

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

CELEBRATING MERCY
WITH BELIEVERS
OF OTHER RELIGIONS



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Dedicated to Pope Francis

*In profound gratitude for his work
and message in fostering interreligious dialogue*

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INTRODUCTION

Celebrating Mercy with Believers of Other Religions is a concise and simple compendium, edited by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, mainly addressed to Bishops' Conferences and through them, to all Catholics. At the same time, we would be pleased if this proves useful to believers of other religions.

In *Misericordiae Vultus*, the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee of Mercy, the Holy Father described the path that led to the Jubilee and expressed the following wish: "I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with these religions (Judaism and Islam) and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, n. 23).

We decided to act upon Pope Francis' urging to encounter the various religious traditions with a focus on mercy, in order to continue on the path of dialogue, overcoming difficulties that unfortunately, still exist and are known to us all.

Our motivation for this compendium is to live this year of grace with our brothers and sisters from different religions. The theme of mercy is actually found in the spirituality of other religious traditions; with this commonality the possibility emerges of sharing moments of spirituality and of interreligious dialogue, as well as concrete works of charity to benefit the needy.

Recently we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra aetate* (October 28, 1965). This document, still timely and inspiring and considered a milestone in the evolution of interreligious dialogue, reminds us that: “In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship” (*Nostra aetate*, 1). This simple compendium we have prepared should be read precisely in the same spirit: that is, a call to look at what we share together with believers of other religions which then invites us into to live our common destiny together.

Religions are the living expression of the soul of peoples and each of these religions testifies to the fact that the human person has been in the search for God for thousands of years; the Catholic Church has been involved in dialogue with religious traditions in every part of the world, at varying levels and with different degrees of intensity. As Catholics, we are urged by Jesus to be the “yeast and ferment” in midst of the world. Therefore, with the occasion of the Jubilee of Mercy, our task is then to proclaim the merciful God made Man who turns His gaze towards all men and women, excluding none.

We are to be witnesses, as Pope Francis urges us, of a Church which goes out untiringly to proclaim a merciful God reviving in a world tired of violence and pain, a profound desire for mercy. Saint John Paul II also reminds us that: “Modern man often anxiously wonders about the solution to the terrible tensions which have built up in the world and which entangle hu-

manity. And if at times he lacks the courage to utter the word ‘mercy’, or if in his conscience empty of religious content he does not find the equivalent, so much greater is the need for the Church to utter this word, not only in her own name but also in the name of all the men and women of our time” (Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, n. 15, 1980).

Let me explain the rationale for this publication.

First of all, this compendium is of itself a product of interreligious collaboration. We have, in fact, asked experts belonging to other religious traditions to contribute to this text.

In presenting the different religions, we maintained the same approach, that of elaborating on the theme of mercy. Certain excerpts from the sacred texts of the various religious traditions are presented for reflection. Aware that some religions do not have sacred texts, nevertheless, they have concepts and ideas inspired by mercy which are also included.

The religions that are described in this text are listed in alphabetical order.

As for Christianity since this text is meant for the Bishops’ Conferences, it seems unnecessary to elaborate on this topic; however, should there be an interest, readers are referred to the valuable and useful texts that are published for the Jubilee and are found on the Jubilee’s official website at: <http://www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va>.

Several excerpts for the Holy Father’s texts on interreligious dialogue are also included. It would not be possible to include everything Pope Francis has said regarding interreligious dialogue, nor would it be the place to do so. Included are excerpts from the Encyclical Letters *Lumen Fidei* and *Laudato si’*, from

the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* as well as several speeches including, the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee, *Misericordiae Vultus*.

Finally, while presenting a number of suggestions on how to live and celebrate this Extraordinary Holy Year with believers from other religions, in an effort to be faithful to our vocation: promoting and supporting local Churches in their outreach in interreligious dialogue.

It is in this sense that we offer all that is gathered in this publication. Limiting ourselves to introductory thoughts that would help Catholics broaden their outlook on the great richness of human spirituality, the hope is to develop an appreciation of what is true, noble and good in every religious tradition. In particular, the theme of mercy offers the opportunity for a commonality in feeling and action among believers, which is the sincere hope of Pope Francis.

It is sincerely desired that interreligious dialogue be based on mutual respect and thus establish bonds of true and real friendship between men and women belonging to different religious traditions. While helping Catholics to appreciate and learn more about other religious traditions, we realize that we cannot ignore nor compromise the essence of our faith, nor relinquish our identity. Openness and respect towards other religious traditions do not create conflict with the Christian faith, nor with the responsibility of the Church to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who freely listen. The Church teaches that, in order to be good Christians, there needs to be an open and respectful attitude towards our neighbors, irrespective of the religious tradition to which they belong. Therefore, we invite all the Catholic faithful avoid

building walls, and instead to go out and walk along the path of mercy together with their neighbors of different faiths.

My heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Maria Laura Marazzi for having suggested and coordinated this project, to the Under-Secretary, Rev. F. Indunil Kodithuwakku, for having edited the sections on Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism and Taoism, to the Msgr. Khaled Akasheh, Head of the Islam Section and Rev. F. Markus Solo for notes on Islam, and to Msgr. Santiago Michael for his contribution on Jainism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism, to Dr. Sabrina Fieni for her assistance in bibliographical research, to Sr. Judith Zobelein for English edition and to entire staff of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Sincere thanks to H.E. Msgr. Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, Secretary, for his work in revising the texts.

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JEAN-LOUIS CARD. TAURAN

President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

MERCY
IN OTHER RELIGIONS

BUDDHISM

In the traditional Buddhist sculpture, the statues of the Buddha are made with several different hand-signs, one among which is called 'symbol of no-fear' (*abhaya-mudra*), a sign which indicates that there is nothing for others to be scared about the Buddha. In a broader sense this symbol conveys that the Buddha is a source of peace to the world. The Buddha gives peace to the world not by means of any particular act but by means of his peaceful nature devoid of any fear or aggression. Where mercy is spoken of, Buddhism advocates *karuna*, which may be rendered as compassion, to those who are grieved, and going further, it culminates in spreading the sentiment of 'friendliness' or love (*metta/maithri*) to all beings.

Compassion according to Buddhism is the heavy heart one feels when one is encountered with the suffering of others. This suffering or despair could be originated from any number of causes, internal or external, including poverty, disease, death, war, conflict and aggression. The world we share with one another is full of suffering. It is particularly so at present with conflicts generated by political and religious ideologies. The enlightened beings, Buddhas, silent Buddhas and arhants, show compassion to all without making any discrimination. Consequently, theirs is described as great compassion – *maha karuna*. Although these beings are ethically and morally higher than the ordinary people who become active or passive partners of conflicts, their relation to the latter is not one of power to the powerless. This involves, among other

things, forgiveness which is a process of both giving and receiving, not something that flows from the higher to the lower. The Bodhisatva, one who is endeavouring to achieve the Buddha-hood, is the Buddhist ideal of ultimate self-less social worker. His behavior is motivated by two great virtues, compassion and wisdom (karuna and prajna). The combination of the two virtues makes certain that his acts are always most compassionate and most rational. Since all beings are potential Bodhisatvas, Buddhism envisages a world occupied by such beings guided by compassion and wisdom.

Among the ordinary people, it is understandable how they feel offended, hurt and damaged in conflict situations and consequently tend to retaliate and to take revenge. In a war, it is quite understandable how winners feel about the vanquished. The Buddha warns us against satisfying this crude instinct. He says:

Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law (The Dhammapada: 05).

In such circumstances as this, it is proper for the victor to forget and forgive and do everything possible to assure safety to the vanquished. This is an act of giving (dana), and what is given is 'non-fear (abhaya), namely, assurance of life, confidence, safety and peace of mind to those who have been deprived of these precious things.

Buddhism teaches the possibility of this particular giving in a much wider context lying beyond narrow confines of war and aggression. This is articulated by way of the five vices to be refrained from in one's daily life. They are: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, falsehood and consumption of alcohol. Refraining from these five constitutes the five precepts to be

practiced by all in any society. It is held that one who practices the five precepts automatically gives peace, security and confidence (abhaya) to his fellow beings and to all beings, human and non-human.

Ultimately, the Buddha sees both winner and the vanquished as occupying two sides of the same phenomenon, one is not really advantaged over the other:

The victor breeds hatred. The defeated live in pain. Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat (The Dhammapada: 201).

This statement of the Buddha refers to a situation in which even compassion becomes redundant for where there are neither victors nor vanquished there is no need of compassion. This may not be achieved universally for there will be a need for compassion always so long as there are those who are covered with lust. Nevertheless, there is a more beautiful state of mind which makes human existence itself, along with all forms of life, beautiful. It is a state of mind in which one radiates one's good will and loving kindness to all beings as a mother would do to her only child.

May all beings be happy and secure; may their minds be contented!

Whatever living beings there may be – feeble or strong, long (or tall) or stout, or medium, short, small, or large, seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born and those who are yet to be born – may all beings, without exception, be happy-minded!

Let not one deceive another, nor despise and person whatever in any place. In anger or ill-will let not one wish and harm to another!

Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings!

Let one's thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world – above, below and across – without any obstruction, without and hatred, without any enmity (Discourse on Practice of Love, Metta Sutta of the Sutta Nipata, Sn. 1.8).

CONFUCIANISM

Confucius

The *Dialogues* of Confucius state that “since a gentleman behaves with reverence and diligence, treating people with deference and courtesy, all within the four seas are his brothers” (*Dialogues*, 12.5). Confucius’s ideal human virtue was *ren*, which has been translated as benevolence, love, humanity, etc. Its wide spectrum includes also mercy, implied in the golden rule appearing so often in the *Dialogues*. Confucius declared his ideal for goodness in human beings in this way: “The good man, what he wishes to achieve for himself, he helps others to achieve; what he wishes to obtain for himself, he enables others to obtain – the ability simply to take one’s own aspirations as a guide is the recipe for goodness” (*Dialogues*, 6:30).

Confucius was merciful even towards animals, as recorded by his: “The master fished with a line, not with a net. When hunting, he never shot a roosting bird” (*Dialogues*, 7:27).

