

The Holy See and Buddhism

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Abstract

The text presents the interaction between the Holy See and Buddhists throughout the world with the emphasis on the activities of Pontifical Council of Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID), the central office of the Catholic Church for the promotion of inter-religious dialogue. The effort of the Holy See to overcome prejudices, create new friendships and also to deepen existing friendly ties, is visible under many aspects: 1) formal Buddhist-Christian Colloquia; 2) other meetings including very important activities of DIMMID (*Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique – Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*); 3) the Messages for Vesakh; 4) formal and informal encounters: a) the *Assisi Pilgrimages*; b) visits of Buddhist delegations from Asian countries to the Holy See; c) visits of the Holy See to Buddhists; 5) Pope's audiences to Buddhists in the Vatican and pontifical journeys. The PCID's initiatives generally take inspiration from the Message for the World Day of Peace, that the Pope delivers on January 1, every year. Both Buddhists and Christians yearn for a "beyond" that, even though perceived in a different way, transcends contingency and visible reality. It is this longing that can, and must, unite us in the commitment to build a world of justice and peace, in fidelity to the original aspiration of their respective religious traditions.

Keywords: *Catholic Church, Christianity, Buddhism, dialogue.*

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Opening Address in Polish

Szanowni Państwo, pozwolę sobie na początku kilka słów powiedzieć po polsku.

Składam podziękowania na ręce pani profesor Marty Kudelskiej za przekazanie informacji o Waszej Konferencji i zaproszenie do uczestnictwa skierowane również do Papieskiej Rady do spraw Dialogu Międzyreligijnego.

Jest to niewątpliwy znak, że w tej przesławnej kazimierzowskiej i jagiellońskiej nauk przemożnej perle, prezentowane zostaje również stanowisko Stolicy Świętej w kwestii tak ważnej dla współczesnego świata, jak wzajemne poznanie i zrozumienie.

Ze względu na moją niewielką – przy czym raczej bierną – znajomość języka polskiego, mnie powierzone zostało zadanie uczestniczenia i przedstawienia, jak w perspektywie dialogu, wyglądają relacje Stolicy Piotrowej z buddyzmem.

Nie mogłem jednak nie powiedzieć, choć przy oczywistych trudnościach, na wstępie tego mojego wystąpienia, kilku słów w języku tylu sławnych ludzi tworzących historię i kulturę Europy. Bo dialog to przecież wysiłek, również językowy...

And now let's go to the English presentation...

1 Introduction: the Foundation Stones of the Dialogue with Buddhists

It is generally agreed that that the number of Buddhists in the world is estimated at around 350 million (6% of the world's population) and 90% live in Asia. Pope Francis appealed to all of us to “intensify dialogue among various religions” and “to build bridges connecting all people, in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister to be welcomed and embraced!” (*Audience with the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, [www 01], 22 March 2013).

In Europe, the situation is not so clear and not only from a statistical viewpoint. Considering the interaction between Buddhists and Christians in Europe one can detect six different identities:

- 1&2 Buddhists and Christians with their own respective identity, well committed in dialogue;
- 3 Buddhist Christians, that is Christians who have integrated Buddhist elements in their religious practice;



- 4 Christian Buddhists, that is baptised Christians who later converted to Buddhism;
- 5&6 Relativist Buddhists and relativist Christians, absorbing any religious elements from two (or more) religious traditions and shifting to a hypothetical world religion.

In order to engage in a fruitful dialogue with Buddhists and followers of other religious traditions throughout the world, to strengthen greater mutual understanding and to collaborate in the promotion of common values, the Pontifical Council of Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID), formerly Secretariat for non-Christians, was created in 1964. The PCID is the central office of the Catholic Church for the promotion of inter-religious dialogue in accordance with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, in particular the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, that states as follows:

Buddhism, in its various forms, 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.¹

While paving the way for inter-religious dialogue, the Holy See cannot neglect “the right of non-Christians to know the riches of the mystery of Christ”, as stated by pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

The Church respects and esteems 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. [...] 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 (cf. *Eph 3:8*).²

¹“Declaration on the relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on 28 October 1965”, no. 2. See: [[www 02](#)].

²Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (= The effort to proclaim the Gospel), 8 December 1975, no. 53. See: [[www 03](#)].



The effort of the Holy See to overcome prejudices, create new friendships and also to deepen existing friendly ties, is visible in many aspects:

1. formal Buddhist-Christian Colloquia
2. other meetings
3. the Messages for Vesakh
4. formal and informal encounters
 - (a) the *Assisi Pilgrimages*
 - (b) visits of Buddhist delegations from Asian countries to the Holy See
 - (c) visits of the Holy See to Buddhists
5. the Pope's audiences with Buddhists in the Vatican and pontifical journeys

The PCID's initiatives generally take inspiration from the Message for the World Day of Peace, that the Pope delivers on January 1, every year.

2 Colloquia

The first formal Buddhist-Christian Colloquium was held at the Fo Guang Shan 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 and Christian Traditions*.

The third formal colloquium took place in Tokyo, Japan in 2002 at the Headquarters of Risho Kosei Kai with the theme: *Sangha in Buddhism and Church in Christianity*.

The fourth Colloquium was held at the Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome, on May 6, 2013, with the theme: *Inner Peace – Peace Among Peoples*.

This event was the fruit of a series of friendly dialogues between the PCID and Buddhists of different traditions living in Italy with the majority of them coming mainly from Asia (Sri Lanka, Japan, Republic of China (Taiwan), Thailand, Tibet) and also from Italy.



Some professors and also priests and the religieux coming from predominantly Buddhist countries in Asia such as Myanmar, Thailand, the People's Republic of China, Sri Lanka, Korea, Vietnam, Republic of China (Taiwan) as well as from Italy, the Philippines, Indonesia and India, attended this last meeting.

The composition of the participants in this colloquium whether Catholics or Buddhists was in harmony with the theme under reflection, namely "Inner Peace, Peace among Peoples".

The mere fact that Buddhists and Christians came together gives witness to peace. Our thoughts, words and gestures of peace contribute to fostering a mentality and a culture of peace and harmony. Ignorance, fear, hostility, prejudice, indifference, exclusion and violence sow the seeds of division in the world. Unfortunately, the religious history of humanity, yesterday and even today has often hindered its mission of fostering peace and coexistence.

Jesus Christ says "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (*Mt.* 5:9). Thus, Christianity teaches that, "peace is not simply a pact or a treaty which ensures a tranquil life, nor can its definition be reduced to the mere absence of war. According to its Hebrew etymology *shalom*, 'peace' means being complete and intact, restored to wholeness. It is the state of those who live in harmony with God, with themselves, with others and with nature. Before appearing outwardly, peace is interior." (Cf. *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* no. 9, [www 04]).

The fifth Buddhist-Christian Colloquium took place in Bodh Gaya, India, from 12 to 13 February 2015, with the theme: *Together Fostering Fraternity*. Sub-themes: *We belong to One Human Family; From a "Culture of Diversity" to a "Culture of Solidarity"*; *Fraternity, a prerequisite for fighting social evils; "Fraternity wipes away Tears"*. *Giving witness to concrete measures in fostering fraternity in society; Together Fostering Fraternity: the Way Forward*.

This gives an idea of the warm climate of friendship and respect nourishing the relationship between the Holy See and the different Buddhist families.

3 Other meetings

At Castel Gandolfo, Rome, Italy from 24th to 27th of April 2004, under the theme *Dharma and Buddhist Compassion – Christian Agape*.



At Rissho Kosei Kai Buddhist Center, in Osaka, Japan from 24th to 27th April 2006, the same theme as the first symposium, organized by the Mahayana Buddhists, Rissho Kosei Kai, Tendai denomination and Nichiren Order.

At Castel Gandolfo, Italy from 24th to 27th April 2008, the same theme. This time both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhists contributed greatly to the symposium enabling a greater, more tangible exchange towards collaboration for peace.

