

Vatican Council and Papal Statements on Islam

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Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 16, November 21, 1964

“But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.”

Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* 3, October 28, 1965

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (Jn 1:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (cf. 2Co 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life.

“The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.

“The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth (Cf. St. Gregory VII, Letter III, 21 to Anazir [Al-Nasir], King of Mauretania PL, 148.451A.), who has spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his Virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.

“Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.”

“Therefore, the Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion. Accordingly, following the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the sacred Council earnestly begs the Christian faithful to ‘conduct themselves well among the Gentiles’ (1P 2:12) and if possible, as far as depends on them, to be at peace with all men (cf. Rm 12:18), and in that way to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt 5:45).”

Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam* 107, August 6, 1964

“Then [we refer] to the adorers of God according to the conception of monotheism, the Muslim religion especially, deserving of our admiration for all that is true and good in their worship of God.”

Paul VI, “Message to the World,” Bethlehem, January 6, 1964

“We address this reverent greeting in particular to those who profess monotheism and with us direct their religious workshop to the one true God, most high and living, the God of Abraham, the supreme God whom Melchizedek, a mysterious person about whose genealogy and end Scripture tells us nothing, and by whose regal priesthood Christ himself wishes to be characterized, one day, distinct in the past but recalled in the Bible and in the Missal, celebrated as ‘God Most High, maker of heaven and earth’ (cf. Gn 14:19; Heb 7; Ps 76:3; 110:4).

“We Christians, informed by revelation, understand God as existing in the three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; however, we celebrate the divine nature as one, as the living and true God. May these peoples, worshipers of the one God, also welcome our best wishes for peace in justice.

“Our greeting is also being addressed to all peoples wherever Our Catholic missions carry the Gospel, and with it an invitation to its universality and a working towards its realization.”

Paul VI, address to the Islamic communities of Uganda, August 1, 1969

“In our prayers, we always remember the peoples of Africa. The common belief in the Almighty professed by millions calls down upon this continent the graces of his Providence and love, most of all, peace and unity among all its sons. We feel sure that as representatives of Islam, you join in our prayers to the Almighty, that he may grant all African believers the desire for pardon and reconciliation so often commended in the Gospels and in the Qur’an.

“Our pilgrimage to these holy places is not for purposes of prestige or power. It is a humble and ardent prayer for peace, through the intercession of the glorious protectors of Africa, who gave up their lives for love and for their belief. In recall the Catholic and Anglican Martyrs, We gladly recall also those confessors of the Muslim faith who were the first to suffer death, in the year 1848, for refusing to transgress the precepts of their religion.”

John Paul II, address to the Catholic community of Ankara, Turkey, November 29, 1979

After quoting *Nostra Aetate* 3, as given above, he says: “My brothers, when I think of this spiritual heritage (Islam) and the value it has for man and for society, its capacity of offering, particularly in the young, guidance for life, filling the gap left by materialism, and giving a reliable foundation to social and juridical organization, I wonder if it is not urgent, precisely today when Christians and Muslims have entered a new period of history, to recognize and

develop the spiritual bonds that unite us, in order to preserve and promote together for the benefit of all men, 'peace, liberty, social justice and moral values' as the Council calls upon us to do (Nostra Aetate 3).

"Faith in God, professed by the spiritual descendants of Abraham—Christians, Muslims and Jews—when it is lived sincerely, when it penetrates life, is a certain foundation of the dignity, brotherhood and freedom of men and a principle of uprightness for moral conduct and life in society. And there is more: as a result of this faith in God the Creator and transcendent, one man finds himself at the summit of creation. He was created, the Bible teaches, 'in the image and likeness of God' (Gn 1:27); for the Qur'an, the sacred book of the Muslims, although man is made of dust, 'God breathed into him his spirit and endowed him with hearing, sight and heart,' that is, intelligence (Surah 32.8).

"For the Muslims, the universe is destined to be subject to man as the representative of God: the Bible affirms that God ordered man to subdue the earth, but also to 'till it and keep it' (Gen. 2:15). As God's creature, man has rights which cannot be violated, but he is equally bound by the law of good and evil which is based on the order established by God. Thanks to this law, man will never submit to any idol. The Christian keeps to the solemn commandment: 'You shall keep no other gods before me' (Ex 20:30). On his side, the Muslim will always say: 'God is the greatest.'

"I would like to take advantage of this meeting and the opportunity offered to me by the words that St. Peter wrote to your predecessors to invite you to consider every day the deep roots of faith in God in whom also your Muslim fellow citizens believe, in order to draw from this the principle of a collaboration with a view to the progress of man, emulation in good, and the extension of peace and brotherhood in free profession of the faith peculiar to each one."

John Paul II, address to representatives of Muslims of the Philippines, February 20, 1981

"I deliberately address you as brothers: that is certainly what we are, because we are members of the same human family, whose efforts, whether people realize it or not, tend toward God and the truth that comes from him. But we are especially brothers in God, who created us and whom we are trying to reach, in our own ways, through faith, prayer and worship, through the keeping of his law and through submission to his designs.

"But are you not, above all, brothers of the Christians of this great country, through the bonds of nationality, history, geography, culture, and hope for a better future, a future that you are building together? Is it not right to think that in the Philippines, the Muslims and the Christians are really traveling on the same ship, for better or for worse, and that in the storms that sweep across the world the safety of each individual depends upon the efforts and cooperation of all?...

"I salute all this efforts [of civic and political cooperation] with great satisfaction, and I earnestly encourage their extension. Society cannot bring citizens the happiness that they expect from it unless society itself is built upon dialogue. Dialogue in turn is built upon trust, and trust presupposes not only justice but mercy. Without any doubt, equality and freedom, which are at the foundation of every society, require law and justice. But as I said in a recent letter addressed to the whole Catholic Church, justice by itself is not enough: 'The equality

brought by justice is limited to the realms of objective and extrinsic goods, while love and mercy bring it about that people meet one another in that value which is man himself, with the dignity that is proper to him' (Dives in misericordia, encyclical letter 'On the Mercy of God').

“Dear Muslims, my brothers: I would like to add that we Christians, just like you, seek the basis and model of mercy in God himself, the God to whom your Book gives the very beautiful name of al-Rahman, while the Bible calls him al-Rahum, the Merciful One.”

John Paul II, address to bishops of North Africa on an *ad limina* visit, Rome, November 23, 1981

“One of the essential characteristics of the life of the Church in Maghreb is, in fact, to be invited to enter upon a constructive Islamic-Christian dialogue. I am anxious to encourage you along this difficult way, where failure may occur, but where hope is even stronger. To maintain it, strong Christian convictions are necessary. More than elsewhere, it is highly desirable that Christians should take part, as you encourage them to do, in a permanent catechesis which completes a biblical renewal course, or more exactly a reading of the Word of God in the Church, with the help of theologians and truly competent spiritual teachers.

“But it can never be said enough that such a dialogue is in the first place a question of friendship; one must know how to give dialogue the time for progress and discernment. That is why it is surrounded by discretion out of a concern to be considerate with regard to the slowness of the evolution of mentalities. The seriousness of commitment in this dialogue is measured by that of the witness lived and borne to the values in which one believes, and, for the Christian, to him who is their foundation, Jesus Christ. That is why it conceals an inevitable tension between the deep respect which is due to the person and the convictions of the one with whom we are speaking, and an unshakeable attachment to one's faith. This sincere dialogue and this demanding witness involve a part of spiritual abnegation: how can we fail to proclaim the hope that we have received of taking part in this wedding feast of the Lamb at which the whole of mankind will be gathered one day?

“It is also necessary - among other things, in order to preserve this dialogue in its truth - for this deep hope to remain without yielding to any faintheartedness born of uncertain doctrine. Such a spirit is embodied in the first place in disinterested service with a view to fraternity participating in the development of these countries and to sharing the aspirations of their people. I am anxious to stress here the quality of the work carried out by so many of those cooperators in the discretion and dedication, and by those who supported them.”

John Paul II, address to the bishops of Senegal on their *ad limina* visit, Rome, January 26, 1982

“In this country, which is mainly Muslim, you take care to keep alive in Christians the sense of friendship, a friendship whose sincerity is measured by the effectiveness of the actions it inspires. I do not want to dwell here on this important question of the dialogue between Christians and Muslims, with which I quite recently dealt in my conversations with your confreres in North Africa. But I am anxious to point out the importance of the initiative you

have taken in common in this field, in the framework of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa, by creating a special commission to promote such a dialogue.

