

**CATHOLIC STATEMENTS ON ISLAM AND MUSLIMS:
TAKEN FROM DOCUMENTS OF THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL
COUNCIL, PAPAL DOCUMENTS AND ADDRESSES
AND STATEMENTS OF THE ROMAN CURIA**

Paul VI, inaugurating the second period, Second Vatican Council, September 29, 1963
(those who “uphold the meaning and concept of God as one, Creator, provident ...)

“The Catholic Church looks into the distance, beyond the confines of the Christian horizon; how could she place limits on her love, if this very love is to be that of God the Father who showers his favors upon everyone (cf. Mt 5:45), and who so loved the world that for it he gave his only Son (cf. Jn 3:16)? Look therefore beyond your own sphere and observe those other religions that uphold the meaning and the concept of God as one, Creator, provident, most high and transcendent, that worship God with acts of sincere piety and upon whose beliefs and practices the principles of moral and social life are founded.

“The Catholic Church unquestionably, and to its regret, perceives gaps, insufficiencies and errors in many religious expressions as those indicated, yet she cannot fail to turn her thoughts to them as well, to remind them that the Catholic religion upholds in just regard all that which in them is true, good and human. Moreover, in order to preserve religious sentiment and the worship of God in modern culture--the duty and need of a true civilization--she is in the forefront as the most valid supporter of the rights of God over humanity.”

Paul VI, “Message to the World,” from Bethlehem, January 6, 1964
(First public papal greetings to Muslims and Jews)

“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, *Ecclesiam Suam* 107, August 6, 1964
(First positive reference to Muslims in an encyclical)

“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.”

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Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 16, November 21, 1964
(Repeating Paul VI)

“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* 2-3, 5, October 28, 1965

[2]“The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of acting and of living, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the one she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim, Christ as “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Jn. 14:6), in whom men and women may find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-19).

“The Church therefore exhorts her sons and daughters to recognize, preserve, and foster the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among the followers of other religions. This is done through conversations and collaboration with them, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life.

[3]“The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, who is living and subsisting in himself, merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth (cf. St. Gregory VII, Letter XXI to Anzir [Nacir], king of Mauritania [PL 148, cols. 450ff]), who has spoken to humans; they strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam is gladly linked, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, his virgin mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. Moreover, they look forward to the day of judgment when God will reward all those raised up. For this reason, they value the moral life and worship God, especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

“In the course of centuries there have indeed arisen not a few quarrels and hostilities between Christians and Muslims. But now this Sacred Synod pleads with all to forget the past, to make sincere efforts for mutual understanding, and so to work together for the preservation and fostering of social justice, moral welfare, and peace and freedom, for all humankind.”

[5]“The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination or harassment against men or women because of their race or color, condition in life or religion. On the contrary, following the footsteps of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this Sacred Synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to “maintain good conduct among the peoples” (1 Pet. 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all (cf. Rom. 12-18) so that they may truly be sons and daughters of the Father who is in heaven. (cf. Mt. 5:45).”

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Paul VI, address to the Islamic communities of Uganda, August 1, 1969
(Reference to the Qur’an and common martyrs for the faith)

“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 recalling 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.”

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

(A new period of history and recognizing the spiritual bonds that unite us

[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

(Addressing Muslims as “brothers”)

“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?...

“. . . 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 “Holiness in Christianity and in Islam” symposium Rome, May 9, 1985 (A Pope quoting the Qur’an)

“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 (A Pope paraphrasing the Quran [5:48], not one community but as a test)

“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 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
(The Bible and Qur’an teach mercy and justice)

“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 the delegation of the World Islamic Call Society, Rome, 15
January 1990 (mission and *da’wah*)

“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 (Annual *‘Id al-Fitr* Greetings in the year of the first Gulf War, quoting Gregory VII)

“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
(Traditions of Abraham)

“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
(Extolling the “Founders” of various religions)

“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
(Trinity and Oneness of God)

“. . . 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 (Papal Visit to al-Azhar University in the Great Jubilee Year 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

(Acknowledging sins of the past in preparation to celebrate the Great Jubilee Year)

