

The Catholic Church and Interreligious Dialogue and Relations From Vatican II (1962-65) to a New Millennium and Beyond (Other than *Nostra Aetate*)

“The Catholic Church looks into the distance, beyond the confines of the Christian horizon; how could she place limits on her love, if this very love is to be that of God the Father who showers his favors upon everyone (cf. Mt 5:45), and who so loved the world that for it he gave his only Son (cf. Jn 3:16)? Look therefore beyond your own sphere and observe those other religions that uphold the meaning and the concept of God as one, Creator, provident, most high and transcendent, that worship God with acts of sincere piety and upon whose beliefs and practices the principles of moral and social life are founded.

“The Catholic Church unquestionably, and to its regret, perceives gaps, insufficiencies and errors in many religious expressions as those indicated, yet she cannot fail to turn her thoughts to them as well, to remind them that the Catholic religion upholds in just regard all that which in them is true, good and human. Moreover, in order to preserve religious sentiment and the worship of God in modern culture--the duty and need of a true civilization--she is in the forefront as the most valid supporter of the rights of God over humanity.”

**Paul VI, address inaugurating the second period,
Second Vatican Council, September 29, 1963**

“We offer you an announcement in this regard, hoping it may enjoy the call and value of the Pentecost. It is this: as announced some time ago, we are establishing precisely in these days here in Rome the ‘Secretariat for Non-Christians,’ an organ which will have quite different functions but a structure analogous to that for separated Christians . . .

“No pilgrim, no matter how distant he may be religiously or geographically, no matter his country of origin, will any longer be a complete stranger in this Rome, ever faithful to the historic program the Catholic faith has reserved to it as ‘*patria communis*.’”

**Paul VI, announcement of the establishment of the Secretariat for
Non-Christians, Pentecost Sunday, May 17, 1964**

“We need to keep ever present this ineffable, yet real relationship of the dialogue, which God the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, has offered to us and established with us, if we are to understand the relationship which we, that is, the Church, should strive to establish and to foster with the human race.

“The dialogue of salvation was opened spontaneously on the initiative of God: ‘He (God) loved us first’ (1Jn 4:10); it will be up to us to take the initiative in extending to all peoples this same dialogue, without waiting to be summoned to it.”

**Paul VI, Encyclical on the Church (*Ecclesiam Suam*) 71-72,
August 6, 1964**

“Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try

in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience-- those too may achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those without any fault of theirs have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life.

Whatever good or truth is found among them is considered by the church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all that they may at length have life.”

Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* 16, November 21, 1964

“The search for truth, however, must be carried out in a manner that is appropriate to the dignity of the human person and his social nature, namely, by free inquiry with the help of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue. It is by these means that people share with each other the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in such a way that they help one another in the search for truth. Moreover, it is by personal assent that people must adhere to the truth they have discovered.”

Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae)* 3, December 7, 1965

“This all-embracing plan of God for the salvation of the human race is accomplished not only as it were secretly in their souls, or through the efforts, including religious efforts, by which they seek God in many ways, “in the hope that they might feel after him and find him, although he is not far from each one of us” (Ac 17, 27): for these efforts need to be guided and corrected, even though in the loving design of God’s providence they can at times be regarded as leading towards the true God or as paving the way for the gospel message.”

Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (Ad Gentes)* 3, December 7, 1965

“Since the right and methodical exercise of missionary activity requires that those who labor for the Gospel should be scientifically prepared for their task, and especially for dialogue with non-Christian religions and cultures, and also that they should be effectively assisted in the carrying out of this task, it is desired that, for the sake of the missions, there should be fraternal and generous collaboration on the part of scientific institutes which specialize in missiology and in other arts and disciplines useful for the missions, such as ethnology and linguistics, the history and science of religions, sociology, pastoral skills and the like.”

Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (Ad Gentes)* 34, December 7, 1965

“All this [renewal through the Holy Spirit] holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way.(31, *Lumen gentium* 16) For, since Christ died for all men,(32, *Rom* 8:32) and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.”

Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* 22, December 7, 1965

“This first proclamation is also addressed to the immense sections of mankind who practice non-Christian religions. The Church respects and esteems these non-Christian religions because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart. They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts. They have taught generations of people how to pray. They are all impregnated with innumerable ‘seeds of the Word’ [References to Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, *Ad Gentes* 11, *Lumen Gentium* 17] and can constitute a true ‘preparation for the Gospel,’ [Reference to *Praeparatio Evangelica* and *Lumen Gentium* 16] to quote a felicitous term used by the Second Vatican Council and borrowed from Eusebius of Caesarea.

