

## PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

### ***DIALOGUE AND PROCLAMATION***

#### **Reflection And Orientations On Interreligious Dialogue And The Proclamation Of The Gospel Of Jesus Christ (1)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

##### ***1. 25 years after "Nostra Aetate"***

It is 25 years since "Nostra Aetate", the declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the Church's relationship to other religions, was promulgated. The document stressed the importance of interreligious dialogue. At the same time, it recalled that the Church is in duty bound to proclaim without fail Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, in whom all people find their fulfillment (cf. NA 2).

##### ***2. Dialogue and mission***

To foster the work of dialogue, Pope Paul VI set up in 1964 the Secretariat for Non-Christians, recently renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Following its Plenary Assembly of 1984, the Secretariat issued a document entitled "The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission." This document states that the evangelizing mission of the Church is a "single but complex and articulated reality." It indicates the principal elements of this mission: presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and finally, proclamation and catechesis(2). Proclamation and dialogue are thus both viewed, each in its own place, as component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church. They are both oriented towards the communication of salvific truth.

##### ***3. Dialogue and proclamation***

The present document gives further consideration to these two elements. It first puts forward the characteristics of each, and then studies their mutual relationship. If dialogue is treated first, this is not because it has any priority over proclamation. It is simply due to the fact that dialogue is the primary concern of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue which initiated the preparation of the document. The document in fact was first discussed during

the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat in 1987. The observations made then, together with further consultation, have led to this text, which was finalized and adopted at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Both dicasteries are offering these reflections to the universal Church.

#### **4. Current affairs**

Among the reasons which make the relationship between dialogue and proclamation a relevant theme for study, the following may be mentioned:

a) In the world of today, characterized by rapid communications, mobility of peoples, and interdependence, there is a new awareness of the fact of religious plurality. Religions do not merely exist, or simply survive. In some cases, they give clear evidence of a revival. They continue to inspire and influence the lives of millions of their adherents. In the present context of religious plurality, the important role played by religious traditions cannot be overlooked.

b) Interreligious dialogue between Christians and followers of other religious traditions, as envisaged by the Second Vatican Council, is only gradually coming to be understood. Its practice remains hesitant in some places. The situation differs from country to country. It can depend on the size of the Christian community, on which other religious traditions are present, and on various other cultural, social and political factors. A further examination of the question may help to stimulate dialogue.

c) The practice of dialogue raises problems in the minds of many. There are those who would seem to think, erroneously, that in the Church's mission today dialogue should simply replace proclamation. At the other extreme, some fail to see the value of interreligious dialogue. Yet others are perplexed and ask: if interreligious dialogue has become so important, has the proclamation of the Gospel message lost its urgency? Has the effort to bring people into the community of the Church become secondary or even superfluous? There is a need therefore for doctrinal and pastoral guidance to which this document wishes to contribute, without pretending to answer fully the many and complex questions which arise in this connection.

As this text was in its final stages of preparation for publication, the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, offered to the Church his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* in which he addressed these questions and many more. The present document spells out in greater detail the teaching of the Encyclical on

dialogue and its relationship to proclamation (cf. RM 55-57). It is therefore to be read in the light of this Encyclical.

### **5. *The Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi***

The World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, on 27 October 1986, held at the initiative of Pope John Paul II, provides another stimulus for reflection. Both on the day itself and after, especially in his address to the Cardinals and to the Roman Curia in December, 1986, the Holy Father explained the meaning of the Assisi celebration. He underlined the fundamental unity of the human race, in its origin and its destiny, and the role of the Church as an effective sign of this unity. He brought out forcibly the significance of interreligious dialogue, while at the same time reaffirming the Church's duty to announce Jesus Christ to the world(3).

### **6. *The encouragement of John Paul II***

The following year, in his address to the members of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Pope John Paul II declared: "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... There can be no question of choosing one and ignoring or rejecting the other."(4) The lead given by the Pope encourages us to give further attention to the present theme.

### **7. *Further stimuli to tackle the issue***

This document is addressed to all Catholics, particularly to all who have a leadership role in the community or are engaged in formation work. It is offered as well for the consideration of Christians belonging to other Churches or Ecclesial Communities who themselves have been reflecting on the questions it raises(5). It is hoped that it will receive attention also from the followers of other religious traditions.

Before proceeding it will be useful to clarify the terms being used in this document.

### **8. *Evangelization***

*Evangelizing mission*, or more simply *evangelization*, refers to the mission of the Church in its totality. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* the term evangelization is taken in different ways. It means "to bring the Good News into all areas of humanity, and through its impact, to transform that humanity from within, making it new" (EN 18). Thus, through evangelization

the Church "seeks to convert solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, their ways of life, and the actual milieu in which they live" (EN 18). The Church accomplishes her evangelizing mission through a variety of activities. Hence there is a broad concept of evangelization. Yet in the same document, evangelization is also taken more specifically to mean "the clear and unambiguous proclamation of the Lord Jesus" (EN 22). The Exhortation states that "this proclamation - *kerygma*, preaching or catechesis - occupies such an important place in evangelization that it has often become synonymous with it; and yet it is only one aspect of evangelization" (EN 22). In this document the term *evangelizing mission* is used for evangelization in its broad sense, while the more specific understanding is expressed by the term *proclamation*.

## **9. Dialogue**

*Dialogue* can be understood in different ways. Firstly, at the purely human level, it means reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion. Secondly, dialogue can be taken as an attitude of respect and friendship, which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the Church. This can appropriately be called "the spirit of dialogue". Thirdly, in the context of religious plurality, dialogue means "all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment"(6), in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions. It is in this third sense that the present document uses the term dialogue for one of the integral elements of the Church's evangelizing mission.

## **10. Proclamation**

*Proclamation* is the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church. This proclamation can be solemn and public, as for instance on the day of Pentecost (cf. Ac 2:5-41), or a simple private conversation (cf. Ac 8:30-38). It leads naturally to catechesis which aims at deepening this faith. Proclamation is the foundation, centre, and summit of evangelization (cf. EN 27).

## **11. Conversion**

Included in the idea of *conversion*, there is always a general movement towards God, "the humble and penitent return of the heart to God in the desire to submit one's life more generously to him"(7). More specifically, conversion may refer to a change of religious adherence, and particularly to embracing the Christian faith. When the term conversion is used in this document, the context will show which sense is intended.

## **12. Religions and religious traditions**

The terms *religions* or *religious traditions* are used here in a generic and analogical sense. They cover those religions which, with Christianity, are wont to refer back to the faith of Abraham(8), as well as the religious traditions of Asia, Africa and elsewhere.

## **13. New religious movements**

Interreligious dialogue ought to extend to all religions and their followers. This document, however, will not treat of dialogue with the followers of "New Religious Movements" due to the diversity of situations which these movements present and the need for discernment on the human and religious values which each contains(9).

---

# **1. INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

## **1. A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS**

### **14. Positive evaluation of religious traditions**

A just appraisal of other religious traditions normally presupposes close contact with them. This implies, besides theoretical knowledge, practical experience of interreligious dialogue with the followers of these traditions. Nevertheless, it is also true that a correct theological evaluation of these traditions, at least in general terms, is a necessary presupposition for interreligious dialogue. These traditions are to be approached with great sensitivity, on account of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them. They command our respect because over the centuries they have borne witness to the efforts to find answers "to those profound mysteries of the human condition" (NA 1) and have given expression to the religious experience and they continue to do so today.