“I know you are beginning to perceive the fruits of this mutually agreed upon decision; it gradually makes possible a real renewal of mentalities, which facilitates the beneficial transition from ignorance to knowledge of the Muslim faith, from indifference to opening, from rejection to dialogue.”

John Paul II, address to a symposium on “Holiness in Christianity and in Islam,” Rome, May 9, 1985

“All true holiness comes from God, who is called ‘The Holy One’ in the sacred books of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Your holy Qur’an calls God ‘Al-Quddus,’ as in the verse: ‘He is God, besides whom there is no other, the Sovereign, the Holy, the (source of) Peace’ (Qur’an 59, 23). The prophet Hosea links God’s holiness with his forgiving love for mankind, a love which surpasses our ability to comprehend: ‘I am God, not man; I am the Holy One in your midst and have no wish to destroy’ (Ho 11:9). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples that holiness consists in assuming, in our human way, the qualities of God’s own holiness which he has revealed to mankind: ‘Be holy, even as your heavenly Father is holy’ (Mt 5:48).

“Thus the Qur’an calls you to uprightness (al-salah), to conscientious devotion (al-taqwa), to goodness (al-husn), and to virtue (al-birr), which is described as believing in God, giving one’s wealth to the needy, freeing captives, being constant in prayer, keeping one’s word, and being patient in times of suffering, hardship and violence (Qur’an 2:177). Similarly, St. Paul stresses the love we must show toward all, and the duty to lead a blameless life in the sight of God: ‘May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race as much as we love you. And may he so confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all his saints’ (1 Th 3:12-13).”

John Paul II, address to representatives of the Muslims of Belgium, May 19, 1985

“It is a joy for me to have this occasion to meet with you. As the spiritual head of the Catholic Church, I have had many other opportunities both to welcome Muslims in Rome and to visit them in various countries in the course of my travels.

“As Christians and Muslims, we encounter one another in faith in the one God, our Creator and guide, our just and merciful judge. In our daily lives we strive to put into practice God’s will according to the teaching of our respective Scriptures. We believe that God transcends our thoughts and our universe and that his loving presence accompanies us throughout each day. In prayer, we place ourselves in the presence of God to offer him our worship and thanksgiving, to ask forgiveness for our faults, and to seek his help and blessing.

“Today we are meeting in Belgium, a country with a long tradition of hospitality toward persons of diverse religious adherence, whose legislation guarantees the freedom of worship and education. We know that this does not resolve all the problems which are common to the

plight of immigrants. Nevertheless, these very difficulties ought to be an incentive to all believers, Christian and Muslim, to come to know one another better, to engage in dialogue in order to find peaceful ways of living together and mutually enriching one another.

“It is a good thing to come to understand each other by learning to accept differences, by overcoming prejudices in mutual respect, and by working together for reconciliation and service to the lowliest. This is a fundamental dialogue which must be practiced in neighborhoods, in places of work, in schools. This is the dialogue which is proper to believers who live together in a modern and pluralistic society.

“It has not been granted to us that we form a single community; this is, rather, a test which has been imposed upon us. In confronting this situation, allow me to repeat the advice of the Apostle Paul: ‘Those who have placed their faith in God should set their hearts on the practice of what is good’ (Tt 3:8). This type of mutual emulation can benefit the whole society, especially those who find themselves most in need of justice, consolation, hope - in a word, those in need of reasons for living. We know that by working together fraternally, we will thus be carrying out the will of God.”

John Paul II , address to the young Muslims of Morocco, August 19, 1985

“Christians and Muslims have many things in common, as believers and as human beings. We live in the same world, marked by many signs of hope, but also by multiple signs of anguish. For us, Abraham is a model of faith in God, of submission to his will and of confidence in his goodness. We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection. . . .

“God asks that we should listen to His voice. He expects from us obedience to His holy will in a free consent of mind and heart.

“It is therefore toward this God that my thought goes and that my heart rises. It is of God himself that, above all, I wish to speak with you; of him, because it is in him that we believe, you Muslims and we Catholics. I wish also to speak with you about human values, which have their basis in God, these values which concern the blossoming of our person, as also that of our families and our societies, as well as that of the international community. The mystery of God - is it not the highest reality from which depends the very meaning which man gives to his life? And is it not the first problem that presents itself to a young person, when he reflects upon the mystery of his own existence and on the values which he intends to choose in order to build his growing personality? . . .

“First of all, I invoke the Most High, the all-powerful God who is our Creator. He is the origin of all life, as he is at the source of all that is good, of all that is beautiful, of all that is holy. . . .

“He made us, us men, and we are from him. His holy law guides our life. It is the light of God which orients our destiny and enlightens our conscience. . . .

“Yes, God asks that we should listen to his voice. He expects from us obedience to his holy will in a free consent of mind and of heart.

“That is why we are accountable before him. It is He, God, who is our judge; He who alone is truly just. We know, however, that his mercy is inseparable from His justice. When man

returns to Him, repentant and contrite, after having strayed into the disorder of sin and the works of death, God then reveals Himself as the one who pardons and shows mercy.

“To Him, therefore, our love and our adoration! For His blessing and His mercy, we thank Him, at all times and in all places. . . .

“Man is a spiritual being. We believers know that we do not live in a closed world. We believe in God. We are worshipers of God. We are seekers of God.

“The Catholic Church regards with respect and recognizes the equality of your religious progress, the richness of your spiritual tradition. . . .

“I believe that we, Christians and Muslims, must recognize with joy the religious values that we have in common, and give thanks to God for them. Both of us believe in one God, the only God, who is all justice and all mercy; we believe in the importance of prayer, of fasting, of almsgiving, of repentance and of pardon; we believe that God will be a merciful judge to us all at the end of time, and we hope that after the resurrection He will be satisfied with us and we know that we will be satisfied with him.

“Loyalty demands also that we should recognize and respect our differences. Obviously the most fundamental is the view that we hold onto the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. You know that, for Christians, Jesus causes them to enter into an intimate knowledge of the mystery of God and into the filial communion by His gifts, so that they recognize Him and proclaim Him Lord and Savior.

“Those are the important differences which we can accept with humility and respect, in mutual tolerance; this is a mystery about which, I am certain, God will one day enlighten us.

“Christians and Muslims, in general we have badly understood each other, and sometimes, in the past, we have opposed and often exhausted each other in polemics and in wars.

“I believe that today, God invites us to change our old practices. We must respect each other, and we must stimulate each other in good works on the path of God.

“With me, you know the reward of spiritual values. Ideologies and slogans cannot satisfy you nor can they solve the problems of your life. Only spiritual and moral values can do it, and they have God at their foundation.

“Dear young people, I wish that you may be able to help in building a world where God may have first place in order to aid and to save mankind. On this path, you are assured, of the esteem and the collaboration of your Catholic brothers and sisters whom I represent among you this evening.”

John Paul II, address to a group of Christians, Jews and Muslims, February 26, 1986

“Both the Bible and the Qur’an teach that mercy and justice are two attributes most characteristic of God. He, ‘the Just One,’ ‘the Merciful, the Compassionate,’ can bring about these same qualities in mankind, if only we open our hearts to allow him to do so. He wants us to be merciful toward each other. Along this path there are new solutions to be found to

the political, racial and confessional conflicts which have plagued the human family throughout history.

“You come from a city that has so much meaning for all of us: Jews, Christians and Muslims. Jerusalem, the city of David, the place of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the site of Muhammad’s night journey to God: this city must be a living symbol that God’s will for us is to live in peace and mutual respect!

“I wish to encourage you in your efforts. In today’s world, it is more important than ever that people of faith place at the service of humanity their religious conviction, founded on the daily practice of listening to God’s message and encountering him in prayerful worship. My prayers and hopes are with you as you pursue your reflection on the God of mercy and justice, the God of peace and reconciliation!”

