



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE OPENING OF THE SIXTH WORLD ASSEMBLY OF
THE "WORLD CONFERENCE ON RELIGION AND PEACE"**

Synod Hall

Thursday, 3 November 1994

Dear Friends,

1. I am happy to welcome the participants in the *World Conference on Religion and Peace* on the occasion of the opening of your Sixth World Assembly, which will later continue in Riva del Garda. The Holy See has participated in previous Assemblies and continues to follow with interest your efforts to work together for peace in ways suited to men and women of deep religious convictions. I thank the Reverend Nikkyo Niwano for his kind remarks regarding the relationship between the Holy See and your Organization from its beginnings.

When I greeted the members of your International Council in July 1991, I spoke of the need for the religions of the world to engage in a dialogue of mutual understanding and peace on the basis of the values they share. These values are not just humanitarian or humanistic – they belong to the realm of the deeper truths affecting man's life in this world and his destiny (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 1). Today, such a dialogue is more necessary than ever. Indeed, as old barriers fall, new ones arise whenever fundamental truths and values are forgotten or obscured, even among people who profess themselves to be religious. Through interreligious dialogue we are able to bear witness to those truths which are the necessary point of reference for the individual and for society: the dignity of each and every human being, whatever his or her ethnic origin, religious affiliation, or political commitment. We testify that we respect and love all men and women because they are creatures of God, and therefore are of immense value.

Genuine dialogue helps us to understand one another as *religious* men and women, and enables us to respect our differences, without for that reason abstaining from affirming clearly and unequivocally what we believe to be the true way to salvation. By the same token, we should together uphold religious freedom for all. Religious freedom is the cornerstone of all freedoms; to

prevent others from freely professing their religion is tantamount to jeopardizing our own.

2. The theme of this Sixth World Assembly: *Healing the World, Religions for Peace*, is itself a strong affirmation of a fundamental truth, namely, that religion is ordered towards that peace which reflects the divine harmony. As you reflect on the role of religion in healing the world, you will be examining some of the major manifestations of human suffering: the misuse of natural resources, violence and war, oppression and lack of justice, lack of respect for the human person. Violence in any form is opposed not only to the respect which we owe to every fellow human being; it is opposed also to the true essence of religion. Whatever the conflicts of the past and even of the present, it is our common task and duty to make better known the relation between religion and peace. This commitment is inscribed in your own identity as an association.

Today, religious leaders must clearly show that they are pledged to the promotion of peace precisely because of their religious belief. Religion is not, and must not become, a pretext for conflict, particularly when religious, cultural and ethnic identity coincide. In recent days, sadly, I have had reason to affirm once more that: "No one can consider himself faithful to the great and merciful God who in the name of the same God dares to kill his brother" (John Paul II, *General Audience*, 26 Oct. 1994). *Religion and peace go together*: to wage war in the name of religion is a blatant contradiction. I hope that you will be able, during your Conference, to find ways to spread this profound conviction.

3. During this *International Year of the Family*, allow me to draw your attention to the intimate connection between religion and the family. The family is the first community charged with educating in the essential values of human life, transmitting above all the conviction that "man is more precious for what he is than for what he has" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 35). Religion, by referring to God's plan for life and for society, helps the family fulfil this task at the deepest level. Cooperation among religious leaders is important in upholding and promoting this basic human institution, especially in these times when it is being attacked from many sides, as if it were something to be abandoned, forgotten or replaced by other forms of personal relationships. *Healing the world* means also, if not primarily, defending the family as a community of persons of equal dignity, working together in harmony for the common good.

In this context, attention should also be paid to the *problem of housing and human settlements*. Today, the lack of adequate and affordable housing suited to the needs of the family is widespread, and is affecting younger people in particular. Furthermore, in some places, the deliberate destruction of houses and settlements, as well as the forced displacement of ethnic groups, have become a cruel weapon of discrimination and war. Your commitment to serving peace requires that you look carefully at this contemporary tragedy, a tragedy which religions are called to help in healing. Numberless refugees and displaced persons, often separated from their families, are waiting for the consoling assistance that religions can and should provide. The United Nations hopes to address the urgent question of human settlements in 1997. It is not too early for

religious bodies to begin to reflect on the common values which they have to offer and which will help the international community to address the question with adequate attention to the moral and ethical aspects involved.

4. In the Christian Scriptures, we read about a man seeking to justify himself. He asks Jesus who his neighbour is. Through the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus changes the terms of the question. The question is not who one's neighbour is, but rather who *made himself* a neighbour to the poor man who fell victim to the violence of robbers. The reply should continually echo in our minds and hearts: "The one who showed mercy to him" (Lk. 10:29-37). Mercy is the fruit of a love which recognizes in all those who suffer the dignity of human beings, whatever their condition, nationality or religion. This compassionate love knows no enemies, only brothers and sisters; it is universal. The wounds of humanity cannot leave us indifferent; we must heal, console, care for the multitudes of suffering individuals and peoples. Your present Assembly, by addressing the causes of suffering, can be instrumental in enlightening consciences regarding the profound human solidarity without which peace is impossible.

5. Peace is a precious gift from God to be sought in prayer and promoted with reverence. It was this conviction which led me to invite religious leaders to Assisi, in October 1986, to fast and pray for peace in the world. A number of you were present on that memorable occasion. Faced with the present tragedies of violence in Bosnia and Hercegovina, in Rwanda, and in many other troubled places around the world, let us pray without ceasing for peace. Those who pray for this gift, in humility and truth, cannot but dedicate themselves to the work of peace.

Together, may we love peace and bring peace to others. Your Assembly will be, I am sure, an invitation to religious men and women everywhere to put themselves at the service of peace and reconciliation. *Healing the world* through the commitment of *Religions for Peace* means that you look in faith and hope to the One in whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 9:17, 28), in order to become better instruments for the accomplishment of man's true destiny here and beyond. May God's blessings be upon you and your families, upon your deliberations, and upon all the members of your Organization.