



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 15 May 2004

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I cordially greet all of you who are gathered here from different parts of the world to take part in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

I greet the President, Archbishop Michael Louis Fitzgerald, and I thank him for his kind words on your behalf. I greet the Secretary and other collaborators of the Pontifical Council and those who have prepared this important meeting which commemorates the 40th anniversary of the Dicastery's establishment on 19 May 1964.

The decision of my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, derives from "the atmosphere of union and expectation that clearly characterized the Second Vatican Council" (*Discourse to the College of Cardinals*, 23 June 1964), as he himself wrote. And from the Council itself, especially with the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, this new Council received the guidelines for its activity, aimed at promoting relations with followers of other religions.

2. Throughout these past 40 years, the Dicastery has accomplished its ecclesial service with zealous determination, finding positive collaboration and reciprocal advantages in many dioceses and in church and Christian communities of different denominations.

The importance of the work you carry out has been likewise understood by many organizations of other religions which have, and still continue today, to maintain positive contacts with your

Pontifical Council and join in different initiatives of dialogue. It becomes necessary to intensify such fruitful cooperation, focusing attention on topics of common interest.

3. Over the next years the Church will assiduously endeavour to answer the great challenge of interreligious dialogue. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I emphasized that the millennium just begun is situated in the climate of "increased cultural and religious pluralism" (n. 55).

Dialogue is therefore important and must continue, since it "is part of the Church's evangelizing mission", in "intimate connection" with the proclamation of Christ and at the same time distinct from it, without confusion and manipulation (cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 55). However, so as to foster such dialogue with the followers of other religions, all religious relativism and indifferentism must be avoided, making the effort to offer respectfully to all the joyful witness of the "hope that is in us" (cf. I Pt 3: 15).

4. As I observed in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, interreligious dialogue is also important for "establishing a sure basis for peace", as it enables "the name of the one God" to become "increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace" (n. 55). By virtue of the "ministry of reconciliation" entrusted to them by God (cf. II Cor 5: 18), Christians are aware of their ability to contribute to the building of peace in the world, allowing themselves to be vivified by love for all men and women and for each person, courageously seeking out the truth, cultivating a prophetic thirst for justice and freedom. Persevering, humble, trusting prayer to God must always be part of this effort; indeed, peace is above all a divine gift to implore unceasingly.

May the Virgin Mary accompany the work of your Pontifical Council and make fruitful each of your projects. For my part, I assure you of my prayer and cordially impart to you a special Apostolic Blessing.