## **15. Orientations of Vatican II**

The Second Vatican Council has given the lead for such a positive assessment. The exact meaning of what the Council affirms needs to be carefully and accurately ascertained. The Council reaffirms the traditional doctrine according to which salvation in Jesus Christ is, in a mysterious way, a reality open to all persons of good will. A clear enunciation of this basic conviction in Vatican II is found in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. The Council teaches that Christ, the New Adam, through the mystery of his incarnation, death and resurrection, is at work in each human person to bring about interior renewal.

"This hold true not for Christians only but also for all persons of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal mystery" (GS 22).

## **16. The effects of divine Grace**

The Council proceeds further. Making its own the vision and the terminology of some early Church Fathers, *Nostra Aetate* speaks of the presence in these traditions of "a ray of that Truth which enlightens all" (NA 2). *Ad Gentes* recognizes the presence of "seeds of the word", and points to "the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations" (AG 11). Again, *Lumen Gentium* refers to the good which is "found sown" not only "in minds and hearts", but also "in the rites and customs of peoples" (LG 17).

## **17. The action of the Holy Spirit**

These few references suffice to show that the Council has openly acknowledged the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions, but also in the religious traditions to which they belong. It attributed these values to the active presence of God through his Word, pointing also to the universal action of the Spirit: "Without doubt," *Ad Gentes* affirms, "the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified" (No. 4). From this it can be seen that these elements, as a preparation for the Gospel (cf. LG 16), have played and do still play a providential role in the divine economy of salvation. This recognition impels the Church to enter into "dialogue and collaboration" (NA 2; cf. GS 92-93): "Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral good found among non-Christians, as well as their social and cultural values" (NA 2).

## **18. The role of the Church's activity**

The Council is not unaware of the necessity of the missionary activity of the Church in order to perfect in Christ these elements found in other religions. The Council states very clearly: "Whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations, as a sort of secret presence of God, this activity frees from all taint of evil and restores to Christ its Maker, who overthrows the devil's domain and wards off the manifold malice of vice. And so, whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples, is not lost. More than that, it is healed, ennobled, and perfected for the glory of God, the same of the demon, and the bliss of men" (AG 9).

### **19. The history of God's salvific action**

The Old Testament testifies that from the beginning of creation God made a Covenant with all peoples (*Gn* 1:11). This shows that there is but one history of salvation for the whole of humankind. The Covenant with Noah, the man who "walked with God" (*Gn* 6:9), is symbolic of the divine intervention in the history of the nations. Non-Israelite figures of the Old Testament are seen in the New Testament as belonging to this history of salvation. Abel, Enoch and Noah are proposed as models of faith (cf. *Heb* 11:4-7). It is this history of salvation which sees its final fulfillment in Jesus Christ in whom is established the new and definitive Covenant for all peoples.

### **20. Beyond the confines of the Chosen People**

The religious consciousness of Israel is characterized by a deep awareness of its unique status as God's Chosen People. This election, accompanied by a process of formation and continuous exhortations to preserve the purity of monotheism, constitutes a mission. The prophets continually insist on loyalty and fidelity to the One True God and speak about the promised Messiah. And yet these prophets, particularly at the time of the Exile, bring a universal perspective, for God's salvation is understood to extend beyond and through Israel to the nations. Thus Isaiah foretells that in the final days the nations will stream to the house of the Lord, and they will say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths" (*Is* 52:10). In the Wisdom literature also, which bears witness to cultural exchanges between Israel and its neighbours, the action of God in the whole universe is clearly affirmed. It goes beyond the boundaries of the Chosen People to touch both the history of nations and the lives of individuals.

### **21. The universal mission of Jesus**

Turning to the New Testament, we see that Jesus professes to have come to gather the lost sheep of Israel (cf. *Mt* 15:24) and forbids his disciples for the moment to turn to the Gentiles (cf. *Mt* 10:5). He nevertheless displays an open attitude towards men and women who do not belong to the chosen people of Israel. He enters into dialogue with them and recognizes the good that is in them. He marvels at the centurion's readiness to believe, saying that he has found no such faith in Israel (cf. *Mt* 8:5-13). He performs miracles of healing for "foreigners" (cf. *Mk* 7:24-30; *Mt* 15:21-28), and these miracles are signs of the coming of the Kingdom. He converses with the Samaritan woman and speaks to her of a time when worship will not be restricted to any one particular place, but when true worshippers will "worship the Father in spirit and truth" (*Jn* 4:23). Jesus is thus opening up a new horizon, beyond the purely local, to a universality which is both Christological and Pneumatological in character. For the new sanctuary is now the body of the Lord Jesus (cf. *Jn* 2:21) whom the Father has raised up in the power of the Spirit.

## **22. The announcement of the Kingdom of God**

Jesus' message, then, proved by the witness of his life, is that in his own person the Kingdom of God is breaking through to the world. At the beginning of his public ministry, in Galilee of the nations, he can say: "The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand." He also indicates the conditions for entry into this Kingdom: "Repent and believe the Good News" (*Mk* 1:15). This message is not confined only to those who belong to the specially chosen people. Jesus in fact explicitly announces the entry of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God (cf. *Mt* 8:10-11; *Mt* 11:20-24; *Mt* 25:31-32,34), a Kingdom which is to be understood as being at one and the same time historical and eschatological. It is both the Father's Kingdom, for the coming of which it is necessary to pray (cf. *Mt* 6:10), and Jesus' Kingdom, since Jesus openly declares himself to be king (cf. *Jn* 18:33-37). In fact in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, we have the fullness of revelation and salvation and the fulfillment of the desires of the nations.

## **23. The calling of all peoples**

References in the New Testament to the religious life of the Gentiles and to their religious traditions may appear to be contrasting, but can be seen as complementary. There is, on the one hand, the negative verdict of the Letter to the Romans against those who have failed to recognize God in his creation and have fallen into idolatry and depravity (cf. *Rm* 1:18-32). On the other hand, the Acts testify to Paul's positive and open attitude towards the Gentiles, both in his discourse to the Lycaonians (cf. *Ac* 14:8-18) and in his Areopagus

speech at Athens, in which he praised their religious spirit and announced to them the one whom unknowingly they revered as the "unknown God" (cf. *Ac* 17:22-34). Nor must it be forgotten that the Wisdom tradition is applied in the New Testament to Jesus Christ as the Wisdom of God, the Word of God that enlightens every man (cf. *Jn* 1:9) and who in his Incarnation pitches his tent among us (cf. *Jn* 1:14).

#### **24. *The Fathers of the first centuries***

The post-Biblical tradition also contains contrasting data. Negative judgements on the religious world of their time can easily be gleaned from the writings of the Fathers. Yet the early tradition shows a remarkable openness. A number of Church Fathers take up the sapiential tradition reflected in the New Testament. In particular, writers of the second century and the first part of the third century such as Justin, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, either explicitly or in an equivalent way, speak about the "seeds" sown by the Word of God in the nations(10). Thus it can be said that for them, prior to and outside the Christian dispensation, God has already, in an incomplete way, manifested himself. This manifestation of the *Logos* is an adumbration of the full revelation in Jesus Christ to which it points.

