



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THOSE TAKING PART IN THE MEETING
SPONSORED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

Saturday, 16 June 2001

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am pleased to extend my most cordial welcome to all of you who are taking part in the Days of Encounter and Reflection organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, in collaboration with the Pontifical Lateran University and the Piero Rossano Foundation, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Bishop Rossano's death. The meetings will be taking place here in Rome and at Veenza d'Alba, the late Bishop's birthplace.

I greet Cardinal Francis Arinze, whom I thank for his courteous words on behalf of all who are taking part in this meeting. I also greet the Bishops, priests, authorities and everyone here. The 10th anniversary of Bishop Rossano's death is an especially favourable occasion to remember gratefully his unflagging commitment to interreligious dialogue. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* I wanted to reassert the importance of this task: "This dialogue". I wrote, "must continue.

In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sound basis for peace and warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history. The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: *a name of peace and a summons to peace*" (n. 55).

2. A serious and authentic interreligious dialogue must rest on solid foundations so that it will bear

the hoped for fruit at the appropriate time. Being open to dialogue means being absolutely consistent with one's own religious tradition. This is the teaching that stands out in the life of Bishop Rossano. For many years he served the universal Church in the then-Secretariat for Non-Christians, today the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In his spiritual experience and at the service of the Holy See, openness to others was never separated from fidelity to Christ's teaching. This unconditional adherence to Christ did not prevent him from conversing with the exponents of other religions. Indeed, this absolute fidelity to Christ became a solid starting point for meeting people and appreciating those riches which - as the Second Vatican Council says - God in his munificence has distributed to the peoples (cf. *Ad gentes* n. 11).

3. Dear brothers and sisters, may Bishop Rossano's example encourage you to redouble your efforts for dialogue, offering to all a clear witness of the mystery of Christ, Lord and Saviour of all. Indeed, as I reasserted in the Apostolic Letter cited, "we should not fear that it will be considered an offence to the identity of others what is rather the joyful proclamation of a gift meant for all, and to be offered to all with the greatest respect for the freedom of each one: the gift of the revelation of the God who is Love, the God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3,16)" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 56).

Far from encouraging withdrawal into self, acceptance of Christ is a crucial incentive to meet and accept all people. Bishop Rossano gave ample proof of this openness. His tireless efforts to find solutions through exchanges and sharing between the exponents of different religions were expressed in an important enrichment for all those with whom he had the opportunity to be in contact.

Even in his generous and fruitful episcopal ministry as Auxiliary Bishop of Rome with responsibility for culture and as rector of the Pontifical Lateran University, Bishop Rossano never lost sight of the commitment to dialogue, perfectly carrying out what can be read in the Document published in 1984 by the Secretariat for Non-Christians: "*The attitude of the Church to the followers of other religions*: "Dialogue is first and foremost a style of action, an attitude and a spirit that directs conduct. It entails attention, respect for and acceptance of others, and makes room for their personal identity, their own form of expression and values" (n. 29).

4. It is well known that the ecumenical dimension is also important for the task of interreligious dialogue. In this regard, I would like to express my deep pleasure at the constant and fruitful collaboration between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Office for Relations and Interreligious Dialogue of the World Council of Churches. This is a significant collaboration, which Bishop Rossano started and encouraged. I would also like to pay him a tribute for this. May the work he has undertaken receive a new impetus from your initiative. As I thank the Lord for the good he has worked through the humble and faithful person of Bishop Piero Rossano, I invoke upon you and upon your appreciated work an abundance of the Holy Spirit, as a pledge of whose gifts I impart my Blessing to you and to all your loved ones.

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