John Paul II, address to Christians (and others) in Bangladesh, November 19, 1986

“You must try to show your Muslim brethren and the followers of other religious traditions that your Christian faith, far from weakening your sense of pride in your homeland and your love for her, helps you to prize and respect the culture and heritage of Bangladesh. It inspires you to face the challenges of the present day with love and responsibility. . . .

“The Catholic Church is committed to a path of dialogue and collaboration with the men and women of goodwill of every religious tradition. We have many spiritual resources in common which we must share with one another as we work for a more human world. Young people especially know how to be open with each other and they want a world in which all the basic freedoms, including the freedom of religious belief, will be respected.

“Sometimes Christians and Muslims fear and distrust one another as a result of past misunderstanding and conflict. This is also true in Bangladesh. Everyone, especially the young, must learn to always respect one another’s religious beliefs and to defend freedom of religion, which is the right of every human being.”

John Paul II, address to the delegation of the World Islamic Call Society, Rome, 15 January 1990

“The topic of your discussion is a timely one. Since we are believers in God - who is goodness and perfection - all our activities must reflect the holy and upright nature of the one whom we worship and seek to obey. For this reason, also in the works of mission and da’wah, our action must be founded upon a respect for the inalienable dignity and freedom of the human person created and loved by God. Both Christians and Muslims are called to defend the inviolable right of each individual to freedom of religious belief and practice. There have been in the past, and there continue to be in the present, unfortunate instances of misunderstanding, intolerance and conflict between Christians and Muslims, especially in circumstances where either Muslims or Christians are a minority or are guest workers in a given country. It is our challenge as religious leaders to find ways to overcome such difficulties in a spirit of justice, brotherhood and mutual respect. Hence, by considering the

proper means of carrying out mission and *da'wah* you are dealing with an issue which is important both for religious and for social harmony.

“You have also been addressing the difficulties faced today by those who believe in God in their efforts to proclaim his presence and his will for mankind. As believers, we do not deny or reject any of the real benefits which modern developments have brought, but we are convinced nevertheless that without reference to God modern society is unable to lead men and women to the goal for which they have been created. It is here too that Christians and Muslims can work together, bearing witness before modern civilization to the divine presence and loving Providence which guide our steps. Together we can proclaim that he who has made us has called us to live in harmony and justice. May the blessing of the Most High accompany you in your endeavors on behalf of dialogue and peace.”

John Paul II, Message to the faithful of Islam at the end of the month of Ramadan, April 3, 1991

“To all Muslims throughout the world, I wish to express the readiness of the Catholic Church to work together with you and all the people of good will to aid the victims of the war and to build structures of a lasting peace not only in the Middle East, but everywhere. This cooperation in solidarity towards the most afflicted can form the concrete basis for a sincere, profound and constant dialogue between believing Catholics and believing Muslims, from which there can arise a strengthened mutual knowledge and trust, and the assurance that each one everywhere will be able to profess freely and authentically his or her own faith.

“Injustice, oppression, aggression, greed, failure to forgive, desire for revenge, and unwillingness to enter into dialogue and negotiate: these are merely some of the factors which lead people to depart from the way in which God desires us to live on this planet. We must all learn to recognize these elements in our own lives and societies, and find ways to overcome them. Only when individuals and groups undertake this education for peace can we build a fraternal and united world, freed from war and violence.

“I close my greeting to you with the words of one of my predecessors, Pope Gregory VII who in 1076 wrote to Al-Nasir, the Muslim Ruler of Bijaya, present day Algeria: ‘Almighty God, who wishes that all should be saved and none lost, approves nothing in so much as that after loving Him one should love his fellow man, and that one should not do to others, what one does not want done to oneself. You and we owe this charity to ourselves especially because we believe in and confess one God, admittedly, in a different way, and daily praise and venerate him, the creator of the world and ruler of this world.’

“These words, written almost a thousand years ago, express my feelings to you today as you celebrate ‘Id al-Fitr, the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast. May the Most High God fill us with all His merciful love and peace.”

John Paul II, address to Islamic leaders of Senegal, Dakar, February 22, 1992

“It is natural that believers in God should meet in friendship and sharing. Christians and Muslims, together with the followers of the Jewish religion, belong to what can be called ‘the

tradition of Abraham.’ In our respective traditions Abraham is called ‘the intimate friend of God’ (in Arabic, Al-Khalil). He receives this title because of his flawless faith in God. . . .

“As two religious communities who strive to submit ourselves without reserve to the will of God, we Christians and Muslims should live together in peace, friendship and cooperation. I am happy to note that, since the arrival of the first Christians in this land, the people of Senegal have given the world a good example of this sharing life.

“In May 1991, in a joint message to their fellow Christians, the Catholic bishops of Senegal called attention to the ‘real efforts at understanding and dialogue between Christians and Muslims, the meeting between religious leaders’ which have been undertaken in your country. They noted that the young people have worked together to build cemeteries, mosques and churches; that school children engage in healthy emulation to make their schools places of peace, forgiveness and fraternity; that adults work together to improve the life of the community spirit of the country. I would like to support and encourage all these efforts at building a harmonious society because I am convinced that this is the way of God. Our Creator and our final judge desires that we live together. Our God is a God of peace, who desires peace among those who live according to His commandments. Our God is the holy God who desires that those who call upon Him live in ways that are holy and upright. He is a God of dialogue who has been engaged from the very beginning of history in a dialogue of salvation with the humanity which He created. This dialogue continues in the present day, and will go on until the end of time.

“We Christians and Muslims must be people of dialogue. As I have often said, and as the bishops of Senegal have repeated, this commitment to dialogue means, first of all, ‘a dialogue of life’, a positive acceptance, interaction and cooperation by which we bear active witness, as believers, to the ideals to which God has called us.”

John Paul II, address at the General Audience, September 9, 1998

“It must first be kept in mind that every quest of the human spirit for truth and goodness, and in the last analysis for God, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The various religions arose precisely from this primordial openness to God. At their origins we often find founders who, with the help of God’s Spirit, achieved a deeper religious experience. Handed on to others, this experience took form in the doctrines, rites and precepts of the various religions.

“In every authentic religious experience, the most characteristic expression is prayer. Because of the human spirit’s constitutive openness to God’s action of urging it to self-transcendence, we can hold that ‘every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person’ (John Paul II’s address to the Members of the Roman Curia, December 22, 1986, n. 11; L’Osservatore Romano English edition, January 5, 1987, p. 7).”

John Paul II, address at the General Audience, May 5, 1999

“. . . The Christian doctrine on the Trinity, confirmed by the Councils, explicitly rejects any form of ‘tritheism’ or ‘polytheism’. In this sense, i.e., with reference to the one divine substance, there is significant correspondence between Christianity and Islam.

“However, this correspondence must not let us forget the difference between the two religions. We know that the unity of God is expressed in the mystery of the three divine Persons. Indeed, since he is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), God has always been a Father who gives his whole self in begetting the Son, and both are united in a communion of love which is the Holy Spirit. This distinction and co-penetration (perichoresis) of the three divine Persons is not something added to their unity but is its most profound and characteristic expression. . . .

“In today’s world where God is tragically forgotten, Christians and Muslims are called in one spirit of love to defend and always promote human dignity, moral values and freedom. The common pilgrimage to eternity must be expressed in prayer, fasting and charity, but also in joint efforts for peace and justice, for human advancement and the protection of the environment. By walking together on the path of reconciliation and renouncing in humble submission to the divine will any form of violence as a means of resolving differences, the two religions will be able to offer a sign of hope, radiating in the world the wisdom and mercy of that one God who created and governs the human family.”

John Paul II, to H. E. Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, Cairo, February 24, 2000

“Thank you for your kind words. Permit me to continue with your ideas. God created human beings, man and woman, and gave to them the world, the earth to cultivate. There is a strict connection between religions, religious faith and culture. Islam is a religion. Christianity is a religion. Islam has become also a culture. Christianity has become also a culture. So it is very important to meet personalities representing Islamic culture in Egypt.

“I express my great gratitude for this opportunity and I greet all the eminent scholars gathered here. I am convinced that the future of the world depends on the various cultures and on interreligious dialogue. For it is as St. Thomas Aquinas said: ‘Genus humanum arte et ratione vivit.’ The life of the human race consists in culture and the future of the human race consists in culture. I thank your university, the biggest centre of Islamic culture. I thank those who are developing Islamic culture and I am grateful for what you are doing to maintain the dialogue with Christian culture. All this I say in the name of the future of our communities, not only of our communities but also of the nations and of the humanity represented in Islam and in Christianity. Thank you very much.”