#### **25. *The theology of history***

In fact, these early Fathers offer what may be called a theology of history. History becomes salvation history, inasmuch as through it God progressively manifests himself and communicates with humankind. This process of divine manifestation and communication reaches its climax in the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. For this reason, Irenaeus distinguishes four "covenants" given by God to the human race: in Adam, in Noah, in Moses, and in Jesus Christ(11). The same patristic current, whose importance is not to be underestimated, may be said to culminate in Augustine who in his later works stressed the universal presence and influence of the mystery of Christ even before the Incarnation. In fulfillment of his plan of salvation, God, in his Son, has reached out to the whole of humankind. Thus, in a certain sense, Christianity already exists "at the beginning of the human race"(12).

#### **26. *The contribution of the Magisterium***

It was to this early Christian vision of history that the Second Vatican Council made reference. After the Council, the Church's Magisterium, especially that of Pope John Paul II, has proceeded further in the same direction. First the Pope gives explicit recognition to the operative presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the members of other religious traditions, as when in *Redemptor Hominis* he speaks of their "firm belief" as being "an effect of the Spirit of

truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body" (No. 6). In *Dominum et Vivificantem*, he takes a further step, affirming the universal action of the Holy Spirit in the world before the Christian dispensation, to which it was ordained, and referring to the universal action of the same Spirit today, even outside the visible body of the Church (cf. No. 53).

### ***27. John Paul II and the approach to other religious traditions***

In his address to the Roman Curia after the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, Pope John Paul II stressed once more the universal presence of the Holy Spirit, stating that "every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person," Christian or otherwise. But again, in the same discourse, the Pope, going beyond an individual perspective, articulated the main elements which together can be seen as constituting the theological basis for a positive approach to other religious traditions and the practice of interreligious dialogue.

### ***28. The mystery of the unity of all mankind***

First comes the fact that the whole of humankind forms one family, due to the common origin of all men and women, created by God in his own image. Correspondingly, all are called to a common destiny, the fullness of life in God. Moreover, there is but one plan of salvation for humankind, with its centre in Jesus Christ, who in his incarnation "has united himself in a certain manner to every person" (RH 13; cf. GS 22.2). Finally, there needs to be mentioned the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the religious life of the members of the other religious traditions. From all this the Pope concludes to a "mystery of unity" which was manifested clearly at Assisi, "in spite of the differences between religious professions."(13)

### ***29. The unity of salvation***

From this mystery of unity it follows that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit. Christians know this through their faith, while others remain unaware that Jesus Christ is the source of their salvation. The mystery of salvation reaches out to them, in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their saviour (cf. AG 3,9,11).

### ***30. The need for discernment***

The fruits of the Spirit of God in the personal life of individuals, whether Christian or otherwise, are easily discernible (cf. *Ga* 5:22-23). To identify in other religious traditions elements of grace capable of sustaining the positive response of their members to God's invitation is much more difficult. It requires a discernment for which criteria have to be established. Sincere individuals marked by the Spirit of God have certainly put their imprint on the elaboration and the development of their respective religious traditions. It does not follow, however, that everything in them is good.

### ***31. Values and contradictions***

To say that the other religious traditions include elements of grace does not imply that everything in them is the result of grace. For sin has been at work in the world, and so religious traditions, notwithstanding their positive values, reflect the limitations of the human spirit, sometimes inclined to choose evil. An open and positive approach to other religious traditions cannot overlook the contradictions which may exist between them and Christian revelation. It must, where necessary, recognize that there is incompatibility between some fundamental elements of the Christian religion and some aspects of such traditions.

### ***32. Dialogue and purification***

This means that, while entering with an open mind into dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions, Christians may have also to challenge them in a peaceful spirit with regard to the content of their belief. But Christians too must allow themselves to be questioned. Notwithstanding the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, the way Christians sometimes understand their religion and practise it may be in need of purification.

## **2. THE PLACE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE EVANGELIZING MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

### ***33. The Church, universal sacrament of salvation***

The Church has been willed by God and instituted by Christ to be, in the fullness of time, the sign and instrument of the divine plan of salvation (cf. LG 1), the centre of which is the mystery of Christ. She is the "universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48), and is "necessary for salvation" (LG 14). The Lord Jesus himself inaugurated her mission "by preaching the good news, that is, the coming of God's Kingdom" (LG 5).

### ***34. Seed and beginning of the Kingdom***

The relationship between the Church and the Kingdom is mysterious and complex. As Vatican II teaches, "principally the Kingdom is revealed in the person of Christ himself." Yet the Church, which has received from the Lord Jesus the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom "is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that Kingdom." At the same time the Church "slowly grows to maturity (and) longs for the completed Kingdom" (LG 5). Thus "the Kingdom is inseparable from the Church, because both are inseparable from the person and work of Jesus himself... It is therefore not possible to separate the Church from the Kingdom as if the first belonged exclusively to the imperfect realm of history, while the second would be the perfect eschatological fulfillment of the divine plan of salvation"(14).

### **35. Religious traditions and the Church**

To the Church, as the sacrament in which the Kingdom of God is present "in mystery", are related or oriented (*ordinantur*) (cf. LG 16) the members of other religious traditions who, inasmuch as they respond to God's calling as perceived by their conscience, are saved in Jesus Christ and thus already share in some way in the reality which is signified by the Kingdom. The Church's mission is to foster "the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ" (Rv 11:15), at whose service she is placed. Part of her role consists in recognizing that the inchoate reality of this Kingdom can be found also beyond the confines of the Church, for example in the hearts of the followers of other religious traditions, insofar as they live evangelical values and are open to the action of the Spirit. It must be remembered nevertheless that this is indeed an inchoate reality, which needs to find completion through being related to the Kingdom of Christ already present in the Church yet realized fully only in the world to come.

### **36. The pilgrim Church**

The Church on earth is always on pilgrimage. Although she is holy by divine institution her members are not perfect; they bear the mark of their human limitations. Consequently, her transparency as sacrament of salvation is blurred. This is the reason why the church herself, "insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth," and not only her members, is constantly in need of renewal and reform (cf. UR 6).

### **37. Towards the fullness of divine truth**

With regard to divine Revelation the Council taught that "the most intimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of revelation" (DV 2). Faithful to the command received from Christ himself, the

apostles handed on this Revelation. Yet "the Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on" (DV 8). This happens through study and spiritual experience. It also comes about through the teaching of the bishops who have received a sure charism of truth. Thus the Church "is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her" (DV 8). This in no way contradicts the Church's divine institution nor the fullness of God's Revelation in Jesus Christ which has been entrusted to her.

### **38. Dialogue of salvation**

Against this background it becomes easier to see why and in what sense interreligious dialogue is an integral element of the Church's evangelizing mission. The foundation of the Church's commitment to dialogue is not merely anthropological but primarily theological. God, in an age-long dialogue, has offered and continues to offer salvation to humankind. In faithfulness to the divine initiative, the Church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all men and women.

### **39. Methods of presence, respect and love towards all**

Pope Paul VI taught this clearly in his first Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*. Pope John Paul II too has stressed the Church's call to interreligious dialogue and assigned to it the same foundation. Addressing the 1984 Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the Pope declared: "(Interreligious) dialogue is fundamental to the Church, which is called to collaborate in God's plan with her methods of presence, respect and love towards all persons." He went on to call attention to a passage from *Ad Gentes*: "closely united to men in their life and work, Christ's disciples hope to render to others true witness of Christ and to work for this salvation, even where they are not able to proclaim Christ fully" (AG 12). He prefaced this by saying: "dialogue finds its place within the Church's salvific mission; for this reason it is a dialogue of salvation"(15).

### **40. Collaborate with the Holy Spirit**

In this dialogue of salvation, Christians and others are called to collaborate with the Spirit of the Risen Lord who is universally present and active. Interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations.

It reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness to one's beliefs and a common exploration of one's

respective religious convictions. In dialogue, Christians and others are invited to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God's personal call and gracious self-gift, as our faith tells us, always passes through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the work of his Spirit.

#### **41. Conversion to God**

Given this aim, a deeper conversion of all towards God, interreligious dialogue possesses its own validity. In this process of conversion "the decision may be made to leave one's previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself towards another"(16). Sincere dialogue implies, on the one hand, mutual acceptance of differences, or even of contradictions, and on the other, respect for the free decision of persons taken according to the dictates of their conscience (cf. DH 2). The teaching of the Council must nevertheless be borne in mind: "All men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his Church, and to embrace it and to hold on to it as they come to know it" (DH 1).

### **3. FORMS OF DIALOGUE**

#### **42. The forms of dialogue**

There exist different forms of interreligious dialogue. It may be useful to recall those mentioned by the 1984 document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue(17). It spoke of four forms, without claiming to establish among them any order of priority:

a) The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.

b) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.

c) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.

d) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

#### **43. The interdependence of the various forms of dialogue**

One should not lose sight of this variety of forms of dialogue. Were it to be reduced to theological exchange, dialogue might easily be taken as a sort of luxury item in the Church's mission, a domain reserved for specialists. On the contrary, guided by the Pope and their bishops, all local Churches, and all the members of these Churches, are called to dialogue, though not all in the same way. It can be seen, moreover, that the different forms are interconnected. Contacts in daily life and common commitment to action will normally open the door for cooperation in promoting human and spiritual values; they may also eventually lead to the dialogue of religious experience in response to the great questions which the circumstances of life do not fail to arouse in the minds of people (cf. NA 2). Exchanges at the level of religious experience can give more life to theological discussions. These in turn can enlighten experience and encourage closer contacts.

#### ***44. Dialogue and human liberation***

The importance of dialogue for integral development, social justice and human liberation needs to be stressed. Local Churches are called upon, as witnesses to Christ, to commit themselves in this respect in an unselfish and impartial manner. There is need to stand up for human rights, proclaim the demands of justice, and denounce injustice not only when their own members are victimized, but independently of the religious allegiance of the victims. There is need also to join together in trying to solve the great problems facing society and the world, as well as in education for justice and peace.

#### ***45. Dialogue and culture***

Another context in which interreligious dialogue seems urgent today is that of culture. Culture is broader than religion. According to one concept religion can be said to represent the transcendent dimension of culture and in a certain way its soul. Religions have certainly contributed to the progress of culture and the construction of a more humane society. Yet religious practices have sometimes had an alienating influence upon cultures. Today, an autonomous secular culture can play a critical role with regard to negative elements in particular religions. The question is complex, for several religious traditions may coexist within one and the same cultural framework while, conversely, the same religion may find expression in different cultural contexts. Again, religious differences may lead to distinct cultures in the same region.

#### ***46. Tensions and conflicts***

The Christian message supports many values found and lived in the wisdom and the rich heritage of cultures, but it may also put in question culturally accepted values. Attentive dialogue implies recognizing and accepting

cultural values which respect the human person's dignity and transcendent destiny. It may happen, nevertheless, that some aspects of traditional Christian cultures are challenged by the local cultures of other religious traditions (cf. EN 20). In these complex relationships between culture and religion, interreligious dialogue at the level of culture takes on considerable importance. Its aim is to eliminate tensions and conflicts, and potential confrontations by a better understanding among the various religious cultures of any given region. It may contribute to purifying cultures from any dehumanizing elements, and thus be an agent of transformation. It can also help to uphold certain traditional cultural values which are under threat from modernity and the levelling down which indiscriminate internationalization may bring with it.

#### **4. DISPOSITIONS FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND ITS FRUITS**

##### ***47. A balanced attitude***

Dialogue requires, on the part of Christians as well as of the followers of other traditions, a balanced attitude. They should be neither ingenuous nor overly critical, but open and receptive. Unselfishness and impartiality, acceptance of differences and of possible contradictions, have already been mentioned. The will to engage together in commitment to the truth and the readiness to allow oneself to be transformed by the encounter are other dispositions required.

##### ***48. Religious conviction***

This does not mean that in entering into dialogue the partners should lay aside their respective religious convictions. The opposite is true: the sincerity of interreligious dialogue requires that each enters into it with the integrity of his or her own faith. At the same time, while remaining firm in their belief that in Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man (cf. *1 Tm 2:4-6*), the fullness of revelation has been given to them, Christians must remember that God has also manifested himself in some way to the followers of other religious traditions. Consequently, it is with receptive minds that they approach the convictions and values of others.

##### ***49. Openness to truth***

Moreover, the fullness of truth received in Jesus Christ does not give individual Christians the guarantee that they have grasped that truth fully. In the last analysis truth is not a thing we possess, but a person by whom we must allow ourselves to be possessed. This is an unending process. While keeping their identity intact, Christians must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions.

Through dialogue they may be moved to give up ingrained prejudices, to revise preconceived ideas, and even sometimes to allow the understanding of their faith to be purified.

### ***50. New dimensions of faith***

If Christians cultivate such openness and allow themselves to be tested, they will be able to gather the fruits of dialogue. They will discover with admiration all that God's action through Jesus Christ in his Spirit has accomplished and continues to accomplish in the world and in the whole of humankind. Far from weakening their own faith, true dialogue will deepen it. They will become increasingly aware of their Christian identity and perceive more clearly the distinctive elements of the Christian message. Their faith will gain new dimensions as they discover the active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ beyond the visible boundaries of the Church and of the Christian fold.

## **5. OBSTACLES TO DIALOGUE**

### ***51. Obstacles to dialogue***

Already on a purely human level, it is not easy to practise dialogue. Interreligious dialogue is even more difficult. It is important to be aware of the obstacles which may arise. Some would apply equally to the members of all religious traditions and impede the success of dialogue. Others may affect some religious traditions more specifically and make it difficult for a process of dialogue to be initiated. Some of the more important obstacles will be mentioned here.

### ***52. Human factors***

a) Insufficient grounding in one's own faith.

b) Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the belief and practices of other religions, leading to a lack of appreciation for their significance and even at times to misrepresentation.

d) Socio-political factors or some burdens of the past.

e) Wrong understanding of the meaning of terms such as conversion, baptism, dialogue, etc.

f) Self-sufficiency, lack of openness leading to defensive or aggressive attitudes.

g) A lack of conviction with regard to the value of interreligious dialogue, which some may see as a task reserved to specialists, and others as a sign of weakness or even a betrayal of the faith.

h) Suspicion about the other's motives in dialogue.

i) A polemical spirit when expressing religious convictions.

j) Intolerance, which is often aggravated by association with political, economic, racial and ethnic factors, a lack, of reciprocity in dialogue which can lead to frustration.

k) Certain features of the present religious climate, e.g., growing materialism, religious indifference, and the multiplication of religious sects which creates confusion and raises new problems.

### ***53. The initiative of God***

Many of these obstacles arise from a lack of understanding of the true nature and goal of interreligious dialogue. These need therefore to be constantly explained. Much patience is required. It must be remembered that the Church's commitment to dialogue is not dependent on success in achieving mutual understanding and enrichment; rather it flows from God's initiative in entering into a dialogue with humankind and from the example of Jesus Christ whose life, death and resurrection gave to that dialogue its ultimate expression.

