



The Holy See

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

Hall of Popes

Friday, 24 November 1995

Dear Cardinal Arinze,

Your Eminences,

Dear Brother Bishops, and Friends in Christ,

1. I am happy to have this occasion to meet the members of the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* gathered for your Plenary Assembly. I greet you in the peace of Christ, through whom "we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2).

Thirty years after the Council issued the Declaration on the relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, your involvement in interreligious dialogue cannot but continue to be guided and encouraged by the teaching and insights of that important document. Indeed, the theme of your Assembly, *The Dialogue of Spirituality and the Spirituality of Dialogue*, provides an excellent opportunity for reflection on what might be called "the reading of the human soul", which is the starting point of "[Nostra Aetate](#)", which states: "Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence... What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behaviour, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?" ([Nostra Aetate](#), 1).

2. Often today, in many parts of the world, a materialistic culture imprisons people as it were in

space and time, so that they find themselves disorientated and unable to give meaning to life. Some, as the Second Vatican Council already noted, living in an atmosphere of practical materialism, do not perceive this human drama (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 10). There are others "whose hopes are set on a genuine and total emancipation of mankind through human effort alone and look forward to some future earthly paradise where all the desires of their hearts will be fulfilled" (*Ibid.*). A third category, those who believe in God or search for the Absolute, finds a response to these interrogations of the human soul *through spirituality*, in other words through a conception of life and of human history which is not confined to the narrow limits of our earthly existence, but which is *open to transcendence and to eternity*. The Church, for her part, "believes that Christ, who died and was raised for the sake of all, can show man the way and strengthen him through the Spirit in order to be worthy of his destiny". She believes too that "the key, the centre and the purpose of the whole of man's history are to be found in the Lord and Master" (*Ibid.*).

3. The "spirituality" which is at the heart of your reflections involves the concept of man's quest for a personal relationship with God, a relationship which can give life and substance to his relations with others who follow a different religious tradition. "Spirituality" is more than knowledge and discussion. It is inseparable from the search for holiness which, in the absolute sense, belongs only to God, but which, through his tender mercy, is given also to man as a gift and a responsibility. The Second Vatican Council has re-echoed the exhortation of St Paul: "What God wants is for you all to be holy" (1 Thess. 4:3), underlining on more than one occasion the universal vocation to holiness ((cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 42).

In the wider perspective, the search for perfection, for purification, for conformity to the divine will is not restricted to Christians. It involves every human being. It is no wonder therefore that we find in the religious traditions of humanity a clear awareness of the call to the highest values. The various religions, as my predecessor Pope Paul VI taught, "bear within them the reflection of thousands of years of searching for God, an incomplete quest but one often enough carried out with sincerity and honesty. Theirs is an impressive heritage of profoundly religious texts. They have taught generations how to pray. All are strewn with innumerable 'seeds of the Word'" (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53).

4. Thus the theme of spirituality constitutes a natural meeting point for the followers of different religious traditions and a fruitful subject for interreligious dialogue. As your Plenary Assembly has shown, the "dialogue of spirituality" is an essential and crowning form of dialogue between men and women of different religious experiences. It enables "persons rooted in their own religious traditions" to share "their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute" (*Ibid.*, 42). Such exchanges, for which Christians should be adequately trained, can be a source of mutual enrichment and a stimulus to fruitful co-operation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals of humanity. Within this dialogue there will be ample opportunity for Christians to share the very heart of the Gospel message and to communicate "the reasons for the hope that lies within us" (1 Pt.

3:15). Although dialogue can take on other forms – the "dialogue of life", the dialogue of co-operation, and formal dialogue or exchanges among experts – all of which are important, *the dialogue of spirituality* can contribute a depth and quality which *will preserve these from the danger of mere activism*.

5. Such a dialogue of spirituality requires a *spirituality of dialogue*, that is, a vision capable of sustaining the efforts to promote good and harmonious relations between the followers of different religions. Interreligious dialogue is never easy. It requires solid convictions and a great understanding and sensitivity regarding difference. It is my hope that your meeting will produce the outlines of a spirituality of dialogue which will be useful to pastors and faithful everywhere, for "each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practise dialogue, though not always to the same degree or in the same way" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 57).

6. As the whole Church prepares for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, we must take into account "the increased interest in dialogue with other religions" as one of the "signs of hope present in the last part of this century" (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 46). In this context I thank you for your attention to the implications and necessary conditions of this dialogue. It is my earnest prayer that the coming of the Third Millennium will see a deepening and consolidating of ever more cordial relations between the different religious traditions, for the benefit of peace and solidarity among peoples everywhere. Invoking upon you the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, I willingly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.

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