At the Vipassana Meditation Center (of Theravada Buddhism), Wat Phra-dhath Sri Jomthong Voravivarn, Chiangmai, Thailand from 1st to 5th February 2010. The then Undersecretary, Msgr. Andrew Vissanu Thanyanan, represented the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. The Symposium took up the theme *The Response of Religions to the Challenges of the Globalized World*, including various sub-topics such as: the collapse of values among families; the education of young people; the mass media; the meaning of suffering for contemporary men and women and the financial crisis and wealth disparity. There were around 300 participants from different parts of the world joining the Symposium.

DIMMID *Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue* (see: [www 05]) – or, more formally and to indicate its international character, *Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique / Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue* (DIMMID) – officially came into being as a commission of the Benedictine Confederation in 1992, but already in the middle of the twentieth century there were monks involved in inter-religious dialogue. *Monasticism proved to be a Bridge Between Religions*. One of the main purposes of DIMMID is to promote interest and involvement in inter-religious dialogue among Catholic monastic men and women. It does this through a network of national commissions, inter-religious conferences, and in its new multi-lingual journal, “Dilatato Corde”, which can be found on the website of DIMMID (see: [www 06]). The name of the journal comes from the Rule of Saint Benedict, which invites those who follow the monastic way of life to run the way of God’s commandments with an “expanded heart” (Prologue, 49).

DIMMID focuses on dialogue with monks and nuns of other religious traditions, whose monastic way of life, it should be noted, predates Christian monasticism by about a thousand years. In addition to offering hospitality





Figure 1: Pictured here are Benedictine and Buddhist women monastics meeting in 2008 at St. Mary Monastery in Rock Island, Illinois.

and living in peace and mutual respect with their Buddhist and Hindu monastic brothers and sisters, more and more Catholic monastics believe they also have something to learn from them. To this end, a *Spiritual Exchange* program between Japanese Zen Buddhist monks and nuns and European monastic communities has been ongoing since 1979, and in North America, *Nuns in the West* and *Monks in the West* have been meeting since 2004.³ In addition, the North American Commission of DIMMID has sponsored three major Buddhist/Catholic dialogues, the *Gethsemani Encounters* held in 1996, 2002, and 2008.⁴

Nuns in the West III was the third in a series of dialogue events sponsored by the North American commission for Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue for American monastic women.

³One example of an area for such mutual learning is monastic celibacy, the topic for the 2006 meeting of *Monks in the West*. See William Skudlarek, *Demythologizing Celibacy. Practical Wisdom from Christian and Buddhist Monasticism*.

⁴Proceedings of the three conferences were newly published by Lantern Books in 2010: *The Spiritual Life. A Dialogue of Buddhist and Christian Monastics*; *Finding Peace in Troubled Times: Buddhist and Christian Monastics on transforming Suffering*; and *Green Monasticism: A Buddhist-Catholic Response to an Environmental Calamity*.

4 The Messages for Vesakh

The Vesakh⁵ message sent from this Dicastery since 1995 has been contributing to the dialogue of friendship among Buddhists and Christians. With the Vesakh message, the PCID is able to greet their Buddhist friends at their greatest religious feast. Such gestures of goodwill offer both Buddhists and Christians an occasion to renew their existing friendship, to overcome prejudices, to start new relationships and to collaborate closely for the progress of the human family. Besides, since the message is translated into different local languages, through the Local Churches, it reaches a wider audience.

In 2011 the Vesakh Message was entitled: *Seeking Truth in Freedom: Christians and Buddhists Live in Peace* (see: [www 07]). On this occasion, Cardinal Tauran remarked that the “human striving for truth offers a fruitful opportunity for the followers of the different religions to encounter one another in depth and to grow in appreciation of the gifts of each”. Wherever religious freedom is effectively acknowledged, the dignity of the human person is respected at its root; by the sincere search for what is true and good, moral conscience and civil institutions are strengthened; and justice and peace are firmly established (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace* 2011, no. 5, [www 08]).