“Such a situation certainly raises complex and delicate questions that must be studied in the light of Christian Tradition and the Church's magisterium, in order to offer to the missionaries of today and of tomorrow new horizons in their contacts with non-Christian religions. We wish to point out, above all today, that neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised is an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ. On the contrary the Church holds that these multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ [*Eph* 3:8] - riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fullness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth. Even in the face of natural religious expressions most worthy of esteem, the Church finds support in the fact that the religion of Jesus, which she proclaims through evangelization, objectively places man in relation with the plan of God, with His living presence and with His action; she thus causes an encounter with the mystery of divine paternity that bends over towards humanity. In other words, our religion effectively establishes with God an authentic and living relationship which the other religions do not succeed in doing, even though they have, as it were, their arms stretched out towards heaven.

“This is why the Church keeps her missionary spirit alive, and even wishes to intensify it in the moment of history in which we are living. She feels responsible before entire peoples. She has no rest so long as she has not done her best to proclaim the Good News of Jesus the Savior. She is always preparing new generations of apostles. Let us state this fact with joy at a time when there are not lacking those who think and even say that ardor and the apostolic spirit are exhausted, and that the time of the missions is now past. The Synod has replied that the missionary proclamation never ceases and that the Church will always be striving for the fulfillment of this proclamation.”

Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 53, December 8, 1975

“What we have just said [regarding Vatican II and ecumenical dialogue] must also be applied—although in another way and with the due differences—to activity for coming closer together with the representatives of the non-Christian religions, an activity expressed through dialogue, contacts, prayer in common, investigation of the treasures of human spirituality, in which, as we know well, the members of these religions also are not lacking. Does it not sometimes happen that the firm belief of the followers of the non-Christian religions—a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside

the visible confines of the Mystical Body—can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church and so prone to relax moral principles and open the way to ethical permissiveness?” **John Paul II, Encyclical *Redeemer of Humanity* 6, March 4, 1979**

“The Second Vatican Council did immense work to form that full and universal awareness by the Church of which Pope Paul VI write in his first encyclical. This awareness—or rather self-awareness—by the Church is formed ‘in dialogue’; and before this dialogue becomes a conversation, attention must be directed to ‘the other,’ that is to say, the person with whom we wish to speak. The Ecumenical Council gave a fundamental impulse to forming the Church’s self-awareness by so adequately and competently presenting to us a view of the terrestrial globe as a map of various religions...

“...The Council document on non-Christian religions, in particular, is filled with deep esteem for the great spiritual values, indeed for the primacy of the spiritual, which in human life finds expression in religion and then in morality, with direct effects on the whole of culture.” **John Paul II, Encyclical *Redeemer of Humanity* 11, March 4, 1979**

“But as we follow this reason for the Jubilee, we cannot limit ourselves to the two thousand years which have passed since the birth of Christ. We need to go further back, to embrace the whole of the action of the Holy Spirit even before Christ—from the beginning, throughout the world, and especially in the economy of the Old Covenant. For this action has been exercised, in every place and at every time, indeed in every individual, according to the eternal plan of salvation, whereby this action was to be closely linked with the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, which in its turn exercised its influence on those who believed in the future coming of Christ. This is attested to especially in the Letter to the Ephesians. (Eph. 1:3-14) Grace, therefore, bears within itself both a Christological aspect and a pneumatological one, which becomes evident above all in those who expressly accept Christ: “In him [in Christ] you...were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it.” (Eph. 1:13f.)” **John Paul II, Encyclical, *On the Holy Spirit [Dominum et Vivificantem]*, 53, May 18, 1986**

“Yes, there is a dimension of prayer, which in the very real diversity of religions tries to express communication with a Power above all our human forces. Peace depends basically on this Power, which we call God, and as Christians believe has revealed himself in Christ. This is the meaning of this World Day of Prayer.

“For the first time in history, we have come together from everywhere, Christian churches and ecclesial communities, and world religions, in this sacred place dedicated to St. Francis, to witness before the world, each according to his conviction, to the transcendent quality of peace. The form and content of our prayers are very different, as we have seen, and there can be no question of reducing them to a kind of common denominator....