"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
(To Jordan before entering Jerusalem for the Great Jubilee Year)

“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, 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-Azhar 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 (First papal statement after 9/11 with regard to Christian-Muslim relations)

"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 (Authentic Islam)

"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 (Pope calling for a common fast during Ramadan and Advent)

"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,” amending “forget the past”

“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

(Assisi No. 3: Post-9/11)

“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, address to Muslims, August 20, 2005, Cologne

(*Nostra Aetate* 3 as *Magna Carta* for Christian-Muslim Dialogue)

[After quoting *Nostra Aetate* (3), see above pp. 1-2, he says,] “For us, these words of the Second Vatican council remain the *Magna Carta* of the dialogue with you, dear Muslim friends, and I am glad that you have spoken to us in the same spirit and have confirmed these intentions. .

..

“Christians and Muslims, we must face together the many challenges of our time. There is no room for apathy and disengagement, and even less for partiality and sectarianism. We must not yield to fear or pessimism. Rather, we must cultivate optimism and hope.

“Interreligious and intercultural 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. . . .

“I pray with all my heart, dear and esteemed Muslim friends, that the merciful and compassionate God may protect you, bless you and enlighten you always.”

Benedict XVI, address in the Aula Magna, University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006

“I was reminded of all this recently, when I read the edition by Professor Theodore Khoury (Münster) of part of the dialogue carried on - perhaps in 1391 in the winter barracks near Ankara - by the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam, and the truth of both. [1] It was presumably the emperor himself who set down this dialogue, during the siege of Constantinople between 1394 and 1402; and this would explain why his arguments are given in greater detail than those of his Persian interlocutor. [2] The dialogue ranges widely over the structures of faith contained in the Bible and in the Qur'an, and deals especially with the image of God and of man, while necessarily returning repeatedly to the relationship between - as they were called - three ‘Laws’ or ‘rules of life’: the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Qur'an. It is not my intention to discuss this question in the present lecture; here I would like to discuss only one point - itself rather marginal to the dialogue as a whole - which, in the context of the issue of “faith and reason”, I found interesting and which can serve as the starting-point for my reflections on this issue.

“In the seventh conversation (διάλεξις - controversy) edited by Professor Khoury, the emperor touches on the theme of the holy war. The emperor must have known that surah 2, 256 reads: ‘There is no compulsion in religion’. According to some of the experts, this is probably one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur'an, concerning holy war. Without descending to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the ‘Book’ and the ‘infidels’, he addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: ‘Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.’ [3] The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. ‘God’, he says, ‘is not pleased by blood - and not acting reasonably (σὺν λόγῳ) is contrary to God's nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death...’ [4]

“The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature. [5] The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our

categories, even that of rationality. [6] Here Khoury quotes a work of the noted French Islamist R. Arnaldez, who points out that Ibn Hazm went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own word, and that nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God's will, we would even have to practise idolatry. [7]

... “The West has long been endangered by this aversion to the questions which underlie its rationality, and can only suffer great harm thereby. The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur - this is the programme with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time. ‘Not to act reasonably, not to act with logos, is contrary to the nature of God’, said Manuel II, according to his Christian understanding of God, in response to his Persian interlocutor. It is to this great logos, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the university.

1. Of the total number of 26 conversations (διάλεξις – Khoury translates this as “controversy”) in the dialogue (“Entretien”), T. Khoury published the 7th “controversy” with footnotes and an extensive introduction on the origin of the text, on the manuscript tradition and on the structure of the dialogue, together with brief summaries of the “controversies” not included in the edition; the Greek text is accompanied by a French translation: “Manuel II Paléologue, Entretiens avec un Musulman. 7e Controverse”, Sources Chrétiennes n. 115, Paris 1966. In the meantime, Karl Förstel published in Corpus Islamico-Christianum (Series Graeca ed. A. T. Khoury and R. Gleis) an edition of the text in Greek and German with commentary: “Manuel II. Palaiologus, Dialoge mit einem Muslim”, 3 vols., Würzburg-Altenberge 1993-1996. As early as 1966, E. Trapp had published the Greek text with an introduction as vol. II of Wiener byzantinische Studien. I shall be quoting from Khoury’s edition.

