



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE  
OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE**

*Tuesday, 18 May 2004*

*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,*

1. I am pleased to meet with you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. I address my heartfelt greeting to everyone and I direct a special thought to your President, Cardinal Stephen Fumio Hamao, thanking him for his kind words on behalf of all. I greet the Secretary and collaborators of the Dicastery, congratulating them on their work in a sector that is gaining importance in today's world.

The theme, too, of today's meeting, *"Intercultural, interreligious and ecumenical dialogue in today's context of migration"*, underlines the relevance and importance of the service that your Pontifical Council is called to carry out in this moment of history.

2. Today, the Christian community is called to face situations profoundly different from those of the past. Without a doubt, one of these is the widespread phenomenon of migration, which is linked to tragedies that shake our conscience. Ethnic, cultural and religious pluralism has resulted from this phenomenon, a usual feature of today's nations.

Comparison with the actual reality of migration makes a renewed Gospel proclamation on the part of the Christian community urgent. This calls into question the pastoral duty and practical witness of all: priests, Religious, laity.

3. Indeed, if "globalization" is the term which more than any other describes historical modern

development, the word "dialogue" must also characterize the mental and pastoral attitude that we are all called to adopt in view of a new world balance. The steady number of 200 million migrants makes this even more urgent.

Integration on the social level and interaction on the cultural one have therefore become the presupposition necessary for authentic peaceful co-existence between peoples and nations. This is more necessary than ever now due to the process of globalization, which increasingly unifies economic, cultural and social development.

4. Every culture serves as an approach to the mystery of man, also in his or her religious dimension, and this explains, as the Second Vatican Council affirms, why certain elements of truth can be found even outside of the revealed message, even among those non-believers who respect outstanding human values without realizing who the author of those values is (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 92). It then becomes necessary to draw near to all cultures with the respectful attitude of one who is aware that they do not just have something to say or give, but also much to listen to and receive (cf. *Message for World Day of Peace 2001*, n. 12).

This attitude is not only a requirement enforced by the transformations of our time, but is necessary so that the proclamation of the Gospel can reach everyone. This calls for intercultural dialogue: an open process that, by accepting what is good and true in the different cultures, can remove certain obstacles in the journey of faith.

Such a dialogue requires a profound change of mentality and also of pastoral structures, so that all that pastors invest in spiritual and cultural formation, even through gatherings and intercultural meetings, is directed toward the future and becomes a factor of the new evangelization.

5. The process of globalization not only calls the Church to intercultural dialogue but also to interreligious dialogue. Indeed, humanity of the third millennium urgently needs to rediscover common spiritual values on which to found the project of a society worthy of man (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, n. 60).

However, the integration between populations that belong to different cultures and religions is never free of uncertainties and difficulties. This especially regards the immigration of Muslim faithful, who present specific problems. It becomes necessary in this regard that pastors accept precise responsibility, promoting an evermore generous evangelical witness given by Christians themselves. Fraternal dialogue and reciprocal respect must never serve as a limit or barrier to Gospel proclamation. Instead, love and welcome are the first and most effective forms of evangelization.

The particular Churches, therefore, must be centres of welcome through pastoral initiatives of meeting and dialogue, but especially by helping the faithful to overcome prejudice and teaching

them to become, in their turn, missionaries *ad gentes* in our countries.

6. Likewise, the always more numerous presence of Christian immigrants not in full communion with the Catholic Church offers to the particular Churches new vistas for fraternity and ecumenical dialogue. This encourages them to arrive at, far from convenient irenicism and proselytism, a better reciprocal understanding between Churches and the Ecclesial Community (cf. *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, n. 58; *Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, 1993, n. 107).

The present-day phenomenon of migration leads to a consideration of the condition of the People of God on their way toward the heavenly homeland. The ecumenical movement itself can be understood in this way as a great exodus, a pilgrimage, which merges and coincides with the current exoduses of peoples in search of a more stable condition of life. In this sense, the ecumenical duty becomes an added incentive to welcome fraternally those whose customs and ways of thinking are different from those with which we are familiar. In this way, the phenomenon of migration and the ecumenical movement become a stimulus, in their respective settings, toward better human understanding.

While invoking God's help upon your work, which I entrust to the protection of the Most Holy Virgin, I impart to all my Blessing.