half of the world's population today, is conscious of all that we have said and the little that we have done about their deep concern for the world that we have created, all its inequities, with its racism, with its perduring prejudices, with its continuing and flagrant discrimination. I speak as one who has spent all of his adult life in the university, with young people. Our younger generation will not wait forever for peaceful solutions to this burning problem of human equality. They have only one life to live here on earth and it is now before them, filled with a whole series of tantalizing frustrations. They know that the human situation need not be what it is, as we permit it to be. If we do not act now, and act together, and act effectively—this conference will be in fact a sad celebration of a very happy and promising moment of twenty years ago. The younger generation is being constantly and strongly tempted to violence, violence that solves nothing and deepens human misery, even the misery of the young. But if we do not act effectively, what other alternatives do we leave them?

Love or hatred, peace or violence, order or disorder: these are the real choices that face humanity, young and old, and this conference today. Strange as it may seem to us, our continuing apathy in the face of worldwide and inhuman injustice, makes the young of this world even doubt the meaning of the words we use in expressing humanity's ideal, makes them doubt even more our sincerity and our courage.

Love is one word that the younger generation accepts. Love, much as the word has been abused, has something to say to us too in the task that faces us in this conference. In the inspired words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "Love is patient, is kind; love is not envious or boastful; is not arrogant or rude; love does not insist on having its own way; it is not ill-humored, it does not brood; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." (I Cor.13)

Jesus Christ said it in a different and more personal way when he identified Himself with all of the poor and abandoned and miserable of this world, the naked, the hungry, the thirsty and those in prison: "Whatever you did for one of these, my least brethren, you did it for Me."

The Christian ideal is clear, but in looking at the history of Christianity we have much for which to ask God's mercy and pardon, even today. As Gilbert Keith Chesterton said: "It isn't that Christianity has been tried and found wanting; it really hasn't been tried."

At this point, I trust that you will permit me a personal observation about our conference. I think we are all agreed that the Universal Declaration on Human Rights was a great rhetorical victory, not to be underestimated, but that we are now at a crossroads. This conference will decide which way we go from here: more rhetoric or effective

implementation. The simple and frustrating fact is that the deepest aspirations of mankind are being negated, in many different ways, in every country of the world.

The understandable frustration is most evident in the way that so many delegates find it easier to accuse others of their shortcomings, than to look deeply into one's own conscience, individual or national. What would be the effect of this conference, if instead of pointing our fingers or aiming our invective at one another, we would look honestly and sincerely at ourselves, to measure, each his own country, against the great ideals enunciated in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights?

I am not here to accuse anyone. As the delegate from Tanzania said, I would much prefer to speak for every single human person, of whatever nationality, religion, language, sex, color or age. What does each person really want? I think, to be himself or herself, to be a person. To be a person is not to be a thing, to be an end and not a means for someone else to use, to stand secure in the dignity of one's own humanity before all men, to be able to hold up one's head in the great fraternity of mankind, to have hope for the future.

One human person, man, woman, or child, thus conceived, in the fullness of human dignity, is more important than all the money in the world, than all the power and all the glory of the nations, than all the monuments and all the empires that man has created.

Now if each one of us, and each of our countries really believed this, we would be in an agony as long as a single one of our countrymen lacked the opportunity to be such a person. For whatever governments are founded to do, they cannot aspire to do less than to grant all of their citizens, rich or poor, powerful or weak, learned or ignorant, the reality of the ideal expressed in the Universal Declaration and spelled out in the two international covenants of 1966.

Many have spoken eloquently here of one of my friends and countrymen, Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King. Personally, I think he was a saint, in the strong tradition of Thoreau, Ghandi and good Pope John XXIII. He typifies a significant reality that has characterized the age-long struggle for civil rights, a man of deep spiritual insight who deeply affected his fellow men everywhere because he really believed in mankind's inherent spiritual dignity and was willing to work and to suffer for his belief.

He spoke of his dream, which I trust is also ours, which he said could not be achieved without suffering, which he viewed to be redemptive of the human situation. Here he followed the lead of Ghandi who said: "Things of fundamental importance to people are not secured by reason alone but have to be secured by their suffering. Suffering," Ghandi said, "is infinitely more important than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent (of human rights) and opening his ears, which are otherwise closed, to the law of reason." And Ghandi concluded: "The appeal of reason is to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man." Ghandi also said those work best for justice who have suffered injustice.

Maybe instead of talking so much, writing so much, accusing so much, we would do better to ask ourselves, each one of us in the depths of our hearts: "How much am I willing to suffer for the achievement of justice in my own country, today, whatever the obstacles, whatever the personal cost to me? Answering such a question affirmatively and generously is what made Ghandi and King so effective. You may say, "I am only one person and the problem is so enormous." But Ghandi, King and John XXIII were only one person, yet they affected millions, because they believed deeply and acted in the depths of their faith, whatever the suffering involved.

One last word about Martin Luther King. In an age of violence he preached non-violence because of his deep conviction that unjust violence is wrong, inhuman and unchristian. In an age of great moral ambiguity he said of basic human rights: "If there are not eternal truths and values that a man is willing to live fully and die for if necessary, he is already dead, whatever his age." In an age that emphasizes material well-being, he understood that to be a human person, in the full spiritual sense of the word was infinitely more important. Realistically, however, he was willing to work for better housing, employment and education because these create the material situation in which human dignity is a reality and not a travesty.

All of us were born somewhere, have lived somewhere. We love our country, our traditions, our language, and our culture. And indeed we should. But the sad fact is that no one of us lives where the full ideal of human opportunity is perfect, where life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—material, spiritual, religious and cultural find fulfillment for everyone. Each one of us can contribute something to the more perfect achievement of human dignity and human rights . . . where we are. And if each one of us does what we can and should, there will be no need to condemn others, to hide our failings behind the failings of others, because we are all failing very much and we all have much yet to do, personally and governmentally.

Three last questions. What is mankind? It is each one of us. What are human rights? How we treat our fellow man, not in the abstract, but where we meet him daily, where he suffers injustice and where we have compassion and concern because of our common humanity. What is the task that faces us in this conference? To make the ideal of the Universal Declaration truly universal in our times, even if because we have no other time in which to act. To make it universal in our hearts, in our families, in our schools and churches, in our national programs, and internationally too, because we are all brothers and all equal. If we aspire to, and in fact, do less than this, we should not be here today, because we are the chosen few who have this wonderful opportunity to move forward, in the name of the millions of people whom we represent and who look to us for the dawn of a new day for all of mankind.