“Prayer, fasting, pilgrimage. This day at Assisi has helped us become more aware of our religious commitments. But it has also made the world, looking at us through the media, more aware of the responsibility of each religion regarding problems of war and peace. Perhaps more than ever before in history, the intrinsic link between an authentic religious attitude and the great good of peace has become evident to all.”

John Paul II, World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, October 27, 1986

“At Assisi, in an extraordinary way, there was the discovery of the unique value that prayer has for peace. It was seen that it is impossible to have peace without prayer, the prayer of all, each one in his own identity and in search of the truth. In deepening what we have said, one must see in this another wonderful manifestation of that unity which binds us together, beyond the differences and divisions which are known to all. Every authentic prayer is under the influence of the Spirit ‘who intercedes insistently for us . . . because we do not even know how to pray as we ought,’ but he prays in us ‘with unutterable groanings’ and ‘the one who searches hearts knows what are the desires of the Spirit’ (Rm 8: 26-27). We can indeed maintain that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person.”

John Paul II, address to the Roman Curia, December 22, 1986

“The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time. 35[*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53] The Second Vatican Council recalls that the Spirit is at work in the heart of every person, through the ‘seeds of the Word,’ to be found in human initiatives-including religious ones-and in mankind’s efforts to attain truth, goodness and God himself. 36 [*Ad Gentes* and *Gaudium et Spes*]

“The Spirit offers the human race ‘the light and strength to respond to its highest calling’; through the Spirit, ‘mankind attains in faith to the contemplation and savoring of the mystery of God’s design’; indeed, ‘we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.’ 37 [*Gaudium et Spes*, 10, 15, 22] The Church ‘is aware that humanity is being continually stirred by the Spirit of God and can therefore never be completely indifferent to the problems of religion’ and that ‘people will always...want to know what meaning to give their life, their activity and their death.’ 38 [*G&S* 41] The Spirit, therefore, is at the very source of man’s existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of his being. 39 [*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 54]

“The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history: ‘The Spirit of God with marvelous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth.’ 40 [*G&S* 26] The risen Christ ‘is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit, not only instilling a desire for the world to come but also thereby animating, purifying and reinforcing the noble aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole earth to this end.’ 41

[G&S 38] Again, it is the Spirit who sows the ‘seeds of the Word’ present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ. 42 [*Lumen Gentium*, 17; AG, 3, 15.]

“Thus the Spirit, who ‘blows where he wills’ (cf. Jn 3:8), who ‘was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified,’ 43 [AG 4] and who ‘has filled the world. . . holds all things together [and] knows what is said’ (Wis 1:7), leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place. 44 [*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53] I have repeatedly called this fact to mind, and it has guided me in my meetings with a wide variety of peoples. The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: ‘Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man.’ 45 [various speeches of JPII] Excluding any mistaken interpretation, the interreligious meeting held in Assisi was meant to confirm my conviction that ‘every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart.’” 46 [Address to the Curia, December 22, 1986]

**John Paul II, encyclical *Mission of the Redeemer* 28-29,
December 7, 1990**

“In Christ, God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love. He does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain ‘gaps, insufficiencies and errors.’”

**John Paul II, encyclical *Mission of the Redeemer* 55,
December 7, 1990**

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

John Paul II, apostolic letter *At the Beginning of the New Millennium* 55, January 6, 2001

“In this whole effort religious leaders have a weighty responsibility. The various Christian confessions as well as the world’s great religions need to work together to eliminate the social and cultural causes of terrorism. They can do this by teaching the greatness and dignity of the human person and by spreading a clearer sense of the oneness of the human family. This is a specific area of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation, a pressing service which religion can offer to world peace.”

“*No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness:* This is what in this message I wish to say to believers and unbelievers alike, to all men and women of good will who are concerned for the good of the human family and for the future.”

**John Paul II, message for the World Day of Peace
January 1, 2002**

“The gathering that the Servant of God John Paul II organized in Assisi appropriately puts the emphasis on the *value of prayer in building peace*. Indeed, we are aware of how difficult and, at times, how humanly desperate this process can be. Peace is a value in which so many elements converge. To build it, the paths of cultural, political and economic order are, of course, important, but first of all *peace must be built in hearts*. It is here, in fact, that sentiments develop that can nurture it or, on the contrary, threaten, weaken and stifle it.