Mencius

Mencius (approx. 389-304 BC) lived about a century after Confucius. He prided himself with faithfully transmitting the doctrine of Confucius. Mencius stated that “the sense of mercy is found in all men” (*Mengzi* 6A6). The pages of the book of *Mencius* highlight how the concept of *ren* of Confucius is including mercy and compassion. Since they are mostly directed at kings and rulers, he reminds them of their duty to

take good care of their subjects, the same care that a parent shows when carrying his infant baby in his arms, and primarily to take care of the neediest, such as orphans and widows (e.g. 1A7, 1B5). Here is the most celebrated page, that later along the centuries became for many Confucians a kind of first principle of all their teachings:

“All human beings have a mind that cannot bear to see the sufferings of others... Here is why I say that all human beings have a mind that commiserates with others. Now, if anyone were suddenly to see a child about to fall into a well, his mind would be filled with alarm, distress, pity, and compassion. That he would react accordingly is not because he would hope to use the opportunity to ingratiate himself with the child’s parents, nor because he would seek commendation from neighbors and friends, nor because he would hate the adverse reputation [that could come from not reacting accordingly]. From this it may be seen that one who lacks a mind that feels pity and compassion would not be human; one who lacks a mind that feels shame and aversion would not be human; one who lacks a mind that feels modesty and compliance would not be human; and one who lacks a mind that knows right and wrong would not be human. The mind’s feeling of pity and compassion is the sprout of humaneness [*ren*]; the mind’s feeling of shame and aversion is the sprout of rightness [*yi*]; the mind’s feeling of modesty and compliance is the sprout of propriety [*li*]; and the mind’s sense of right and wrong is the sprout of wisdom [*zhi*]. Human beings have these four sprouts just as they have four limbs. For one to have these four sprouts and yet to say of oneself that one is unable to fulfill them is to injure oneself, while to say that one’s ruler is unable to fulfill them is to injure one’s ruler. When we know how to enlarge

and bring to fulfillment these four sprouts that are within us, it will be like a fire beginning to burn or a spring finding an outlet. If one is able to bring them to fulfillment, they will be sufficient to enable him to protect ‘all within the four seas’; if one is not, they will be insufficient even to enable him to serve his parents” (*Mengzi*, 2A6) [Transl. Irene Bloom, pp. 35-36].

Later Centuries

During the Song Dynasty (960-1279), overcoming the philosophical challenge of Buddhism and Daoism, Confucianism started a great revival. One of the main authors of the revival was Zhang Zai (1020-1077), who developed further the idea of universal brotherhood to include all beings, thus achieving, in the words of Tu Wei-Ming, an *anthropocosmic* ethics, where all existing beings are taken care of:

“Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I regard as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. The great ruler (the emperor) is the eldest son of my parents (Heaven and earth), and the great ministers are his stewards. Respect the aged – this is the way to treat them as elders should be treated. Show deep love toward the orphaned and the weak – this is the way to treat them as the young should be treated. The sage identifies his character with that of Heaven and earth, and the virtuous man is the best [among the children of Heaven and earth]. Even those who are tired, infirm, crippled, or sick; those who have no brothers or children, wives or husbands, are all my brothers who are

in distress, and have no one to turn to. When the time comes, to keep himself from harm – this is the care of a son. To rejoice in Heaven, and have no anxiety – this is filial piety at its purest. [...] Wealth, honor, blessing, and benefits are meant for the enrichment of my life, while poverty, humble station, and sorrow are meant to help me to fulfillment. In life I follow and serve [Heaven and earth]. In death I will be at peace (From the *Western Inscription*, transl. by Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton [New Jersey] 1963, pp. 497-498).

Wang Yangming (1472-1529), another cardinal figure of the Confucian tradition, stressed further the overall unity of beings in the cosmos: “When we see a child about to fall into the well, we cannot help a feeling of alarm and commiseration. This shows that our humanity (*ren*) forms one body with the child. It may be objected that the child belongs to the same species. Again, when we observe the pitiful cries and frightened appearances of birds and animals about to be slaughtered, we cannot help feeling an ‘inability to bear’ their suffering. This shows that our humanity forms one body with birds and animals. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings as we are. But when we see plants broken and destroyed, we cannot help a feeling of pity. This shows that our humanity forms one body with plants. It may be said that plants are living things as we are. Yet even when we see tiles and stones shattered and crushed, we cannot help a feeling of regret. This shows that our humanity forms one body with tiles and stones (From *Inquiry on the Great Learning*, transl. Wing-tsit Chan, in *A Source Book*, op. cit., pp. 659-660).

JUDAISM

El male-rakhamim אל מלא רחמים God, fullness of mercy and *Pater misericordiarum* אב־הרחמים is God, Creator of the universe, Father of mankind and Redeemer of his people Israel, who reveals Himself as fullness and perfection of tenderness and mercy, as compassionate as a mother's and a father's innards. This visceral, profound and unconditional love, is expressed in the Bible through the language of passion between two lovers in the *Song of Songs*, a loving feeling that the prophet Hosea compares to a husband's impetus of forgiveness towards his unfaithful wife. Prompted by this boundless love, God manifests Himself to Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, Moses and the Prophets, to the Jewish people's sons and daughters, whom He chose with the infinite love a mother has for her children. In the Jewish tradition – that has been evidenced for thousands of years until this day by the Torah, Sacred Scriptures, the Talmud and the Masters' thinking, and was lived out in personal and community prayer, as well as in family and community life – God lets Himself be known and loved as He who is always faithful in love, mercy and forgiveness to a thousand generations (*Exodus* 20:6), which means beyond any possible human reckoning. Merciful divine goodness – חסד *Hesed* – is infinite over time and space, towards every creature, plant, animal and, in particular, is reflected in the human person, who is created “in the image and likeness” of God our Lord (*Genesis* 1: 26-27) and is called to imitate and achieve divine perfection, in the harmony of truth and justice. This vocation to love and mercy

is a founding and peculiar trait of the people of Israel, who was “chosen” (*am-segullah*) for a ministry of holiness in compliance with the Torah and the precepts (*mizwòt*): “Be holy, because I am Holy” (*Leviticus* 19:2). The divine attribute of mercy perfectly summarizes the characteristics of God’s redeeming action, who never gets tired of forgiving and saving us from sin, so that Love might triumph in everything, for everything and over everything, as it is reflected in Israel’s virtuous obedience and faith (*Deuteronomy* 10:12-22).

We can partake of and experience universal divine Love in our human condition, in different ways. After the deluge and the covenant with Noah and his descendants, the road to divine goodness was opened through faithfulness to so-called “Noahic” precepts, which can be summarized with the prohibition of idolatry and violence against our neighbors, and with the duty to establish a society that is regulated according to just norms (cf. *Genesis* 9:1-17). It is a vocation to compassion that is also reflected in other noble humanistic and spiritual traditions, in the Roman and classical virtue of *pietas*, as well as in Buddhist benevolence, in the *ahimsa* of Indian tradition or in the Confucian *ren*. All men and women, irrespective of their age and condition, are called by divine goodness to experience the mercy and love that God spreads throughout the universe, and to fulfill it especially towards the poor, sick, ailing and everyone who needs care and affection. This vocation to be lived in joy and thanksgiving is a priority ethical duty to achieve the imitation of divine virtue, in justice required by reciprocity, and in mercy exceeding mere justice. According to the Jewish Torah, this universal ethical appeal is fulfilled by obeying the precept to love your neighbor (*Leviticus* 19:18), which extends to love for foreigners who are not part of the

Jewish people but enjoy the same citizenship rights (*Leviticus* 19:34).

According to Jewish Masters' doctrine, human mercy's moral urgency flows from divine mercy, to be achieved with the utmost determination, because exercising works of compassion (*gemilut hasidim*) is one of the three pillars on which the world rests, as Simeon the Righteous stated in the *Mishnah* (*Avoth* 1:2). Good works should far exceed what is deemed wise, as well as the letter of the Law (*lifanim mi-shurat ha-din*), since "one hour of repentance and good works in this world is better than the future world's whole life (*Avoth* 4:17). Therefore, the wise men of Israel acknowledge that, thanks to works of justice and mercy, not only Jews but all righteous people – *Tzaddiqim* – in all nations shall inherit the future world: "Works of compassion are pagans' offerings and reconcile them with God" (Yohannan ben Zakkai in *Baba Bathra* 10b), and "The righteous of nations are God's priests" (*Eliyahu Zuta* 20). In accordance with God's commandment (*Exodus* 22:20-23), Jews and non-Jews share the joint responsibility of taking care of people in need, starting from widows, orphans, the poor, the sick, foreigners, prisoners. In this common engagement in works of mercy, for justice and charity, man's cooperation in God's plan is fulfilled in order to take care of creation and make it better (*tiqqun olam*). The rules to celebrate the jubilee every fifty years (*Leviticus* 25), which included debt remission, also express the ambition to implement the same spirit of solidarity in society and public economy, as well as the sharing of goods that God has given freely to all without any privilege for anyone.

The highest experience of divine mercy is the forgiveness and atonement (*Kippur*) of human sins by God, this is why

Jewish life and tradition give great importance to the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) which, when the Temple of Jerusalem still existed, also entailed a complex ceremony (*Leviticus* 16). The Day of Atonement, which is celebrated every year with a solemn rite the tenth day of the month of Tishri, is still characterized by gestures and prayers that express a very high notion of divinity, and of the holiness to which every human being is called: total fasting, penitential gestures, confession of sins, prayer to invoke forgiveness, the inner attitude of deep repentance coming from the awareness of the evil that was perpetrated, the request for forgiveness and reconciliation from the offended person and just redress for the unfair treatment of others. On this day, more than on any other day, each Jew is called to engage in *teshuvah* ('conversion'), restoring one's life right direction towards God, pondering at length the prophet Hosea's urging (chap. 14): "*Return, Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: 'Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips' "*". At the end of the great Day of Atonement, among the most meaningful prayers that summarize this path of conversion, one prayer reads: "*Oh God our Lord, you stretch your hand out to sinners so that they might return to the right path, and you stretch out your right hand to welcome those who have repented. You taught us to confess our sins: please accept our sincere repentance. May it be a welcome sacrifice, according to the promise you made to us!*".

Texts

Hosea, Chapter 14

Return, Israel, to the LORD, your God;
you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

³ Take with you words,
and return to the LORD;
Say to him, “Forgive all iniquity,
and take what is good.

Let us offer the fruit of our lips.

⁴ – Assyria will not save us,
nor will we mount horses;
We will never again say, ‘Our god,’
to the work of our hands;
for in you the orphan finds compassion”.

⁵ “I will heal their apostasy,
I will love them freely;
for my anger is turned away from them.