2. On the origin and redaction of the dialogue, cf. Khoury, pp. 22-29; extensive comments in this regard can also be found in the editions of Förstel and Trapp.

3. Controversy VII, 2 c: Khoury, pp. 142-143; Förstel, vol. I, VII. Dialog 1.5, pp. 240-241. In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur’an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic.

4. Controversy VII, 3 b–c: Khoury, pp. 144-145; Förstel vol. I, VII. Dialog 1.6, pp. 240-243.

5. It was purely for the sake of this statement that I quoted the dialogue between Manuel and his Persian interlocutor. In this statement the theme of my subsequent reflections emerges.

6. Cf. Khoury, p. 144, n. 1.

7. R. Arnaldez, Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue, Paris 1956, p. 13; cf. Khoury, p. 144. The fact that comparable positions exist in the theology of the late Middle Ages will appear later in my discourse.

Benedict XVI, address to Muslim representatives after reactions to his university lecture in Regensburg, September 25, 2006

“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 . . .”

“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 defense 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.”

Benedict XVI in Turkey with Ali Bardakoglu, President, Directorate of Religious Affairs, November 28, 2006 (Correcting comments on Turkey and EU, quoting Gregory VII again)

“For more than forty years, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council has inspired and guided the approach taken by the Holy See and by local Churches throughout the world to relations with the followers of other religions. Following the Biblical tradition, the Council teaches that the entire human race shares a common origin and a common destiny: God, our Creator and the goal of our earthly pilgrimage. Christians and Muslims belong to the family of those who believe in the one God and who, according to their respective traditions, trace their ancestry to Abraham (cf. Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* 1, 3). This human and spiritual unity in our origins and our destiny impels us to seek a common path as we play our part in the quest for fundamental values so characteristic of the people of our time. As men and women of religion, we are challenged by the widespread longing for justice, development, solidarity, freedom, security, peace, defense of life, protection of the environment and of the resources of the earth. This is because we too, while respecting the legitimate autonomy of temporal affairs, have a specific contribution to offer in the search for proper solutions to these pressing questions.

“Above all, we can offer a credible response to the question which emerges clearly from today’s society, even if it is often brushed aside, the question about the meaning and purpose of life, for each individual and for humanity as a whole. We are called to work together, so as to help society to open itself to the transcendent, giving Almighty God his rightful place. The best way forward is via authentic dialogue between Christians and Muslims, based on truth and inspired by a sincere wish to know one another better, respecting differences and recognizing what we have in common. This will lead to an authentic respect for the responsible choices that each person makes, especially those pertaining to fundamental values and to personal religious convictions.

“As an illustration of the fraternal respect with which Christians and Muslims can work together, I would like to quote some words addressed by Pope Gregory VII in 1076 to a Muslim prince in North Africa who had acted with great benevolence towards the Christians under his jurisdiction. Pope Gregory spoke of the particular charity that Christians and Muslims owe to one another ‘because we believe in one God, albeit in a different manner, and because we praise him and worship him every day as the Creator and Ruler of the world.’

“Freedom of religion, institutionally guaranteed and effectively respected in practice, both for individuals and communities, constitutes for all believers the necessary condition for their loyal contribution to the building up of society, in an attitude of authentic service, especially towards the most vulnerable and the very poor.

“Mr. President, I should like to finish by praising the Almighty and merciful God for this happy occasion that brings us together in his name. I pray that it may be a sign of our joint commitment to dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and an encouragement to persevere along that path, in respect and friendship. May we come to know one another better, strengthening the bonds of affection between us in our common wish to live together in

harmony, peace and mutual trust. As believers, we draw from our prayer the strength that is needed to overcome all traces of prejudice and to bear joint witness to our firm faith in God. May his blessing be ever upon us! Thank you.”

Benedict XVI Speaking at the King Hussein Mosque, Jordan, May 9 2009

(Continuing to heal old wounds)

“Muslims and Christians, precisely because of the burden of our common history so often marked by misunderstanding, must today strive to be known and recognized as worshippers of God faithful to prayer, eager to uphold and live by the Almighty's decrees, merciful and compassionate, consistent in bearing witness to all that is true and good, and ever mindful of the common origin and dignity of all human persons, who remain at the apex of God's creative design for the world and for history. . . .