⁵The Vesakh is the holiest of Buddhist holy days, commemorating Gautama Buddha’s birth, at Lumbini in present-day Nepal (c. 563 B.C.E) enlightenment at Bodh Gaya in the state of Bihar (c. 528 B.C.E), and passing away or Parinirvana at Kushinagar (483 B.C.E) both in India. According to tradition, Gautama Buddha was born, achieved enlightenment, and died during the full moon of the month of May, known as *Vaisakha* in the Indian lunar calendar. While the above three historic events of the Buddha are observed in all Buddhist countries, they are not always celebrated on the same day. In Theravada Buddhist countries, the key moments in the Buddha’s life are marked on the full moon of May. In Japan, the three anniversaries are usually observed on separate days – his birth (*hanamatsuri*), on April 8, his enlightenment on December 8, and his death on February 15. This year in most East Asia countries, Buddha’s birthday is celebrated on Friday, 6 May whereas in Theravada countries (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, India) it falls on 13 or 14 May. This celebration differs from country to country, but generally activities are centred on the local temples, where Buddhists, in some countries dressed in white, gather to listen to sermons by monks, to observe religious ceremonies and to conduct the ‘Buddha Puja’ – offerings to the Buddha. In the evening, there are candlelit processions around the temples. The festival is celebrated with much colour and gaiety. Homes, streets and temples are decorated with paper lanterns and oil lamps. Some countries erect Vesakh pandals illuminated with large numbers of bulbs, relating a Jataka story or an event of Buddha’s former life. It is traditional on this day in some countries to free caged birds, setting up booths along streets to offer a treat to passers-by as a meritorious act. Also popular are ‘Bakthi Gee’ (devotional songs) that celebrate Buddha’s teaching and are sung by choirs.



In 2012 the Vesakh Message was entitled: *Sharing Responsibility for Educating the Young Generation on Justice & Peace through Inter-religious Dialogue* (see: [www 09]). Since young people are an asset for the whole society, Cardinal Tauran so addressed the Buddhists: “[...] you pass on to young people the wisdom regarding the need to refrain from harming others and to live lives of generosity and compassion, a practice to be esteemed and recognized as a precious gift to society. This is one concrete way in which religion contributes to educating the young generation, sharing the responsibility and cooperating with others”.

In the Vesakh Message for 2013 entitled *Loving, Defending and Promoting Human Life* (see: [www 10]), Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, who is presently the President of the PCID, expressed sincere respect for the noble religious tradition of the Buddhists: “Frequently we note a consonance with values expressed also in your religious books: respect for life, contemplation, silence, simplicity (cf. *Verbum Domini*, no. 119). Our genuine fraternal dialogue needs to foster what we Buddhists and Christians have in common especially a shared profound reverence for life”.⁶

Today, peace in the world is under threat due to anti-life movements generated by material and spiritual poverty. The Holy Father, Pope Francis appeals to us to “intensify dialogue among various religions”, “to build bridges connecting all people, in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister to be welcomed and embraced!” (*Audience with the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, 22 March 2013).

Together fostering fraternity is the title of the Vesakh Message for 2014 (24 April 2014, see: [www 11]), also inspired by Pope Francis’ Message for the World Day of Peace 2014, where Pope Francis observes that “fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to 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 [...]”.⁷ Vesakh message for 2014 calls 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.

⁶Vesakh Message no. 3.

⁷Vesakh Message no. 1.



5 Formal and informal encounters

5.1 The Assisi pilgrimages

On 27 October 1986, Saint John Paul II succeeded, for the first time in history, in bringing together 160 religious leaders from all over the world: 32 Christian religious organisations (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians), as well as 11 other non-Christian world religions, among which the Buddhist were well represented, side by side with members of Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism, Islam, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Baha'i and African and North American animists.

The meeting was a milestone event which gave enormous impetus to the worldwide peace movement, and at the conclusion of the event, Pope John Paul said, "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 Saint Francis, to witness before the world, each according to his own conviction, about the transcendent quality of peace".

On 27 October 2011 Pope Benedict XVI travelled to Assisi to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the historic meeting there in 1986, called by Pope John Paul II, which gathered representatives of Christian communities and world religions for a day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice. Once again, the Buddhist were well represented.