### ***54. The sharing of evangelical values***

Moreover the obstacles, though real, should not lead us to underestimate the possibilities of dialogue or to overlook the results already achieved. There has been a growth in mutual understanding, and in active cooperation. Dialogue has had a positive impact on the Church herself. Other religions have also been led through dialogue to renewal and greater openness. Interreligious dialogue has made it possible for the Church to share Gospel values with others. So despite the difficulties, the Church's commitment to dialogue remains firm and irreversible.

---

## **2. PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST**

## **1. THE MANDATE FROM THE RISEN LORD**

### ***55. Messengers of the Gospel***

The Lord Jesus gave to his disciples a mandate to proclaim the Gospel. This fact is reported by all four Gospels and by the Acts of the Apostles. There are however certain nuances in the different versions. In Matthew, Jesus says to his disciples: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and so, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt 28:128-20*).

In Mark, the command is given more succinctly: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. he who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (*Mk 16:15-16*).

In Luke, the expression is less direct: "Thus, it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the death, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (*Lk 24:46-48*).

In Acts, the extent of this witness is emphasized: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (*Ac 1:8*).

In John again, the mission is expressed differently: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (*Jn 17:18*); "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you" (*Jn 20:21*).

Announcing the Good News to all, witnessing, making disciples, baptizing, teaching, all these aspects enter into the Church's evangelizing mission, yet they need to be seen in the light of the mission accomplished by Jesus himself, the mission he received from the Father.

### ***56. The presence of the Kingdom***

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel from God saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" (*Mk 1:14-15*). This passage sums up the ministry of Jesus. Jesus does not proclaim this Good News of the Kingdom by word alone, but also by his actions, attitudes and options, indeed by means of his whole life and finally through his death and resurrection. His parables, his miracles, the exorcisms he works, all are related to the Kingdom of God which he announces. This Kingdom moreover

is not just something to be preached, quite unrelated to his own person. Jesus makes it clear that it is through him and in him that the Reign of God is breaking through into the world (cf. *Lk* 17:20-22), that in him the Kingdom has already come upon us, even though it still needs to grow to its fullness(18).

### ***57. Witness through life***

His teaching is confirmed by his life. "Even if you refuse to believe in me, at least believe in the work I do" (*Jn* 10:38). Similarly, his deeds are explained by his words which spring from his awareness of being one with the Father. "I tell you most solemnly, the Son can do nothing by himself, he can only do what he sees the Father doing" (*Jn* 5:19). In the trial before Pilate, Jesus says that he has come into the world "to bear witness to the truth" (*Jn* 18:37). The Father also bears witness to him, both in words spoken from heaven and in the mighty works, the signs, which Jesus is enabled to perform. It is the Spirit who "seals" Jesus' witness, authenticating it as true (cf. *Jn* 3:32-35).

## **2. THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH**

### ***58. The activity of the Church for the proclamation***

It is against this background that the mandate given by the Risen Lord to the Apostolic Church needs to be understood. The Church's mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God established on earth in Jesus Christ, through his life, death and resurrection, as God's decisive and universal offer of salvation to the world. For this reason "there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed" (EN 22). There is continuity between the Kingdom preached by Jesus and the mystery of Christ announced by the Church.

### ***59. At the service of the Kingdom***

Continuing the mission of Jesus, the Church is "the seed and beginning" of the Kingdom (cf. LG 5). She is at the service of this Kingdom and "witnesses" to it. This includes witness to faith in Christ, the Saviour, since this is the very heart of the Church's own faith and life. In the history of the Church, all the Apostles were "witnesses" to the life, death and resurrection of Christ (cf. *Ac* 2:32; 3:15; 10:39; 13:31; 23:11). Witness is given by words and deeds which are not to be set one against the other. The deed validates the word, but without the word the deed may be misinterpreted. The witness of the Apostles, both in words and signs, is subordinate to the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father to fulfill this task of witness (cf. *Jn* 15:26 ff; *1Jn* 5:7-10; *Ac* 5:32).

### **3. THE CONTENT OF PROCLAMATION**

#### ***60. Peter announces the Risen Christ***

On the Day of Pentecost, in fulfillment of Christ's promise, the Holy Spirit came down on the Apostles. At that time "there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven" (Ac 2:5) - the list of people present, given in the book of Acts, serves to underline the universal import of this first ecclesial event. In the name of the Eleven, Peter addressed those assembled, announcing Jesus, commended by God with miracles and portents, crucified by men but raised to life again by God. He concluded: "For this reason the whole house of Israel can be certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Ac 2:36). This was followed by the invitation to his hearers to repent, to become disciples of Jesus by being baptized in his name for the forgiveness of sins, and thus to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. A little later, before the Sanhedrin, Peter bore witness to his faith in the risen Christ, stating clearly: "Only in him is there salvation, for of all names in the world given to men this is the only one by which we can be saved" (Ac 4:11-12). The universal nature of the Christian message of salvation is brought out again in the account of the conversion of Cornelius. When Peter witnessed to the life and work of Jesus, from the beginning of his ministry in Galilee right up to his Resurrection, "the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners" so that those who had accompanied Peter were astonished "that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be poured out on gentiles too" (Ac 10:44-45).

#### ***61. Paul announces the mystery kept hidden for centuries***

The Apostles therefore, following the Pentecost event, present themselves as witnesses to Christ's resurrection (cf. Ac 1:22; 4:33; 5:32-33), or, in a more concise formula, simply as witnesses to Christ (cf. Ac 3:15; 13:31). Nowhere is this clearer than in Paul, "called to be an apostle, set apart for the service of the Gospel" (Rm 1:1), who received from Jesus Christ the "apostolic mission of winning the obedience of faith among all the nations for the honour of his name" (Rm 1:5). Paul preaches "the Gospel that God promised long ago through his prophets in the holy scriptures" (Rm 1:2), the "Gospel of his Son" (Rm 1:9). He preaches a crucified Christ: "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Co 1:23; cf. 2:2), "for no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid" (1 Co 3:11). The whole message of Paul is, as it were, summed up in his solemn declaration to the Ephesians: "I, who am less than the least of all God's holy people, have been entrusted with this special grace, of proclaiming to the gentiles this unfathomable treasure of Christ and of throwing light on the inner workings of the mystery kept hidden through all

the ages in God, the Creator of everything" this many-sided wisdom of God which he has now revealed through the Church, "according to the plan which he had formed from all eternity in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Ep* 3:8-11). The same message is found in the Pastoral Letters. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (*1 Tm* 2:4-6). This "mystery of our religion" which is "very deep" finds expression in a liturgical fragment: "He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (*1 Tm* 3:16).

### **62. John gave witness to the Word of Life**

Turning to the apostle John, we find that he presents himself above all as a witness, one who has seen Jesus and discovered his mystery (cf. *Jn* 13:23-25; 21:24). "We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard" - of the Word of life - "so that you too many share our life" (*1 Jn* 4:14). Central to the message of John is the Incarnation: "The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth" (*Jn* 1:14). Through Jesus, therefore, the Father can be seen (cf. *Jn* 14:9) he is the way to the Father (cf. *Jn* 14:6). Lifted up on the cross he draws all people to himself (cf. *Jn* 12:32). He is truly "the Saviour of the World" (*Jn* 4:42).