“Muslims worship God, the creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity. And as believers in the one God we know that human reason is itself God's gift and that it soars to its highest plane when suffused with the light of God's truth. In fact, when human reason humbly allows itself to be purified by faith, it is far from weakened; rather, it is strengthened to resist presumption and to reach beyond its own limitations. In this way, human reason is emboldened to pursue its noble purpose of serving mankind, giving expression to our deepest common aspirations and extending, rather than manipulating or confining, public debate.

“Thus, genuine adherence to religion - far from narrowing our minds - widens the horizon of human understanding. It protects civil society from the excesses of the unbridled ego which tend to absolutize the finite and eclipse the infinite; it ensures that freedom is exercised hand in hand with truth, and it adorns culture with insights concerning all that is true, good and beautiful. This understanding of reason, which continually draws the human mind beyond itself in the quest for the absolute, poses a challenge; it contains a sense of both hope and caution. Together Christians and Muslims are impelled to seek all that is just and right. We are bound to step beyond our particular interests and to encourage others, civil servants and leaders in particular, to do likewise in order to embrace the profound satisfaction of serving the common good, even at personal cost.

“And we are reminded that because it is our common human dignity which gives rise to universal human rights, they hold equally for every man and woman, irrespective of his or her religious, social or ethnic group. In this regard we must note that the right of religious freedom extends beyond the question of worship and includes the right - especially of minorities - to fair access to the employment market and other spheres of civic life.

Benedict XVI Speaking to Muslims, Berlin, September 23, 2011

(Muslims in German 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. . . .

“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.”

* * *

Francis Speaking to the Diplomatic Corps Credited to the Holy See, March 22, 2013
(Appreciating the presence of Muslims)

“In this work, the role of religion is fundamental. 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. And it is also important to intensify outreach to non-believers, so that the differences which divide and hurt us may never prevail, but rather the desire to build true links of friendship between all peoples, despite their diversity.”

Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 252-253, November 24, 2013
(The great importance of the relationship between Christians and Muslims)

“Our relationship with the followers of Islam has taken on great importance, since they are now significantly present in many traditionally Christian countries, where they can freely worship and become fully a part of society. We must never forget that they ‘profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day.’ (*Nostra aetate* 3) The sacred writings of Islam have retained some Christian teachings; Jesus and Mary receive profound veneration and it is admirable to see how Muslims both young and old, men and women, make time for daily prayer and faithfully take part in religious services. Many of them also have a deep conviction that their life, in its entirety, is from God and for God. They also acknowledge the need to respond to God with an ethical commitment and with mercy towards those most in need.

“In order to sustain dialogue with Islam, suitable training is essential for all involved, not only so that they can be solidly and joyfully grounded in their own identity, but so that they can also acknowledge the values of others, appreciate the concerns underlying their demands and shed light on shared beliefs. We Christians should embrace with affection and respect Muslim immigrants to our countries in the same way that we hope and ask to be received and respected in countries of Islamic tradition. I ask and I humbly entreat those countries to grant Christians freedom to worship and to practice their faith, in light of the freedom which followers of Islam enjoy in Western countries! Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalisations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence.”

Francis, Visit to the President of the Diyanet, Department for Religious Affairs, Turkey, November 28, 2014 (The spiritual bonds that unite us)

“As well as denouncing such violations, we must also work together to find adequate solutions. This requires the cooperation of all: governments, political and religious leaders, representatives of civil society, and all men and women of goodwill. In a unique way, religious leaders can offer a vital contribution by expressing the values of their respective traditions. We, Muslims and Christians, are the bearers of spiritual treasures of inestimable worth. Among these we recognize some shared elements, though lived according to the traditions of each, such as the adoration of the All-Merciful God, reference to the Patriarch Abraham, prayer, almsgiving, fasting... elements which, when lived sincerely, can transform life and provide a sure foundation for dignity and fraternity. Recognizing and developing our common spiritual heritage – through interreligious dialogue – helps us to promote and to uphold moral values, peace and freedom in society (cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Catholic Community in Ankara*, 29 November 1979). The shared recognition of the sanctity of each human life is the basis of joint initiatives of solidarity, compassion, and effective help directed to those who suffer most. In this regard, I wish to express my appreciation for everything that the Turkish people, Muslims and Christians alike, are doing to help the hundreds of thousands of people who are fleeing their countries due to conflicts. There are two million of them. This is a clear example of how we can work together to serve others, an example to be encouraged and maintained.”

