

Keynote Address

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran,
President of the Pontifical Council
for Interreligious Dialogue

Greetings

Venerable Buddhist monks and nuns, the Associate Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Reverend Fathers and Sisters, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, it is a special joy for me to welcome each one of you to this Buddhist-Catholic dialogue entitled “Suffering, Liberation, and Fraternity.” In the backdrop of globalization and migration, the U.S. religious landscape has been undergoing rapid and profound changes with the growing presence of the world religions, including Buddhism. The presence here of the representatives of the great Buddhist traditions in the United States—the Sri Lankan, Thai, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, as well as new traditions such as Won Buddhism and the Rissho Kosei-kai—testify to the emerging

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religious-cultural pluralism in the United States. In a world where diversity is seen as a threat, our coming together today in friendship and peace is a sign of our openness toward one another and our commitment to human fraternity.

I am also pleased to express my warmest welcome to all the Catholic participants. It is gratifying to see that you come from all over the United States too. I note that some of you are ecumenical and interreligious officers in your respective archdioceses, or are active in other ways in the Church’s dialogue with the Buddhists. It is good to see the representatives of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue and of the Focolare Movement as well. I am also happy to see representatives of Catholic social outreach programs, Catholic Charities, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. I welcome all of you once again, and pray for many blessings upon each of you during these days.

Let me now briefly share with you about the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). The PCID was established in 1964 as the central office of the Catholic Church for the promotion of interreligious dialogue and is tasked with fostering mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Catholics and followers of other religions on the basis of common values. The twenty-eighth of October this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate (NA)*, the *Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* which for half a century has certainly inspired the members of the Catholic Church to promote relations of respect and dialogue with their religious neighbors. Although the PCID is the central office for dialogue in the Catholic Church, dialogue is mainly carried out in and through the Local Churches. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you, dear Buddhist friends for your long-lasting relationship with

the Catholic Church. I also wish to express my profound thanks to the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for all of its hard work and commitment to promoting interreligious dialogue in the course of this half century. It is my fervent hope that this dialogue will provide us with an opportunity to further renew our mutual respect, friendship, and cooperation.

Buddhist-Christian Dialogue as Inner Pilgrimage

The Document *NA* points out that “Men look to the various religions for answers to those profound mysteries of human condition which, today even as in older times, deeply stir the human heart” (*NA* 1). It further states that “From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history . . .” (*NA* 2). Regarding Buddhism, it says that “in its various forms, [Buddhism] realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination” (*NA* 2).

We are all pilgrims and I see this Buddhist-Catholic dialogue as a part of our ongoing quest to grasp the mystery of our lives and the ultimate Truth. According to a saying from the Desert Fathers, a brother went to see Abba Moses and begged him for a word. The old man said, “Go and sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.” The cell is a metaphor for the inner cell of the human heart where one discovers the mystery of oneself and of God or the Dharma. Another Desert Father, Antony, compares the cell to water which sustains the life of fish. Without water fish

could die physically; without the cell a monk could die spiritually. If this dialogue is an inner pilgrimage what should we carry with us for the journey?

i). **Less baggage:** Overcoming prejudices, wounds, fears in order to listen to one’s heart and to that of one’s religious neighbor.

ii). **Crossing borders:** Pilgrimage invites us to cross our cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic borders to know, understand, and respect one another. Thus, we journey to the “other side” yet, firmly rooted in our religious beliefs. “Crossing borders” can thus turn ignorance into understanding, a stranger into a friend, hostility to hospitality and divergence into convergence.

iii). **Returning home:** We return home transformed by what we experienced in the cell. You will return to the United States with a new vision and mission to bring—what you have discovered during these days of reflections, prayer, exchange of views—back to your respective communities and thereby to the wider society.

Objectives

The theme for this Catholic-Buddhist dialogue, “Suffering, Liberation and Fraternity,” is based on the Message of Pope Francis for the World Day of Peace 2014 entitled “Fraternity: The Foundation and Pathway to Peace,” as well as the Message of the PCID for the Feast of Vesakh 2014, namely “Buddhists and Christians Fostering Fraternity.” Pope Francis states that “Fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are all relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace” (n. 1). I stated in my Vesakh Message 2014 that “we live in a world all too often torn apart by oppression, selfishness, tribalism, ethnic rivalry, violence

and religious fundamentalism, a world where the ‘other’ is treated as an inferior, a nonperson, or someone to be feared and eliminated if possible” (n. 4).

I would like to quote again, my words in the Vesakh Message 2014 that invited us all to transform the self-centered humankind in order to build a world of fraternity: “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” (n. 4). After discussing the topics of “Suffering, Liberation, and Fraternity” from Buddhist and Christians perspectives, you will spend the last day of the program contemplating and considering how to be *outspoken*, *healers*, and *reconcilers*, reaching out together to those in need, in your cities. In the midst of challenges, I am sure that the interfaith cooperation based on our shared values can resolve issues of common concern and pave the way for genuine fraternity. For this collaboration, you can count on my solidarity and prayers.

Gratitude

In concluding, I would like to compliment the Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for organizing this Catholic-Buddhist dialogue in Rome, ushering in a new era of Buddhist-Christian relationship in the United States. I also wish to congratulate the organizing committee led by Professor Donald Mitchell for working so hard to organize this remarkable dialogue. My special thanks go to the Focolare Movement for hosting this meeting at

the Mariapolis Center. I trust that all of you, the participants, will enjoy your stay at these tranquil and beautiful surroundings.

Once again, I am grateful to all the participants for your presence, contribution and enthusiasm to foster inter-religious dialogue and mutual cooperation. Let us make these five days of praying, listening, reflections, and discussions into truly days of promoting greater understanding and cooperation among us for the good of the human family. May God shower upon each and every one of you wisdom, love, and fellowship. With this note, I wish you all a fruitful and rewarding dialogue.