



Keynote Address

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Under-Secretary, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

1- GREETINGS

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and in the name of H.Em. Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran and Rev. Fr. Miguel Ángel **Ayuso** Guixot, M.C.C.J, President and Secretary respectively, I wish to welcome you to the Fifth Buddhist-Christian Colloquium. Both Cardinal Tauran and Rev. Fr. Ayuso asked me to convey to each one of you their warm greetings and prayerful best wishes. I know some of you have travelled great distances to be here and your presence sends a powerful signal about our common determination and commitment to foster fraternity together.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) created in 1964 as the central office of the Catholic Church for the promotion of interreligious dialogue, is tasked with fostering mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Catholics and followers of other religions on the basis of common values. This year marks the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions which has certainly inspired the members of the Catholic Church for half a century to promote relations of respect and dialogue with their religious neighbour. I would like to seize the occasion to thank you, dear Buddhist friends for your long lasting relationship with the Catholic Church and it is my fervent hope that this Colloquium may provide us with an opportunity to further renew our mutual respect, friendship and cooperation.

2. BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN COLLOQUIA

During last fifty years, the PCID has been involved in dialogue and collaboration with Buddhists throughout the world. This Colloquium is the Fifth in a series promoted by this Pontifical Council. The first formal Buddhist-Christian Colloquium was held at the Fokuangshan Buddhist Monastery in Taiwan, in 1995 with the general theme: *Buddhism and Christianity, Convergence and Divergence*. The second meeting was held in 1998, at the Catholic monastery of Asirvanam, near Bangalore, India under the theme “*Word and Silence in Buddhist Christian Traditions*”. The third

formal colloquium took place in Tokyo, Japan in 2002 at the Headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai with the theme: “*Sangha in Buddhism and Church in Christianity*”. The fourth, Buddhist-Christian Colloquium entitled “*Inner Peace, Peace among Peoples*” was held in Rome, in 2013. Today, we are holding the fifth Colloquium under the theme “*Buddhists and Christians Together Fostering Fraternity*” at Bodh Gaya" where Gautama Buddha attained Enlightenment. We are happy to meet our Buddhist brothers and sisters in this sacred and pilgrimage site with its rich history, culture and monuments that express the different shades of Buddhism. When we were deciding the place for this Colloquium, we also took into consideration that we can meet Buddhists of all traditions here, since Bodh Gaya has temples and monasteries from many other nations such as Bhutan, Bangladesh, China, Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Tibet. So, I warmly greet all Buddhists monks, nuns and lay people from Bodh Gaya present here and I express my gratitude for your generous cooperation to make this event a success.

3. OBJECTIVES

Dear friends, we are meeting today after one month of the visit of Pope Francis to Sri Lanka, the oldest continually Buddhist country. Therefore, this Colloquium is a timely opportunity to reflect on the words and gestures of Pope Francis as well as especially Buddhists in Sri Lanka conducive to foster Buddhist-Christian dialogue. In this regard, I am convinced that the question posed to Pope Francis by journalist, Christoph Schmidt as well as the response of Pope Francis can lay down a solid foundation for this Colloquium and also our future collaboration. For your information, I will now read it.

The journalist Christoph Schmidt: Holy Father, [...] Would you be so kind as to tell us something about your visit to the Buddhist temple yesterday, which was a big surprise. What was the reason for such an apparently spontaneous visit? Are you impressed by that religion? We know that Christian missionaries believed right up to the Twentieth Century that Buddhism was a fraud, a diabolical religion. Third, what relevance does Buddhism have for the future of Asia?

Pope Francis: How was the visit, and why did I go? The head of that temple was invited by the government to the airport for my arrival and there [...] when he greeted me he invited me to the temple [...]. [...] But yesterday, returning from Madhu, there was a chance to do it; he called and so we went. In that temple are relics of two of the Buddha’s disciples. For them these are very important. [...] So he came to greet me at the airport and I went to visit him.

Secondly, yesterday at Madhu I saw something which I would never have expected: not everyone there was Catholic, not even the majority! There were Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and each one came to pray; [...] And if they are so naturally united in going together to pray at that shrine – which is Christian but not only Christian, because all want [to go there], then why shouldn’t I go to a Buddhist temple to greet them? What happened yesterday at Madhu is very important. It helps us to understand the meaning of the interreligious experience in Sri Lanka: there is respect for one another. [...]

Now, as for their going to hell! Even the Protestants... when I was a child, some seventy years ago, all Protestants were going to hell, all of them. [...] But I believe that the Church has become much more respectful [...]. And yes, there are dark periods in the history of the Church, we must admit, without being ashamed, because we too are on a path of constant conversion: always moving from sin to grace. And this interreligious experience of fraternity, each always respecting the other, is a grace". (Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis, On board The Flight From Colombo To Manila *Papal Flight, Thursday, 15 January 2015*)

Dear friends, the encounter of the Buddhist monks and the Pope and their willingness to cross the bridges of differences - ethnic, language, culture, religious- has nurtured both mutual friendship and mutual respect. In other words, journeying to the "other side" firmly rooted in one's religious beliefs, can turn a stranger into a friend and hostility to hospitality. Furthermore, such gestures coupled with open and sincere dialogue can eradicate the bitter roots of distrust, hatred and enmity and bring about "a culture of peace and fraternity" in place of "a culture of suspicion and violence".

Today, in the face of conflicts which arise on account of differences of race, religion, caste, tribe, language etc., we have an urgent need to recover the vision of a single human family with a renewed sense of fellowship between individuals and peoples. This was the core message of our Vesakh greetings last year. "Drawing upon our different religious convictions, we are called especially to be *outspoken* in denouncing all those social ills which damage fraternity; to be *healers* who enable others to grow in selfless generosity, and to be *reconcilers* who break down the walls of division and foster genuine brotherhood between individuals and groups in society" (*Buddhists and Christians: Together Fostering Fraternity*, Message for the Feast of Vesakh, 2014).

I ardently hope that this Colloquium is an occasion to discuss the new challenges to fraternity and also to search together for ways to meet those challenges in order to build a world that is more just, more humane, more respectful and more peaceful. My sincere prayer is that this Colloquium will be a historic and sacred occasion to bring to the world the light of fraternal love and hope.

4. GRATITUDE

Just before we get started, I would first of all like to congratulate the local organizing committee led by H. Ex. William D'Souza, for the excellent arrangements made for this Colloquium and for their hospitality and kindness. I trust that all the participants are enjoying your stay here at Bodh Gaya. I should also extend our gratitude to H. Ex. Salvatore Pennacchio, Apostolic Nuncio, of India and Nepal for lending us a helping hand in the preparations for this meeting. I also would like to thank the co-organizers of this Colloquium namely the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and Religions for Peace for their enormous cooperation in the organization of this event. My special thoughts go to H. Ex Thomas Dabre for his enthusiasm and unfailing cooperation shown from the very beginning for this event. I also want to express our deep sense of appreciation to H. Ex. Larry Yu-yuan Wang, Ambassador of the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the Holy See and the staff for their generous contribution to this Colloquium.

Once again, I want to thank all of you for responding to our invitation. Let us make these two days for praying, listening, reflections, and discussions in the hope of promoting greater understanding and cooperation among us for the good of the human family. It is my hope that from this sacred city marked in the course of history by so much wisdom, compassion, and fraternity, will usher in a new era of Buddhist-Christian relationship. May God, during these days of our deliberations, shower upon each and every one of us wisdom, love and fellowship.