John Paul II, Homily for the First Sunday of Lent, March 12, 2000

“Let us forgive and ask forgiveness! While we praise God, who in his merciful love has produced in the church a wonderful harvest of holiness, missionary zeal, total dedication to Christ and neighbor, we cannot fail to recognize the infidelities to the Gospel committed by some of our brethren, especially during the second millennium. Let us ask pardon for the divisions which have occurred among Christians, for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitudes sometimes taken toward the followers of other religions.

“Let us confess, even more, our responsibilities as Christians for the evils of today. We must ask ourselves what our responsibilities are regarding atheism, religious indifference,

secularism, ethical relativism, the violations of the right to life, disregard for the poor in many countries.

“We humbly ask forgiveness for the part which each of us has had in these evils by our own actions, thus helping to disfigure the face of the church.

“At the same time, as we confess our sins, let us forgive the sins committed by others against us. Countless times in the course of history Christians have suffered hardship, oppression and persecution because of their faith. Just as the victims of such abuses forgave them, so let us forgive as well. The church today feels and has always felt obliged to purify her memory of those sad events from every feeling of rancor or revenge. In this way the jubilee becomes for everyone a favorable opportunity for a profound conversion to the Gospel. The acceptance of God’s forgiveness leads to the commitment to forgive our brothers and sisters and to be reconciled with them.”

John Paul II, at the International Airport, Amman, Jordan, March 20, 2000

“Your Majesty, I know how deeply concerned you are for peace in your own land and in the entire region, and how important it is to you that all Jordanians—Muslims and Christians—should consider themselves as one people and one family. In this area of the world there are grave and urgent issues of justice, of the rights of peoples and nations, which have to be resolved for the good of all concerned and as a condition for lasting peace. No matter how difficult, no matter how long, the process of seeking peace must continue. Without peace, there can be no authentic development for this region, no better life for its peoples, no brighter future for its children. That is why Jordan’s proven commitment to securing the conditions necessary for peace is so important and praiseworthy.

“Building a future of peace requires an ever more mature understanding and ever more practical cooperation among the peoples who acknowledge the one true, indivisible God, the Creator of all that exists. The three historical monotheistic religions count peace, goodness and respect for the human person among the highest values. I earnestly hope that my visit will strengthen the already fruitful Christian-Muslim dialogue which is being conducted in Jordan, particularly through the Royal Interfaith Institute.”

John Paul II, to the ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, September 7, 2000

“I have an especially warm recollection of my meeting with Grand Sheikh Mohammed Sayed Tantawi. We both expressed the wish for a new era of religious and cultural dialogue between Islam and Christianity. It is in this context, Mr. Ambassador, that I am particularly pleased that you have spoken of Egypt as a land where unity and harmony are greatly valued and where differences of religion are seen not as barriers but as a means of mutual enrichment in rendering service to the nation. I trust most sincerely that this will always be the case, and that the difficulties that have arisen from time to time will be overcome, especially in view of the widespread willingness and positive conditions for interreligious dialogue and cooperation which can be found in Egypt.

“In a world deeply marked by violence, it is bitterly ironic that even now some of the worst conflicts are between believers who worship the one God, who look to Abraham as a holy patriarch and who seek to follow the Law of Sinai. Each act of violence makes it more urgent for Muslims and Christians everywhere to recognize the things we have in common, to bear witness that we are all creatures of the one merciful God, and to agree once and for all that recourse to violence in the name of religion is completely unacceptable. Especially when religious identity coincides with cultural and ethnic identity it is a solemn duty of believers to ensure that religious sentiment is not used as an excuse for hatred and conflict. Religion is the enemy of exclusion and discrimination; it seeks the good of everyone and therefore ought to be a stimulus for solidarity and harmony between individuals and among peoples”

John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 55, January 6, 2001

“It is in this context (of openness to God’s grace) also that we should consider the great challenge of interreligious dialogue to which we shall still be committed in the new millennium, in fidelity to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (Cf. Second Vatican Council, declaration *Nostra Aetate*). . . . This dialogue must continue. In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread specter of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history. The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace.”

John Paul II, on his arrival in Syria, May 5, 2001

“I am thinking too of the great cultural influence of Syrian Islam, which under the Umayyad caliphs reached the farthest shores of the Mediterranean. Today, in a world that is increasingly complex and interdependent, there is a need for a new spirit of dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. Together we acknowledge the one indivisible God, the Creator of all that exists. Together we must proclaim to the world that the name of the one God is ‘a name of peace and a summons to peace’ (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 55)!”

John Paul II, address on his Visit to the Umayyad Great Mosque, May 6, 2001

“As-salamu ‘alaikum!

“I give heartfelt praise to almighty God for the grace of this meeting. I am most grateful for your warm welcome in the tradition of hospitality so cherished by the people of this region. I thank especially the minister of the Waqf and the grand mufti for their gracious greetings, which put into words the great yearning for peace which fills the hearts of all people of good will. My jubilee pilgrimage has been marked by important meetings with Muslim leaders in Cairo and Jerusalem, and now I am deeply moved to be your guest here in the great Umayyad mosque, so rich in religious history. Your land is dear to Christians: Here our religion has known vital moments of its growth and doctrinal development, and here are found Christian communities which have lived in peace and harmony with their Muslim neighbors for many centuries.

“We are meeting close to what both Christians and Muslims regard as the tomb of John the Baptist, known as Yahya in the Muslim tradition. The son of Zechariah is a figure of prime importance in the history of Christianity, for he was the precursor who prepared the way for Christ. John’s life, wholly dedicated to God, was crowned by martyrdom. May his witness enlighten all who venerate his memory here, so that they - and we too - may understand that life’s great task is to seek God’s truth and justice.

“The fact that we are meeting in this renowned place of prayer reminds us that man is a spiritual being, called to acknowledge and respect the absolute priority of God in all things. Christians and Muslims agree that the encounter with God in prayer is the necessary nourishment of our souls, without which our hearts wither and our will no longer strives for good but succumbs to evil.

“Both Muslims and Christians prize their places of prayer as oases where they meet the all-merciful God on the journey to eternal life and where they meet their brothers and sisters in the bond of religion. When, on the occasion of weddings or funerals or other celebrations, Christians and Muslims remain in silent respect at the other’s prayer, they bear witness to what unites them without disguising or denying the things that separate.

“It is in mosques and churches that the Muslim and Christian communities shape their religious identity, and it is there that the young receive a significant part of their religious education. What sense of identity is instilled in young Christians and young Muslims in our churches and mosques? It is my ardent hope that Muslim and Christian religious leaders and teachers will present our two great religious communities as communities in respectful dialogue, never more as communities in conflict. It is crucial for the young to be taught the ways of respect and understanding, so that they will not be led to misuse religion itself to promote or justify hatred and violence. Violence destroys the image of the Creator in his creatures and should never be considered as the fruit of religious conviction.

“I truly hope that our meeting today in the Umayyad mosque will signal our determination to advance interreligious dialogue between the Catholic Church and Islam. This dialogue has gained momentum in recent decades; and today we can be grateful for the road we have traveled together so far. At the highest level, the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue represents the Catholic Church in this task. For more than 30 years the council has sent a message to Muslims on the occasion of ‘Id al-Fitr at the close of Ramadan, and I am very happy that this gesture has been welcomed by many Muslims as a sign of growing friendship between us. In recent years the council has established a liaison committee with international Islamic organizations and also with al-Athar in Egypt, which I had the pleasure of visiting last year.

“It is important that Muslims and Christians continue to explore philosophical and theological questions together in order to come to a more objective and comprehensive knowledge of each others’ religious beliefs. Better mutual understanding will surely lead at the practical level to a new way of presenting our two religions not in opposition, as has happened too often in the past, but in partnership for the good of the human family.

