



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

*Christian and Shinto Followers,
Facing Together the Challenge of Secularism*

MESSAGE TO SHINTO FOLLOWERS
2017

Vatican City

Dear Shinto Friends,

1. In the name of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we wish to greet you warmly, once again, on the occasion of the New Year, a solemn feast day for all Japanese and particularly for you, the followers of Shinto. This festival also offers us a time to give thanks for the fruits of dialogue as well to begin anew as we look towards the future.
2. This year with our greetings, we would like to reflect with you on the challenge of secularism, in the West as well as in Japanese society, where 'religion' becomes less and less significant in the life of contemporary women and men, especially of the young people. Secularism as a world view is indifferent to or rejects or excludes religion and religious consideration. It especially seeks to exclude religion from the public sphere: politics, economy, science, education, etc. When religions are confined to the private domain, not only are religious institutions weakened but society as a whole is deprived of the contribution that religion can make for the advancement of the common good.
3. Pope Saint John Paul II asserted that we live in a time of a 'crisis of civilization,' brought on in particular by 'the challenge of secularism.' He continued to speak about a civilization "which is highly developed from the standpoint of technology but is interiorly impoverished by its tendency to forget God or to keep him at a distance" (*The Coming of the Third Millennium*, n. 52). He further noted that "This crisis of civilization must be countered by *the civilization of love*, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty, [...]" (*ibid.*). In speaking thus, Saint John Paul II highlighted not only the malady but the remedy as well.
4. Many Asian societies have found themselves caught up in a global consumer culture that is both secularist and materialistic. Sadly, the high number of suicides can be seen, at least partially, as an expression of the inherent emptiness of consumerism. As you are well aware, Japan also suffers from this scourge. Other problems such as economic crises, a low birth-rate in an aging society, the threat of radioactivity, together with natural disasters like the terrible earthquake that struck the area of Kumamoto during the last month of April, contribute to the despair felt by many people. To face these and similar challenges we need to turn to the spiritual wisdom of our respective religious traditions.
5. Dear followers of Shinto, as believers let us face together the challenge of secularism by entering into dialogue with secularists as well as with the followers of other religions. Women and men of our time, especially the youth, listen more willingly to those whose lives give witness to the values they speak of. Kami-faith is often transmitted from heart to heart through daily life. Our

dialogue, therefore, needs to involve action - aid to victims, the marginalized, the poor and homeless cast aside by globalization and secularist institutions. The solidarity of believers with those who suffer can open their hearts to see the spiritual source that inspires and sustains these actions.

It is all too easy for religious people to give in to the temptation to demonize secularism. However, dialogue with the secularists of our world can offer us an opportunity to deepen our own religious convictions. Even though secular and religious positions differ on many concrete issues, we can come together in our concern to promote the common good. Through encounter and collaboration with all, including secularists, believers and secularists can build fraternity as together they contribute to the renewal of a wounded world.

6. Let us celebrate this festive season, knowing that the joint efforts of Christians and the followers of Shinto can help to alleviate the suffering caused by unbridled materialism. With this common wish, we offer our cordial greetings once again to you, your families and to your communities.

Happy *Oshogatsu* to all of you!

Jean-Louis Card. Tauran

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

+ Miguel Ángel Guixot

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
00120 Vatican City

Tel: +39.06.6988 4321

Fax: +39.06.6988 4494

E-mail: dialogo@interrel.va
<http://www.pcinterreligious.org/>