RACISM, A CANCER THE WORLD MUST BE LIBERATED FROM!

Message addressed by + Helder Camara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife (Brazil), when receiving from the Inter- national Catholic Council the Award for Those who Combat Racisms. Davenport (USA), on 18/10/1975.

1. An Award I Greatly Appreciate

God's mercy and the kindness of friends have given me awards which, quite frankly, I never dreamed of receiving, and which, undoubtedly, act as an encouragement for all of us who struggle for justice and love, towards peace. It is obvious that I receive these prizes on behalf of anonymous Heroes, and Heroines, whose names only God and a few friends know.

When, in Oslo and in Frankfurt, I received the Popular Peace Prize; when the blacks of the USA honoured me with the Martin Luther King Jr. Prize; when the North American Federation of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi honoured me with a Peace Prize - to mention some, among others - I had in mind so many fighters who struggle for Peace, but whose names never happen to be mentioned on radio, TV, and, much less, have their photos on newspapers.

The Prize which the International Catholic Council bestows upon me, today, touches me very deeply, and I shall always see it as a great encouragement for all of us who struggle for a world in which there will be no room for Oppressed, nor Oppressors.

To express my gratitude for this honour, I shall tell you how I see race discrimination, the cancer from which we must liberate the world, with great haste.
2. Three Reflections, Among Many Others

2.1 Racism, when extreme, has shocked the World

One of the most frequent manifestations of race discrimination, throughout history, is the persecution against Jews. The terrible truth is that we, Christians, have to admit that we, who all have a share in the responsibility for the death of Our Saviour, have fostered - consciously or unconsciously - hatred against the Jews, when we attributed to the Jews the death of Christ, thus feeding the hate against the so-called tortures and murderers of Christ. Pope John XXIII, during the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, not only deemed it his duty to apologize to the Jews, in the name of the Church, not only for the extremely sad persecutions of the Jewish Race by the Inquisition, but the holy Holy Father also recognized that this anti-Jewish prejudice is at the root of persecutions against Jews during the last two thousand years... We tend to forget that the Son of God, on becoming a man, made himself a Jew; that Our Lady, Mother of God, is a Jewess; that we adore the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and that we pray the Psalms which are, many of them, attributed to King David...

God knows how to extract good even out of evil itself. When Hitler, with his theories about the aryans, attempted to exalt the alleged superiority of the German races and ordered the death of millions of Jews, hunting them, mercilessly, everywhere, shooting them, burning them alive after robbing all their belongings, even the clothes they wore; when Hitler told people to scent the smell of Jews; to mistrust a Jewish nose, to discover any Jewish drop of blood in white veins, this aberration shocked the whole World. Thus, Hitler, unwillingly, helped Mankind open her eyes to the absurdity of any Racism...

2.2 Racism is Particularly Inconceivable
in this Century, in this Country

Race discrimination, in the Twentieth Century, in the USA, is so incomprehensible and shocking that the disdain and hatred
against Blacks, Latin-Americans, Asian races, in this Century, in this Country, are opening the eyes of many to the insanity of all Racisms...

Was not this great, this immense Country founded by a small group who abandoned their land, their homes, their friends, for the right to be free!?... Why, then, enforce on other human beings the same burdens which compelled the Founding Fathers to look for a Land of Liberty!?...

When the North-American citizen swear allegiance to the flag, symbol of the Country, doesn't he swear that this land shall be of "liberty and justice for all"?... Didn't the Constitution of this Country help inspire the French Revolution with the sacred trilogy: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!?...

Isn't this the Country in which science and technology multiply their wonders every day!?... Doesn't the world read all that is written by psychologists and Educators of this Country!?... Don't you see the students who, from the remotest corners of the Earth, come to study - even Democracy - in this great Country!?...

Don't we live in the Post-Second-World-War-Period? Wasn't it here that the four fundamental rights of men were proclaimed and later expanded into The Universal Declaration of Human Rights!?...

I stress: Racism, in this Century, in this Country, is such a great surprise, such a shock, that it is not only here, in your Country, but in the whole World that Anti-Racism is marching forward with large strides.