“Interreligious dialogue is most effective when it springs from the experience of ‘living with each other’ from day to day within the same community and culture. In Syria, Christians and Muslims have lived side by side for centuries, and a rich dialogue of life has gone on unceasingly. Every individual and every family knows moments of harmony and other moments when dialogue has broken down. The positive experiences must strengthen our

communities in the hope of peace; and the negative experiences should not be allowed to undermine that hope. For all the times that Muslims and Christians have offended one another, we need to seek forgiveness from the Almighty and offer each other forgiveness. Jesus teaches us that we must pardon others' offenses if God is to pardon us our sins (cf. Mt. 6:14).

“As members of the one human family and as believers, we have obligations to the common good, to justice and to solidarity. Interreligious dialogue will lead to many forms of cooperation, especially in responding to the duty to care for the poor and weak. These are the signs that our worship of God is genuine.

“As we make our way through life toward our heavenly destiny, Christians feel the company of Mary, the mother of Jesus; and Islam too pays tribute to Mary and hails her as ‘chosen above the women of the world’ (Qur’an, 3:42). The virgin of Nazareth, the Lady of Saydnâya, has taught us that God protects the humble and “scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts” (Lk. 1:51). May the hearts of Christians and Muslims turn to one another with feelings of brotherhood and friendship, so that the Almighty may bless us with the peace which heaven alone can give. To the one, merciful God be praise and glory forever. Amen.”

John Paul II, Post-9/11 Appeal for Peace in the World, Astana, Kazakhstan, September 23, 2001

“From this city, from Kazakhstan, a country that is an example of harmony between men and women of different origins and beliefs, I wish to make an earnest call to everyone, Christians and the followers of other religions, to work together to build a world without violence, a world that loves life, and grows in justice and solidarity. We must not let what has happened lead to a deepening of divisions. Religion must never be used as a reason for conflict.

“From this place, I invite both Christians and Muslims to raise an intense prayer to the One, Almighty God whose children we all are, that the supreme good of peace may reign in the world. May people everywhere, strengthened by divine wisdom, work for a civilization of love, in which there is no room for hatred, discrimination or violence.

“With all my heart I beg God to keep the world in peace. Amen.”

John Paul II, address on Culture, Art and Science, Astana, Kazakhstan, September 24, 2001

“In this context, and precisely here in the land of encounter and dialogue, and before this distinguished audience, I wish to reaffirm the Catholic Church’s respect for Islam, for authentic Islam: the Islam that prays, that is concerned for those in need. Recalling the errors of the past, including the most recent past, all believers ought to unite their efforts to ensure that God is never made the hostage of human ambitions. Hatred, fanaticism and terrorism profane the name of God and disfigure the true image of man.”

John Paul II, address before the Angelus, November 18, 2001

“We know that prayer acquires power if it is joined with fasting and almsgiving. The Old Testament taught this, and from the earliest centuries Christians have accepted and applied this lesson, especially at the times of Advent and Lent. For their part, the Muslim faithful have just begun Ramadan, a month dedicated to fasting and prayer. Soon, we Christians will begin Advent, to prepare ourselves in prayer, for the celebration of Christmas, the day of the birth of “the Prince of Peace.’

“At this appropriate time, I ask Catholics to make next 14 December [the last Friday of Ramadan and the third Friday of Advent] a day of fasting, to pray fervently to God to grant to the world stable peace based on justice, and make it possible to find adequate solutions to the many conflicts that trouble the world. May what is saved by fasting be put at the disposal of the poor, especially those who at present suffer the consequences of terrorism and war.

“I would also like to announce that it is my intention to invite the representatives of the world religions to come to Assisi on 24 January 2002, to pray for the overcoming of opposition and the promotion of authentic peace. In particular, we wish to bring Christians and Muslims together to proclaim to the world that religion must never be a reason for conflict, hatred and violence. In this historic moment, humanity needs to see gestures of peace and to hear words of hope.

“As I said 15 years ago, when announcing the meeting of prayer for peace, which was held in Assisi the following October: ‘It is urgent that a common invocation rise to heaven from earth, to beg from Almighty God, in whose hands is the destiny of the world, the great gift of peace, the necessary condition for every serious endeavor at the service of humanity’s real progress’.”

John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2002

“No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness: this is what in this Message I wish to say to believers and unbelievers alike, to all men and women of good will who are concerned for the good of the human family and for its future.

“No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness: this is what I wish to say to those responsible for the future of the human community, entreating them to be guided in their weighty and difficult decisions by the light of man’s true good, always with a view to the common good.

“No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness: I shall not tire of repeating this warning to those who, for one reason or another, nourish feelings of hatred, a desire for revenge or the will to destroy.”

John Paul II, address on the Day of Prayer for Peace, January 24, 2002

“To pray is not to escape from history and the problems which it presents. On the contrary, it is to choose to face reality not on our own, but with the strength that comes from on high, the strength of truth and love which have their ultimate source in God. Faced with the treachery of evil, religious people can count on God who absolutely wills what is good. They can pray to him to have the courage to face even the greatest difficulties with a sense of personal responsibility, never yielding to fatalism or impulsive reactions.”

Benedict XVI, message for the XX anniversary interreligious prayer meeting for peace, Assisi, Italy, September 2, 2006

"When the religious sense reaches maturity it gives rise to a perception in the believer that faith in God, Creator of the universe and Father of all, must encourage relations of universal brotherhood among human beings."

Benedict XVI, address to the representatives of the Muslim communities, Castel Gandolfo, September 25, 2006

*Dear Cardinal Poupard,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Muslim Friends,*

I am pleased to welcome you to this gathering that I wanted to arrange in order to strengthen the bonds of friendship and solidarity between the Holy See and Muslim communities throughout the world. I thank Cardinal Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, for the words that he has just addressed to me, and I thank all of you for responding to my invitation.

The circumstances which have given rise to our gathering are well known. I have already had occasion to dwell upon them in the course of the past week. In this particular context, I should like to reiterate today all the esteem and the profound respect that I have for Muslim believers, calling to mind the words of the Second Vatican Council which for the Catholic Church are the *Magna Carta* of Muslim-Christian dialogue: "The Church looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God" (Declaration [Nostra Aetate](#). . . , 3). Placing myself firmly within this perspective, I have had occasion, since the very beginning of my pontificate, to express my wish to continue establishing bridges of friendship with the adherents of all religions, showing particular appreciation for the growth of dialogue between Muslims and Christians (cf. [Address to the Delegates of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Other Religious Traditions](#). . . , 25 April 2005). As I underlined at Cologne last year, "Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends" ([Meeting with Representatives of Some Muslim Communities](#). . . , Cologne, 20 August 2005). In a world marked by relativism and too often excluding the transcendence and universality of reason, we are in great need of an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures, capable of assisting us, in a spirit of fruitful co-operation, to overcome all the tensions together. Continuing, then, the work undertaken by my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, I sincerely pray that the relations of trust which have developed between Christians and Muslims over several years, will not only continue, but will develop further in a spirit of sincere and respectful dialogue, based on ever more authentic reciprocal knowledge which, with joy, recognizes the religious values that we have in common and, with loyalty, respects the differences.

Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is a necessity for building together this world of peace and fraternity ardently desired by all people of good will. In this area, our contemporaries expect from us an eloquent witness to show all people the value of the religious dimension of life. Likewise, faithful to the teachings of their own religious

traditions, Christians and Muslims must learn to work together, as indeed they already do in many common undertakings, in order to guard against all forms of intolerance and to oppose all manifestations of violence; as for us, religious authorities and political leaders, we must guide and encourage them in this direction. Indeed, "although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, the Council urges all parties that, forgetting past things, they train themselves towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people" (Declaration, [Nostra Aetate](#). . . , 3). The lessons of the past must therefore help us to seek paths of reconciliation, in order to live with respect for the identity and freedom of each individual, with a view to fruitful co-operation in the service of all humanity. As Pope John Paul II said in his memorable [speech to young people at Casablanca in Morocco](#). . . , "Respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom. They favour peace and agreement between peoples" (no. 5).

Dear friends, I am profoundly convinced that in the current world situation it is imperative that Christians and Muslims engage with one another in order to address the numerous challenges that present themselves to humanity, especially those concerning the defence and promotion of the dignity of the human person and of the rights ensuing from that dignity. When threats mount up against people and against peace, by recognizing the central character of the human person and by working with perseverance to see that human life is always respected, Christians and Muslims manifest their obedience to the Creator, who wishes all people to live in the dignity that he has bestowed upon them.

