



The Holy See

JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE HOLY LAND (MARCH 20-26, 2000)

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

INTERRELIGIOUS MEETING AT THE NOTRE DAME PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE

Jerusalem

Thursday, 23 March 2000

Distinguished Jewish, Christian and Muslim Representatives,

1. In this year of the Two Thousandth Anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ, I am truly happy to be able to fulfil my long-cherished wish to make a journey through the geography of salvation history. I am deeply moved as I follow in the footsteps of the countless pilgrims who before me have prayed in the Holy Places connected with God's interventions. I am fully conscious that this Land is Holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims. Therefore my visit would have been incomplete without this meeting with you, distinguished religious leaders. Thank you for the support which your presence here this evening gives to the hope and conviction of so many people that we are indeed entering a new era of interreligious dialogue. We are conscious that closer ties among all believers are a necessary and urgent condition for securing a more just and peaceful world.

For all of us Jerusalem, as its name indicates, is the "City of Peace". Perhaps no other place in the world communicates the sense of transcendence and divine election that we perceive in her stones and monuments, and in the witness of the three religions living side by side within her walls. Not everything has been or will be easy in this co-existence. But we must find in our respective religious traditions the wisdom and the superior motivation to ensure the triumph of

mutual understanding and cordial respect.

2. We all agree that religion must be genuinely centred on God, and that our first religious duty is adoration, praise and thanksgiving. The opening *sura* of the Qur'ân makes this clear: "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe" (*Qur'an*, 1:1). In the inspired songs of the Bible we hear this universal call: "Let everything that breathes give praise to the Lord! Alleluia!" (*Ps* 150:6). And in the Gospel we read that when Jesus was born the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest heaven" (*Lk* 2:14). In our times, when many are tempted to run their affairs without any reference to God, the call to acknowledge the Creator of the universe and the Lord of history is essential in ensuring the well-being of individuals and the proper development of society.

3. If it is authentic, devotion to God necessarily involves attention to our fellow human beings. As members of the one human family and as God's beloved children, we have duties towards one another which, as believers, we cannot ignore. One of the first disciples of Jesus wrote: "If any one says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (*1 Jn* 4:20). Love of our brothers and sisters involves an attitude of respect and compassion, gestures of solidarity, cooperation in service to the common good. Thus, concern for justice and peace does not lie outside the field of religion but is actually one of its essential elements.

In the Christian view it is not for religious leaders to propose technical formulas for the solution of social, economic and political problems. Theirs is, above all, the task of teaching the truths of faith and right conduct, the task of helping people – including those with responsibility in public life – to be aware of their duties and to fulfil them. As religious leaders, we help people to live integrated lives, to harmonize the vertical dimension of their relationship with God with the horizontal dimension of service to their neighbour.

4. Each of our religions knows, in some form or another, the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". Precious as this rule is as a guide, true love of neighbour goes much further. It is based on the conviction that when we love our neighbour we are showing love for God, and when we hurt our neighbour we offend God. This means that religion is the enemy of exclusion and discrimination, of hatred and rivalry, of violence and conflict. Religion is not, and must not become, an excuse for violence, particularly when religious identity coincides with cultural and ethnic identity. Religion and peace go together! Religious belief and practice cannot be separated from the defence of the image of God in every human being.

Drawing upon the riches of our respective religious traditions, we must spread awareness that today's problems will not be solved if we remain ignorant of one another and isolated from one another. We are all aware of past misunderstandings and conflicts, and these still weigh heavily upon relationships between Jews, Christians and Muslims. We must do all we can to turn awareness of past offences and sins into a firm resolve to build a new future in which there will be

nothing but respectful and fruitful cooperation between us.

The Catholic Church wishes to pursue a sincere and fruitful interreligious dialogue with the members of the Jewish faith and the followers of Islam. Such a dialogue is not an attempt to impose our views upon others. What it demands of all of us is that, holding to what we believe, we listen respectfully to one another, seek to discern all that is good and holy in each other's teachings, and cooperate in supporting everything that favours mutual understanding and peace.

5. The Jewish, Christian and Muslim children and young people present here are a sign of hope and an incentive for us. Each new generation is a divine gift to the world. If we pass on to them all that is noble and good in our traditions, they will make it blossom in more intense brotherhood and cooperation.

If the various religious communities in the Holy City and in the Holy Land succeed in living and working together in friendship and harmony, this will be of enormous benefit not only to themselves but to the whole cause of peace in this region. Jerusalem will truly be a City of Peace for all peoples. Then we will all repeat the words of the Prophet: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord. . . that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths" (*Is* 2:3).

To re-commit ourselves to such a task, and to do so in the Holy City of Jerusalem, is to ask God to look kindly on our efforts and bring them to a happy outcome. May the Almighty abundantly bless our common endeavours!

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