5.2 Visits of Buddhist delegations to PCID

The visits of Buddhist delegations from Asian countries to our PCID Office are very frequent.

5.3 PCID visits to Buddhists

Visit to Korea (22-27 May 2011) At the invitation of H. Ex. Msgr. Hyginus KIM Hee-joong, Archbishop of Kwangju, President of the Episcopal Committee for promoting Christian Unity and Inter-religious Dialogue and a Member of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, H.Em. Card. Jean-Louis Tauran and H. Ex. Msgr. Pier Luigi Celata, President and Secretary respectively of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue paid a visit to Korea from 22nd to 27th May 2011. The invitation had been extended during



a visit of an inter-religious delegation from Korea to the PCID led by Msgr. Kim in December 2010. The delegation was on a pilgrimage to Assisi and had the opportunity of participating in the General Audience of the Holy Father as well.

On 24 May 2011, H. Em. Card. Tauran paid a visit to Ven Ja-Seung, President of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, the most important of all Buddhist organizations in Korea. During the conversation, Ven. Ja-Seung referred to the Vatican Council II and said that it was and is a source of renewal not only for the Catholic Church but also for Buddhism. From his part, Card. Tauran presented to Ven Ja-Seung a letter of invitation, on behalf of the Holy Father, for the *Day of Reflection and Prayer* in Assisi on 27th October 2011. Obviously quite pleased at the invitation, Ven. Ja-Seung thanked the Cardinal for the same.

On the same day, both Card. Tauran and Archbishop Celata met with representatives of Buddhism, Confucianism, Won-Buddhism, Chandogyo, Association of Korean Native Religions and Protestantism at the Apostolic Nunciature. The lunch hosted by the Pontifical Representative in honour of these religious leaders confirmed the reciprocal respect and cordiality that exist among various religious groups in Korea.

Mount Hiei meetings Following the Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi instituted by Saint John Paul II in 1986, the Tendai Buddhism organised a yearly Religious Summit on Mt. Hiei, Kyoto, Japan. On 3rd and 4th of August 2012, the then Secretary of PCID, Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, on behalf of H. Em. Card. Jean-Louis Tauran, participated in the twenty fifth anniversary of this meeting at the Kyoto International Conference Centre. The theme of the Symposium was *Raging Natural Disasters and the Role of Religious Leaders*.

Mt. Hiei Message 2012 stated that the mere fact that there is still not a safe method of treating nuclear waste makes the continuation of nuclear power plants *religiously and ethically unacceptable*. Religions teach us that happiness is not derived from gratification of desires. We all need to pray for peace and be grateful for “the gift of life which is part of a harmonious whole”. On the other hand, when a natural disaster occurs, we see the future of humanity in the nobility of persons who engage in rescue operations while risking their lives. It is an important mission of the members of religious communities to pray for those who have lost their lives because of the power of nature and to accompany the survivors. We strive to accomplish



this mission by strengthening cooperation among the adherents of religions in the world.

Visit of the PCID Under-Secretary to Myanmar and Thailand (2012) From 1 to 10 November 2012, Fr. Indunil Kodithuwakku, PCID Under-Secretary, accompanied by some local Catholic bishops, paid a visit to the Buddhists in Myanmar and Thailand. In Yangon, Myanmar, Buddhist monks and nuns welcomed him very warmly. In those countries, Theravada Buddhism and monarchism still contribute to shape the nationhood. Conversion to another religion is thus seen as a betrayal. Yet, among tribal/indigenous people there are converts to Christianity.

Social promotion activities of the Church, different initiatives regarding inter-religious dialogue, and the “friendship” method of conducting inter-religious dialogue are slowly and gradually bearing fruit.

The Pattani Conflict (Muslim-Buddhists) is still unsolved: in the three Southern provinces of Thailand, ethno-nationalist conflicts and Rohingya-Bengali immigrants issue (Buddhist-Muslim) in Myanmar highlight the importance of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue for peace-building and Reconciliation.

