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Pilgrims

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Writing in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, he said the pilgrimage by train could be an important part of the meeting's message by showing "the followers of various religions are convinced that it is necessary for them to travel together on the path that leads to peace."

The pope's Assisi meeting was preceded by a Dec. 14 day of fasting and prayers for peace by Catholics around the world.

Who's coming

A Vatican list of participants as of Jan. 22 showed an especially strong presence of Muslim and Orthodox representatives. Muslims from at least 18 countries, including five Middle East nations, Libya, Pakistan and the United States, make up nearly a third of the 100 non-Christian participants.

A Vatican official confirmed that the Orthodox Church of Greece had declined to participate at any level, but the Russian Orthodox Church was sending a representative; relations between the Vatican and the Russian and Greek churches have been cool in recent years.

Greek Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch, whom the pope visited in Syria in May, and Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV, head of the Assyrian Church of the East, have accepted the papal invitation, officials said.

Thirty-three Orthodox participants were to represent 18 Eastern churches, four more than were represented at the pope's original Assisi prayer summit.

As in 1986, when Pope John Paul hosted a huge interreligious peace meeting in Assisi, the 2002 meeting was publicized with repeated Vatican statements that members of different religions would be praying for peace at the same time, but not together.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said members of the divided Christian communities can and should pray together because they have been baptized into the body of Christ.

But, he said in an article in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Christians and followers of other religions "cannot pray together" because their prayers are expressions of a faith they do not share.

Praying separately, but at the same time, gives witness to the values the different religions do share: "respect for God and the divine and the desire for God or the divine; respect for life; and the desire for peace among peoples and peace in the cosmos," the cardinal said.

"They can and must collaborate to defend and promote social justice, moral values, peace and freedom for the good of all men and women," the cardinal said.



KNA/CNS

This is a 1986 file photo of the interfaith prayer gathering in the Italian town of Assisi, which brought world religious leaders together to pray for peace in the face of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. From left are Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie, Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch Methodios of Constantinople, Pope John Paul II and the Dalai Lama.

Also writing in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Bishop Giampaolo Crepaldi, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, said the papal initiative underscores the fact that the response of believers to war and violence must be one of "concentrating on the essentials, looking ahead, beyond the dark night, to have the courage for something new."

'State of the world'

In an annual "state of the world" address to Vatican-accredited diplomats Jan. 10, the pope said fresh global tensions at the start of 2002 had "one advantage" of forcing people to re-examine fundamental human and spiritual truths.

"It makes us squarely face our responsibilities. Everyone is forced to ask the real questions: the truth about God and the truth about man," he said.

Picking up a theme from his message for World Day of Peace 2002, the pope told the diplomats he wanted to emphasize again to the international community that killing in the name of God "is an act of blasphemy and a perversion of religion."

"It is a profanation of religion to declare oneself a terrorist in the name of God, to do violence to others in his name," he said.

The pope said God is "not at the beck and call" of one individual or people and cannot be "monopolized" by any one group.

"The children of Abraham," he said, referring to Christians, Jews and Muslims, "know that God cannot be commanded by anyone: God is to be received."

He said humans cannot be true to themselves without recognizing, "in an attitude of poverty," that they were created by God. That acknowledgment of a higher truth allows believers to "transcend themselves"

and forgive and seek forgiveness, he said.

"This truth about God and man is a gift which Christians offer to all people, especially to their brothers and sisters who are followers of authentic Islam, a religion of peace and love of neighbor," the pope said.

Recent setbacks

The pope's survey of humanity's "setbacks" in the past year focused special attention on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which he said had made the Holy Land, "through man's fault, a land of fire and blood."

"No one can remain indifferent to the injustice of which the Palestinian people have been victims for more than 50 years. No one can contest the right of the Israeli people to live in security," he said.

"But neither can anyone forget the innocent victims who, on both sides, fall day after day under the blows of violence. Weapons and bloody attacks will never be the right means for making a political statement to the other side. Nor is the logic of the law of retaliation capable any longer of leading to paths of peace," he said.

The pope said the only way to "break the hellish cycle of hatred and vengeance" was Israel's evacuation of occupied Palestinian territories, respect for people "and their legitimate aspirations," application of international law and an internationally guaranteed status for Jerusalem's holy places.

"One against the other, neither Israelis nor Palestinians can win the war. But together they can win peace," he said.

The pope said the "legitimate fight against terrorism" following the Sept. 11 attacks in New York and Washington also should prompt reflection on "the factors underlying such acts," the most effective means of eradicating terrorism, and "the

measures to be taken to bring about a process of 'healing' in order to overcome fear and to avoid evil being added to evil, violence to violence."

The pope also warned the international community not to ignore less-noticed situations of human misery in Africa and Latin America, especially recently bankrupted Argentina.

"In the face of these outbreaks of irrational and unjustifiable violence, the great danger is that other situations will go unnoticed and leave whole peoples abandoned to their sad fate," he said.

He urged Argentines not to resign themselves to the current crisis and to work together to overcome it by drawing on "the great human and natural resources available."

"If this is to happen, private or partisan interests must be set aside, and the interest of the nation must be promoted by every legitimate means, through a return to moral values, open and frank dialogue, and the renunciation of what is superfluous in order to help those who are in any way in need," he said.

Among positive developments this year, the pope identified the continuing unification of Europe and adoption of a common currency.

But he criticized the "marginalization" of religious representatives from talks on a proposed European constitution as "an injustice and an error of perspective." Religions contributed to Europe's culture and humanism in the past and continue to do so today, he said.

"To recognize an indisputable historical fact in no way means to disregard the modern demand for states to have an appropriate nonconfessional character, and therefore Europe as well," he said.

The pope also identified what he considered priority challenges for humanity in coming years:

- Defense of human life, "especially in relation to the challenges proposed by genetic manipulation."
- Promotion of the family.
- Elimination of poverty through development, reduction of debt and loosening trade barriers.
- Respect for human rights, especially of children, women and refugees.
- Disarmament and the reduction of arms sales to poor countries.
- The fight against major diseases and access to basic health care and medicines for the poor.
- Protection of the environment and prevention of natural disasters.
- "Rigorous" application of international law and conventions.

"If these priorities became the central concerns of political leaders; if people of good will made them part of their daily endeavors; if religious believers included them in their teaching, the world would be a radically different place," the pope said.

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