Nevertheless, let us admit the truth: many people who are shocked with race discrimination in the U.S.A., at heart, are racists...

When Robert Kennedy visited Brazil, and spoke at the Pontifical University of Rio de Janeiro, a young man, expressing himself in fluent English, interrupted the Senator to say: "Go back to your country, you racists have no moral right to teach anyone democracy".
Bob Kennedy did not lose his self-control. The Senator answered softly: "My young friend. You are right. Race discrimination is a shame to my Country. All I want is to assure you that the number of those who fight race discrimination has multiplied - even in the Government...". At this stage, Bob Kennedy created a suspense: silently, deliberately, he began to carefully examine the audience... Everybody wondered what he was looking for... After a lapse of time, Kennedy remarked with friendly malice: "Excuse me. I was only looking for a black here, but didn't find one, neither among the Directors, Professors, nor even among the Students... Perhaps there may be one among the janitors..."

Wild applause proved that the Senator was right...

2.3 World Dimensions of Racism

One of the characteristics of race discrimination is that it is often unconscious...

When I asked my USA Black Brothers to adopt, as their own, the cause of the Third World, it was because, to me, it seemed obvious that, if Continents are oppressed by injustices which subject people to a sub-human condition, there is, on the part of the Oppressors - even if unconsciously - a racial problem. If Europe and North-America are rich and becoming always richer, while two-thirds of Mankind become poorer, the final explanation given is that the Whites are superior in intelligence, will-power, kindness, in comparison to coloured people: black Africa; yellow Asia, tanned or mulatto Latin America...

This concept is absolutely wrong. What we do have, in the Poor Countries, as well as in poverty pockets of Rich countries, are terrible problems of injustice...

If Hitler had sent to the Poor Countries the most pure of his pure Aryans, and if they found themselves in the sub-human
situation in which two-thirds of the Poor Countries of the World live, I should like to see whether those so-called Super-men would have more endurance, more courage, more intelligence, and more kindness than our long-suffering people!

3. The Light, in this Matter, is Coming from Here

3.1 The Teacher that Cannot be forgotten

The United States a racist country!... What many people have not yet noticed is that, in matters of race discrimination, the light, to a great extent, is coming from this very Country.

Your blacks are an inspiration to us all. What a great human being, what a model, what a symbol we all have in Pastor Martin Luther King Jr. ... How well he was understood and followed by his black brothers. How well he discovered the right track, the exact methods! If some black groups at times dispaired - if others, today, seem distant - they have, or will soon discover that all of us must enter Teacher King's School!

3.2 Not a Smaller Lesson, nor a less Beautiful one

Besides the lessons on anti-racism we must learn from your blacks, we have a great deal to learn from our Spanish-speaking brothers, especially Puertoricans and Chicanos!

They were able to make themselves understood by North-American men and women who have become their brothers and sisters to the point that, when one has to deal with them, it is difficult to say when the American ends and the Chicano begins, or where the Chicano ends and the American begins.

4. Appeal to Christians and Men of Goodwill

If only all of us, who believe in a Creator and common Father, seriously considered this fundamental truth: all, absolutely
all Men, without any exception, are sons of God - we ought to treat each other as Brothers...

If Christians, of all denominations, had in mind, always, that all Men are brothers, because all, absolutely all, have the same Father and Creator; and also have in mind that the Son of God, who made himself our brother, Jesus Christ, shed his blood for all, absolutely all, without any exception, we, who bear the responsibility of carrying the name of Christ, should be his living presence among men, and we should, at least, treat each other as Brothers - Brothers of the same blood!

Catholics of the USA: you are giving us a marvellous example when you celebrate the Bicentennial of your Independence by inviting the whole Country to verify whether there really is "liberty and justice for all". I say:

If, as a result of your effort, every Catholic in this Country - Lay, Religious, Priest, Bishop - becomes a living example of the total overcoming of race discrimination, a decisive battle will have been won on the peaceful war against race discrimination!

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