Dear friends, I pray with my whole heart that the merciful God will guide our steps along the paths of an ever more authentic mutual understanding. At this time when for Muslims the spiritual journey of the month of Ramadan is beginning, I address to all of them my cordial good wishes, praying that the Almighty may grant them serene and peaceful lives. May the God of peace fill you with the abundance of his Blessings, together with the communities that you represent!

Benedict XVI, letter to H.E. Mr. Suhail Khalil Shuhaiber, new Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Holy See, December 13, 2007 (excerpt)

"I greatly appreciate Your Excellency's reference to your country's acknowledgement of the importance of interreligious and intercultural dialogue for the promotion of peace. Such dialogue—and I think here with satisfaction of the increasing contacts between Muslims and Christians—is essential for overcoming misunderstandings and forging solid relations marked by mutual respect and cooperation in the pursuit of the common good of the whole human family."

Benedict XVI, address to participants in the tenth plenary assembly of the pontifical council for interreligious dialogue, June 7, 2008

"I am pleased to have this opportunity to meet you at the conclusion of the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. To all of you taking part in this important gathering I extend cordial greetings. I thank in particular Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran for his gracious words.

"Dialogue *in veritate et caritate*: Pastoral orientations" – this is the theme of your Plenary Assembly. I am happy to learn that during these days you have sought to arrive at a deeper understanding of the Catholic Church's approach to people of other religious traditions. You have considered the broader purpose of dialogue – to discover the truth – and the motivation for it, which is charity, in obedience to the divine mission entrusted to the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the inauguration of my Pontificate I affirmed that "the Church wants to continue building bridges of friendship with the followers of all religions, in order to seek the true good of every person and of society as a whole" ([Address to Delegates of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Other Religious Traditions](#). . . , 25 April 2005). Through the ministry of the Successors of Peter, including the work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the efforts of local Ordinaries and the People of God throughout the world, the Church continues to reach out to followers of different religions. In this way she gives expression to that desire for encounter and collaboration in truth and freedom. In the words of my venerable Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, the Church's principal responsibility is service to the Truth – "truth about God, truth about man and his hidden destiny, truth about the world, truth which we discover in the Word of God" ([Evangelii Nuntiandi](#). . . , 78).

Human beings seek answers to some of the fundamental existential questions: What is the origin and destiny of human beings? What are good and evil? What awaits human beings at the end of their earthly existence? All people have a natural duty and a moral obligation to seek the truth. Once it is known, they are bound to adhere to it and to order their whole lives in accordance with its demands (cf. [Nostra Aetate](#). . . , 1 and [Dignitatis Humanae](#). . . , 2).

Dear friends, "*Caritas Christi urget nos*" (2 Cor 5:14). It is the love of Christ which impels the Church to reach out to every human being without distinction, beyond the borders of the visible Church. The source of the Church's mission is Divine Love. This love is revealed in Christ and made present through the action of the Holy Spirit. All the Church's activities are to be imbued with love (cf. [Ad Gentes](#). . . , 2-5; [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#). . . , 26, and *Dialogue and Mission*, 9). Thus, it is love that urges every believer to listen to the other and seek areas of collaboration. It encourages Christian partners in dialogue with the followers of other religions to propose, but not impose, faith in Christ who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (*Jn* 14:16). As I said in my recent Encyclicals, the Christian faith has shown us that "truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities" ([Spe Salvi](#). . . , 39). For the Church, "charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" ([Deus Caritas Est](#). . . , 25).

The great proliferation of interreligious meetings around the world today calls for discernment. In this regard, I am pleased to note that during these days you have reflected on pastoral orientations for interreligious dialogue. Since the Second Vatican Council, attention has been focused on the spiritual elements which different religious traditions have in common. In many ways, this has helped to build bridges of understanding across religious boundaries. I understand that during your discussions you have been considering some of the issues of practical concern in interreligious relations: the identity of the partners in dialogue, religious education in schools, conversion, proselytism, reciprocity, religious freedom, and the role of religious leaders in society. These are important issues to which religious leaders living and working in pluralistic societies must pay close attention.

It is important to emphasize the need for formation for those who promote interreligious dialogue. If it is to be authentic, this dialogue must be a journey of faith. How necessary it is for its promoters to be well formed in their own beliefs and well informed about those of others. It is for this reason that I encourage the efforts of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to organize formation courses and programmes in interreligious dialogue for different Christian groups, especially seminarians and young people in tertiary educational institutions.

Interreligious collaboration provides opportunities to express the highest ideals of each religious tradition. Helping the sick, bringing relief to the victims of natural disasters or violence, caring for the aged and the poor: these are some of the areas in which people of different religions collaborate. I encourage all those who are inspired by the teaching of their religions to help the suffering members of society.

Dear friends, as you come to the end of your Plenary Assembly, I thank you for the work you have done. I ask you to take the message of good will from the Successor of Peter to your Christian flock and to all our friends of other religions. Willingly I impart my Apostolic blessing to you as a pledge of grace and peace in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Benedict XVI, address to the representatives of the Muslim community of Cameroon, Yaoundé, March 19, 2009

My Dear Friends,

Grateful for this opportunity to meet representatives of the Muslim community in Cameroon, I express my heartfelt thanks to Mr Amadou Bello for his kind words of greeting extended to me on your behalf. Our encounter is a vivid sign of the desire we share with all people of good will – in Cameroon, throughout Africa and across the globe – to seek opportunities to exchange ideas about how religion makes an essential contribution to our understanding of culture and the world, and to the peaceful coexistence of all the members of the human family. Initiatives in Cameroon, such as the *Association Camerounaise pour le Dialogue Interreligieux*, illustrate how such dialogue enhances mutual understanding and assists in the building up of a stable and just political order.

Cameroon is home to thousands of Christians and Muslims, who often live, work and worship in the same neighbourhood. Both believe in one, merciful God who on the last day will judge mankind (cf. [Lumen Gentium](#). . . , 16). Together they bear witness to the fundamental values of family, social responsibility, obedience to God's law and loving concern for the sick and suffering. By patterning their lives on these virtues and teaching them to the young, Christians and Muslims not only show how they foster the full development of the human person, but also how they forge bonds of solidarity with one's neighbours and advance the common good.

My friends, I believe a particularly urgent task of religion today is to unveil the vast potential of human reason, which is itself God's gift and which is elevated by revelation and faith. Belief in the one God, far from stunting our capacity to understand ourselves and the world, broadens it. Far from setting us against the world, it commits us to it. We are called to help others see the subtle traces and mysterious presence of God in the world which he has marvellously created and continually sustains with his ineffable and all-embracing love.

Although his infinite glory can never be directly grasped by our finite minds in this life, we nonetheless catch glimpses of it in the beauty that surrounds us. When men and women allow the magnificent order of the world and the splendour of human dignity to illumine their minds, they discover that what is "reasonable" extends far beyond what mathematics can calculate, logic can deduce and scientific experimentation can demonstrate; it includes the goodness and innate attractiveness of upright and ethical living made known to us in the very language of creation.

This insight prompts us to seek all that is right and just, to step outside the restricted sphere of our own self-interest and act for the good of others. Genuine religion thus widens the horizon of human understanding and stands at the base of any authentically human culture. It rejects all forms of violence and totalitarianism: not only on principles of faith, but also of right reason. Indeed, religion and reason mutually reinforce one another since religion is purified and structured by reason, and reason's full potential is unleashed by revelation and faith.

I therefore encourage you, my dear Muslim friends, to imbue society with the values that emerge from this perspective and elevate human culture, as we work together to build a civilization of love. May the enthusiastic cooperation of Muslims, Catholics and other Christians in Cameroon be a beacon to other African nations of the enormous potential of an interreligious commitment to peace, justice and the common good!

With these sentiments, I once again express my gratitude for this auspicious occasion to meet you during my visit to Cameroon. I thank Almighty God for the blessings he has bestowed upon you and your fellow citizens, and I pray that the links that bind Christians and Muslims in their profound reverence for the one God will continue to grow stronger, so that they will reflect more clearly the wisdom of the Almighty, who enlightens the hearts of all mankind.

