

# JESUS CHRIST AT THE CENTRE OF THE NEW SPRINGTIME

Address to Participants at the annual Springtime  
of Faith Summit in Rome, 15 Nov., 2008

## 1. When we say Springtime

When we say springtime, our thought goes to such concepts as new life, freshness, vitality and life which is already present now showing itself more and more.

Springtime of the Christian faith necessarily has Jesus Christ at the centre. He is our message. It is Jesus Christ that we preach, with his entire message of a call to conversion and an offer of salvation and new life. As St Paul wrote the Corinthians: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor 1:23-24). "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), as Peter and John courageously testified before the Supreme Council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin.

The biggest event that ever took place since God created the world is that the only Son of God, the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, in the fullness of time, for love of us and for our salvation, broke into human history, took flesh of the Virgin Mary, was born in Bethlehem, and did the work of our salvation especially by his suffering, death and resurrection. And he instituted the Church, his Church, to bring his message of salvation to every human being until the end of the world. "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed" (Paul VI: *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22).

When, therefore, we think of the springtime of the faith, we think of renewed commitment to faith in Jesus Christ, of fresh flowering of the Christian religion and of new fervour among his disciples in being his "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

# JESUS CHRIST AT THE CENTRE OF ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE IN THE NEW SPRINGTIME

Since the participants in this convention come from differing Christian religious families and not only from the Catholic Church, it is fitting that we reflect on how Jesus Christ has to be at the centre of ecumenical dialogue in the new springtime. When we say ecumenism, we include the various measures which are taken for promoting the restoration of unity among all Christians. Jesus prayed that all his followers may be one as he and the Father are one (cf Jn 17:21). Ecumenism, therefore, includes prayers, joint reflections, meetings, and other initiatives geared at helping to restore damaged unity between Christians.

It is important that divided Christians keep clearly in view that Jesus Christ is at the centre of all ecumenical action. Ecumenism differs from political negotiation where each participant gives and takes and the grounds keep shifting until a workable compromise is reached. In ecumenical dialogue all hearts and minds should be fixed on Jesus Christ to try to see what he wants in and for his Church. It is Christ who brings Christians together. As the Second Vatican Council says: "All those justified by faith through Baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honoured by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers in the Lord by the sons of the Catholic Church" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3). Christians in ecumenical contact should always bear in mind that it is Jesus Christ who calls them together, who gives meaning and a sense of direction to their commitment as Christians, and who has prayed for the unity of all his disciples.

### 3. Christian Leaders to reflect Christian Love as Witnesses in the new Springtime

To favour a new springtime for Christianity, it is important that Christian leaders manifest Christian love as witnesses of Christ. Jesus calls mutual love among his disciples his new commandment: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (Jn 13:34). And we know how much he loved us: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). And we know that that end meant dying for us on the Cross: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).

Christians from differing denominations will be promoting a springtime of the faith if they love one another so much that bystanders will be able to remark: "See how these Christians love one another". Pope Paul VI observed that contemporary man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses (cf Address to "Consilium de Laicis", 2 Oct. 1974 in AAS 66 (1974), 568). Gestures of mutual love between Christians can include kind thoughts, considerate comments about others especially when they are in difficulty, prayers for others, mutual visits, joint action to address social challenges such as street children, street women, unemployment, and corruption in public life. In general, gratuitous love, or a favour done to others without any plan or prospect of getting something back, is a rather convincing witness.

## URGENCY OF ECUMENISM IN CATHOLIC LAY MOVEMENTS

It would be incorrect to restrict ecumenism to contacts between official representatives of the various Christian communions. Often these representatives come from the clergy or the hierarchy, although not exclusively. But it should be recalled that in the Catholic Church the lay faithful form about 98 or 99% of the whole Church. It is, therefore, important that the laity promote ecumenical action, either as individuals or as members of Catholic Lay Movements or Associations. I think, for example, of various organizations of Catholic Knights, the Focolare Movement, various marriage and family enrichment associations, the Sant'Egidio Movement, the Comunione e Liberazione and Catholic Women's Organizations, to name only a few.

Catholic lay faithful who intend to engage in ecumenical contacts will do well to be deeply rooted in their Catholic faith, to know the Bible, to keep a clear Catholic identity and to be well informed on Catholic ecumenical action worldwide, especially on the directives of the Second Vatican Council and of Church organs in the years since that Council.

According to local possibilities Catholic lay faithful can cooperate with other Christians in defence of human life from conception right up to natural death, in defence of the right to religious freedom in parliaments and world bodies, protection of marriage and the family, control of the mass media so that they do not broadcast violence or moral dirt, action in favour of refugees and displaced people and the promotion of justice, reconciliation and peace between communities, ethnic groups and peoples. In general, all Christians should work together to persuade human society to run according to God's will and plan.

### 5. Perspective on what new Springtime could look like

In conclusion, if you ask me what a new springtime for the faith could look like, I reply with the following desiderata.

I pray for a society where Jesus Christ is gratefully accepted as the one and only Saviour of all humanity. This faith in him is proposed. It is not imposed. But it would greatly help matters if all disciples of Christ were on fire to share this faith with all

who freely listen to its proclamation and declare their acceptance. Pope John Paul II spoke to the Bishops of Latin America of new evangelization. By this he meant, an evangelization which would be new, not indeed in its content or message, but rather in its ardour, in its methods and in its expressions (cf Speech to Assembly of CELAM on 9 March, 1983, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VI, 1 (1983) p. 698).

I dream of a new world in which the right to religious freedom for every human being could be freely exercised. That would mean for Christians freedom to propose faith in Christ to people who freely listen and welcome it. This would mean more baptisms in Africa and Asian countries. It would include re-evangelization of areas in the world where the faith of many Christians has grown cold.

Marriage and the family are under attack in country after country. Christians are needed who see clearly, who have the courage to call a spade a spade, and who do not hesitate to take consequent action especially in conjunction with others, since some demons and challenges need organized response if they are to be exorcised.

It is important that the Church meet the culture in each country more and more, so that customs, celebrations, greetings, celebrations of marriage, and burial, and attitudes to life generally may reflect that of a people who have absorbed the Christian faith and are living it in a dynamic way. This Christian influence on culture should also appear in the functioning of the mass media, especially radio, press, television, internet and their derivatives.

If there is a springtime of the faith, it will also include more young people embracing the sacred priesthood or the consecrated life in monasteries or Religious Congregations of brothers and sisters. Above all, an increase of Christians on fire to share the Gospel, would be an unmistakable indication that a springtime is on.

Jesus Christ has told us that without him we can achieve nothing (cf Jn 15:5). We absolutely need his grace and the light, guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit, so that we may not be lacking in our contribution to a new springtime. May the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of our Saviour, obtain for us these graces.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Francis Card. Arinze". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

\* Francis Card Arinze

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