⁶ I will be like the dew for Israel:
he will blossom like the lily;
He will strike root like the Lebanon cedar,

⁷ and his shoots will go forth.
His splendor will be like the olive tree
and his fragrance like Lebanon cedar.

⁸ Again they will live in his shade;
they will raise grain,
They will blossom like the vine,
and his renown will be like the wine of Lebanon.

⁹ Ephraim! What more have I to do with idols?
I have humbled him, but I will take note of him.

I am like a verdant cypress tree.
From me fruit will be found for you!”.

Stretch out your hand

“Oh God our Lord, you stretch your hand out to sinners
So that they might return to the right path,
And you stretch out your right hand to welcome
Those who have repented.
You taught us to confess our sins:
Please accept our sincere repentance.
May it be a welcome sacrifice,
According to the promise you made to us!”.

(Preghiera alla fine del Kippur, in Elia Kopciowski, Ascolta Israele, Ed. Paoline, Milano 1983, p. 147)

Rabbinic Statements on Mercy

“Rabbi Gamliel the son of Rabbi Simeon says (on the words) ‘and He will grant you mercy and have mercy on you’ (*Deuteronomy* 13:18), whoever has mercy on (God’s) creatures, is granted mercy from Heaven” (*TB Shabbat* 151b).

“One who shows no mercy for fellow creatures is assuredly not of the (true) seed of Abraham, our father” (*TB Betzah* 32b).

“Be full of mercy one for the other and the Holy One Blessed be He will have mercy on you” (*Genesis Rabbah*, 33).

“Says the Holy One Blessed Be He Let my (attribute of) Mercy overcome my (attribute of) Judgment, so that I may deal with my children beyond the strict limits of judgment” (*TB Bera-Koth* 7a.).

“We are obligated to be careful with regard to the commandment of charity to a greater extent than all [other] positive commandments, because charity is an identifying mark of a righteous person, a descendant of Abraham, our patriarch, as [Genesis 18:19] states: ‘I have known him, because he commands his children... to perform charity.’ The throne of Israel will not be established, nor will the true faith stand except through charity, as [Isaiah 54:14] states: ‘You shall be established through righteousness.’ And Israel will be redeemed solely through charity, as [Isaiah 1:27] states: “Zion will be redeemed through judgment and those who return to her through charity” (Maimonides, *Yad*, Laws of Giving to the Poor 10:1).

JAINISM

Jainism, traditionally known as *Jain Dharma*, is a religion of compassion (*karuṇā*), universal love (*maitrī*) and forgiveness (*kṣamā*). True to this nature, it encourages its followers to completely identify themselves, with empathy, not just with their fellow beings but also with all the other living beings and with the entire universe. Its adherents are therefore exhorted to follow the principles of “live and let live” and “live and help others live”.

The popular term used to express the concept of “mercy” in Jainism is “*dayā*” which also means compassion, empathy and charity. “*Dayā*” has been described by great Jain teachers as the “beneficent mother of all beings”. Words like kindness, sympathy, benevolence, forbearance, forgiveness, generosity, understanding also, in one way or the other, refer to the different aspects of “mercy”. Given the fact that Jainism speaks of compassion towards all, it uses the word “*jīva-dayā*” to denote care for and sharing of the gift of knowledge and material wellbeing with all the living beings, tending, protecting and serving them. To this end, it strongly advocates respect for life, in any and every form and sharing of goods with the needy and suffering. Vegetarianism is thus a hallmark of Jain life with the majority of Jains practising lacto vegetarianism.

“*Kṣamā*” (forgiveness) in Jainism is a strong component of “mercy”. The Jains observe a Day of Universal Forgiveness at the conclusion of *Paryuṣaṇa* or *Daslakṣaṇa* festival celebrated every year in August or September. They ask for forgive-

ness from each other saying, “*Micchāmi Dukkaḍam*” which means “If I have caused you offence in any way, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word or action, then, I ask your forgiveness”. By doing so, they not only renew their friendship with one another but also wish that all living beings may cherish one another.

The most famous word though that eloquently propounds the concept of “mercy” in Jainism is “*Ahiṃsā*” (non-violence) which is an aspect of “mercy” itself. Its pre-eminence among the Jains can be gauged from the oft-quoted phrase, “*ahiṃsā paramo dharmah*” (non-violence is the supreme form of religious conduct). Labelled generally as the sheet-anchor of Jainism, “*ahiṃsā*” prescribes a path of “non-injury” by thought, word or deed towards all living beings. According to the Jain Scriptures: “The *Arhats* and *Bhagwats* of the past, present and future, all say thus, speak thus, declare thus, explain thus: all breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away” (*Ācāraṅga Sūtra*: Book I, Lecture 4, Lesson 1, Aphorism 1. English translation by Herman Jacobi). Tirthankar Mahavir said, “To kill any living being amounts to killing oneself. Compassion to others is compassion to one’s own self. Therefore, one should avoid violence like poison and thorn (that cause pain)” (*Mahavir Vāṇī*, in jaincosmos.blogspot.it; Nov. 19, 2012). Although the word “*ahiṃsā*” is stated in the negative (non-violence), yet it is rooted in a host of positive thoughts, words and actions that can help people live the golden rule of life (you should do unto them what you want them to do unto you) and thus become more compassionate and more humane towards all living beings.

HINDUISM

Mercy or compassion is a core principle of the *Sanatana Dharma* as Hinduism is called and a noble virtue its followers are exhorted to nurture. In classical literature of Hinduism, its many shades have been explained by different terms, the foremost among them are: *dayā*, *karunā* and *anukampā*.

Listing ‘dayā’ as the foremost of the virtues required of a person wanting to receive *samskaras* (sacraments), Gautama Dharmasutra (600-400 BC) defines it as follows: *Ātmavata sarvabhūtesu yad hitāya śivāya ca / Vartate satatam hr̥ṣṭo kṛtsnā hy eṣā dayā smṛtā*. It means: “complete love belongs to one who always delights in behaving towards all beings as equal to the self, for their good and for their welfare”.

Padma Purana speaks of it as the virtuous desire to mitigate the sorrow and difficulties of others by making all the efforts necessary; Matsya Purana, calls it as one of the necessary paths to being happy and describes it as a value that treats not just the human beings but all living beings as one’s own self and as one that wants the welfare of all. Ekadashi Tat-tvam explains it as a virtue that treats a stranger, a relative, a friend and a foe as one’s own self. According to Hitopadesa (1:60), ‘dayā’ is not dependent on the qualities of virtues of the being to which it is addressed: *nirgunesv api sattvesu dayām kurvanti sādḥavah* (Good people are compassionate even of beings that have no value).

In a fascinating story found in Bṛihad-āranyaṅka Upaniṣhad (5:2), God is shown as giving a message, at their requests, to

each of the three groups (gods, demons and human beings) that came to meet him. His message was the same for all, a one syllable 'da'. But each of the groups understood it differently. While the gods took it as meaning 'damam' (self-control); the demons thought of it as 'dayā' (mercy, compassion) and the human beings internalized it as 'dānam' (giving, sharing). Though understood differently, yet it can be seen that all the three complement one another: Without 'damam' there cannot be 'dānam' and without 'dayā' a truly human world cannot be built.

The word 'karunā', likewise, denotes placing of one's self in another's place and understanding the other from his or her perspective. 'Anukampā', yet another word for compassion refers to one's state after one has observed and understood the pain and suffering in the other.

Compassion (mercy) is the basis for the Hindu understanding and practice of 'ahimsa' (non-violence), a core virtue, declared to be the supreme ingredient of righteousness. Compassion is not pity or feeling sorry for the sufferer, because that is marred with condescension; compassion is feeling one with the sufferer, leading to acts of kindness, mercy and charity in selfless service (seva) especially to those in need and in pain. This compassion extends to animals as well. This explains why most of the devout Hindus are vegetarians.

ISLAM

After the solemn profession of God's oneness – “There is no God but Allâh” (the second part would be “Muhammad is the messenger of God”) – the most characterizing adjective attributed to God by Islam is his being merciful: “the Lord of Mercy” and “the Giver of Mercy” (*rahmân, rahîm*). Both terms refer to the *rahm*, the mother's womb, the place and symbol of the greatest mercy or, even better, tenderness (cf. *Isaiah* 49:14-15). The term ‘mercy’ is mentioned 62 times in the Quran, while ‘merciful’ occurs 57 times.

113 out of the 114 suras (chapters) of the Quran begin with the words (*basmala*) “In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy”.

There is also one sura in the Quran that is named *al-Rahmân* (the Lord of Mercy) (n. 55, made up by 78 verses).

Among the 99 “most beautiful names of Allâh” (*al-asmâ' al-husna*), some highlight other features of God such as, for example, his forgiveness (*al-Ghafour, al-Ghaffâr*, He who forgives a lot).

Muhammad's own mission in the world is described as “a Mercy to the worlds”: “And we have not sent you except as a Mercy to the worlds” (*Quran* 21:107).

Muslim always try to start any important activity by saying: “In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy” (*Bi-'sm Allâh al-Rahmân al-Rahîm*).

There are a number of Muslim masculine names which evoke the merciful God, “servant of the Lord of Mercy” (*‘abd al-Rahmân*), “servant of the Giver of Mercy” (*‘abd al-Rahîm*), “servant of He who forgives a lot” (*‘abd al-Ghaffour*, *‘abd al-Ghaffâr*). There is also the name *rahîm* (merciful) and the female version *rahma* (mercy).

Another aspect of God in the Quran and Islamic tradition is his being “Compassionate” (*al-Ra’ûf*), which is also one of Allâh’s 99 most beautiful names, used also as a masculine name (*‘abd al-Ra’ûf*).

Furthermore, there are a number of nouns and adjectives that extol God’s power, in particular the title of “All-powerful” (*al-Qâdir*).

Muslims too are called to be merciful towards other Muslims (cf. *Quran* 48:29) and other groups that are seen as vulnerable: orphans, widows, poor beggars, travelers (cf. *Quran* 93:9-10; 17: 26).

Muslim mercy also extends to the animal world: letting an animal die of thirst or starvation is not allowed, and the same applies to overloading and abusing animals. Care also applies to the inanimate world, out of respect towards the Creator (*al-Khâliq*, another one of Allâh’s most beautiful names) and other people.

