

International Meeting "The Audacity of Peace"

Forum 14 Interreligious Dialogue: A Resource For Global
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The Catholic Church and Interreligious Dialogue

His Eminence Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ

Prefect

Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue

*Your Eminences, Excellencies,
Distinguished Authorities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

It is a great honour for me today to be here, as Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, that works to promote dialogue between people belonging to different religious traditions. I am delighted to participate in this important International Meeting "The Audacity of Peace" promoted by the Community of Sant'Egidio and I also would like to thank all the organizers for the invitation and the host city of Berlin. This capital is a city which in its history has been marked by many tragedies but which is also a symbol of unity and reconciliation. Unity and reconciliation that even the initiative

of People and Religions, from 1987 to today, wants to promote with perseverance and audacity by carrying forward and proposing the 'spirit of Assisi' to believers and non-believers. The world has yet to recover from a devastating Covid-19 pandemic. Tragically, the war in Ukraine and other ongoing wars and conflicts, as well as climate change, affect all, worsening our already ravaged and battered humanity and the earth.

In the pandemic we have understood that everything concerns us, that it is truly true that we are all in the same boat and that the only way is to become all brothers and sisters. Faced with the tragedy of war, we understand the risk that the whole human family runs today, because war “is not a ghost of the past, but has become a constant threat” (*Fratelli Tutti* 256).

I’m convinced that dialogue between religions is not a sign of weakness but a manifestation of God's dialogue with humanity and fraternity is a challenge for all humanity.

Foster unity and love among human beings

The concept of dialogue was not a marginal issue to the Fathers of Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). In addition to ecumenical dialogue (i.e. dialogue with other Christians)

which is consistently stressed in the Council documents, the need for dialogue with people of other religions is a recurring theme in the Council documents as the *Nostra Aetate* (28 October 1965), the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, which is considered as the *Magna Charta* of interreligious dialogue. The doctrinal bases of interreligious dialogue are laid down in the document on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), while that on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*) enunciates the principles of respect and esteem for the innate human dignity of each person upon which the idea of dialogue is founded.

Nostra Aetate encourages Christians to “foster unity and love among human beings, and even among nations by studying what human beings have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them” (NA, 1). The document points to the common origin and one final goal of all people, namely God, as the point of departure to build peace in the world and harmony in society. Manifesting her desire to relate respectfully with the followers of other religions the Church exhorts her sons to “prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve, and

promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture” (NA, 2).

The Church wishes to engage friendly interreligious relationships because she considers this an important part of her mandate. In her dialogue the Church speaks to the followers of other religions because God has finally spoken to humanity in his Son, and God continues to speak to the entire human race, particularly through his Church, a message of goodness, forgiveness and peace.

Furthermore, God’s dialogue with humanity serves as the pattern and model for all dialogue.

Pope Francis: promote a ‘culture of dialogue’ through mutual respect, friendship and fraternity.

Living one's identity in the "courage of otherness" is the threshold which the Church of Pope Francis asks us today to cross. He highlights in his very first speech to the representatives of Christians and members of different religions that the cornerstone of any dialogue is friendship and respect: “The Catholic Church is conscious of the importance of promoting friendship and respect between men and women

of different religious traditions (...)” (*To the representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Different Religions* 17 march 2013). A solid and genuine friendship and respect then pave the way for dialogue of action. Through dialogue the Pope seeks to foster a culture of encounter. It “means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life” (FT 216).

Pope Francis has beckoned us to focus on the gift of interreligious friendship, both by his example and his words. In his meeting with the Muslim Council of Elders in Bahrain, he stated: “I believe that increasingly we need to encounter one another, to get to know and to esteem one another, to put reality ahead of ideas and people ahead of opinions, openness to heaven ahead of differences on earth.” (4 november 2022). In this way, he keeps at the centre of the endeavour the path of embracing both transcendence and human fraternity.

For the Catholic Church, dialogue between different religious traditions has its own intrinsic value, it is not born of tactics or hidden interests. Its primary purpose is to enable

people of different religions to live in harmony and peace, to understand each other better, to work together for the benefit of humanity and to help each other respond to God's call.

This is the challenge launched by Pope Francis: to consider universal fraternity, based on the dignity of the human person, as a fundamental and indispensable factor to build a dialogue for peace. Real and lasting peace will only be possible “on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family” (*Ft* 127).

Interreligious Dialogue to foster unity, harmony and peace

One of the challenges in the context of the new perspectives in interreligious dialogue, is exactly the promotion of a major reciprocal collaboration to build a more peaceful and harmonious society, addressing the global movement of peoples coming out of a variety of world situations. In concrete terms, this means to work together towards promoting the dignity of every person through the commitment to justice. In fact, believers, following their own

respective traditions, draw attention to the truth of the sacred character and dignity of the person. This is the basis of our reciprocal respect and esteem and the condition of service for collaboration for peace between nations and peoples, the strongest desire of every believer and every person of good will.

The prospect, then, and the purpose of dialogue, is that through authentic collaboration between believers we can work to contribute to the good of all, fighting against the many injustices that still afflict this world and condemning all forms of violence.

Interreligious dialogue will help build a culture of encounter and fraternity if we really strive to find shared points of contact to promote work for the common good.

By fraternity is meant the fundamental human relationships that draw from the depth of the meaning of family – that of sister or brother – not just fellowship or friendship, but most of all the inextricable bond that is the human family. But fraternity cannot mean being exclusive to my group, community, culture, religion but inclusive of all humanity.

In his Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2021) Pope Francis wrote that being artisans of peace is a task we must share with believers of other religious traditions, so that a culture of encounter may be affirmed and interreligious dialogue may have a future.

People belonging to different religions must show that religion is not a problem but part of the solution to bring harmony and peace to society through interfaith collaboration. Harmony must be cultivated and peace must be welcomed as a gift from God, built by people in all circumstances.

We must offer our collaboration to the societies where we live and share with all our common values and deepest beliefs to defend and promote peace and justice, human dignity, and environmental protection.

It follows that interreligious dialogue is becoming increasingly necessary, certainly not a luxury or an accessory, to help this world find peace.

Conclusion

Pope John XXIII wrote 60 years ago: “The world must be educated to love Peace, to build it up and defend it. We must

arouse in the men [and women] of our time and of future generations the sense and love of Peace founded upon truth, justice, freedom and love” (cf. Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*). Sixty years later, these words still impress us by their timeliness. Infact we can affirm that our world needs a renewed wave of love that is capable of compassion, tenderness, attention, forgiveness and fraternity.

Through our efforts in interreligious dialogue, as members of one human family, we are called to promote the dignity of each person, recognizing her or him as sister or brother, at all times and in any part of the world.

Pope Francis in his speech at the Global Conference of Human Fraternity said: “The time has come when religions should more actively exert themselves, with courage and audacity, and without pretense, to help the human family deepen the capacity for reconciliation, the vision of hope and the concrete paths of peace.” (*Address of Pope Francis, Global Conference of Human Fraternity, Founder’s Memorial Abu Dhabi, 4.2.2019*).

We are called to pursue this path of interreligious dialogue tirelessly, with courage and audacity, in the effort to help each

other overcome tensions and misunderstandings, clichés and stereotypes that generate fear and opposition. In this way, we will encourage the growth of a fruitful and respectful spirit of cooperation and peace.

Thank you so much for your interest and attention.