“Moreover, the human heart is the place where God intervenes. In this regard, in addition to the "horizontal" dimension of relations with other human beings, the "vertical" dimension of each person's relationship with God, the foundation of all things, is proving to be of fundamental importance. This was exactly what Pope John Paul II intended to recall to the world with the 1986 event.

“He asked for genuine prayer which involves the whole of life. Thus, he desired it to be accompanied by fasting and expressed in pilgrimage, a symbol of the journey towards the encounter with God. And he explained, ‘Prayer entails conversion of heart on our part’ (*Inauguration of the World Day of Prayer for Peace, Assisi, 27 October 1986, n. 4; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 3 November, p. 1*).

“Among the features of the 1986 Meeting, it should be stressed that this value of prayer in building peace *was testified to by the representatives of different religious traditions*, and this did not happen at a distance but *in the context of a meeting*. Consequently, the people of diverse religions who were praying could show through the language of witness that prayer does not divide but unites and is a decisive element for an effective pedagogy of peace, hinged on friendship, reciprocal acceptance and dialogue between people of different cultures and religions.

“We are in greater need of this dialogue than ever, especially if we look at the new generations. Sentiments of hatred and vengeance have been inculcated in numerous young people in those parts of the world marked by conflicts, in ideological contexts where the seeds of ancient resentment are cultivated and their souls prepared for future violence. These barriers must be torn down and encounter must be encouraged.”

Benedict XVI, message on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the interreligious meeting of prayer for peace, September 2, 2006

“The broader purpose of dialogue is to discover the truth. What is the origin and destiny of mankind? What are good and evil? What awaits us at the end of our earthly existence? Only by addressing these deeper questions can we build a solid basis for the peace and security of the human family, for ‘wherever and whenever men and women are enlightened by the splendor of truth, they naturally set out on the path of peace’ (2006 World Day of Peace message, 3).

“We are living in an age when these questions are too often marginalized. Yet they can never be erased from the human heart. Throughout history, men and women have striven to articulate their restlessness with this passing world. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the psalms are full of such expressions: ‘My spirit is overwhelmed within me’ (Ps 143:4; cf. Ps 6:6; 31:10; 32:3; 38:8; 77:3); ‘why are you cast down, my soul, why

groan within me?’ (Ps 42:5). The response is always one of faith: ‘Hope in God, I will praise him still; my Savior and my God’ (Ps 42:5, 11; cf. Ps 43:5; 62:5).

“Spiritual leaders have a special duty, and we might say competence, to place the deeper questions at the forefront of human consciousness, to reawaken mankind to the mystery of human existence and to make space in a frenetic world for reflection and prayer.

**Benedict XVI, Address to Interreligious Leaders,
Washington, DC, April 17, 2008**

“. . . As followers of different religious traditions working together for the good of the community at large, we attach great importance to this "side by side" dimension of our cooperation, which complements the ‘face to face’ aspect of our continuing dialogue.

“On the spiritual level, all of us, in our different ways, are personally engaged in a journey that grants an answer to the most important question of all--the question concerning the ultimate meaning of our human existence. The quest for the sacred is the search for the one thing necessary that alone satisfies the longings of the human heart. In the fifth century St. Augustine described that search in these terms: ‘Lord, you have created us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you’ (*Confessions*, Book I, 1). . .

“So it is that genuine religious belief points us beyond present utility toward the transcendent. It reminds us of the possibility and the imperative of moral conversion, of the duty to live peaceably with our neighbor, of the importance of living a life of integrity. Properly understood, it brings enlightenment, it purifies our hearts and it inspires noble and generous action to the benefit of the entire human family. It motivates us to cultivate the practice of virtue and to reach out toward one another in love, with the greatest respect for religious traditions different from our own.

“Ever since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has placed special emphasis on the importance of dialogue and cooperation with the followers of other religions. In order to be fruitful, this requires reciprocity on the part of all partners in dialogue and the followers of other religions. I am thinking in particular of situations in some parts of the world where cooperation and dialogue between religions call for mutual respect, the freedom to practice one's religion and to engage in acts of public worship, and the freedom to follow one's conscience without suffering ostracism or persecution, even after conversion from one religion to another. Once such a respect and openness has been established, peoples of all religions will work together effectively for peace and mutual understanding and so give a convincing witness before the world.

“This kind of dialogue needs to take place on a number of different levels and should not be limited to formal discussions. The dialogue of life involves simply living alongside one another and learning from one another in such a way as to grow in mutual knowledge and respect.