According to al-Ghazâlî (1058-1111), one of the greatest Islamic theologians and thinkers, “perfect mercy is that which actually bestows good upon those in need. The willing of good for the needy is concern for them. All-inclusive mercy gives to both the worthy and unworthy. The mercy of God is perfect and all-inclusive. It is perfect in the sense that He not only wills the satisfaction of the needs of the needy but

actually satisfies them. It is all-inclusive in that it includes the worthy and the unworthy, this life and that which is to come and encompasses the essentials, needs and advantages which go beyond them. Thus He is in truth the Compassionate absolutely” (see “Ninety-Nine Names of God in Islam”, a translation of the major portion of al-Ghazālī’s *Al-Maḥṣad Al-Asnā*, by Robert Charles Stade, Daystars Press, Ibadan (Nigeria), 1970, 13-14).

Muslim individuals and communities alike are particularly sensitive to the urgings of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, and are ready to devote a special attention to the poor and the needy and work together to help our “common home” overcome its difficulties, in the name of Allāh, the Lord of Mercy and the Giver of Mercy.

Texts

The first Sura of the Quran, Fâtiha (“the opening”), which is repeated by Muslims during each prayer cycle and is uttered at least seventeen times every day, refers to these two names, al-Rahmân (the Lord of Mercy), al-Rahîm (the Giver of Mercy) in the first and third verses:

“¹In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy! ²Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds, ³the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy, ⁴Master of the Day of Judgment. ⁵It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help. ⁶Guide us to the straight path: ⁷the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray!”.

Through the same mercy, human beings are able to grow in the knowledge of the world and the universe:

¹⁶³“Your God is the one God: there is no god except Him, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy. ¹⁶⁴In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the seas with goods for people; in the water which God sends down from the sky to give life to the earth when it has been barren, scattering all kinds of creatures over it; in the changing of the winds and clouds that run their appointed courses between the sky and earth: there are signs in all these for those who use their minds” (*Quran* 2:163-164).

God forgives all sins, except for idolatry:

“God does not forgive the worship of others beside Him – though He does forgive whoever He will for lesser sins – for whoever does this has gone far, far astray” (*Quran* 4:116).

God has taken it on himself to be merciful:

“Say, ‘To whom belongs all that is in the heavens and earth?’ Say, ‘To God. He has taken it upon Himself to be merciful. He will certainly gather you on the Day of Resurrection, which is beyond all doubt. Those who deceive themselves will not believe’” (*Quran* 6:12).

⁵⁴When those who believe in Our revelations come to you [Prophet], say, “Peace be upon you. Your Lord has taken it on Himself to be merciful: if any of you has foolishly done a bad deed, and afterwards repented and mended his ways, God is most forgiving and most merciful”. ⁵⁵In this way We explain the revelations, so that the way for sinners may be made clear (*Quran* 6:54-55).

No one is righteous, outside of divine mercy:

“If it were not for God’s bounty and mercy towards you, not one of you would have attained purity. God purifies whoever He will: God is all hearing, all seeing (*Quran* 24:21b).

(*The Quran – A New Translation* by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford World’s Classics, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004).

On several occasions, the Prophet of Islam urged believers to be merciful. This provision is one of the main signs of true allegiance to Islam. According to a prophetic tradition (hadith), Muhammad said: “God made mercy one-hundred parts. He held back ninety-nine parts, and sent down one part to earth. It is from that part that creatures show mercy to each other, such that a mare will lift her hoof over her foal, fearing that she might harm him” (Sahih al-Bukhari no. 6066, Kitab al-Adab).

TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

As a Christian theme, the term “mercy” does not have a direct and immediate correlation as such in the languages and concepts of most of the traditional societies associated with traditional religions (e.g.: the primal religions of ethnic peoples or natives of the southern continents of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas). All the same, followers of traditional religions have their own ways of expressing and practicing mercy according to their own understanding and reality. Mercy is both religious and cultural in its meaning and expression. It is a basic cultural and community expression of the society. Seen from this context, mercy in traditional religions could be viewed from the following two perspectives, namely: a) The traditional religions’ conceptions of God as creator and sustainer of universe, b) Traditional religions’ teachings on community life, sharing and caring.

a) The Traditional Religions’ conceptions of God as Creator and Sustainer of universe

In traditional religions, God is conceptualized as creator and sustainer of the universe and man. Followers of traditional religions accentuate the universe with profound religious meaning. This deep awareness and recognition of God as creator and sustainer of the universe results in a way of life that is imbued with a deep religious sense.¹ They believe that there is a High God, a Supreme Being and Creator; He has no equal, is not sub-

¹ II VATICAN COUNCIL, *Nostra aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, 28 October 1965: AAS 58 (1966) 740-744: 2.

jected to any power, but controls the entire cosmos. He is not isolated from His creation; rather He is involved in the life of the human beings on earth. He is not visible to mortal eyes but he manifests himself in various ways. This great notion of God as the first and ultimate cause and sustainer of things; a living sense of God as the Supreme personal and physical Being pervades the whole of culture of the people of the traditional religion.² It is also a widespread view among some adherents of traditional religions that God continues to create. Thus, the creation of the universe did not stop in the distant past: it is an ongoing process, which will probably never end. In many societies of the traditional religions, it is believed that the universe is divisible into two. These are the visible and the invisible parts, or the heavens (or sky) and the earth. Some people, however, hold that the universe is in the form of a three-tier creation, namely: the heavens, the earth and the underworld, which lies below it. But the people of traditional religions do not think of these divisions as separate but see them as linked together. God is often believed to have other beings living with him or close to him in heaven or “sky”. Some of these are in charge of different departments of the universe, others are his messengers and servants or ministers, and some are like his children. The keyword here is that God cares for the people. God is the creator and origin of the universe and everything that inhabits the earth, including man. God not only created the universe but he cares, and that is why he shares in every detail in the affairs of man and the community through the mediation of the ancestors and God’s omnipresence. In other words, traditional

² PAUL VI, *Africae Terrarum*, Apostolic Message to the Peoples of Africa, 29 October 1967: AAS 69 (1967) 1073-1102: 8.

religions have anthropomorphic interpretation of the universe where man is at the center of the created world and he is conceptualized as the being that receives the greatest attention of God the Creator. Since man thinks of himself as being at the center, he consequently sees the universe from that perspective. It is as if the whole world exists for man's sake. Therefore, traditional religion people look for the usefulness of the universe to man, what the world can do for man, and how man can use the world for his own good. This attitude towards the universe is deeply engrained among the people of traditional religions. Man sees the universe in terms of himself, and endeavors to live in harmony with it. Man is not the master in the universe; he is only the center, the friend, the beneficiary, the user. For that reason, he has to live in harmony with the universe, obeying the laws of natural, moral and mystical order as laid down by the traditions and customs handed down by the ancestors. If these are unduly disturbed, it is man who suffers most.

b) Traditional Religions' Teachings on Community Life, Sharing and Caring

Secondly, traditional religions are basically community cultural religion. To say this is to recognize that traditional religions function as the life wire of the community and its component families. In this sense, community just like the concept of family in traditional religions, includes all living members of these groups, besides being mystically connected to the ancestors and, through social pacts, to outsiders such as friends and others. Besides, membership within the community (clan or tribe) is usually brought about by special initiation rites showing thereby the sacredness of the community. In other words, the cat-

egory “community” in societies of traditional religions evokes not only blood communal membership of few living members, but also the themes of clan, tribe, affinity, maternity, *patria potestas*, priesthood, ancestors (thereby including the themes of mythical time, arch-types, heroes, founders), initiation and hence fecundity, life, power, sacrality, and so forth. Again, the concept of community in traditional religions derives from the extension in time through matrimonial links of relationships between parents and children of a particular extended family or clan. Besides, it includes individuals without any parental relationships, but who, having been put under the care of a family head of one of the families that make up the community, end up being considered members of the community.

In some societies of the traditional religions, the stress on family is not on legality but rather on togetherness, on communion, sharing, caring, compassion, on respect for traditions and on unquestioning acceptance of what the ancestors have practiced, sanctioned and established as the way things are done. People practice extended family system through which every member of the family is taken care of in moments of joy or trials of life. People are at home both in the nuclear family and in the extended family in the societies of traditional religions. It is true that the father is taken as the head of the family, yet his function has a link with the ancestors. The father is regarded as the family priest. He is regarded as the loving provider for the family unit, and as the reference point for tradition and the link with the ancestors. In fact, the traditional religions’ sense of the family brings out the complementarity of the role of the members of the family. Each member of the family knows his or her role. There are certain duties as well as obligations expected of husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and children. The emphasis is

on communitarian living. The husband or father is appreciated as the protector and symbol of unity. The mother or wife is all the more appreciated as the one who disseminates love, tenderness, care, calm and peace. The children are considered a blessing from God, and as comforters of the parents and helpers of the aged or sick parents and grandparents. According to a general rule, the division of work between family members is done on the bases of two criteria: sex and age; the boys learn their job gradually in company of their father, the girls learn in company of their mother. In other words, the traditional religion sense of the family has room for all its members: parents, children, grandparents and grandchildren, sick and healthy, old and young, hard-working and handicapped members. Family affairs or disputes are settled through dialogue. From this standpoint, one can reaffirm that the stress is on community. Community life is the soul of many societies of traditional religions.

As regards marriage, this is a family affair. This means that marriage involving a member of the family is considered not just the affair of the young man and his fiancée (or the young woman and her fiancé), but a long process between both families (entailing the marriage payment by the fiancé, religious ceremonies and sacrifice, and the celebration of the marriage itself). The long process is often carried out on behalf of the intending couple by their families. One of the major reasons of the family's strong involvement in marriages stems from the fact that the children that would result from marriages are already counted members of the family. In fact, only the family head can give *his* daughter in marriage and receive wives for *his* sons. Marriage in turn, creates new relationships between couples and between them and their various in-laws and the two families thus allied.

