



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

*clementine Hall*

*Thursday, 28 November 2013*

*Your Eminences,*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

First of all, please excuse the delay. The audiences have been running behind. Thank you for your patience. I am delighted to meet you within the context of your Plenary Session: I offer each of you a cordial welcome and I thank Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran for the words which he addressed to me on your half.

The Catholic Church is aware of the value of promoting friendship and respect among men and women of different religious traditions. We increasingly understand its importance, both because in a certain sense the world has become “smaller” and because the phenomenon of migration increases contact between persons and communities from various traditions, cultures and religions. This reality summons our consciences as Christians, it is a challenge for understanding the faith and for the concrete life of the local Churches, parishes and so many believers.

The theme chosen for your meeting, “Members of different religious traditions in society”, is therefore particularly relevant. As I stated in the Apostolic Exhortation *[Evangelii Gaudium](#)*, “an attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides” (n. 250). Indeed, situations in the world where coexistence is difficult are not lacking: often political or economic motives overlap with cultural and religious differences, which also play upon misunderstandings and mistakes of the past: this is all likely to generate suspicion

and fear. There is only one road for conquering this fear and it is dialogue and encounter marked by friendship and respect. When we take this path it is a human one.

Dialogue does not mean renouncing one's own identity when it goes against another's, nor does it mean compromising Christian faith and morals. To the contrary, "true openness involves remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own identity" (ibid., 251) and therefore open to understanding the religions of another, capable of respectful human relationships, convinced that the encounter with someone different than ourselves can be an occasion of growth in a spirit of fraternity, of enrichment and of witness. This is why interreligious dialogue and evangelization are not mutually exclusive, but rather nourish one another. We do not impose anything, we do not employ any subtle strategies for attracting believers; rather, we bear witness to what we believe and who we are with joy and simplicity. In fact, an encounter wherein each party sets aside his beliefs, pretending to renounce what he holds most dear, would certainly not be an authentic relationship. In this case we could speak of a false fraternity. As disciples of Jesus we have to make every effort to triumph over fear, always ready to take the first step, without becoming discouraged in the face of difficulty and misunderstanding.

Constructive dialogue between persons of different religious traditions helps also to overcome another fear, which we unfortunately increasingly see in strongly secularized societies: fear directed toward the various religious traditions and toward the religious dimension as such. Religion is looked upon as something useless or even dangerous; Christians are even required at times to act in the exercise of their profession with no reference to their religious and moral convictions (cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, 10 January 2011). It is widely thought that coexistence is only possible by hiding one's own religious affiliation, by meeting in a kind of neutral space, devoid of references to transcendence. But here, too: how would it be possible to create true relationships, to build a society that is a common home, by imposing that each person set aside what he considers to be an intimate part of his very being? It is impossible to think of fraternity being "born in a laboratory". Of course it is necessary that all things be done while respecting the convictions of others, and of unbelievers, but we must have the courage and patience to come together as we are. The future lies in the respectful coexistence of diversity, not in homologation to a single theoretically neutral way of thought. Throughout history we have seen the tragedy of narrow mindedness. The recognition of the fundamental right of religious freedom in all of its dimensions is unavoidable. The Magisterium of the Church has spoken about this with great commitment in recent decades. We are convinced that world peace passes by this route.

I wish to thank the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for the valuable service they carry out, and I invoke upon each of you the Lord's abundant blessing. Thank you.

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