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COMUNICATO: ASSEMBLEA PLENARIA DEL PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER IL DIALOGO INTERRELIGIOSO (14-19 MAGGIO 2004)

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Plenary Assembly

A Plenary Assembly is an important event for every dicastery of the Roman Curia. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) will hold its Plenary Assembly this year from 14-19 May. On the last day the PCID will complete 40 years since its foundation. To commemorate this significant milestone the Plenary Assembly will conclude with a public session.

History

Pope Paul VI instituted the "Secretariatus Pro Non-Christianis" on 19 May 1964. On Pentecost day that year the Holy Father said to the faithful : "We offer you an announcement... hoping it may enjoy the call and value of Pentecost. It is this – as announced some time ago, We are establishing precisely in these days here in Rome the 'Secretariat for Non-Christians', an organ which will have quite different functions but a structure analogous to that for separated Christians... No pilgrim, no matter how distant he may be religiously or geographically, no matter what his country of origin, will any longer be a complete stranger in this Rome, ever faithful to the historic programme the Catholic faith has reserved to it as '*patria communis*'"[Paul VI, *Insegnamenti* (1964), II, p. 342].

The historical note in the *Annuario Pontificio* (2004) reads : "The competence of the dicastery is to promote adequate studies (on various religious traditions) and to favour friendly relations of the Church with the followers of other religions. The Council is linked, for doctrinal and practical aspects, to the Conciliar Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*. The Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* of 28 June 1988 on the Roman Curia changed the name - from the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions - to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (Pontificium Consilium pro Dialogo inter Religiones), assigning to it the competence of favouring and regulating relations with members and groups of other religions which are not included under any Christian denomination, and also with people who are, in whatever manner, endowed with a religious sense".

Programme

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue is composed of Members who are appointed by the Holy Father for a five-year term. This body of Members, which comprises three Cardinals of the Roman Curia and seven from all the five continents, Archbishops and Bishops from various countries where people of different religious traditions form a single population, will be invited to reflect on the forty years of interreligious dialogue as practised by the Catholic Church. More specifically the discussions will address the following topics: "Theological Reflection on Religious Pluralism - Developments and Tendencies", "Bilateral Dialogue Experiences - Developments and Prospects", and "Multi-religious Initiatives and the Challenges of Alternative Religiosity".

Fr. Michel Fédou, a Jesuit priest and the Dean of Studies at Centre Sevre in Paris, will offer a theological reflection on the practice of dialogue which has emerged explicitly as the official policy of the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council. As is the custom during the Plenary Assembly the Secretary of the Council, H.E. Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, will present a report on the various activities and projects of the Council during the years since the last Plenary Assembly. Each official of the Council, responsible for a different sector, such as Africa, Asia, Latin America, Islam, pastoral attention to Sects and New Religious Movements, will initiate a discussion among Members by offering an appraisal of the Church's dialogue with different religious traditions in the last forty years. The Members are also expected to enrich the reflection by sharing reports on the situations of dialogue in their own countries and regions. The plenary sessions and group discussions will give attention to such questions as : How is the practice of interreligious dialogue understood/grasped in today's world? What means are used to spread the practice of interreligious dialogue? How is the message of interreligious dialogue transmitted? What more can still be done to diffuse the practice of interreligious dialogue? What problems are encountered? How is the duty to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour of all respected while engaging in dialogue with people of other religions?

Prayer

Each day will open with *Lauds* during which H.E. Mgr Antony Selvanayagam, Bishop of Penang, Malaysia, H.E. Mgr. Emmanuel Bushu, Bishop of Yagoua. Cameroun, and H.E. Mgr. Giuseppe Chiaretti, Archbishop of Perugia-Città della Pieve, Italy, will offer brief reflections on the biblical readings of the day. The participants in the Plenary Assembly will gather in the Crypt of St Peter's Basilica on the last day to celebrate a thanksgiving Mass which will be presided over by H.E. Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, President.

Public Celebration

The afternoon of the last day, 19 May, will be dedicated to the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the PCID. A public Session will take place on 19 May 2004 from 4.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. in the Pope John Paul II Auditorium at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome. H.E. Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, President of PCID, will open the session with words of welcome. H. E. Francis Cardinal Arinze, former President of the PCID and now Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, will address the invited guests on "Forty Years of Developing Theological and Dialogical Engagement". Professor Franco Cardini from the University of Florence will speak from a "Historical Perspective". Four scholars, representing Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam have been invited to present their testimonies from the point of view of their own religious tradition. They are: Rev. Dr. Hans Ucko, a representative of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, Dr Ahmed Mechergui, a Muslim Professor from Tunisia, Dr. Anuradha Senaviratne, Professor of Buddhism from Kandy, Sri Lanka and Dr. Mrs Kala Acharya, a Hindu from India and an expert on Sanskrit religious literature.

Concert

On the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the PCID, the 'Gen Rosso', a musical complex of the Focolare Movement, will be presenting *Voglio Svegliare l'aurora*, a musical show based on the Psalms. This will take place in the Aula Nervi, Vatican, in the evening of 18 May, which also coincides with the 84th birthday of the Holy Father.

Conclusion

Forty years in the life of a dicastery is relatively short time; but it is certainly an occasion to raise our hearts in thanksgiving to the Lord for all the benefits the Church has received through its apostolate of interreligious dialogue. The Popes, particularly Paul VI and John Paul II, have been illustrious and guiding examples and

above all a constant inspiration in the work of the Council.

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