Conclusion

The cultural meaning of “mercy” in traditional religions is apparent from the people’s constant search to live in harmony with God, nature and with one another through community living as laid down by their ancestral traditions and customs. It is seen by the way the people strive to take care of one another through family and community living. The breach of any aspect of the customs and traditions for harmonious living as laid down by the ancestors by any living member of the community or the community itself is regarded as an offence against the ancestral tradition and the Supreme God, the Creator of the universe. To appease God and the ancestors and restore harmony for the well-being of the individual or the community, sacrifice is needed. Sacrifice in this sense becomes the way adherents of traditional religions use to welcome back an offender into its main fold after a period of estrangement caused by negligence or evil acts committed by the offender. In traditional religions, an offence of this kind has both personal and communitarian dimensions. Any offence by any member of the community is seen as an infringement against the community and its ancestral traditions. In this sense, every offence has a religious interpretation and so needs religious response to reestablish the offender once more into the mainstream of the life of the community. This helps to remove the sense of guilt both for the offender and the community as a whole. Again, the strong sense of the community in the traditional religions helps to protect and take care of the weak, the elderly, the sick and needy of the society as laid down by the traditions and customs of the people. This practice brings out the cultural sense of mercy as compassion, sharing, caring, forgiveness and solidarity as virtualized in the way of life of adherents of traditional religions.

SHINTOISM

The Japanese word ‘itsukushimi’ is the noun form corresponding to the verb ‘itsukushimu’, meaning the fact of ‘itsukushimu’.¹ If now we ask what is the meaning of the verb ‘itsukushimu’ (applied to God), it would be that: “God loves/treasures us as His children”. Here the word “to treasure as something precious” (‘taisetsunisuru’) is the same one which was used by Christians when Christianity was first introduced to Japan to express (in translation) the love of Christ as ‘Kami no go taisetsu’: the love of God.

However, the term ‘Kami no itsukushimu’ is etymologically rooted in the expressions found in Shinto’s ancient prayers (norito) and similar religious formulas referring to ‘Kami no mi i itsu’. Now, here, the particle ‘mi’ expresses deep respect for the thing signified by the following term, namely, in our case: ‘itsu’, meaning ‘the great power or majesty’ of the Divinity. By adding ‘kushimu’ to ‘itsu’, the Japanese term ‘itsukushimu’ was formed. In the term ‘Kushimu’, ‘kushi’ means something marvelous, wondrous, out of the ordinary, surprising, strange (fushigi). Therefore, the word ‘itsukushimu’ has its roots in the Shinto technical terms ‘Mi i tsu’ and ‘kushimu’ having the original meaning of “the wondrous great power/majesty” of the Divinity.

¹ The term carries with it, of course, a Japanese nuance that is difficult, indeed impossible, to translate. It refers to the feeling or sentiment of tenderness and love towards someone, like, for example, that of a mother, or a father, towards their child.

Again, the ancient form of the verb 'itsukushimu' is deeply related to another technical term of Shintoism: 'itsukushimu'. Here 'itsu/ku' refers to our reverential fear of the 'great wondrous power' of the Divinity, which urges us to purify ourselves body and soul, in order to be able to worship the Divinity. By doing so, we came to believe that the Divinity would have 'itsukushimu' feelings/sentiments of love/tenderness towards us. A very important teaching of Shinto is that we should first purify ourselves, body and soul, before we worship the Divinity. Purifying our body and our soul means to present ourselves to the Divinity without having to be ashamed of ourselves, leading a pure, just, beautiful life, as honest and sincere persons, so that the Divinity may look upon us with tenderness and love us. This is 'Kami no itsukushimi', the tender love of God, according to the religious tradition of Shinto.

Kiyoki (pure), *Akaki* (joyful), *Naoki* (honest), *Tadashii* (just) and *Makoto-no-Kokoro* (sincere heart) are the principal characteristics of Shinto spirituality. *Makoto* expresses the knowledge of the gods and the relationship with them by way of living a humble and sincere life. *Makoto* is the core of the spirituality of Shinto. The divinity requires the human person cultivate a sincere heart and true heart without falsehood. *Makoto* is invisible, but the gods see it. Shinto emphasizes the need of the perfect purification of the Shinto priest who celebrates the rites, and not only the purification of the heart, but also that of the body and of the attitudes of daily life and speech.

Shinto describes mercy in the chapter of the Sun Goddess: *Amaterasu Oomikami*, is the Sun Goddess, who radiates energy and love equally to all beings and creatures on the earth.

There was a time when she concealed herself in the Rocky Celestial Cave. Then, the universe turned into total darkness. When she came out of the cave, the universe became bright and full of life. Sun light nurtures all living beings impartially without discrimination. This illustrates the love and mercy of God that fosters all sentient beings in the universe.²

Another episode about mercy is an ancient virtuous emperor in fifth century: Emperor *Nintoku* – who climbed to the top of a mountain, and looked around the country. He did not see cooking smoke rising from houses. He found that people are living in difficulties, so he ordered to exempt people from taxation for three years. This caused damage to the palace, and the roof leaked badly at many places within the palace. But the emperor did not repair the roof, he used vessels to receive leaking rainwater, and he moved himself here and there to escape from the water falling down from the roof. Years later he climbed the mountain and looked at the land. He saw smoke rising into the air from houses, and he realized that people were back in affluent circumstances, and ordered to resume the tax. In those days people prospered and did not suffer by tax, and people praised glorious reign of merciful emperor.³

² “Kojiki, Records of Ancient Matters (Japan’s oldest historical record)” dictated by Hiedano Are, written and compiled by Ohno Yasumaro in 712. TSUGITA MASAKI, *Kojiki volume I*, Kodansha Publishers, Tokyo: 1977, p. 90.

³ TSUGITA MASAKI, *Kojiki volume III*, Kodansha Publishers, Tokyo: 1984, p. 24.

SIKHISM

‘Mercy’ has a pre-eminent place in the Sikh Faith or *Dharam*. God is seen as the epitome and the source of all virtues that include most importantly ‘*prem*’ (love), ‘*deya*’ (mercy & compassion), and ‘*khema*’ (forgiveness) as well. The ‘*Mahadeyal*’ (Super Compassionate), ‘*Deyapati*’ (Lord of Compassion), ‘*Deyal Dev*’ (Merciful God), ‘*Karima Rahima*’ (the Merciful One) as He is called, bestows upon humans virtues for their journey in this world. This may be considered as the first act of God’s mercy in the making of human beings.

‘*Deya*’ (mercy and compassion) therefore, is a divine quality and the highest virtue. The mythical bull supporting the planet earth is Dharam, which is the son of mercy and compassion that patiently holds the planet in its place, meaning, the foundation for Dharam or religion is mercy and compassion – “*Dhaul Dharam deya ka poot*” (Guru Granth Sahib Ji (GGSJ), Ang 3).

The importance of mercy is emphasized in many ways in the Sikh Faith. For example, “*Atth saht teerath, sagal pun, jee deya parvaan*” (GGSJ, Ang 136). It means that exercising mercy and compassion towards all living beings, is more virtuous than pilgrimages to all sacred places and accumulated charitable acts.

“Without compassion and mercy; God’s light will not shine within them” (SGGSJ, Ang 903); “keep your heart content and cherish compassion for all beings” (GGSJ, Ang 299).

Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the Founder of Sikh Faith said that one who is instilled with ‘*deya*’, “chooses to die himself rather

than cause others to die” (GGSJ, Ang 356). Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth and last Guru in human form said, ‘On seeing any person involved in trouble have mercy on him, and remove his sufferings to the best of your ability... ‘He who practises these virtues becomes the greatest of the great and the primal supreme being [in God’s image] will be merciful upon him’ (*The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* by Max Arthur MacCauliffe, Vol. 5, Digital Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 160).

The opportunity to practice mercy and compassion is availed in many forms. This can include ‘*wand chhakna*’ (sharing wealth with others) and contributing to the provision of *langar* (free vegetarian meals served) to all regardless of creed, in *Gurudwaras* (Sikh places of worship). In addition, there is the practice of *daswandh*, whereby a Sikh is expected to donate a minimum of one tenth of one’s earnings every year for charitable purposes. Furthermore, it is the duty of every Sikh to engage in ‘*nishkam seva*’ (self-less service) whenever possible. The Sikh Faith urges its members to lose the ‘self’ in service – ‘*aap gavaye seva karey ta kitch paye maan*’ (GGSJ, Ang 474). It also says, ‘the hands and feet that shun *seva* [service] are condemnable; actions other than *seva* are fruitless’ (Bhai Gurdas, *Varan*, XXVI.10).

As per the Sikh Faith, where there is forgiveness (*khema*), there is God Himself. Forgiveness, according to Kabir Das Ji, is the shortest route to connect and experience God (cf. GGSJ, Ang 1372*). Calling the virtue of ‘forgiveness’ (*khema*) as divine, the Sikh Faith exhorts its followers to resist ridiculing, mocking, belittling, scorning and being malicious to others, and asks them to be non-judgemental and respectful.

TAOISM (DAOISM)

Daoism, also referred to as Taoism, is an ancient tradition of philosophy and religious belief which originated, deeply rooted in Chinese customs and worldview over 2000 years ago. Daoism is about the Dao (or Tao), usually translated as *the "way"*. The Dao is the ultimate creative principle of the universe. All things are unified and connected in the Dao. It is a religion of unity and opposites; Yin and Yang. The principle of Yin Yang sees the world as filled with complementary forces – action and non-action, light and dark, hot and cold, and so on. The Dao is not God and therefore is not worshipped. Daoism includes many deities, that are worshipped in Daoist temples, they are part of the universe and depend, like everything, on the Dao.

When founded by Laozi (or Lao-tzu, 604-517 B.C.?), legendary writer of the *Daodejing* (or *Tao Te Ching*, regarded as the Bible of Daoism), Daoism started as a philosophy, although deeply related to mystical and religious experience. Then, in Han dynasty, it developed into religious Daoism with Zhang Daoling (34-156 AD). Although scholars like Feng Youlan (1895-1990) still makes a distinction between the Daoist philosophy (*dao jia* 道家) and Daoist religion (*dao jiao* 道教), however, this distinction is a bit too simplistic in the context of Chinese culture. The reason is that the *Canon of the Religious Daoism* includes all Daoist philosophical works, such as the *Daodejing*, the *Zhuangzi* and others. Thus there is a textual continuity between Daoist religion and Daoist philosophy from

which it has emerged. Also, it is an historical fact that Daoist religious masters first called themselves *dao jia*. Therefore, the position that there is a continuity between philosophical Daoism and its development into Religious Daoism can be sustained. Nevertheless, for both of them, the idea of merciful compassion is always a fundamental tenet and a basic value. In the Chapter 67 of the *Daodejing*, it is said that:

“I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures. Simple in actions and in thoughts, you return to the source of being. Patient with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are. Compassionate toward yourself, you reconcile all beings in the world” (*Daodejing*, chapter 67).