### **63. The power of the Word announced by the Church**

"Proclaim the word", Paul writes to Timothy (*2 Tm* 4:2). The content of this word is expressed in different ways: it is the Kingdom (cf. *Ac* 20:25), the Gospel of the Kingdom (cf. *Mt* 24:14), the Gospel of God (cf. *Mk* 1:14; *1 Tm* 2:9). But these different formulations really mean the same thing: to preach Jesus (cf. *Ac* 9:20; 19:13), to preach Christ (cf. *Ac* 8:5). Just as Jesus spoke God's own words (cf. *Jn* 3:34), so the apostles preach the word of God, for Jesus whom they preach is the Word.

The Christian message therefore is a powerful one, to be welcomed for what it really is, "not the word of any human being, but God's word" (*1 Th* 2:13). Accepted in faith the word will be "alive and active", cutting "more incisively than any two-edged sword" (*Heb* 4:12). It will be a word which purifies (cf. *Jn* 15:3), it will be the source of the truth which brings freedom (cf. *Jn* 8:31-32). The word will become an interior presence: "anyone who loves me will keep

my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make a home in him" (*Jn 14:23*). This is the word of God which is to be proclaimed by Christians.

#### **4. THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

##### ***64. The presence of the Holy Spirit***

In proclaiming this word, the Church knows that she can rely on the Holy Spirit, who both prompts her proclamation and leads the hearers to obedience of faith. "It is the Holy Spirit who today, just as at the beginning of the Church, acts in every evangelizer who allows himself to be possessed and led by him. The Holy Spirit places on his lips the words which he could not find by himself, and at the same time the Holy Spirit predisposes the soul of the hearer to be open and receptive to the Good News and to the Kingdom being proclaimed" (EN 75).

##### ***65. The power of the Holy Spirit***

The force of the Spirit is attested by the fact that the most powerful witness is often given precisely at that point where the disciple is most helpless, incapable of word or deed, and yet remains faithful. As Paul says: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 *Co 12:9-10*). The witness by which the Spirit brings men and women to know Jesus as Lord is no human achievement but God's own work.

#### **5. THE URGENCY OF PROCLAMATION**

##### ***66. The duty to announce***

Pope Paul VI said in his Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "The presentation of the Gospel message is not optional for the Church. It is her duty, by command of the Lord Jesus, so that men may believe and be saved. This message is indeed a necessary one. It is unique and irreplaceable. It allows of neither indifference, syncretism, nor compromise, for it concerns the salvation of mankind" (EN 5). The urgency had been indicated by Paul: "How then are they to call upon him if they have not come to believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard of him? And how will they hear of him unless there is a preacher for them?... But it is in that way that faith comes, from hearing, and that means hearing the word of Christ" (*Rm 10:4 ff*).

"This law, set down one day by the Apostle Paul, maintains its full force today... it is through listening to the Word that one is led to believe" (EN 42). It is fitting to remember also that other word of Paul: "For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Co 9:16).

### **67. Announce salvation in Jesus Christ**

Proclamation is a response to the human aspiration for salvation. "Wherever God opens a door for the word in order to declare the mystery of Christ, then the living God and he whom he has sent for the salvation of all, Jesus Christ, are confidently and perseveringly proclaimed to all men. And this is in order that non-Christians, whose hearts are being opened by the Holy Spirit, might, while believing, freely turn to the Lord who, since he is «the Way, the Truth, and the Life» (Jn 14,6), will satisfy all their inner hopes, or rather infinitely surpass them" (AG 13).

## **6. THE MANNER OF PROCLAMATION**

### **68. The guidance of the Holy Spirit**

While proclaiming the message of God in Jesus Christ, the evangelizing Church must always remember that her task is not exercised in a complete void. For the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is present and active among the hearers of the Good News even before the Church's missionary action comes into operation (cf. RH 12; DV 53). They may in many cases have already responded implicitly to God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, a sign of this being the sincere practice of their own religious traditions, insofar as these contain authentic religious values. They may have already been touched by the Spirit and in some way associated unknowingly to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ (cf. GS 22).

### **69. Learn to announce**

Mindful of what God has already accomplished in those addressed, the Church seeks to discover the right way to announce the Good News. She takes her lead from divine pedagogy. This means learning from Jesus himself, and observing the times and seasons as prompted by the Spirit. Jesus only progressively revealed to his hearers the meaning of the Kingdom, God's plan of salvation realized in his own mystery. Only gradually, and with infinite care, did he unveil for them the implications of his message, his identity as the Son of God, the scandal of the Cross. Even his closest disciples, as the Gospels testify, reached full faith in their Master only through their Easter experience and the gift of the Spirit. Those who wish to become disciples of Jesus today

will pass through the same process of discovery and commitment. Accordingly the Church's proclamation must be both progressive and patient, keeping pace with those who bear the message, respecting their freedom and even their "slowness to believe" (EN 79).

### **70. The qualities specific to the Gospel**

Other qualities must also characterize the Church's proclamation. It should be:

a) Confident, in the power of the Spirit, and in obedience to the mandate received from the Lord (cf. *1 Tm* 2:2; *2 Co* 3:12; 7:4; *Ph* 1:20; *Ep* 3:12; 6:19-20; *Ac* 4:13,29,31; 9:27,28 etc.).

b) Faithful in the transmission of the teaching received from Christ and preserved in the Church, which is the depository of the Good News to be proclaimed (cf. EN 15). "Fidelity to the message whose servants we are... is a pivotal point of proclamation" (EN 4). "Evangelization is for no one an individual and isolated act; it is one that is deeply ecclesial" (EN 60).

c) Humble, in the awareness that the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ has been received as a free gift (*Ep* 3:2), and that the messengers of the Gospel do not always fully live up to its demands.

d) Respectful, of the presence and action of the Spirit of God in the hearts of those who listen to the message, in the recognition that the Spirit is the "principal agent of evangelization" (EN 75).

e) Dialogical, for in proclamation the hearer of the Word is not expected to be a passive receiver. There is progress from the "seeds of the Word" already present in the hearer to the full mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Church must recognize a process of purification and enlightenment in which the Spirit of God opens the mind and heart of the hearer to the obedience of faith.

f) Inculturated, incarnated in the culture and the spiritual tradition of those addressed, so that the message is not only intelligible to them, but is conceived as responding to their deepest aspirations, as truly the Good News they have been longing for (cf. En 20,62).

### **71. In close union with Christ**

To maintain these qualities the Church must not only bear in mind the circumstances of life and the religious experience of those addressed. She

must also live in constant dialogue with her Lord and Master through prayer and penance, meditation and liturgical life, and above all in the celebration of the Eucharist. Only then will both proclamation and celebration of the Gospel message become fully alive.

## **7. OBSTACLES TO PROCLAMATION**

### ***72. Difficulty of the proclamation***

The Church's proclamation of the Good News makes serious demands both on the evangelizing Church and her members engaged in evangelization, and on those called by God to the obedience of Christian faith. It is no easy task. Some of the principal obstacles she can meet with are mentioned here.

### ***73. Internal difficulties***

a) It can happen that Christian witness does not correspond to belief; there is a gap between word and deed, between the Christian message and the way Christians live it.

b) Christians may fail to proclaim the Gospel through negligence, human respect, or shame, which Saint Paul called "blushing for the Gospel", or because of false ideas about God's plan of salvation (cf. EN 80).

c) Christians who lack appreciation and respect for other believers and their religious traditions are ill-prepared to proclaim the Gospel to them.

d) In some Christians, an attitude of superiority, which can show itself at the cultural level, might give rise to the supposition that a particular culture is linked with the Christian message and is to be imposed on converts.

