



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS AND STAFF

OF THE SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS Tuesday, 28 April 1987 Dear Cardinals and Brother Bishops,

Dear Friends, 1. Today I am happy to welcome you, the members and staff of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, with the experts and observers, who are gathered in plenary session. This Vatican Department, one of the concrete and lasting fruits of the Second Vatican Council, has almost completed its first quarter-century of existence and activity. It is good that you have come here to reflect on your experience during these years and to examine together how the Secretariat can, in the future, best serve the Church and the whole human family. The theme of your last plenary session in 1984 was "Dialogue and Mission". On the feast of Pentecost of that same year, the document produced by your assembly, "The attitude of the Church towards the followers of other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission", was presented to the whole Church. 2. This year you have chosen to continue your reflections on this theme, concentrating on one particular aspect of it: "*Dialogue and Proclamation*". The Church exists to proclaim our faith in the one God, Creator of the universe, whose eternal Word became incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and whose Spirit dwells actively in the world, leading people to the truth, giving them life, and making them holy. We believe that Jesus Christ "causes us to enter into an intimate knowledge of the mystery of God and into a filial communion through his gifts, so that we recognize and proclaim him Lord and Saviour" (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Allocutio in urbe «Casablanca», in Marochio, ad iuvenes muslimos habita*, 10, die 19 aug. 1985: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII, 2(1985) 506). In him, God has accomplished the salvation of all humanity (Cfr. Io. 4, 42); it is he, together with the Father, who has sent the Holy Spirit, who continues the divine work of salvation. At the same time, as the documents of the Second Vatican Council have made clear, and as I have stressed on many occasions, both here in Rome and in my travels to various parts of the world, the commitment of the Catholic Church to dialogue with the followers of other religions remains firm and unchanged. Events in recent years underline the need for a strong restatement of this commitment. 3. Your assembly must thus *reaffirm the commitment of the Catholic Church both to dialogue and to the proclamation of the Gospel*. There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other. Even in situations where the proclamation of our faith is difficult, we must have the courage to speak of God who is the foundation of that faith, the reason for our hope, and the source of our love. It is also true that in those circumstances in

which the proclamation of the Gospel bears much fruit we must not forget that dialogue with others is a Christian work desired by God. Moreover, the proclamation of the Gospel has to take due notice of the religious and cultural background of those to whom it is addressed. 4. As you seek to formulate the relationship between dialogue and proclamation, I would like to remind you of some aspects of the question. As the document of your earlier plenary session stated so well, *dialogue* is a complex of human activities, all *founded upon respect and esteem for people to different religions*. It includes the daily living together in peace and mutual help, with each bearing witness to the values learned through the experience of faith. It means a readiness to cooperate with others for the betterment of humanity, and a commitment to search together for true peace. It means the encounter of theologians and other religious specialists to explore, with their counterparts from other religions, areas of convergence and divergence. Where circumstances permit, it means a sharing of spiritual experiences and insights. This sharing can take the form of coming together as brothers and sisters to pray to God in ways which safeguard the uniqueness of each religious tradition. Just as interreligious dialogue is one element in *the mission of the Church, the proclamation of God's saving work in our Lord Jesus Christ is another*. Christ's followers must carry out his mandate to make disciples of all nations, to baptize and to teach the observance of the commandments (Cfr. *Matth.* 28, 19-20). As Saints Peter and John told the Sanhedrin: "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (*Act.* 4, 20). Likewise with Saint Paul we must be aware of the consequences of neglecting to proclaim the Gospel (Cfr. *1 Cor.* 9, 16). The Second Vatican Council reminds us that Jesus Christ announces the universal love of our Heavenly Father, reveals his saving deeds, and embodies his new and eternal Covenant with humanity. Hence, the Council states that "the Church painstakingly fosters her missionary work" (*Lumen Gentium*, 16). 5. Throughout my Pontificate it has been my constant concern to fulfil the apostolic and pastoral task of both dialogue and proclamation. On my last visit to Africa, I met leaders of African traditional religions, and witnessed their awareness of God's nearness and their appreciation of the ethical values of a godly person. In Morocco, I was received warmly by Muslims and spoke to them about the demands of leading a life of faith today. In India, I saw the evidence of the ancient spiritual traditions of that country which continue to be a force of light, wisdom and strength amidst the problems of modern life. Last October I invited representatives of all the world's religions to Assisi - the home of Saint Francis, that holy man of deep dialogue and untiring proclamation - to come together to pray for the peace of the world. I have likewise stressed on other occasions the importance of missionary proclamation, conversion, the setting up of local Churches, and suitable catechesis of the faith. 6. There remain many questions which we have to develop and articulate more clearly. How does God work in the lives of people of different religions? How does his saving activity in Jesus Christ effectively extend to those who have not professed faith in him? In the coming years, these questions and related ones will become more and more important for the Church in a pluralistic world, and pastors, with the collaboration of experienced theologians, must direct their studious attention to them. I offer you my best wishes for your deliberations during this plenary session, and I ask God's Spirit to guide your work. I pray that, during your days together, Jesus Christ will strengthen the bonds of fraternity among you. May Almighty God bless you and the work which you have come to Rome to carry out, and

may it provide inspiration for you and your people when you return to your respective countries.

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