This text serves as the basic reference of all Daoist emphasis, both philosophy and religion, on merciful compassion. While there are three treasures, it is merciful compassion that is considered as highest because even Heaven will protect the humans by way of merciful compassion. Simplicity and patience go hand in hand with compassion. Therefore, these three qualities are inseparable. The compassion of the Daoist sage is all-encompassing and he can therefore bring true peace, reconciling all beings in the world.

In religious Daoism, mercy is also of fore and first importance. Not only believers till now in religious Daoism greet each other by saying “merciful compassion”, this indeed is well rooted in their Scriptures. For example, in East Jin dynasty (317-420 AD), the Scripture *Great Subtle Spiritual Book in Record of the Purple Letter Immortal’s Truth* says that, “For he who learns the Dao, the first thing is to do good things extensively without being known by other people, to tend mer-

ciful compassion towards all things, to save people in their difficulties, and to help people go through dangerous situations”. Later, in the famous *Emperor Wenchang’s Unknown Good Deeds*, which has the fame of “the first wonderful book benefitting the world”, says right from its beginning, “To save people in difficulties, to help people in urgencies, to mercy their solitude, to tolerate their trespasses. Practice extensively good deeds while nobody knows, these will arrive at the eyes of Heaven”.

Furthermore, the first principle of Daoism: *Oneness* – there is not “just us”, or “just nature”, but both – is related to compassion.

“The Master views the parts with compassion, because he understands the whole. His constant practice is humility. He doesn’t glitter like a jewel but lets himself be shaped by the Tao, as rugged and common as a stone” (Daodejing, chapter 39).

Accordingly, human beings are not just individual parts separate from the whole. It requires humility by giving up our desire to outshine all others to discover the interrelatedness. The polarization can be overcome if we let the Dao do its work in our lives.

Moreover, wisdom and compassion are the essence of an enlightened life. They are inextricably linked like two sides of the same coin. *“The greatest love seems indifferent, the greatest wisdom seems childish” (Daodejing, chapter 41).* Without wisdom, compassion lacks the detachment and so wisdom bestows on the compassionate person the strength to act against his/her egoism.

Thus it is clear that both Daoist philosophy and religion cherish the virtue and the value of merciful compassion. All the

above show some textual examples of the idea of mercy in Daoism: the philosophical Daoism of Laozi, and religious Daoism.

*That which is well established cannot be uprooted
That which is strongly held cannot be taken
The descendants will commemorate it forever
Cultivate it in yourself; its virtue shall be true
Cultivate it in the family; its virtue shall be abundant
Cultivate it in the community; its virtue shall be lasting
Cultivate it in the country; its virtue shall be prosperous
Cultivate it in the world; its virtue shall be widespread
Therefore observe others with yourself
Observe other families with your family
Observe other communities with your community
Observe other countries with your country
Observe the world with the world
With what do I know the world?
With this.*

(*Daodejing*, chapter 54)

ZOROASTRIANISM

Compassion, mercy (*marzhdika*) is one of the most articulate values in Zoroastrianism. For a Zoroastrian, ‘*marzhdika*’ is more than having sympathy for someone in distress; it is the deep desire to alleviate the sufferings of others irrespective of who and what they are; they could very well be animals as well. The exhortation of the Sacred texts of Zoroastrianism is, “Ye, Zoroastrians! Hold your hands and feet in preparedness... (...) Relieve those who have fallen in distress” (*Visparad*, XV. I). But this compassion must go beyond relieving the sufferings. The *Denkard*, a 9th century Encyclopaedia of Zoroastrianism declares that “apart from the salvation for one’s soul, it is best striving for saving other people’s souls” (‘Zoroastrian Ethos of Compassion’ by Homi Dhalla in *Compassion in the World’s Religions: Envisioning Human Solidarity*, Ed. Anindita Niyogi Balslev, LIT, Berlin, 2013). This makes embracing of mercy and compassion a great moral and spiritual obligation for all Zoroastrians.

‘*Marzhdika*’ is spoken of among the followers of Mazdaism (Zoroastrianism) as an attitude and ornament of the strong, “the mightiest in the mightiest, becoming the throned monarch better than his crown, an attribute to God Himself” (*Yasna XLVI*, 6; as quoted in *A Brief Sketch of Zoroastrian Religion & Customs*, Ervad Sheriarji Dadabhai Bharucha, Forgotten Books, Bombay 2013). The Zoroastrian texts do depict Ahura Mazda (the Wise Lord) as the ‘Merciful and Compassionate Lord’ and also as the ‘Forgiver of sins’ (*Menok Xrat I.16*). For-

giveness, as commonly understood, is an important aspect of ‘compassion’, ‘mercy’. But when it comes to extending ‘mercy’, ‘forgiveness’ to the wrong-doers, they have a different point of view: mercy for the wicked is considered as partaking in the wickedness of the wicked – “Verily he is wicked who encourages the wicked”(Yasna XLVI, 6).

Two principles are fundamental to the understanding of ‘*marzhdika*’ without which it would be construed as incomplete. They are: 1. *Nidhasnaithishem* (non-violence), 2. *Khaetwadatham* (self-sacrifice or service). To a Zoroastrian, the life of every creature is sacred and therefore non-violable. This attitude of non-violence must be extended to the nature as well. ‘*Khaetwadatham*’ which stands for altruism, self-sacrifice or service, in the Zoroastrian terminology, is an extension of compassionate living itself. Zarathushtra, the Founder of Zoroastrianism says, “one who strives to understand and attain a true life, should preach the law of Ahura Mazda to mankind better by acts of service than by words” (Yasna 51.19). Charity (*raiti*) therefore is one of the fundamental precepts of Zoroastrianism. For, “the greatest act of righteousness is charity” (Menok Xrat IV. 2:4). The Zoroastrians therefore have a social obligation to share their wealth with the less fortunate ones. But such an act is required to be done cautiously and judiciously because while it can be meritorious when it is done towards the deserving objects, it would be reprehensible if it is extended towards those who are unworthy of it (cf. *A Brief Sketch of Zoroastrian Religion and Customs*, op. cit.).

TEXTS
BY HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

LUMEN FIDEI

Encyclical Letter, June 29, 2013

34. The light of love proper to faith can illumine the questions of our own time about truth. Truth nowadays is often reduced to the subjective authenticity of the individual, valid only for the life of the individual. A common truth intimidates us, for we identify it with the intransigent demands of totalitarian systems. But if truth is a truth of love, if it is a truth disclosed in personal encounter with the Other and with others, then it can be set free from its enclosure in individuals and become part of the common good. As a truth of love, it is not one that can be imposed by force; it is not a truth that stifles the individual. Since it is born of love, it can penetrate to the heart, to the personal core of each man and woman. Clearly, then, faith is not intransigent, but grows in respectful coexistence with others. One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all (...).

35. The light of faith in Jesus also illumines the path of all those who seek God, and makes a specifically Christian contribution to dialogue with the followers of the different religions. The Letter to the Hebrews speaks of the witness of those just ones who, before the covenant with Abraham, already sought God in faith. Of Enoch “it was attested that he had pleased

God” (*Heb* 11:5), something impossible apart from faith, for “whoever would approach God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (*Heb* 11:6). We can see from this that the path of religious man passes through the acknowledgment of a God who cares for us and is not impossible to find. What other reward can God give to those who seek him, if not to let himself be found? Even earlier, we encounter Abel, whose faith was praised and whose gifts, his offering of the firstlings of his flock (cf. *Heb* 11:4), were therefore pleasing to God. Religious man strives to see signs of God in the daily experiences of life, in the cycle of the seasons, in the fruitfulness of the earth and in the movement of the cosmos. God is light and he can be found also by those who seek him with a sincere heart.

LAUDATO SI'

Encyclical Letter, May 24, 2015

200. Any technical solution which science claims to offer will be powerless to solve the serious problems of our world if humanity loses its compass, if we lose sight of the great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices and to treat others well. Believers themselves must constantly feel challenged to live in a way consonant with their faith and not to contradict it by their actions. They need to be encouraged to be ever open to God's grace and to draw constantly from their deepest convictions about love, justice and peace. If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by so doing we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve. Cultural limitations in different eras often affected the perception of these ethical and spiritual treasures, yet by constantly returning to their sources, religions will be better equipped to respond to today's needs.

201. The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity. Dialogue among the various sciences is likewise needed, since each can tend to become enclosed in its own language, while specialization leads to a certain isolation and the absolutiza-

tion of its own field of knowledge. This prevents us from confronting environmental problems effectively. An open and respectful dialogue is also needed between the various ecological movements, among which ideological conflicts are not infrequently encountered. The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that “realities are greater than ideas”.

246. At the conclusion of this lengthy reflection which has been both joyful and troubling, I propose that we offer two prayers. The first we can share with all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator, while in the other we Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus.

A prayer for our earth

*All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.*

*Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.*

EVANGELII GAUDIUM

Apostolic Exhortation, November 24, 2013

250. 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. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. This dialogue is in first place a conversation about human existence or simply, as the bishops of India have put it, a matter of “being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows”. In this way we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation. Efforts made in dealing with a specific theme can become a process in which, by mutual listening, both parts can be purified and enriched. These efforts, therefore, can also express love for truth.

251. In this dialogue, ever friendly and sincere, attention must always be paid to the essential bond between dialogue and proclamation, which leads the Church to maintain and intensify her relationship with non-Christians. A facile syncretism would ultimately be a totalitarian gesture on the part of those who would ignore greater values of which they are not the masters. True openness involves remaining steadfast

in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own identity, while at the same time being "open to understanding those of the other party" and "knowing that dialogue can enrich each side". What is not helpful is a diplomatic openness which says "yes" to everything in order to avoid problems, for this would be a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others. Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another.

252. Our relationship with the followers of Islam has taken on great importance, since they are now significantly present in many traditionally Christian countries, where they can freely worship and become fully a part of society. We must never forget that they "profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day". The sacred writings of Islam have retained some Christian teachings; Jesus and Mary receive profound veneration and it is admirable to see how Muslims both young and old, men and women, make time for daily prayer and faithfully take part in religious services. Many of them also have a deep conviction that their life, in its entirety, is from God and for God. They also acknowledge the need to respond to God with an ethical commitment and with mercy towards those most in need.