“The dialogue of action brings us together in concrete forms of collaboration as we apply our religious insights to the task of promoting integral human development, working for peace, justice and the stewardship of creation. Such a dialogue may include exploring together how to defend human life at every stage and how to ensure the non-exclusion of the religious dimension of individuals and communities in the life of society.

“Then at the level of formal conversations, there is a need not only for theological exchange but also sharing our spiritual riches, speaking of our experience of prayer and contemplation, and expressing to one another the joy of our encounter with divine love.”

**Benedict XVI, Address to Interreligious Leaders, Great Britain
September 17, 2010**

“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’.[194] 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.

“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.[195] 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’.[196, RM] 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.[197]

“Non-Christians, by God’s gracious initiative, when they are faithful to their own consciences, can live ‘justified by the grace of God’,[199] and thus be ‘associated to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ’.[200] 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.[201] 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.”

Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, 250-251, 254, March 24, 2013

[194] Indian Bishops' Conference, Final Declaration of the XXX Assembly: The Role of the Church for a Better India (8 March 2013), 8.9.

[195] Cf. Propositio 53, 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization.

[196] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 56: AAS 83 (1991), 304.

[197] Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia (21 December 2012): AAS 105 (2006), 51; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 9; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 856.

[198] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

[199] International Theological Commission, Christianity and the World Religions (1996), 72: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 15, No. 1061.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Cf. *ibid.*, 81-87: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 15, Nos. 1070-1076.

“Deep down, we are all pilgrims on this earth, and on this pilgrim journey, as we yearn for truth and eternity, we do not live autonomous and self-sufficient individual lives; the same applies to religious, cultural and national communities. We need each other, and are entrusted to each other’s care. Each religious tradition, from within, must be able to take account of others. . .

“Let us look around us: there are so many poor and needy people, so many societies that try to find a more inclusive way of social justice and path of economic development! How great is the need for the human heart to be firmly fixed on the deepest meaning of experiences in life and rooted in a rediscovery of hope! Men and women, inspired in these areas by the values of their respective religious traditions, can offer an important, and even unique, contribution. This is truly a fertile land offering much fruit, also in the field of interreligious dialogue.

“I also wish to mention something which is always an illusion: relativism, ‘everything is relative’. In this regard, we must keep in mind a clear principle: we cannot enter into dialogue if we do not approach it from the perspective of our own identity. Without identity, there can be no dialogue. It would be an illusory dialogue, a dialogue without substance: it would serve no purpose. All of us have our own religious identity to which we are faithful. But the Lord knows how to guide history. May each one of us begin with our own identity, not pretending to have another, because it serves no end and does not help; it is relativism. What unites us is the path of life, is starting from our own identity for the good of our brothers and sisters. To do good! And so, we walk together as brothers and sisters. Every one of us offers the witness of our identity to others and engages in dialogue with others. Then dialogue can move onto theological questions. But even more important and beautiful is to walk together without betraying our own identity, without disguising it, without hypocrisy. This is what I like to think.”

**Francis, Meeting with Religious Leaders, Albania
September 21, 2014**

“Why should this document, addressed to all people of good will, include a chapter dealing with the convictions of believers? I am well aware that in the areas of politics and philosophy there are those who firmly reject the idea of a Creator, or consider it irrelevant, and consequently dismiss as irrational the rich contribution which religions can make towards an integral ecology and the full development of humanity. Others view religions simply as a subculture to be tolerated. Nonetheless, science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both. . .

“ . . . 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.

“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 absolutization 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.’” [*Evangeliu Gaudium* 231] **Francis, Encyclical on Care of our Common Home *Laudato Si’* 62, 200-201, May 24, 2015**

“In an Amazonian region characterized by many religions, we believers need to find occasions to speak to one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor. This has nothing to do with watering down or concealing our deepest convictions when we encounter others who think differently than ourselves. If we believe that the Holy Spirit can work amid differences, then we will try to let ourselves be enriched by that insight, while embracing it from the core of our own convictions and our own identity. For the deeper, stronger and richer that identity is, the more we will be capable of enriching others with our own proper contribution.

“We Catholics possess in sacred Scripture a treasure that other religions do not accept, even though at times they may read it with interest and even esteem some of its teachings. We attempt to do something similar with the sacred texts of other religions and religious communities, which contain ‘precepts and doctrines that... often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women’.” [*Nostra Aetate* 2]

Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, 106-107, February 2, 2020

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