



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Friday, 11 April 1986

Dear Friends in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I extend a warm welcome to the Dialogue Section of the World Council of Churches on the occasion of your meeting here in Rome with the Secretariat for Non-Christians. I am grateful for this opportunity to meet with all of you during your joint annual session on interreligious dialogue. I know that for some time you have been gathering each year, alternating between Geneva and Rome, in order to study and discuss questions of dialogue with people of other faiths, as well as to share experiences and co-ordinate future activities. Certainly, your commitment is not limited solely to what you can accomplish on your own. You are also concerned about what is being done in this field by all Christian groups.

1. I was happy to learn that the subject for study this year is "the dialogue of life" – dialogue between ordinary believers, a harmonious and constructive sharing in the situations of daily contacts. This is truly a basic form of dialogue and one which lays the foundation for other more specialised encounters.

The effort to build respect, understanding and trust at the popular level is a condition for friendly relations among the followers of the great religions. The vision and the good will of individuals alone is not sufficient to affect deeply the relations between communities of believers. The vast numbers of ordinary believers must also come to understand and accept people of other faiths as brothers and sisters with whom they can peacefully share their lives.

For this reason, in addressing gatherings of Christians, as well as people of other religions, I often speak of the need to promote mutual respect, esteem and co-operation within society itself. This was a prominent theme during my recent visit to India. For this reason too, I was happy to accept the invitation to visit Morocco and speak to the Muslim youth of that country. Since you are both

concerned with addressing the same need, I encourage you in your role of animation.

2. I would like to take the opportunity offered by this meeting to recall another aspect of your collaboration. We must never forget that working together to promote interreligious dialogue is actually one of the paths which can help Christians move towards the unity desired by Christ. Through their dialogue with believers of other faiths, Christians of various Churches and Communions come to recognise how much they have in common precisely as believers in Christ. They also come to sense more keenly the painful scandal of division among Christians and how it diminishes our witness to "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" .

There is also a wider sense in which a common approach to interreligious dialogue can favour Christian unity. If believers in Christ can respond together at the level of faith to the challenges of humanity, if they can build respect for the many and diverse gifts which God has showered upon all peoples, if they can express love and care for all persons just as the Lord loves them, then this common witness to Christ will become more evident as a lived reality.

3. In the final analysis, prayer is the best means by which all humanity can be united. It disposes people to accept God's will for them. It also affects the relationship of those who pray together, for by coming together before God in prayer people can no longer ignore or hate others. Those who pray together discover that they are pilgrims and seekers of the same goal, brothers and sisters who share responsibility for the same human family, children of the same God and Father. It is my ardent hope that the Day of Prayer for Peace to be held in Assisi, at which Christians of all Communions and believers from all the great religions have been invited to participate, will be a beginning and an incentive for all believers in God to come often before him united in prayer.

In this same spirit, I would invite you now to join with me in praying to our heavenly Father, as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has taught us:

Our Father who art in heaven, / hallowed be Thy name. / Thy kingdom come. / Thy will be done on earth, / as it is in heaven. / Give us this day our daily bread, / and forgive us our trespasses, / as we forgive those who trespass against us, / and lead us not into temptation, / but deliver us from evil. / Amen.

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