253. In order to sustain dialogue with Islam, suitable training is essential for all involved, not only so that they can be solidly and joyfully grounded in their own identity, but so that they can also acknowledge the values of others, appreciate the concerns underlying their demands and shed light on shared beliefs. We

Christians should embrace with affection and respect Muslim immigrants to our countries in the same way that we hope and ask to be received and respected in countries of Islamic tradition. I ask and I humbly entreat those countries to grant Christians freedom to worship and to practice their faith, in light of the freedom which followers of Islam enjoy in Western countries! Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalizations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence.

254. Non-Christians, by God's gracious initiative, when they are faithful to their own consciences, can live "justified by the grace of God", and thus be associated "to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ". But due to the sacramental dimension of sanctifying grace, God's working in them tends to produce signs and rites, sacred expressions which in turn bring others to a communitarian experience of journeying towards God. While these lack the meaning and efficacy of the sacraments instituted by Christ, they can be channels which the Holy Spirit raises up in order to liberate non-Christians from atheistic immanentism or from purely individual religious experiences. The same Spirit everywhere brings forth various forms of practical wisdom which help people to bear suffering and to live in greater peace and harmony. As Christians, we can also benefit from these treasures built up over many centuries, which can help us better to live our own beliefs.

MISERICORDIAE VULTUS

Bull of indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy

April 11, 2015

23. There is an aspect of mercy that goes beyond the confines of the Church. It relates us to Judaism and Islam, both of which consider mercy to be one of God's most important attributes. Israel was the first to receive this revelation which continues in history as the source of an inexhaustible richness meant to be shared with all mankind. As we have seen, the pages of the Old Testament are steeped in mercy, because they narrate the works that the Lord performed in favour of his people at the most trying moments of their history. Among the privileged names that Islam attributes to the Creator are "Merciful and Kind". This invocation is often on the lips of faithful Muslims who feel themselves accompanied and sustained by mercy in their daily weakness. They too believe that no one can place a limit on divine mercy because its doors are always open.

I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with these religions and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination.

**MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE CHURCHES, ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES
AND OTHER RELIGIONS**

Clementine Hall, March 20, 2013

(...) And now I turn to you distinguished representatives of the Jewish people, to which we are joined in a very special spiritual bond, since, as the Second Vatican Council affirms, “the Church of Christ acknowledges that the beginnings of her faith and her election are already, according to the divine mystery of salvation, in the Patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets” (Decr. *Nostra aetate*, 4). Thank you for your presence and I am confident that, with the help of the Almighty, we will be able to continue profitably that fraternal dialogue that the Council advocated (cf. *ibid.*) and that has actually been accomplished, bringing many fruits, especially in recent decades.

I then greet and cordially thank you all, dear friends belonging to other religious traditions; first of all the Muslims, who worship the one God, living and merciful, and call upon Him in prayer, and all of you. I really appreciate your presence: in it I see a tangible sign of the will to grow in mutual esteem and cooperation for the common good of humanity.

The Catholic Church is aware of the importance of promoting friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions – I wish to repeat this: promoting friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions – it also attests the valuable work that the Pontifical Council for interreligious dialogue performs. It is equally aware

of the responsibility that we all have towards this world of ours, towards all of Creation, that we should love and protect. And we can do much for the sake of the poorest, those who are weak and who suffer, to promote justice, to promote reconciliation and to build peace. But, above all, we need to keep alive in the world the thirst for the absolute, not allowing to prevail a one-dimensional vision of the human person, according to which man is reduced to what he produces and consumes: this is this one of the most dangerous pitfalls for our time.

We know how much violence has been produced in recent history by the attempt to eliminate God and the divine from the horizon of humanity, and we experience the value of witnessing in our societies to the original opening to transcendence that is inherent in the human heart. In this, we feel close even to all those men and women who, whilst not recognizing themselves belonging to any religious tradition, feel themselves nevertheless to be in search of truth, goodness and beauty, this truth, goodness and beauty of God, and who are our precious allies in efforts to defend the dignity of man, in building a peaceful coexistence among peoples and in guarding Creation carefully.

Dear friends, thank you again for your presence. To everyone I extend my cordial and fraternal greeting.

**TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE PLENARY
ASSEMBLY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

Clementine Hall, November 28, 2013

*Your Eminences,
Dear brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear brothers and sisters,*

First of all, I apologize for this delay: the audiences ran late. Thank you for your patience. I am pleased to meet with you in the context of your Plenary Session: I extend to each of you a most cordial welcome and thank Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran for the words he addressed to me on your behalf.

The Catholic Church is aware of the value inherent in the promotion of friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions. We understand more and more its importance, both because the world, in some way, has become “smaller”, and because the phenomenon of migration increases the contact among individuals and communities of different traditions, cultures, and religions. This reality interpellates our Christian conscience; it is a challenge to the understanding of our faith and the concrete life of the local Churches, of the parishes and for many believers.

The theme of your meeting is, therefore, of particular relevance: “Members of different religious traditions in civil society”. As I stated in the 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 vari-

ous obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides” (n. 250). In fact, we are not without situations in the world where coexistence is difficult: often political or economic reasons superimpose themselves on cultural and religious differences, leveraging also on misunderstandings and mistakes of the past: anything that is likely to generate suspicion and fear. There is only one way to overcome this fear, and that is dialogue, an encounter marked by friendship and respect. When you walk this path, then you can say it is a human one!

Dialogue does not mean giving up one’s own identity when one encounters the other, nor is it compromising on faith and Christian morality. On 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 understand others, capable of respectful human relations, convinced that the meeting with those who are different from us can be an opportunity for growth in fraternity, in enrichment and in witness. It is for this reason that interreligious dialogue and evangelization are not mutually exclusive, but nourish each other. We do not impose anything, we do not use any underhanded strategy to attract the faithful, but witness with joy and simplicity to what we believe and who we are. In fact, a meeting in which each puts aside what he believes in, pretending to give up what is most precious, certainly would not be an authentic relationship. In this case one could speak of a false fraternity. As disciples of Jesus we must strive to overcome fear, be always ready to take the first step, without becoming discouraged in the face of difficulties and misunderstandings.

The constructive dialogue between people of different religious traditions also serves to overcome another fear, which,

unfortunately, we find increasing in the more strongly secularized societies: fear of the different religious traditions and of the religious dimension in and of itself. Religion is seen as something useless or even dangerous; in some instances, it is mandated that Christians renounce their religious and moral convictions in the exercise of their profession (cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, Jan. 10, 2011). It is widely thought that coexistence is possible only by hiding one's religious identity, encountering others in a kind of neutral space, devoid of references to transcendence. But here, too, how would it be possible to create true relationships, build a society that is an authentic common home, by requiring that one put aside what he or she considers to be an intimate part of his or her being? It is not possible to think of fraternity "in a laboratory". Of course, it is necessary that everything proceed with respect to the beliefs of others, even those who do not believe, but we must have the courage and the patience to encounter each other for who we are. The future lies in the respectful coexistence of diversity, not in the uniformity of a single thought, theoretically neutral. We have seen throughout history the tragedy of the uniformity of thoughts. It therefore becomes essential to recognize the fundamental right to religious freedom, in all its dimensions. The Church's Magisterium has spoken with great commitment on this in recent decades. We are convinced that this is the way of building peace in the world.

I thank the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for the valuable service it performs, and I invoke upon each of you an abundance of the Lord's blessing. Thank you.

**MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

From the Vatican, May 19, 2014

*To My Venerable Brother
Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*

On the occasion of this important commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I am pleased to convey my warm greeting to you, Venerable Brother, to the Superiors and Officials of the Dicastery, as well as to the illustrious guests who will speak at the commemoration.

The institution by the Secretariat for non-Christians, which came about with the Apostolic Letter *Progremente Concilio* of 19 May 1964 represents one of the important decisions the Servant of God Paul VI enacted during the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council after deep reflection. Its purpose was to begin implementing the Council's guidelines and to orient the universal Church on the path of a much hoped for renewal.

At that stage, characterized by great openness, the Church, visibly manifest in the Conciliar Hall, felt inspired by a sincere desire for encounter and dialogue with humanity as a whole, in order to be able to present herself to a rapidly changing world in her deepest and most authentic identity: "The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it

lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make”, as Pope Paul VI wrote at that time in his first and programmatic Encyclical (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 6 August 1964, III, The Dialogue, n. 65).

From the beginning it was clear that such a dialogue was not meant to relativize the Christian faith, or to set aside the longing that resides in the heart of every disciple, to proclaim to all the joy of encounter with Christ and his universal call. Moreover, dialogue is possible only by beginning with one’s own identity. As the Holy Father Saint John Paul II would show frequently through words and gestures, dialogue and proclamation do not exclude one another, but are intimately connected, though their distinction must be maintained and the two should never be confused or instrumentalized or judged equivalent or interchangeable (cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 55). In truth, “it is always the Spirit who is at work, both when he gives life to the Church and impels her to proclaim Christ, and when he implants and develops his gifts in all individuals and peoples, guiding the Church to discover these gifts, to foster them and to receive them through dialogue” (*ibid.*, n. 29).

As I had the chance to recall in the very first days of my ministry as the Bishop of Rome, “the Catholic Church is conscious of the importance of promoting friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions” (*Audience with Representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the Different Religions*, 20 March 2013).

Like Christ on the way to Emmaus, the Church wishes to be close to and to accompany every man and woman. Such a readiness to walk together is much more necessary in this day

and age, marked by profound and never-before-known interactions between diverse peoples and cultures. In this context, the Church will be ever more committed to travel along the path of dialogue and to intensify the already fruitful cooperation with all those who, belonging to different religious traditions, share her intention to build relations of friendship and share in the many initiatives to do with dialogue.

Joining in thanksgiving to God for the work carried out over these 50 years, I wish that the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue may continue her mission with renewed vigour, which in turn will benefit the cause of peace and authentic progress among peoples. To all the participants in this Conference, I assure you of my remembrance and I send you a heartfelt blessing.

INTERRELIGIOUS GENERAL AUDIENCE
THE PROMULGATION
OF THE CONCILIAR DECLARATION *NOSTRA ÆTATE*

Saint Peter's Square, October 28, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

At the General Audiences there are often people or groups who belong to other religions; but today this presence is of particular importance, because we can remember together the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council *Nostra aetate* on the Relation of the Catholic Church to Non-Christian Religions. This subject was dear to the heart of Bl. Pope Paul VI, who on the Feast of Pentecost the year before the close of the Council, had established the Secretariat for non-Christians, today called the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. For this reason, I express my gratitude and my warm welcome to the people and groups of various religions, who today have wished to attend, especially to those who have come from afar.

