Dialogue in Truth and Charity

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Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue

Introduction

1. “Dialogue in Truth and Charity: Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue,” was the theme of the tenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue held in Rome from 4 to 7 June 2008. It was an important occasion for the Cardinals and Bishops who were Members of this Pontifical Council to reflect on the developments in interreligious relations in the world. The present document, published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the 50th anniversary of its institution by Pope Paul VI in 1964 as “Secretariat for Non-Christians”, embodies the suggestions of some Episcopal Conferences and individual Bishops, as well as the results of consultation with Members during the aforementioned Plenary Assembly. It is aimed at providing some indications for pastors and all the Faithful who live and work with the people of other religions.

2. In our time, dialogue can be understood in many ways. At the purely human level, it is “reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion.” 1} In the context of religious plurality, it means not only discussion, but also constructive relations with individuals and communities of other religions, which, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom, are directed at mutual understanding.[2] It includes “witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions”.[3] With reference to the initiatives of the Catholic Church to reach out to people of other religions, dialogue is also understood as “an attitude of respect and friendship” which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting her evangelizing mission in the world.[4]

3. Those who promote interreligious dialogue must be persons well-formed in their particular traditions, possessing a clear religious identity. In addition, basic human qualities and virtues are also essential requirements for any interreligious encounter. Interreligious dialogue, in itself, does not aim at conversion. Nevertheless, it does not exclude that it might be an occasion of conversion. All believers are “pilgrims of truth and peace.”[5] They meet to listen to each other, to come to know and respect one another and thus to work together in society “in projects of common concern”[6].

4. Thanks to modern means of transport and communication, especially the use of radio, television and internet, the space for the exchange of religious and cultural experiences is expanding through an evergrowing physical and virtual presence. While this phenomenon of coming together can be considered a positive one, it also creates opportunity for the globalization of once localised problems such as misunderstanding and intolerance in society, often expressed in violent conflicts, at times inflamed by the manipulation of religious affiliations and sensitivities.

5. In order to face the growing challenges to peaceful coexistence among believers of different religions, a proliferation of interreligious dialogue initiatives has emerged, not only by religious leaders but also by civil authorities, individuals and groups from different walks of life. While some of these initiatives are good and useful, there are those that reduce dialogue in a way that excludes bearing witness to any specific religious belief and, therefore, threatens to annul the richness of

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religious identities and to generate a kind of relativism, which constitutes a danger to one's own beliefs and to the genuineness of interreligious dialogue.

6. These considerations along with the shared experiences of different local churches have made it necessary to rediscover and renew the true sense of interreligious dialogue in order to help Catholics to understand and to participate in an interchange, which is properly guided by faith, animated by charity, and oriented towards the common good, through mutual respect, knowledge and trust.

7. This pastoral resource is meant to furnish Bishops, Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful, who are engaged in interreligious activities with some essential elements to assist in discernment and also to provide some indications for local programmes of formation in interreligious dialogue. It is intended as well, in a more general way, for all Catholics who have questions about the significance and the purpose of inter7 religious dialogue in the Church. As the scope and the intent of the document are limited to the issues raised by the Members, there is no need to reiterate all the points already covered in previous documents of the Magisterium and this Pontifical Council. Occasionally, the issues discussed go beyond the specific concerns of Catholics and can be applied to all Christians.

8. It is to be understood that a document such as this one, directed to the local Churches spread around the world, provides general indications and, therefore, cannot treat all cases particular to local settings. It is recommended that Bishops' Conferences provide guidelines for the specific context of interreligious dialogue in their own countries.

9. With the globalisation of communication, it is to be expected that this document might reach brothers and sisters of other religions who may also want to know not only what the Catholic Church means by interreligious dialogue but also her underlying motivation for such engagement. For a more comprehensive picture of the position of the Catholic Church, it is advisable to read this document alongside those other resource materials, which, drawing upon the Church's Magisterium, the Pontifical Council has published in the past. The documents, Dialogue and Mission and Dialogue and Proclamation, explain the nature and meaning of interreligious dialogue and they address the frequently asked questions about the relationship between dialogue and proclamation of the Gospel.

The document's content:

- Chapter One
  The church and interreligious dialogue
- Chapter Two
  Dynamics of interreligious dialogue
- Chapter Three
  Specific fields of interreligious relations
- Conclusion

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