From 6th to 8th November 2012 Rev. Fr. Indunil J. Kodithuwakku, Under-secretary, also went to Bangkok, Thailand, to participate in a seminar on a *Vision of Faith for Asia* upon the invitation of the Office for Evangelization of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

Hong Kong: The Colloquium of Leaders of the Six Religions (Buddhism, Catholicism, Confucianism, Islam, Taoism and Protestantism) More than 40 years ago, Bishop Francis Hsu, the first Chinese bishop in Hong Kong, set up the Interfaith Dialogue Commission in the Diocese of Hong Kong in 1972, seven years after the closing of Second Vatican Council. Then the Commission members contacted Buddhists, Taoists and Muslims, as well as Protestants and Confucian followers in Hong Kong. In 1976, the religious leaders met and began their first dialogue. Finally, in 1978, the Colloquium of Leaders of the Six Religions in Hong Kong (Colloquium) was inaugurated. The leaders of Buddhism, Catholicism, Confucianism, Islam, Taoism and Protestantism made a commitment to promote interfaith dialogue among Chinese



believers of the six religions⁸. In 2013 the Colloquium celebrated its 35th anniversary.

Visit of the PCID Under-Secretary to Japan Fr. Indunil Kodithuwakku, PCID Under-Secretary, also joined in the Mount Hiei meeting on 4 August 2014. On 1 August he paid a visit to Rissho Kosei Kai ([\[www 12\]](#)) a lay Buddhist Association, with which the Catholic Church is in close contact.

⁸Rev. Fr. Edward Chau King Fun, who has been involved in the interfaith exchanges for decades in Hong Kong, underlines the following aspects:

1. Mutual respect is most important regarding inter-religious dialogue.
2. Public recognition: over the past decades, the Colloquium of Leaders of the Six Religions has become widely known in Hong Kong society. The speakers' texts are compiled and published as books, which present in writing the viewpoints from all religions respectively.
3. Government recognition: The Colloquium is recognised by the local government as a point of contact with the religious sector of Hong Kong.
4. Catholic efforts: The Catholics always draw their inspiration for dialogue with other religions from Church teaching. Love and tolerance are of utmost importance in inter-religious dialogue.
5. Common goal: The Colloquium affirms the importance of communication and communion. Religion is like a pool of water in the ocean, in which believers are like droplets contributing to the big drop. The Colloquium encourages people to show love, justice and peace through dialogue. It is hoped that society and the world will then enjoy harmony, and attain truth, goodness, beauty and holiness.
6. Socio-cultural influence: At every Lunar New Year, the Colloquium issues an open statement to the local people. Besides sending seasonal greetings, the Six Leaders will draw public attention to social issues, such as education, youth, social justice, cultural manners and moral cultivation. On special occasions like the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, the religious leaders made special calls for prayers and aid to the victims and the needy.
7. Platform for friendship: The Colloquium is a platform for sharing, solidarity and mutual understanding. Today, representatives from Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism are more active than before. They even adopt "preaching" methods from the Christian Churches to spread their doctrine. Previously they were relatively low-key and preferred to work alone. Now, they will invite other religious representatives to join their activities.
8. Moral values: Our society today is secularised and filled with the values of relativism. It is high time for religious leaders to discuss how to serve society better with religious and cultural thinking. We hope to maintain and to foster the spirit of mutual respect, social inclusiveness and positive thinking in society, especially among young people.



6 The Pope's audiences to Buddhists and pontifical journeys

6.1 Audiences in the Vatican

6.1.1 with Paul VI

1. Buddhist monks from Thailand, 5 June 1972
2. The Supreme Buddhist Patriarch from Laos, 8 June 1973
3. A group of Japanese Buddhists, 5 September 1973
4. The Dalai Lama, 30 September 1973
5. The Ven. Gyalwa Karmapa, Tibetan Buddhist Leader, 17 January 1975

6.1.2 with John Paul II

1. Monks and Lay people from different Buddhist traditions (Zen, Pure Land, Shingon and Nichiren; the Japanese Rinzai Zen leader), 26 September 1979
2. A group of Buddhists and Shintoists, 20 February 1980

6.1.3 with Pope Benedict XVI

There are no official records, but the pope used to meet and shake hands with leaders and groups of different Buddhist traditions during the Wednesday General Audience.

