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UDIENZA AI PARTECIPANTI ALLA PLENARIA DEL PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER IL DIALOGO INTERRELIGIOSO

Alle ore 11.45 di questa mattina, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI riceve in Udienza i partecipanti alla Plenaria del Pontificio Consiglio per il Dialogo Interreligioso e rivolge loro il discorso che riportiamo di seguito:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

I am pleased to have this opportunity to meet you at the conclusion of the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. To all of you taking part in this important gathering I extend cordial greetings. I thank in particular Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran for his gracious words.

"Dialogue *in veritate et caritate*: Pastoral orientations" – this is the theme of your Plenary Assembly. I am happy to learn that during these days you have sought to arrive at a deeper understanding of the Catholic Church's approach to people of other religious traditions. You have considered the broader purpose of dialogue – to discover the truth – and the motivation for it, which is charity, in obedience to the divine mission entrusted to the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the inauguration of my Pontificate I affirmed that "the Church wants to continue building bridges of friendship with the followers of all religions, in order to seek the true good of every person and of society as a whole" (*Address to Delegates of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Other Religious Traditions*, 25 April 2005). Through the ministry of the Successors of Peter, including the work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the efforts of local Ordinaries and the People of God throughout the world, the Church continues to reach out to followers of different religions. In this way she gives expression to that desire for encounter and collaboration in truth and freedom. In the words of my venerable Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, the Church's principal responsibility is service to the Truth – "truth about God, truth about man and his hidden destiny, truth about the world, truth which we discover in the Word of God" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 78).

Human beings seek answers to some of the fundamental existential questions: What is the origin and destiny of human beings? What are good and evil? What awaits human beings at the end of their earthly existence? All people have a natural duty and a moral obligation to seek the truth. Once it is known, they are bound to adhere

to it and to order their whole lives in accordance with its demands (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 1 and *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2).

Dear friends, "*Caritas Christi urget nos*" (2 Cor 5:14). It is the love of Christ which impels the Church to reach out to every human being without distinction, beyond the borders of the visible Church. The source of the Church's mission is Divine Love. This love is revealed in Christ and made present through the action of the Holy Spirit. All the Church's activities are to be imbued with love (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 2-5; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 26, and *Dialogue and Mission*, 9). Thus, it is love that urges every believer to listen to the other and seek areas of collaboration. It encourages Christian partners in dialogue with the followers of other religions to propose, but not impose, faith in Christ who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (*Jn* 14:16). As I said in my recent Encyclicals, the Christian faith has shown us that "truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities" (*Spe Salvi*, 39). For the Church, "charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 25).

The great proliferation of interreligious meetings around the world today calls for discernment. In this regard, I am pleased to note that during these days you have reflected on pastoral orientations for interreligious dialogue. Since the Second Vatican Council, attention has been focused on the spiritual elements which different religious traditions have in common. In many ways, this has helped to build bridges of understanding across religious boundaries. I understand that during your discussions you have been considering some of the issues of practical concern in interreligious relations: the identity of the partners in dialogue, religious education in schools, conversion, proselytism, reciprocity, religious freedom, and the role of religious leaders in society. These are important issues to which religious leaders living and working in pluralistic societies must pay close attention.

It is important to emphasize the need for formation for those who promote interreligious dialogue. If it is to be authentic, this dialogue must be a journey of faith. How necessary it is for its promoters to be well formed in their own beliefs and well informed about those of others. It is for this reason that I encourage the efforts of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to organize formation courses and programmes in interreligious dialogue for different Christian groups, especially seminarians and young people in tertiary educational institutions.

Interreligious collaboration provides opportunities to express the highest ideals of each religious tradition. Helping the sick, bringing relief to the victims of natural disasters or violence, caring for the aged and the poor: these are some of the areas in which people of different religions collaborate. I encourage all those who are inspired by the teaching of their religions to help the suffering members of society.

Dear friends, as you come to the end of your Plenary Assembly, I thank you for the work you have done. I ask you to take the message of good will from the Successor of Peter to your Christian flock and to all our friends of other religions. Willingly I impart my Apostolic blessing to you as a pledge of grace and peace in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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