### ***74. External difficulties***

a) The weight of history makes proclamation more difficult, as certain methods of evangelization in the past have sometimes aroused fear and suspicion on the part of the followers of other religions.

b) The members of other religions may fear that the Church's evangelizing mission will result in the destruction of their religion and culture.

c) A different conception of human rights or a lack of respect for them in practice can result in a lack of religious freedom.

d) Persecution can render the Church's proclamation especially difficult or well-nigh impossible. It must be remembered, however, that the Cross is a source of life; "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians."

e) The identification of a particular religion with the national culture, or with a political system, creates a climate of intolerance.

f) In some places, conversion is forbidden by law or converts to Christianity meet with serious problems, such as ostracism by their religious community of origin, social milieu or cultural environment.

g) In pluralistic contexts, the danger of indifferentism, relativism, or of religious syncretism creates obstacles to the proclamation of the Gospel.

## **8. PROCLAMATION IN THE EVANGELIZING MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

### ***75. Proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God***

The Church's evangelizing mission has sometimes been understood as consisting simply in inviting people to become disciples of Jesus in the Church. Gradually, a broader understanding of evangelization has developed, in which proclamation of the mystery of Christ nevertheless remains central. The Second Vatican Council's decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, when dealing with missionary work, mentions solidarity with mankind, dialogue and collaboration, before speaking about witness and the preaching of the Gospel (cf. AG 11-13). The 1974 Synod of Bishops and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which followed it have both taken evangelization in a broad sense. In evangelization, the whole person of the evangelizer is involved, words, actions, witness of life (cf. EN 21-22). Likewise its aim extends to all that is human, as it seeks to transform human culture and cultures with the power of the Gospel (cf. EN 18-20). Yet Pope Paul VI made it quite clear that "evangelization will always entail as the simultaneous foundation, core and summit of its dynamism a clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all as a gift of God's kindness and mercy" (EN 27). It is in this sense that the 1984 document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue lists proclamation among the various elements which make up the Church's evangelizing mission(19).

### ***76. The sacred duty to announce***

Still it is useful to point out once again that to proclaim the name of Jesus and to invite people to become his disciples in the Church is a sacred and major duty which the Church cannot neglect. Evangelization would be incomplete

without it (EN 22), for without this central element the others, though in themselves genuine forms of the Church's mission, would lose their cohesion and vitality. It is clear therefore that in situations where, for political or other reasons, proclamation as such is practically impossible, the Church is already carrying out her evangelizing mission not only through presence and witness but also through such activities as work for integral human development and dialogue. On the other hand, in other situations where people are disposed to hear the message of the Gospel and have the possibility of responding to it, the Church is in duty bound to meet their expectations.

---

### **3. INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND PROCLAMATION**

#### **1. INTERRELATED YET NOT INTERCHANGEABLE**

##### ***77. The Church's mission***

Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: true interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel spirit of dialogue. The two activities remain distinct but, as experience shows, one and the same local Church, one and the same person, can be diversely engaged in both.

##### ***78. Awareness of the circumstances***

In actual fact the way of fulfilling the Church's mission depends upon the particular circumstances of each local Church, of each Christian. It always implies a certain sensitivity to the social, cultural, religious and political aspects of the situation, as also attentiveness to the "signs of the times" through which the spirit of God is speaking, teaching and guiding. Such sensitivity and attentiveness is developed through a spirituality of dialogue. This requires a prayerful discernment and theological reflection on the significance in God's plan of the different religious traditions and the experience of those who find in them their spiritual nourishment.

#### **2. THE CHURCH AND RELIGIONS**

##### ***79. The universality of the Church's mission***

In fulfilling her mission, the Church comes into contact with people of other religious traditions. Some become disciples of Jesus Christ in his Church, as a result of a profound conversion and through a free decision of their own. Others are attracted by the person of Jesus and his message, but for various reasons do not enter the fold. Yet others seem to have but little or no interest in Jesus. Whatever the case may be, the Church's mission extends to all. Also in relation to the religions to which they belong, the Church in dialogue can be seen to have a prophetic role. In bearing witness to Gospel values, she raises questions for these religions. Similarly, the Church, insofar as she bears the mark of human limitations, may find herself challenged. So in promoting these values, in a spirit of emulation and of respect for the mystery of God, the members of the Church and the followers of other religions find themselves to be companions on the common path with humanity is called to tread. At the end of the day of prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage for peace in Assisi, Pope John Paul II said: "Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendental goal which he sets for us"(20).

### ***80. The way of dialogue***

The Church encourages and fosters interreligious dialogue not only between herself and other religious traditions, but even among these religious traditions themselves. This is one way in which she fulfills her role as "sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among all people" (LG 1). She is invited by the spirit to encourage all religious institutions and movements to meet, to enter into collaboration, and to purify themselves in order to promote truth and live, holiness, justice, love and peace, dimensions of that Kingdom which, at the end of time, Christ will hand over to his Father (cf. *1 Co 15:24*). Thus, interreligious dialogue is truly part of the dialogue of salvation initiated by God(21).

## **3. PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST**

### ***81. Preach and confess***

Proclamation, on the other hand, aims at guiding people to explicit knowledge of what God has done for all men and women in Jesus Christ, and at inviting them to become disciples of Jesus through becoming members of the Church. When, in obedience to the command of the risen Lord and the Spirit's promptings, the Church fulfills this task of proclamation, this will often need to be done in a progressive manner. A discernment is to be made concerning how God is present in each one's personal history. The followers of other religions may discover, as may Christians also, that they already share many

values. This can lead to a challenge in the form of the witness of the Christian community or a personal profession of faith, in which the full identity of Jesus is humbly confessed. Then, when the time is right, Jesus' decisive question can be put: "Who do you say that I am?" The true answer to this question can come only through faith. The preaching and the confession, under the movement of grace, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God the Father, the Risen Lord and Saviour, constitutes the final stage of proclamation. One who freely professes this faith is invited to become a disciple of Jesus in his Church and to take a responsible part in her mission.

#### **4. COMMITMENT TO THE ONE MISSION**

##### ***82. Personal involvement***

All Christians are called to be personally involved in these two ways of carrying out the one mission of the Church, namely proclamation and dialogue. The manner in which they do this will depend on the circumstances and also on their degree of preparation. They must nevertheless always bear in mind that dialogue, as has already been said, does not constitute the whole mission of the Church, that it cannot simply replace proclamation, but remains oriented towards proclamation in so far as the dynamic process of the Church's evangelizing mission reaches in it its climax and its fullness. As they engage in interreligious dialogue they will discover the "seeds of the Word" sown in people's hearts and in the religious traditions to which they belong. In deepening their appreciation of the mystery of Christ they will be able to discern the positive values in the human search for the unknown or incompletely known God. Throughout the various stages of dialogue, the partners will feel a great need both to impart and to receive information, to give and to receive explanations, to ask questions of each other. Christians in dialogue have the duty of responding to their partners' expectations regarding the contents of the Christian faith, of bearing witness to this faith when this is called for, of giving an account of the hope that is within them (*1 P 3:15*). In order to be able to do this, Christians should deepen their faith, purify their attitudes, clarify their language and render their worship more and more authentic.