Francis, Address to Participants in the International Peace Conference, al-Azhar Conference Centre, Cairo, April 28, 2017 (3 virtues for dialogue)

“Precisely in the field of dialogue, particularly interreligious dialogue, we are constantly called to walk together, in the conviction that the future also depends on the encounter of religions and cultures. In this regard, the work of the *Mixed Committee for Dialogue between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Committee of Al-Azhar for Dialogue* offers us a concrete and encouraging example. Three basic areas, if properly linked to one another, can assist in this dialogue: *the duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others, the courage to accept differences, and sincerity of intentions.*

“*The duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others*, because true dialogue cannot be built on ambiguity or a willingness to sacrifice some good for the sake of pleasing others. *The courage to accept differences*, because those who are different, either culturally or religiously, should not be seen or treated as enemies, but rather welcomed as fellow-travellers, in the genuine conviction that the good of each resides in the good of all. *Sincerity of intentions*, because dialogue, as an authentic expression of our humanity, is not a strategy for achieving specific goals, but rather a path to truth, one that deserves to be undertaken patiently, in order to transform competition into cooperation.

“An education in respectful openness and sincere dialogue with others, recognizing their rights and basic freedoms, particularly religious freedom, represents the best way to build the future *together*, to be *builders of civility*. For the only alternative to the *civility of encounter* is the *incivility of conflict*; there is no other way. To counter effectively the barbarity of those who foment hatred and violence, we need to accompany young people, helping them on the path to maturity and teaching them to respond to the incendiary logic of evil by patiently working for the growth of goodness. In this way, young people, like well-planted trees, can be firmly rooted in

the soil of history, and, growing heavenward in one another's company, can daily turn the polluted air of hatred into the oxygen of fraternity. . .

“May the sun of a renewed fraternity in the name of God rise in this sun-drenched land, to be the dawn of a *civilization of peace and encounter*. May Saint Francis of Assisi, who eight centuries ago came to Egypt and met Sultan Malik al Kamil, intercede for this intention.”

Francis, Address to the Fraternity Conference, Abu Dhabi, February 4, 2019

(The next phase: Human Fraternity)

“*As-salāmu alaykum!* Peace be with you!

“I give heartfelt thanks to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Doctor Ahmad Al-Tayyib, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, for their words. I am grateful to the Council of Elders for the meeting that we have just had at the Grand Mosque of Sheikh Zayed. . .

“With a heart grateful to the Lord, in this eighth centenary of the meeting between Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al Kāmil, I have welcomed the opportunity to come here as a believer thirsting for peace, as a brother seeking peace with the brethren. We are here to desire peace, to promote peace, to be instruments of peace.

“The logo of this journey depicts a dove with an olive branch. It is an image that recalls the story – present in different religious traditions – of the primordial flood. According to the biblical account, in order to preserve humanity from destruction, God asked Noah to enter the ark along with his family. Today, we too in the name of God, in order to safeguard peace, need to enter together as one family into an ark which can sail the stormy seas of the world: *the ark of fraternity*.

“The point of departure is the recognition that God is at the origin of the one human family. He who is the Creator of all things and of all persons wants us to live as brothers and sisters, dwelling in the common home of creation which he has given us. Fraternity is established here at the roots of our common humanity, as ‘a vocation contained in God’s plan of creation’. [Benedict XVI, *Address to the New Ambassadors to the Holy See*, 16 December 2010.] This tells us that all persons have equal dignity and that no one can be a master or slave of others.