Benedict XVI, to H.E. Mr. Ali Akbar Naseri, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Holy See, October 29, 2009 (excerpt)

"...Faith in the one God must bring all believers closer, impelling them to work together for the defense and promotion of fundamental human values. Among the universal rights, religious freedom and freedom of conscience play a fundamental role, because they constitute the basis of the other freedoms. Defense of other rights that stem from the dignity of the person and of peoples particularly the promotion of the safeguarding of life, of justice and of solidarity must be, in turn, the object of true collaboration. Moreover, as I have often had the opportunity to emphasize, it is an urgent necessity of our time to stabilize cordial relations among believers of different religions, in order to construct a world that is more human and in greater harmony with God's plan for Creation. I am therefore pleased with the existence of the regular meetings, on themes of common interest, organized regularly and jointly by the [Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue](#). . . and The Organization of Culture and Islamic Relations. By contributing to the common search for what is just and true, meetings of this kind allow everyone to grow in reciprocal knowledge and to cooperate in reflecting on the important issues concerning human life..."

Benedict XVI, to H.E. Mr. Kenan Gürsoy, new Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey, January 7, 2010 (excerpt)

My visit to Turkey also provided me with a welcome opportunity to greet members of the Muslim community. Indeed it was my first visit as Pope to a predominantly Islamic country. I was glad to be able to express my esteem for Muslims and to reiterate the commitment of the Catholic Church to carry forward inter-religious dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect and friendship, bearing joint witness to the firm faith in God that characterizes Christians and Muslims, and striving to know one another better so as to strengthen the bonds of affection between us (cf. [Address, Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate](#). . . , Ankara, 28 November 2006). It is my fervent prayer that this process will lead to greater trust between individuals, communities, and peoples, especially in the troubled areas of the Middle East..."

<="" span="" align="centermargin-top:7.5pt;margin-right:12.0pt;">*Dear Muslim Friends,*

I am glad to be able to welcome you here, as the representatives of different Muslim communities in Germany. I thank Professor Mouhanad Khorchide most sincerely for his kind greetings and for the profound reflections that he shared with us. His words illustrate what a climate of respect and trust has grown up between the Catholic Church and the Muslim communities in Germany and how the convictions we share are becoming visible.

Berlin is a good place for a meeting like this, not only because the oldest mosque in Germany is located here, but also because Berlin has the largest Muslim population of all the cities in Germany.

From the 1970s onwards, the presence of numerous Muslim families has increasingly become a distinguishing mark of this country. Constant effort is needed in order to foster better mutual acquaintance and understanding. Not only is this important for peaceful coexistence, but also for the contribution that each can make towards building up the common good in this society.

Many Muslims attribute great importance to the religious dimension of life. At times this is thought provocative in a society that tends to marginalize religion or at most to assign it a place among the individual's private choices.

The Catholic Church firmly advocates that due recognition be given to the public dimension of religious adherence. In an overwhelmingly pluralist society, this demand is not unimportant. In the process, care must be taken to guarantee that the other is always treated with respect. This mutual respect grows only on the basis of agreement on certain inalienable values that are proper to human nature, in particular the inviolable dignity of every single person as created by God. Such agreement does not limit the expression of individual religions; on the contrary, it allows each person to bear witness explicitly to what he believes, not avoiding comparison with others.

In Germany – as in many other countries, not only Western ones – this common frame of reference is articulated by the Constitution, whose juridical content is binding on every citizen, whether he belong to a faith community or not.

Naturally, discussion over the best formulation of principles like freedom of public worship is vast and open-ended, yet it is significant that the German Basic Law expresses them in a way that is still valid today at a distance of over sixty years (cf. Art. 4:2). In this law we find above all the common ethos that lies at the heart of human coexistence and that also in a

certain way pervades the apparently formal rules of operation of the institutions of democratic life.

We could ask ourselves how such a text – drawn up in a radically different historical epoch, that is to say in an almost uniformly Christian cultural situation – is also suited to present-day Germany, situated as it is within a globalized world and marked as it is by a remarkable degree of pluralism in the area of religious belief.

The reason for this seems to me to lie in the fact that the fathers of the Basic Law at that important moment were fully conscious of the need to find truly solid ground with which all citizens would be able to identify and which could serve as the supporting foundation for everyone, irrespective of their differences. In seeking this, mindful of human dignity and responsibility before God, they did not prescind from their own religious beliefs; indeed for many of them, the real source of inspiration was the Christian vision of man. But they knew that everyone has to engage with the followers of other religions and none: common ground for all was found in the recognition of some inalienable rights that are proper to human nature and precede every positive formulation.

In this way, a society which at that time was essentially homogenous laid the foundations that we today may consider valid for a markedly pluralistic era, foundations that actually point out the evident limits of pluralism: it is inconceivable, in fact, that a society could survive in the long term without consensus on fundamental ethical values.

Dear friends, on the basis of what I have outlined here, it seems to me that there can be fruitful collaboration between Christians and Muslims. In the process, we help to build a society that differs in many respects from what we brought with us from the past. As believers, setting out from our respective convictions, we can offer an important witness in many key areas of life in society. I am thinking, for example, of the protection of the family based on marriage, respect for life in every phase of its natural course or the promotion of greater social justice.

This is another reason why I think it important to hold a day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice in the world, which as you know we plan to do on 27 October next in Assisi, [twenty-five years after the historic meeting there led by my predecessor, Blessed Pope John Paul II](#). . . . Through this gathering, we wish to express, with simplicity, that we believers have a special contribution to make towards building a better world, while acknowledging that if our actions are to be effective, we need to grow in dialogue and mutual esteem.

With these sentiments I renew my sincere greetings and I thank you for this meeting, which for me has been a great enrichment of my visit to my homeland. Thank you for your attention!

Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* on the Church in Africa in service to Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace, November 19, 2011 (excerpt)

Islam

94. The Synod Fathers highlighted the complexity of the Muslim presence on the African continent. In some countries, good relations exist between Christians and Muslims; in others, the local Christians are merely second-class citizens, and Catholics from abroad, religious

and lay, have difficulty obtaining visas and residence permits; in some, there is insufficient distinction between the religious and political spheres, while in others, finally, there is a climate of hostility. I call upon the Church, in every situation, to persist in esteem for Muslims, who "worship God who is one, living and subsistent; merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity." [147]. . . If all of us who believe in God desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism. In her social apostolate, the Church does not make religious distinctions. She comes to the help of those in need, be they Christian, Muslim or animist. In this way she bears witness to the love of God, creator of all, and she invites the followers of other religions to demonstrate respect and to practise reciprocity in a spirit of esteem. I ask the whole Church, through patient dialogue with Muslims, to seek juridical and practical recognition of religious freedom, so that every citizen in Africa may enjoy not only the right to choose his religion freely [148]. . . and to engage in worship, but also the right to freedom of conscience. [149]. . . Religious freedom is the road to peace. [150]. . .

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Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, September 14, 2012 (excerpt)

Interreligious dialogue

19. The Church's universal nature and vocation require that she engage in dialogue with the members of other religions. In the Middle East this dialogue is based on the spiritual and historical bonds uniting Christians to Jews and Muslims. It is a dialogue which is not primarily dictated by pragmatic political or social considerations, but by underlying theological concerns which have to do with faith. They are grounded in the sacred Scriptures and are clearly defined in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium](#). . . and in the Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions [Nostra Aetate](#). . .

[17]. . . Jews, Christians and Muslims alike believe in one God, the Creator of all men and women. May Jews, Christians and Muslims rediscover one of God's desires, that of the unity and harmony of the human family. May Jews, Christians and Muslims find in *other believers* brothers and sisters to be respected and loved, and in this way, beginning in their own lands, give the beautiful witness of serenity and concord between the children of Abraham. Rather than being exploited in endless conflicts which are unjustifiable for authentic believers, the acknowledgment of one God – if lived with a pure heart – can make a powerful contribution to peace in the region and to respectful coexistence on the part of its peoples.

23. The Catholic Church, in fidelity to the teachings of the [Second Vatican Council](#). . . , looks with esteem to Muslims, who worship God above all by prayer, almsgiving and fasting, revere Jesus as a prophet while not acknowledging his divinity, and honour Mary, his Virgin Mother. We know that the encounter of Islam and Christianity has often taken the form of doctrinal controversy. Sadly, both sides have used doctrinal differences as a pretext for justifying, in the name of religion, acts of intolerance, discrimination, marginalization and even of persecution. [19]. . .