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9. Need for scholarly research: This will enable more people to study the need for and development of inter-religious dialogue. At least Catholics can put in more effort into research work and discuss how to promote such dialogue. Regarding taking part in the rituals of other religions, such as Confucianism and Buddhism, Catholics should be better prepared beforehand. The meaning, context, connotations and denotations of symbols, gestures and rites in other religions should be learnt. Likewise, the meaning of religious worship and prayers should be presented in an understandable manner. More research work is needed.
 10. Religious education: Various religions have published books or materials on religious education or life education. There are common ideas and values. If they can be presented systematically or used as cross-references, this will help religions and educators to broaden their views and thinking. Students will eventually benefit from it. The Colloquium plans to work more on behalf of the younger generation, such as publishing books on religious values.



6.1.4 with Pope Francis

1. Students and Teachers from Seibu Gakuen Bunri Junior High School, Saitama, Tokyo, Japan; 21 August 2013

Presently Pope Francis very often meets with leaders and groups of different Buddhist traditions at the end of Wednesday General Audience. In these occasions no official speech is delivered. They just shake hands and talk freely out of the Curia protocol. This is consistent with Pope Francis' philosophy of dialogue. In his *Evangelii Gaudium*, though not mentioning explicitly the Buddhists, he states:

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.⁹

6.2 Pontifical Journeys

6.2.1 Paul VI

1. Jakarta, Indonesia; 3 December 1970

⁹Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 24 November 2013, no. 254. See: [[www 13](#)].



6.2.2 John Paul II

1. Manila, The Philippines; 21 February 1981
2. Seoul, Korea; 6 May 1984
3. Bangkok, Thailand; 11 May 1984
4. Delhi, India; 2 February 1986
5. Los Angeles, USA; 16 September 1987
6. Jakarta, Indonesia; 10 October 1989
7. Colombo, Sri Lanka; 20 January 1995

6.2.3 Francis

1. Meeting with religious leaders Seoul, Korea; 18 August 2014

“Life is a journey, a long journey, but a journey which we cannot make by ourselves. We need to walk together with our brothers and sisters in the presence of God. So I thank you for this gesture of walking together in the presence of God: that is what God asked of Abraham. We are brothers and sisters. Let us acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters, and walk together”.

7 Conclusion

Both Buddhists and Christians yearn for a “beyond” that, even though perceived in a different way, transcends contingency and visible reality. It is this longing that can, and must, unite us in the commitment to build a world of justice and peace, in fidelity to the original aspiration of our respective religious traditions.

With regard to an encounter of religions, the Buddhist scholar of philosophy of religion Masao Abe (1915–2006) used to speak of a “point of view without a point of view, which – because it is empty itself – allows every different point of view to exist and to work as it is.” Encounter can only happen in the openness to the other person’s viewpoint; beyond an obliterating tolerance. It includes both the recognition of one’s own and of the different standpoint.

The open emptiness of religious self-awareness allows us healing, integrating encounters. In a moving discussion with representatives of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue in April 1993, Masao Abe applied



his word to the Christian event of salvation. In the redeeming death of Jesus on the Cross in unsurpassable depth takes place the “point of view without point of view” of human loneliness and emptiness.

In the sacrifice of life [*Dasein zum Tode*] shines out life for all [*Dasein für Alle*]. In Jesus, who through his deepest obedience to the will of the Father “emptied himself and became like a slave” (*Phil 2:7*), the fullness of divine love shines as a source of new life. Christians do not see in the Crucified the annihilation of the Son of God, but even venerate his “standpoint” of complete openness in which the mystery of salvation takes place, which connects in him the entire humankind with the Father. In view of this *Ecce Homo* (*Jn 19:5*, “Look, here is *the* man”) the religions become transparent to one another. Dialogue calls for a common witness of the truth.



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