



The Holy See

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

Friday, 9 November 2001

*Dear Cardinal Arinze,
Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,*

1. It gives me great pleasure to greet all of you taking part in the Plenary Assembly of the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor 1:3).

Your Assembly is reflecting on the progress of interreligious dialogue at a time when the whole of humanity is still under shock from the events of 11 September last. It has been suggested that we are witnessing a veritable clash of religions. But, as I have already said on numerous occasions, this would be to falsify religion itself. Believers know that, far from doing evil, they are obliged to do good, to work to alleviate human suffering, to build together a just and harmonious world.

2. If it is imperative for the international community to foster good relations between people belonging to different ethnic and religious traditions, it is all the more urgent for believers themselves to foster relations characterized by openness and trust, and leading to common concern for the well-being of the whole human family.

In my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I wrote that: "In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that [interreligious] dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history. The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a

summons to peace" (No. 55). We know, and we experience every day, how difficult it is to achieve this goal. We realize, in fact, that peace will not come as the result of our own efforts; it is not something that the world can give. It is a gift from the Lord. And to receive it we have to prepare our hearts. When conflicts arise, peace can only come through a process of reconciliation, and this requires both humility and generosity.

3. On the part of the Holy See it is your Council – ever since its institution by my predecessor Pope Paul VI as the Secretariat for Non-Christians – which has the special task of promoting interreligious dialogue. Over the years, the Council has been instrumental in furthering contacts with representatives of the various religions in a growing spirit of understanding and cooperation, a spirit which was clearly evident, for example, during the Interreligious Assembly held here in the Vatican on the eve of the Great Jubilee. At the closing ceremony of that Assembly I recalled that a vital task before us is to show how religious belief inspires peace, encourages solidarity, promotes justice and upholds liberty (cf. *Speech to the Interreligious Assembly*, Saint Peter's Square, 28 October 1999).

4. I make these brief remarks bearing in mind the theme chosen for your Plenary Assembly, *The Spirituality of Dialogue*. You have chosen to reflect on the spiritual inspiration which ought to sustain those engaged in interreligious dialogue. When we Christians consider the nature of God, as revealed in Scripture and above all in Jesus Christ, we realize that the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the perfect and eminent model of dialogue among human beings. Revelation teaches us that God has always been in dialogue with mankind, a dialogue which permeates the Old Testament and reaches its climax in the last days, when God speaks directly through his Son (cf. *Heb 1:2*). Consequently, in interreligious dialogue we must take to heart the exhortation of Saint Paul: "In your minds you must be the same as Jesus Christ" (*Phil 2:5*). The Apostle then goes on to underline the humility of Jesus, his *kenosis*. It is in the measure that, like Christ, we empty ourselves that we shall truly be able to open our hearts to others and walk with them as fellow pilgrims towards the destiny that God has prepared for us.

5. This reference to the *kenosis* of the Son of God serves to remind us that dialogue is not always easy or without suffering. Misunderstandings arise, prejudice can stand in the way of common accord, and the hand offered in friendship may even be refused. A true spirituality of dialogue has to take such situations into account and provide the motivation for persevering, even in the face of opposition or when the results appear to be meagre. There will always be a need for great patience, for the fruits will come, but in due time (cf *Ps 1:3*); when those who were sowing in tears will sing as they reap (cf *Ps 126:5*).

At the same time, contact with the followers of other religions is often a source of great joy and encouragement. It leads us to discover how God is at work in the minds and hearts of people, and indeed in their rites and customs. What God has sown in this way can, through dialogue, be purified and perfected (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 17). The spirituality of dialogue will therefore

attentively seek to discern the workings of the Holy Spirit, and will give thanks for the fruits of love, joy and peace that the Spirit brings.

6. May Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church, intercede for you all, that our heavenly Father will fill you with wisdom and strength in order to follow, and encourage others to follow, the genuine path of dialogue. With gratitude, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.