##### ***83. Love and sharing***

In this dialogical approach, how could they not hope and desire to share with others their joy in knowing and following Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour? We are here at the heart of the mystery of love. Insofar as the Church and Christians have a deep love for the Lord Jesus, the desire to share him with others is motivated not merely by obedience to the Lord's command, but by this love itself. It should not be surprising, but quite normal, that the followers

of other religions should also desire sincerely to share their faith. All dialogue implies reciprocity and aims at banishing fear and aggressiveness.

#### **84. *Indications of the Holy Spirit***

Christians must always be aware of the influence of the Holy Spirit and be prepared to follow wherever in God's providence and design the Spirit is leading them. It is the Spirit who is guiding the evangelizing mission of the Church. It belongs to the Spirit to inspire both the Church's proclamation and the obedience of faith. It is for us to be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit. Whether proclamation be possible or not, the Church pursues her mission in full respect for freedom, through interreligious dialogue, witnessing to and sharing Gospel values. In this way, the partners in dialogue proceed in response to the divine call of which they are conscious. All, both Christians and the followers of other religious traditions, are invited by God himself to enter into the mystery of his patience, as human beings seek his light and truth. Only God knows the times and stages of the fulfillment of this long human quest.

### **5. JESUS OUR MODEL**

#### **85. *The example of Jesus***

It is in this climate of expectation and listening that the Church and Christians pursue proclamation and interreligious dialogue with a true Gospel spirit. They are aware that "all things work together for the good of those who love God" (*Rm 8:28*). By grace they have come to know that he is the Father of all, and that he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Is not Jesus their model and guide in the commitment to both proclamation and dialogue? Is he not the only one who even today can say to a sincere religious person: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" (*Mk 12:34*)?

#### **86. *Intimately united to Christ***

Christians are not only to imitate Jesus, but to be closely united to him. He invited his disciples and friends to join him in his unique offering on behalf of the whole of humanity. The bread and wine for which he gave thanks symbolized the entire creation. They became his body "given" and his blood

"poured out for the forgiveness of sins." Through the ministry of the Church, the one Eucharist is offered by Jesus in every age and place, since the time of his passion, death and resurrection in Jerusalem. It is here that Christians unite themselves to Christ in his offering which "brings salvation to the whole world" (Euch. Prayer IV). Such a prayer is pleasing to God who "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4). Thus they offer thanks for "everything that is true, everything that is honourable, everything that is upright and pure, everything that we love and admire, whatever is good and praiseworthy" (Ph 4:8). Here they draw the grace of discernment, to be able to read the signs of the Spirit's presence and to recognize the favourable time and right manner of proclaiming Jesus Christ.

---

## **CONCLUSION**

### ***87. Special attention for each religion***

The aim of these reflections on interreligious dialogue and proclamation has been to provide some basic clarifications. However, it is important to remember that the various religions differ from one another. Special attention should therefore be given to relations with the followers of each religion.

### **88. Specific studies on the relationship between dialogues and announcement**

It is also important that specific studies on the relationship between dialogue and proclamation be undertaken, taking into account each religion within its geographical area and its socio-cultural context. Episcopal Conferences could entrust such studies to the appropriate commissions and theological and pastoral institutes. In the light of the results of these studies, these institutes could also organize special courses and study sessions in order to train people for both dialogue and proclamation. Special attention is to be given to young people living in a pluralistic environment, who meet the followers of other religions at school, at work, in youth movements and other associations and even within their own families.

### ***89. The need for prayer***

Dialogue and proclamation are difficult tasks, and yet absolutely necessary. All Christians, according to their situations, should be encouraged to equip themselves so that they may better fulfil this two-fold commitment. Yet more than tasks to be accomplished, dialogue and proclamation are graces to be sought in prayer. May all continually implore the help of the Holy Spirit so that

he may be "the divine inspirer of their plans, their initiatives and their evangelizing activity" (EN 75).

Rome, 19 May 1991

---

(1) Joint Document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples, Rome, 19 May 1991; OR. 21 June, 1991.

(2) *The attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, AAS 75 [1984], pp. 816-828; also *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non Christianis* 56 (1984/2), No. 13. (This document will be referred to henceforth as DM).

(3) *Insegnamenti* 1986, IX/2, pp. 1249-1273; 2019-2029. Cf. *Bulletin* No. 64 (1987/1), which contains all the Pope's discourses before, during and after the Day of Prayer in Assisi.

(4) *Insegnamenti* 1987, X/1, pp. 1449-1452. Cf. *Bulletin* No. 66 (1987/3), pp. 223-225.

(5) *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faith and Ideologies*, World Council of Churches, Geneva 1979; "Mission and Evangelism - an Ecumenical Affirmation", in *International Review of Mission* 71 (1982), pp. 427-451.

(6) DM 3.

(7) DM 37.

(8) Because the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is so great (NA 4), dialogue between Christians and Jews has its own special requirements. These are not dealt with in this document. For a full treatment, cf. Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, *Guidelines on Religious Relations with Jews*, 1 December 1974 (in Austin P. Flannery, O.P., ed. *Documents of Vatican II*, 1984, pp. 743-749); "Notes for a Correct Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching and Catechesis", 24 June 1985, in *Origins* vol. 15, No. 2 (4 July 1985), pp. 102-107.

(9) The question of New Religious Movements has been treated in a recent document published in collaboration by the following Pontifical Councils: PC for Promoting Christian Unity, PC for Interreligious Dialogue, PC for Dialogue with Non-Believers and PC for Culture. The complete text can be found in *Origins* vol. 16, No. 1 (22 May 1986); French original in *La Documentation Catholique*, No. 1919 (1 June 1986).

(10) Justin speaks about the "seeds" sown by the *Logos* in the religious traditions. Through the incarnation the manifestation of the *Logos* becomes complete (1 *Rv* 46:1-4; 2 *Rv* 8:1; 10:1-3; 13:4-6). For Irenaeus, the Son, the visible manifestation of the Father, has revealed himself to mankind "from the beginning"; yet the Incarnation brings about something entirely new (*Adv. Haer.*, 4,6,5-7; 4.7,2; 4,20,6-7). Clement of Alexandria explains that "philosophy" was given to the Greeks by God as a "covenant", as a "stepping-stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ," as a "schoolmaster" bringing the Hellenistic mind to him (*Stromata*, 1,5; 6,8; 7,2).

(11) *Adv. Haer.*, 3,11,8.

(12) *Retract.*, 1,13,3; cf. *Enarr. in Ps. 118 (Sermo 29,9)*, 142,3.

(13) *Insegnamenti* 1986, IX/2, pp. 2019-2029; *OR.EE.* 5 January 1987.

(14) John Paul II, *To Indian Bishops on "ad limina" visit* (13 April 1989); *Insegnamenti* 1989, XII/1, pp. 802 - 804.

(15) *Insegnamenti* 1984, VII/1, pp. 595-599.

(16) DM 37.

(17) Cf. DM 28-35.

(18) In the early Church, the Kingdom of God is identified with the Reign of Christ (cf. *Ep* 5:5; *Rv* 11:15; 12:10). See also *Origen*, in *Mt* 14:7; *Hom.* in *Lk* 36, where he calls Christ *autobasileia*, and Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* IV, 33,8: "In evangelio est Dei Regnum, Christus ipse". On the correct understanding of the term "kingdom", see the report of the International Theological Commission (8 October 1985): *Selected Themes in Ecclesiology*, No. 10,3.

(19) DM 13.

(20) *Insegnamenti* 1986, IX/2, p. 1262.

(21) Cf. *Ecclesiam Suam*, ch. III; cf. also *Insegnamenti* 1984, VII/1, p. 598.