



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

*Hall of Popes
Friday, 13 November 1992*

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear Friends in Christ,*

1. I am happy to meet the members of the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, in the course of your Plenary Assembly.

In greeting you all I extend a special welcome to the new members among you. One of your number, Bishop Franjo Komarica of Banja Luka in Bosnia–Herzegovina, has not been able to come because of the tragic conflict affecting his Diocese. I am sure that you will join me in assuring him of our prayers for all the people in that area of immense human suffering.

2. Interreligious dialogue at its deepest level is always a *dialogue of salvation*, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age–long dialogue which God maintains with mankind. From the point of view of the Christian, it presupposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved, but it requires that this proclamation should be carried out in the Gospel spirit of understanding and peace. These ideas are amply discussed in the document, "[Dialogue and Proclamation](#)", issued by your Council in collaboration with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (cf. [Dialogue and Proclamation](#), 38, 77) . I avail myself of the occasion of your Plenary Assembly to recommend this document to all the Pastors of the Church. It addresses a question which has practical implications for the Catholic community in every part of the world, namely, the relationship between the Church's mission to preach salvation in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and her mission to enter into dialogue with all men and women of good will, with profound respect for their outlook and experience. Both aspects of the one mission

are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related but not interchangeable (cf. *ibid.* 77). "[Dialogue and Proclamation](#)" indicates how unilateral emphases should be avoided lest the Christian message itself be distorted.

3. Since your last Plenary Assembly, another document has been issued which touches upon the subject of interreligious dialogue.

I refer to the Encyclical Letter "[Redemptoris Missio](#)", on the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate. While affirming in this Encyclical that proclaiming the Gospel is the permanent priority of mission (cf. John Paul II, [Redemptoris Missio](#), 44), I also stated that "interreligious dialogue is part of the Church's evangelizing mission" (*Ibid.* 55), and that "each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practise dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way" (*Ibid.* 57). It should be evident to all that interreligious dialogue has taken on a new and immediate urgency in the present historical circumstances. We can only be deeply disturbed and saddened by the appearance or resurgence of prejudices and aggressive attitudes which are sometimes preached in the name of God but which have no basis in belief in the Almighty and Merciful Creator. *Believers*, while remaining faithful to their own religious convictions and without falling into false irenicism, *can and should engage in a truthful, humble and frank dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions, in order to eliminate intolerance and misunderstanding* (cf. [Redemptoris Missio](#), 56). Genuine dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion (cf. *ibid.*), and it is only such a spiritual renewal which will save the world from further widespread sufferings.

I am happy to hear that you have been examining the reactions to these documents, both within the Church and among the followers of other religions. In re-affirming the validity of these teachings of the Magisterium, I encourage you to reflect on how to spread the message which is contained in them, *a message of love and respect for our brothers and sisters of other traditions.*

4. In my apostolic journey this year to West Africa I was able to see a particular instance of the benefits of interreligious dialogue. I am thinking of Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea, where Muslims and Christians and the followers of Traditional Religions live together in harmony. The spirit which sustains this harmony is one of mutual respect and of cooperation with one another in social and civic life. As long as different religious traditions foster this spirit, attention can be given to what people have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them (cf. [Nostra Aetate](#), 1).

5. Contact with the religions of Asia, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, which are noted for their contemplative spirit, their methods of meditation and asceticism, can contribute greatly to the inculturation of the Gospel on that continent. A wise exchange between Catholics and the followers of other traditions can help in discerning points of contact in the spiritual life and in the expression of religious beliefs, without ignoring the differences. Such a discernment is all the more

urgent where people have lost their roots in their own tradition and are looking to other sources for spiritual support and enrichment. The growth of so-called new or alternative Religious Movements is evidence of how widespread this trend is becoming. There is a challenge here to the Christian communities of Asia. I am happy that the Pontifical Councils for Interreligious Dialogue, for Promoting Christian Unity, for Dialogue with Non-Believers and for Culture are continuing to study this phenomenon together in order to provide pastoral guidance.

6. This leads to a further point: the importance of theological reflection on the doctrinal foundations of the Church's efforts to promote interreligious dialogue. Catholic universities and faculties, seminaries and houses of formation, should be equipped to train leaders in the field of collaboration with other believers. I was therefore pleased to learn that your Council is preparing to hold a theological colloquium next August on "Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour, and the Encounter with Religions". I encourage you in your preparations for this meeting and I pray that it will give fresh impulse to efforts to improve relations between believers.

7. Your Plenary Assembly is surveying the various fields of the Pontifical Council's activity since its foundation. This assessment will show where progress has been made and where there is room for further effort. It will help to specify more exactly the ways in which your Council can be of service to the particular Churches as they seek to promote more friendly relations with other believers in the circumstances of each place, each people and each culture.

Your evaluation comes at a time when the political geography of the world has changed, and is still changing. This has brought with it a new breath of freedom, including religious liberty, but it has also given rise to tragic and destructive conflicts. In this situation believers have an urgent responsibility *to pray and work together for peace*. In my Message for the World Day of Peace this year I noted that believers must not forget the efficacy of prayer, which is "par excellence the power needed to implore that peace and obtain it" (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1992*, 4) . Your Council can play an active part in encouraging Catholics to join with others in earnest prayer for peace, while at the same time recalling valid guidelines so that this joint prayer does not lead to religious indifferentism or a clouding of revealed truth. The truth is that "interreligious contacts, together with ecumenical dialogue, now seem to be obligatory paths, in order to ensure that the many painful wounds inflicted over the course of centuries will not be repeated, and indeed that any such wounds still remaining will soon be healed" (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1992*, 6).

8. Finally, I express my gratitude to you all for your Council's generous sharing in my apostolic service to the Church throughout the world. Your work contributes to the fulfilment of what I have always considered a very important part of my ministry: the fostering of more friendly relations with the followers of other religious traditions. May the Lord, through the gift of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Mary, reward you with light, strength and joy.

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