

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

NOSTRA AETATE: DECREE ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS (excerpts)

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, October 28, 1965

2. 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; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language... Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.(4)

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

5. We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men,(14) so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.(15)

I AM REMINDED...

By Edward L. Shirley, SFO
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I have been reminded of many truths through my encounters with non-Christians:

Jews have reminded me of the importance of Tradition and Community.

Muslims have reminded me that next to God, all else is but a speck, and of the importance of daily spiritual discipline.

Hindus have reminded me that the Divine manifests itself in many, and often seemingly contradictory, ways.

Buddhists have reminded me that change must come from within, and of the importance of meditation and the inner life.

Taoists have reminded me of the power in taking the lower way.

New Agers have reminded me that wings and a spirit of willing experimentation often lead to new insights.

FINAL THOUGHT

At a Muslim-Christian Dialogue session, I was once asked, "What would you do to prove your religion is the true one."

I replied, "I have no desire to prove my religion is the true one. However, if I wanted to prove that my religion was relevant and offered a way of life, I would begin to truly practice it."

A Muslim in the audience stood up and said, "Muslims, too!"