



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Dialogue is part of Church's saving mission¹. “One God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:6). In the light of these words from the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Christians of Ephesus, today we wish to reflect on how to witness to God the Father in dialogue with the followers of all religions. In our reflection we have two reference-points: the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra aetate* on “The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” and the goal of the now imminent Great Jubilee. The Declaration *Nostra aetate* laid the foundations for a new style of dialogue in the Church's relationship with the various religions. For its part, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 is a privileged opportunity to witness to this style. In *Tertio millennio adveniente*, I invited people, precisely in this year dedicated to God the Father, to take a closer look at the dialogue with the great religions, which includes meetings in places of significance to them (cf. nn. 52-53).² In Sacred Scripture the theme of the one God in relation to the universality of the peoples seeking salvation is gradually developed until it culminates in the full revelation in Christ. The God of Israel, expressed by the sacred Tetragrammaton, is the God of the patriarchs, the God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush (cf. Ex 3) to free Israel and make it the people of the covenant. The Book of Joshua tells how they chose the Lord at Shechem, where a great multitude of people opted for the God who had shown himself benevolent and provident, and forsook all other gods (cf. Jos 24). In the religious awareness of the Old Testament, this choice increasingly takes the form of a rigorous and universalistic monotheism. If the Lord God of Israel is not one god among many but the only true God, it follows that all the nations “to the end of the earth” (Is 49:6) must be saved by him. The universal salvific will transforms human history into a great pilgrimage of peoples towards one destination, Jerusalem, but without loss of any of their ethnic-cultural differences (cf. Rv 7:9). The prophet Isaiah vividly expresses this outlook in the image of a road connecting Egypt to Assyria, stressing that the divine blessing will join Israel, Egypt and Assyria (cf. Is 19:23-25). All peoples, while fully preserving their own identity, are called to turn more and more to the one God who revealed himself to Israel.³ This “universalistic” inspiration in the Old Testament is further developed in the New, which reveals to us that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4). The conviction that God is really preparing all people for salvation is the basis of Christian dialogue with the followers of other religious beliefs. The Council described the Church's attitude to non-Christian religions in this way: “The Church has a high regard

for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims, and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is 'the way, the truth and the life' (*Jn* 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself, men find the fullness of their religious life" (*Nostra aetate*, n. 2). In years past, some considered *dialogue* with the followers of other religions to be opposed to *proclamation*, a primary duty of the Church's mission. In fact, interreligious dialogue is an integral part of the Church's evangelizing mission (cf. *CCC*, n. 856). As I have often stressed, it is fundamental for the Church, is an expression of her saving mission and is a dialogue of salvation (cf. *Insegnamenti VIII/1* [1984], pp. 595-599). Thus, interreligious dialogue does not mean abandoning proclamation, but answering a divine call so that exchange and sharing may lead to a mutual witness of one's own religious viewpoint, deeper knowledge of one another's convictions and agreement on certain fundamental values.

4. Reference to the common "fatherhood" of God will therefore not prove vaguely universalistic, but will be lived by Christians with full knowledge of that saving dialogue which comes through the mediation of Jesus and the action of his Spirit. Thus, for example, while taking from religions such as Islam the powerful affirmation of the personal Absolute who transcends the cosmos and man, on our part we can offer the witness of God in his inner Trinitarian life, explaining that the Trinity of Persons does not diminish but characterizes the divine unity itself. Therefore, in religious journeys which lead to a monistic conception of ultimate reality as an undifferentiated "Self" into which everything is resolved, Christianity also discerns the call to respect the deepest meaning of the divine mystery, beyond every human word and concept. And yet it does not hesitate to affirm God's personal transcendence, while proclaiming his universal and loving fatherhood which is fully revealed in the mystery of his crucified and risen Son. May the Great Jubilee be a valuable opportunity for the followers of all religions to grow in knowledge, esteem and love for one another through a dialogue which will be an encounter of salvation for

all!

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said: I extend a particular greeting to the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing, and I encourage them in their joyful service of the Church's evangelizing mission. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Philippines, Japan and the United States of America, I invoke the joy and peace of the risen

Saviour.

In these joyous days of the Easter season, unfortunately many of the world's people continue to suffer. In addition to the ongoing tragedy in Kosovo, today I would like to recall the "forgotten wars" which are soaking Africa in blood. From Angola to the Great Lakes, from Congo-Brazzaville to Sierra Leone, from Guinea-Bissau to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, from the Horn of Africa to Sudan, a long, bitter series of conflicts within and between States continue to strike innocent people especially and to upset the life of Catholic communities. The arrest of Bishop Augustin Misago of Gikongoro, Rwanda, has caused particular pain and regret. The risen Christ says again and again to our sorely tried brothers and sisters: "*Peace be with you*" (cf. *Jn* 20:19). May his divine voice be heard by those who obstinately refuse to accept his message of life! May he enlighten the blindness of those who stubbornly pursue the tortuous ways of hatred and violence, convincing them to decide once and for all on sincere and patient dialogue, which will lead to beneficial solutions for everyone! In the certainty that the power of the Resurrection is stronger than evil, let us implore the Conqueror of sin and death so that the desire for a peaceful and fraternal Africa may soon become a comforting

reality.

I have closely followed reports about the situation of a group of people kidnapped on 12 April as they were flying from Bucaramanga to Bogotá and who are still being held against their will in northern Colombia. I vigorously appeal to the kidnappers to stop their unjust treatment of these people, whose rights they are seriously violating, and to restore their

freedom. This will encourage the reconciliation process to which that entire beloved nation is committed and for whose success I pray constantly to the God of peace.

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