24. Despite this fact, Christians live daily alongside Muslims in the Middle East, where their presence is neither recent nor accidental, but has a long history. As an integral part of the Middle East, Christians have developed over the centuries a type of relationship with their surroundings which can prove instructive. They have let themselves be challenged by Muslim

devotion and piety, and have continued, in accordance with their means and to the extent possible, to live by and to promote the values of the Gospel in the surrounding culture. The result has been a particular form of symbiosis. It is proper, then, to acknowledge the contribution made by Jews, Christians and Muslims in the formation of a rich culture proper to the Middle East. [\[20\]](#). . .

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Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Lebanon, Message to Young People, *Square across from the Maronite Patriarchate of Bkerké, September 15, 2012* (excerpt)

"...I should like now to greet the young Muslims who are with us this evening. I thank you for your presence, which is so important. Together with the young Christians, you are the future of this fine country and of the Middle East in general. Seek to build it up together! And when you are older, continue to live in unity and harmony with Christians. For the beauty of Lebanon is found in this fine symbiosis. It is vital that the Middle East in general, looking at you, should understand that Muslims and Christians, Islam and Christianity, can live side by side without hatred, with respect for the beliefs of each person, so as to build together a free and humane society..."

Francis, Address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, March 22, 2013 (excerpt)

"...It is not possible to build bridges between people while forgetting God. But the converse is also true: it is not possible to establish true links with God, while ignoring other people. Hence it is important to intensify dialogue among the various religions, and I am thinking particularly of dialogue with Islam. At the Mass marking the beginning of my ministry, I greatly appreciated the presence of so many civil and religious leaders from the Islamic world..."

Francis, Message to Muslims throughout the world for the end of Ramadan, July 10, 2013

To Muslims throughout the World

It gives me great pleasure to greet you as you celebrate '*Id al-Fitr*', so concluding the month of Ramadan, dedicated mainly to fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

It is a tradition by now that, on this occasion, the [Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue](#). . . sends you a message of good wishes, together with a proposed theme for common reflection. This year, the first of my Pontificate, I have decided to sign this traditional message myself and to send it to you, dear friends, as an expression of esteem and friendship for all Muslims, especially those who are religious leaders.

As you all know, when the Cardinals elected me as Bishop of Rome and Universal Pastor of the Catholic Church, I chose the name of "Francis", a very famous saint who loved God and every human being deeply, to the point of being called "universal brother". He loved, helped and served the needy, the sick and the poor; he also cared greatly for creation.

I am aware that family and social dimensions enjoy a particular prominence for Muslims during this period, and it is worth noting that there are certain parallels in each of these areas with Christian faith and practice.

This year, the theme on which I would like to reflect with you and with all who will read this message is one that concerns both Muslims and Christians: Promoting Mutual Respect through Education.

This year's theme is intended to underline the importance of education in the way we understand each other, built upon the foundation of mutual respect. "Respect" means an attitude of kindness towards people for whom we have consideration and esteem. "Mutual" means that this is not a one-way process, but something shared by both sides.

What we are called to respect in each person is first of all his life, his physical integrity, his dignity and the rights deriving from that dignity, his reputation, his property, his ethnic and cultural identity, his ideas and his political choices. We are therefore called to think, speak and write respectfully of the other, not only in his presence, but always and everywhere, avoiding unfair criticism or defamation. Families, schools, religious teaching and all forms of media have a role to play in achieving this goal.

Turning to mutual respect in interreligious relations, especially between Christians and Muslims, we are called to respect the religion of the other, its teachings, its symbols, its values. Particular respect is due to religious leaders and to places of worship. How painful are attacks on one or other of these!

It is clear that, when we show respect for the religion of our neighbours or when we offer them our good wishes on the occasion of a religious celebration, we simply seek to share their joy, without making reference to the content of their religious convictions.

Regarding the education of Muslim and Christian youth, we have to bring up our young people to think and speak respectfully of other religions and their followers, and to avoid ridiculing or denigrating their convictions and practices.

We all know that mutual respect is fundamental in any human relationship, especially among people who profess religious belief. In this way, sincere and lasting friendship can grow.

When I received the [Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See on 22 March 2013](#). . . , I said: "It is not possible to establish true links with God, while ignoring other people. Hence it is important to intensify dialogue among the various religions, and I am thinking particularly of dialogue with Islam. At the Mass marking the beginning of my ministry, I greatly appreciated the presence of so many civil and religious leaders from the Islamic world." With these words, I wished to emphasize once more the great importance of dialogue and cooperation among believers, in particular Christians and Muslims, and the need for it to be enhanced.

With these sentiments, I reiterate my hope that all Christians and Muslims may be true promoters of mutual respect and friendship, in particular through education.

Finally, I send you my prayerful good wishes, that your lives may glorify the Almighty and give joy to those around you.

Happy Feast to you all!

From the Vatican, 10 July 2013

Francis, Address to Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, November 28, 2013

Your Eminences, Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am delighted to meet you within the context of your Plenary Session: I offer each of you a cordial welcome and I thank Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran for the words which he addressed to me on your half.

The Catholic Church is aware of the value of promoting friendship and respect among men and women of different religious traditions. We increasingly understand its importance, both because in a certain sense the world has become "smaller" and because the phenomenon of migration increases contact between persons and communities from various traditions, cultures and religions. This reality summons our consciences as Christians, it is a challenge for understanding the faith and for the concrete life of the local Churches, parishes and so many believers.

The theme chosen for your meeting, "Members of different religious traditions in society", is therefore particularly relevant. As I stated in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, "an attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides" (n. 250). Indeed, situations in the world where coexistence is difficult are not lacking: often political or economic motives overlap with cultural and religious differences, which also play upon misunderstandings and mistakes of the past: this is all likely to generate suspicion and fear. There is only one road for conquering this fear and it is dialogue and encounter marked by friendship and respect. When we take this path it is a human one.

Dialogue does not mean renouncing one's own identity when it goes against another's, nor does it mean compromising Christian faith and morals. To the contrary, "true openness involves remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own identity" (*ibid.*, 251) and therefore open to understanding the religions of another, capable of respectful human relationships, convinced that the encounter with someone different than ourselves can be an occasion of growth in a spirit of fraternity, of enrichment and of witness. This is why interreligious dialogue and evangelization are not mutually exclusive, but rather nourish one another. We do not impose anything, we do not employ any subtle strategies for attracting believers; rather, we bear witness to what we believe and who we are with joy and simplicity. In fact, an encounter wherein each party sets aside his beliefs, pretending to renounce what he holds most dear, would certainly not be an authentic relationship. In this case we could speak of a false fraternity. As disciples of Jesus we have to make every effort to triumph over fear, always ready to take the first step, without becoming discouraged in the face of difficulty and misunderstanding.

Constructive dialogue between persons of different religious traditions helps also to overcome another fear, which we unfortunately increasingly see in strongly secularized

societies: fear directed toward the various religious traditions and toward the religious dimension as such. Religion is looked upon as something useless or even dangerous; Christians are even required at times to act in the exercise of their profession with no reference to their religious and moral convictions (cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 10 January 2011). It is widely thought that coexistence is only possible by hiding one's own religious affiliation, by meeting in a kind of neutral space, devoid of references to transcendence. But here, too: how would it be possible to create true relationships, to build a society that is a common home, by imposing that each person set aside what he considers to be an intimate part of his very being? It is impossible to think of fraternity being "born in a laboratory". Of course it is necessary that all things be done while respecting the convictions of others, and of unbelievers, but we must have the courage and patience to come together as we are. The future lies in the respectful coexistence of diversity, not in homologation to a single theoretically neutral way of thought. Throughout history we have seen the tragedy of narrow mindedness. The recognition of the fundamental right of religious freedom in all of its dimensions is unavoidable. The Magisterium of the Church has spoken about this with great commitment in recent decades. We are convinced that world peace passes by this route.

I wish to thank the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for the valuable service they carry out, and I invoke upon each of you the Lord's abundant blessing. Thank you.

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