The Second Vatican Council was an extraordinary time of reflection, dialogue and prayer which aimed to renew the gaze of the Catholic Church on herself and on the world. A reading of the signs of the times in view of an update oriented by a twofold faithfulness: faithfulness to the ecclesial tradition and faithfulness to the history of the men and women of our time. In fact God, who revealed himself in creation and in history, who spoke through the prophets and comprehensively through his Son made man (cf. *Heb* 1:1), speaks to the heart

and to the spirit of every human being who seeks the truth and how to practice it.

The message of the Declaration *Nostra aetate* is always timely. Let us briefly recall a few of its points:

- the growing interdependence of peoples (cf. n. 1);
- the human search for the meaning of life, of suffering, of death, questions which always accompany our journey (cf. n. 1);
- the common origin and the common destiny of humanity (cf. n. 1);
- the uniqueness of the human family (cf. n. 1.);
- religions as the search for God or of the Absolute, within our various ethnicities and cultures (cf. n. 1);
- the benevolent and attentive gaze of the Church on religions: she rejects nothing that is beautiful and true in them (cf. n. 2);
- the Church regards with esteem the believers of all religions, appreciating their spiritual and moral commitment (cf. n. 3);
- the Church, open to dialogue with all, is at the same time faithful to the truths in which she believes, beginning with the truth that the salvation offered to everyone has its origin in Jesus, the One Saviour, and that the Holy Spirit is at work, as a font of peace and love.

There have been so many events, initiatives, institutional or personal relationships with the non-Christian religions in these last 50 years, that it is difficult to recall them all. A particularly meaningful event was the meeting in Assisi on 27 October 1986. It was willed and sponsored by St John Paul

II, who the year before, thus 30 years ago, addressing the Muslim youth in Casablanca, hoped that all believers in God would favour friendship and unity between men and peoples (19 August 1985). The flame, lit in Assisi, has spread throughout the world and is a permanent sign of hope. Deserving of special gratitude to God is the veritable transformation of Christian-Jewish relations in these 50 years. Indifference and opposition have changed into cooperation and benevolence. From enemies and strangers we have become friends and brothers. The Council, with the Declaration *Nostra aetate*, has indicated the way: “yes” to rediscovering Christianity’s Jewish roots; “no” to every form of anti-Semitism and blame for every wrong, discrimination and persecution deriving from it. Knowledge, respect and esteem for one another are the way. Indeed, if this applies in a particular way to relations with Jews, it likewise applies to relationships with other religions as well. I am thinking in particular of Muslims, who – as the Council recalls – “worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men” (*Nostra aetate*, n. 3). They acknowledge Abraham’s paternity, venerate Jesus as a prophet, honour his virgin Mother, Mary, await the day of judgment, and practice prayer, almsgiving and fasting (cf. *ibid.*).

The dialogue that we need cannot but be open and respectful, and thus prove fruitful. Mutual respect is the condition and, at the same time, the aim of interreligious dialogue: respecting others’ right to life, to physical integrity, to fundamental freedoms, namely freedom of conscience, of thought, of expression and of religion.

The world, looking to us believers, exhorts us to cooperate amongst ourselves and with the men and women of good will

who profess no religion, asking us for effective responses regarding numerous issues: peace, hunger, the poverty that afflicts millions of people, the environmental crisis, violence, especially that committed in the name of religion, corruption, moral decay, the crisis of the family, of the economy, of finance, and especially of hope. We believers have no recipe for these problems, but we have one great resource: prayer. We believers pray. We must pray. Prayer is our treasure, from which we draw according to our respective traditions, to request the gifts that humanity longs for.

Because of violence and terrorism an attitude of suspicion or even condemnation of religions has spread. In reality, although no religion is immune to the risk of deviations of a fundamentalist or extremist nature in individuals or groups (cf. *Address to the United States Congress*, 24 September 2015), it is necessary to look to the positive values that religions live and propound, and that are sources of hope. It is a matter of raising our gaze in order to go further. Dialogue based on confident respect can bring seeds of good that in their turn may bud into friendship and cooperation in many fields, especially in service to the poor, to the least, to the elderly, through welcoming migrants, and attention to those who are excluded. We can walk together taking care of one another and of creation. All believers of every religion. Together we can praise the Creator for giving us the garden of the world to till and keep as a common good, and we can achieve shared plans to overcome poverty and to ensure to every man and woman the conditions for a dignified life.

The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, which is before us, is a propitious occasion to work together in the field of the works of charity. In this field, where compassion counts above

all else, we may be joined by many people who are not believers or who are in search of God and of the Truth, people who place at the centre the face of another person, in particular the face of a needy brother or sister. The mercy to which we are called embraces all of creation, which God entrusted to us so that we keep it, not exploit it or worse still, destroy it. We must always seek to leave the world better than we found it (cf. Encyclical *Laudato si'*, n. 194), beginning with the environment in which we live, and the small gestures of our daily life. Dear brothers and sisters, as for the future of interreligious dialogue, the first thing we have to do is pray, and pray for one another: we are brothers and sisters! Without the Lord, nothing is possible; with Him, everything becomes so! May our prayer – each one according to his or her own tradition – adhere fully to the will of God, who wants all men and women to recognize they are brothers and sisters and live as such, forming the great human family in the harmony of diversity.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CELEBRATING THE JUBILEE OF MERCY

As we are aware, interreligious dialogue can assume many different forms whenever people of different religions come together, seeking to live in harmony with one another, working together for the benefit of society, clarifying their understanding of one another through formal exchanges, and sharing spiritual experiences. Through dialogue with people of other religions, Christians have come to know that they can live their faith more fully and be better witnesses to Jesus Christ by collaborating with believers of other religions.

The Jubilee of Mercy provides a precious opportunity for people of all religions to get to know each other better, to appreciate, respect, and love each other, and to become increasingly open to dialogue. In today's world, where God is tragically forgotten and His name abused, believers of different religions are called to defend and promote peace and justice, human dignity, and to protect the environment, by working together in solidarity.

The Jubilee Year can be a time to organize less formal meetings with followers of other religions during which individuals can offer the witness of their own religion on the theme of mercy. Sharing our beliefs with others, discussing common issues, and discovering similarities with persons from another religion can greatly help overcome prejudices and misunderstandings, especially where there are tensions and conflicts.

Another important area for the exchange of knowledge and for discussion is that of education, especially the education of young people. For example, in many Catholic institutes (schools, colleges, and universities) there are students from other religions. It could be beneficial if teachers were to prepare and organize opportunities for exchange on the theme of mercy. They could also work together with their students to undertake acts of charity. The members of religious houses, seminaries, novitiates, etc. could also participate in similar kinds of outreach.

To this end the materials provided here can be of use.

Opportunities for sharing one's own religious experience are significant, but even more are those occasions when works of charity are undertaken together. Such works provide believers of different religions concrete opportunities for collaboration and solidarity that can help them rediscover their innate desire to do good and to give themselves in service to others. Christians are called to put into practice the commandment of love of neighbor and especially love of the poor – a religious and spiritual experience that is also shared by other religious traditions. Let us call to mind Pope Francis' words during the Interreligious General Audience of 28 October 2015: "We can walk together taking care of one another and of creation. All believers of every religion (...). The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, which is before us, is a propitious occasion to work together in the field of the works of charity".

A broad area of possible cooperation between persons of different religious traditions is open for us. There are many settings where we can witness to divine mercy and interreligious collaboration: in hospitals, nursing homes for the elderly, or-

phanages, prisons, welcome centers for those seeking asylum, refugee camps, etc. Surely there is no lack of opportunities for collaborating together in works of charity.

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (*Lk 6:36*). These words of Christ, which are also the motto of the Jubilee, are more than a command. They also signify that everyone is able to participate in the mercy of God. The Church urges us to carry out works of charity to help our neighbors who are in need, whether that need be physical or spiritual, and identifies seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy. These merciful acts can be undertaken and experienced together with our brothers and sisters of other religions and also on their behalf.

Here it seems appropriate to quote from a speech Cardinal Walter Kasper gave on Mercy: “The Christian tradition lists seven corporal works of mercy and seven spiritual works of mercy. The corporal works of mercy are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to harbor the harborless, to visit the sick, to ransom the captive, to bury the dead. Some of these works are very current. To give food and drink calls us to act justly in a world where the resources that sustain life are distributed in a very unjust way. To harbor the harborless becomes a matter of conscience, faced as we are with millions of refugees – a situation that has become a sign of our times. To visit the sick and the elderly is becoming increasingly important in societies where often only young, healthy, strong and successful people are appreciated, while an increasing number of elderly people are left to themselves. To ransom the captive means improving and humanizing the condition of prisoners and working to help those who are unjustly incarcerated (political prisoners, religious prisoners,

among whom are persecuted Christians, etc.). Christian realism is particularly apparent when we turn to the spiritual works of mercy. People suffer not only from material poverty, but from cultural poverty as well. There is the poverty of those who have no access to culture (i.e., illiteracy). There is also relational poverty, that is, the lack of communication for those who live alone. Not least is spiritual poverty, the empty and ever expanding inner desert, the lack or loss of direction in our lives. In this respect, the spiritual works of mercy have become very relevant once again: educating the ignorant, giving advice to those who are in doubt, comforting the suffering, correcting sinners, forgiving those who have offended us, putting up with unpleasant people (the hardest of all), praying for all. If we try to address the huge problems that confront us today without any religious grounding, we will be without the emotional impetus that is needed to work towards a better world. Without mercy, we run the risk of having our society become a wasteland” (Vita-Salute San Raffaele University of Milan, Opening Ceremony of the 2014-2015 Academic Year, *Lectio Magistralis* by His Eminence Walter Cardinal Kasper: *The Message of Mercy*).

These then are some simple suggestions for your consideration. We know that the social and religious contexts of actual living situations, concrete circumstances, and especially urgent problems and needs will determine how to go about finding the most appropriate ways and means to celebrate this gift of mercy with believers of other religions. In the words of Pope Francis, “How many ways there are for the followers of the different religions to carry out this service! How many are the needs that must be tended to with the healing balm of fraternal solidarity! I think in particular of the material

and spiritual needs of the poor, the destitute, those who yearn for a word of consolation and hope” (Interreligious and Ecumenical Meeting, *Address of the Holy Father*, Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, Colombo, 13 January 2015).

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