PONTIFICIAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Christian and Shinto Followers: Praying for Peace and Harmony

MESSAGE TO SHINTO FOLLOWERS 2015

Vatican City
Dear Shinto Friends,

1. In the name of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we wish once again to extend to all of you, our heartfelt best wishes on the occasion of the beginning of a New Year, a solemn feast day for all Japanese people and especially for you, the followers of Shinto. *Akemashite omedetou gozaimasu!*

2. At the beginning of the new year, most Japanese people observe the ancient and beautiful tradition of making their way to a Shinto shrine to pray (*"hatsumode"*). In this message we would like to join you in prayer for the cause of peace and harmony in the world. We do so remembering that this year Japan, together with many other nations, celebrates the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. With the atrocities of war in mind and solemnly resolved to avoid any new wars, Japan rose from its ruins and engaged in an unprecedented common effort to build an era of peace and prosperity, doing so under a new Constitution that enshrines peace at its very heart.

3. We Christians and Shintoists are convinced that the origin of all conflict is ultimately located in the human heart. The tragic and indeed barbaric acts that seem to be an inevitable part of warfare reflect the dark side of the untamed human heart. Sadly, even today, our world is not free from the evils of war, violence, discrimination and exclusion. Commenting on past and present conflicts, Pope Francis noted that “War is madness “[…] War is irrational; its only plan is to bring destruction: it seeks to grow by destroying. […] There are tears, there is mourning, there is sadness (Homily of Pope Francis, *Military Memorial of Redipuglia*, 13 September 2014).

4. Your religious tradition has known the unifying and harmonizing power of religion in the very building of the Japanese nation. Yamato is the land of the “great peace”, and its first law, the “Seventeen-article constitution,” begins with the great law of harmony. Followers of Shinto, along with many other Japanese, celebrate the beginning of the year with a prayer for peace at Shinto shrines. We are happy to recall the fact that the late Pope Paul VI declared in 1968 that a “Day of Peace” should be celebrated on January 1, the first day of the civil year. The longing for peace is deeply rooted in human nature and is found in all religions. Prayer has a calming effect on those who pray and produces fruits of love, harmony and cooperation. At the dawn of the new year, we Christians wish to join you
in praying for peace and committing ourselves to work for peace throughout the world.

5. Today’s world urgently needs ardent messengers of both dialogue and peace. Therefore, we would like to emphasize that in the years following the peace treaty that marked the end of hostilities between Japan and the Allied Powers, our common mission has not lost any of its urgency and importance. The commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II reminds us that “War is the work of man. War is destruction of human life. War is death. To remember the past is to commit oneself to the future. To remember Hiroshima is to abhor nuclear war. To remember Hiroshima is to commit oneself to peace” (Saint Pope John Paul II, Hiroshima Peace memorial Park, 25 January 1981).

6. Dear followers of Shinto, let us persevere in prayer and in dialogue in order to contribute to the fostering of peace in the world both now and in the future. May this peace be with you and your families, during this New Year and at all times!

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