



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

**MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF WORLD RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Japanese Cultural Centre, Los Angeles
Wednesday, 16 September 1987*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Representatives of World Religions and Religious Leaders,
Dear Friends,*

1. It is a great Joy for me to meet you, the local representatives of great religions of the world, during the course of my pastoral visit. I wish to thank in particular the Japanese community of Los Angeles for their kind hospitality at this centre, which is a symbol of cultural diversity within the United States as well as a symbol of dialogue and interaction at the service of the common good. I understand that the Japanese community has been present in this area of Los Angeles for a century. May God continue to bless you with every good gift now and in the future. I also wish to extend *cordial greetings to all religious leaders and to all people of good will who honour us with their presence today.*

It is my conviction that we must make use of every *opportunity to show love and respect* for one another in the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* which, as the theme of our meeting affirms, is indeed alive twenty-two years after its promulgation among the documents of the Second Vatican Council. This declaration on the relation of the Catholic Church to Non-Christian religions speaks of "that which people have in common and of those things which tend to promote fellowship among them" (*Nostra Aetate*, 1). This continues to be the basis of our efforts to develop a fruitful relationship

among all the great religions of the world.

2. As I stated earlier this year, the Catholic Church remains firmly committed to the proclamation of the Gospel and to dialogue with people of other religions: *proclamation of the Gospel*, because as *Nostra Aetate* points out, the Church "must ever proclaim Christ, 'the way, the truth, and the life' (Jo. 14, 6) in whom people find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to himself (Cfr. 2Cor. 5, 18-19)" (*Nostra Aetate*, 2); *dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions*, because of the spiritual and moral goods that we share (Cfr. *ibid.*). That dialogue "is a complex of human activities, all founded upon respect and esteem for people of 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" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad sodales Secretariatus pro non-Christianis*, die 28 apr. 1987: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X, 1 (1987) 1449-1450).

Throughout my pontificate it has been my constant concern to fulfil this twofold task of proclamation and dialogue. On my pastoral visits around the world I have sought to encourage and strengthen the faith of the Catholic people and other Christians as well. At the same time I have been pleased to meet leaders of all religions in the hope of promoting greater interreligious *understanding and cooperation* for the good of the human family. I was very gratified at the openness and good will with which the *World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi* last October was received, not only by the various Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, but by the other religions of the world as well. I was also pleased that another World Day of Prayer subsequently took place in Japan at Mount Hiei.

3. What I said in Assisi also applies to our meeting today: "The fact that we have come here does not imply any intention of seeking a religious consensus among ourselves or of negotiating our faith convictions. Neither does it mean that religions can be reconciled at the level of a common commitment in an earthly project which would surpass them all. Nor is it a concession to relativism in religious beliefs, because every human being must sincerely follow his or her upright conscience with the intention of seeking and obeying the truth. Our meeting attests only - and this is its real significance for the people of our time - that in the great battle for peace, humanity, in its very diversity, must draw from its deepest and most vivifying sources where its conscience is formed and upon which is founded the moral action of all people".

It is in that spirit that I wish, through you, to greet each of your communities before saying something further about the concern for peace that we all share.

To the Buddhist Community, which reflects numerous Asian traditions as well as American: I wish respectfully to acknowledge your way of life, based upon compassion and loving kindness and upon a yearning for peace, prosperity and harmony for all beings. May all of us give witness to compassion and loving kindness in promoting the true good of humanity.

To the Islamic Community: I share your belief that mankind owes its existence to the One, Compassionate God who created heaven and earth. In a world in which God is denied or disobeyed, in a world that experiences so much suffering and is so much in need of God's mercy, let us then strive together to be courageous bearers of hope.

To the Hindu Community: I hold in esteem your concern for inner peace and for the peace of the world, based not on purely mechanistic or materialistic political considerations, but on self-purification, unselfishness, love and sympathy for all. May the minds of all people be imbued with such love and understanding.

To the Jewish Community: I repeat the Second Vatican Council's conviction that the Church "cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his mercy established the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which has been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles (Cfr. *Rom.* 11, 17-24)" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4), With you, I oppose every form of anti-Semitism. May we work for the day when all peoples and nations may enjoy security, harmony and peace.

4. Dear brothers and sisters of these religions and of every religion: so many people today experience inner emptiness even amid material prosperity because they overlook the *great questions of life*: "What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is goodness and what is sin? What gives rise to suffering and what purpose does it serve? What is the path to true happiness? What is death, judgement and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate, ineffable mystery which embraces our existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we move?" (*Nostra Aetate*, 1).

These profoundly spiritual questions, which are shared to some degree by all religions, also draw us together in *a common concern* for man's earthly welfare, especially world peace. As I said at Assisi: "(World religions) share a common respect of and obedience to conscience, which teaches all of us to seek the truth, to love and serve all individuals and peoples, and therefore to make peace among individuals and among nations" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad legatos christianarum Ecclesiarum aliarumque religionum in conclusione communis orationis pro pace*, 2, die 27 oct. 1986: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX, 2 (1986) 1260).

In the spirit of the kind words with which you addressed me earlier as an advocate of peace, let us continue *to seek peace for the human family*: through prayer, since peace transcends our human

efforts; through penance, since we have not always been "peacemakers"; through prophetic witness, since old divisions and social evils need to be challenged; and through constant initiatives on behalf of the rights of individuals and nations, and on behalf of justice everywhere. The fragile gift of peace will survive only if there is a concerted effort on the part of all, to be concerned with the "glaring inequalities not merely in the enjoyment of possessions but even more in the exercise of power" (Pauli VI *Populorum Progressio*, 9). In this regard world leaders and international bodies have their special role to play. But universal sensitivity is also called for, particularly among the young.

I believe that the *Prayer of Saint Francis* of Assisi, universally recognized as a man of peace, touches the conscience of us all. It is that prayer that best expresses my sentiments in meeting all of you today:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to be love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

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