“We cannot honour the Creator without cherishing the sacredness of every person and of every human life: each person is equally precious in the eyes of God, who does not look upon the human family with a preferential gaze that excludes, but with a benevolent gaze that includes. Thus, to recognize the same rights for every human being is to glorify the name of God on earth. In the name of God the Creator, therefore, every form of violence must be condemned without hesitation, because we gravely profane God’s name when we use it to justify hatred and violence against a brother or sister. No violence can be justified in the name of religion.

“The enemy of fraternity is an individualism which translates into the desire to affirm oneself and one’s own group above others. This danger threatens all aspects of life, even the highest innate prerogative of man, that is, the openness to the transcendent and to religious piety.

True religious piety consists in loving God with all one’s heart and one’s neighbour as oneself. Religious behaviour, therefore, needs continually to be purified from the recurrent temptation to judge others as enemies and adversaries. Each belief system is called to overcome the divide between friends and enemies, in order to take up the perspective of heaven, which embraces persons without privilege or discrimination. . . .

Fraternity certainly ‘also embraces variety and differences between brothers and sisters, even though they are linked by birth and are of the same nature and dignity’. [*Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2015, 2.] Religious plurality is an expression of this; in such a context the right attitude is neither a forced uniformity nor a conciliatory syncretism. What we are called to do as believers is to commit ourselves to the equal dignity of all, in the name of the Merciful One who created us and in whose name the reconciliation of conflicts and fraternity in diversity must be sought. Here I want to reaffirm the conviction of the Catholic Church: ‘We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God’ [*Nostra Aetate*, 5.] . . .

“If we believe in the existence of the human family, it follows that it must, as such, be looked after. As in every family, this happens above all through a daily and effective dialogue. This presupposes having one’s own identity, not to be foregone to please the other person. But at the same time it demands *the courage of otherness*, [Cf. Address at Al-Azhar, April 29, 2017] which involves the full recognition of the other and his or her freedom, and the consequent commitment to exert myself so that the other person’s fundamental rights are always affirmed, everywhere and by everyone. Without freedom we are no longer children of the human family, but slaves. As part of such freedom, I would like to emphasize religious freedom. It is not limited only to freedom of worship but sees in the other truly a brother or sister, a child of my own humanity whom God leaves free and whom, therefore, no human institution can coerce, not even in God’s name.

“The courage of otherness is the heart of *dialogue*, which is based on sincerity of intentions. Dialogue is indeed compromised by pretense, which increases distance and suspicion: we cannot proclaim fraternity and then act in the opposite way. According to a modern author, ‘The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to such a pass that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others’. [F. M. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, II, 2.]

In all this, *prayer* is essential: while sincerely intended prayer incarnates the courage of otherness in regard to God, it also purifies the heart from turning in on itself. Prayer of the heart restores fraternity. Consequently, ‘as for the future of interreligious dialogue, the first thing we have to do is pray, and pray for one another: we are brothers and sisters! Without the Lord, nothing is possible; with him, everything becomes so! May our prayer – each one according to his or her own tradition – adhere fully to the will of God, who wants all men and women to recognize they are brothers and sisters and live as such, forming the great human family in the harmony of diversity’. [*Interreligious General Audience*, 28 October 2015] . . .

Having spoken of *fraternity as an ark of peace*, I now want to take inspiration from a second image, that of the *desert* which surrounds us.

Here, in just a few years, with farsightedness and wisdom, the desert has been transformed into a prosperous and hospitable place. From being an unapproachable and inaccessible obstacle, the desert has become a meeting place between cultures and religions. Here the desert has flourished, not just for a few days in the year, but for many years to come. This country, in which sand and skyscrapers meet, continues to be an important crossroads between the West and East, between the North and South of the planet: a *place of development*, where once inhospitable spaces supply jobs for people of various nations.

Nonetheless, development, too, has its adversaries. If the enemy of fraternity is the individualism referred to above, I want to point to indifference as an obstacle to development, an

indifference which ends up converting flourishing realities into desert lands. In fact, a purely utilitarian development cannot provide real and lasting progress. Only an integral and cohesive development provides a future worthy of the human person. Indifference prevents us from seeing the human community beyond its earnings and our brothers and sisters beyond the work they do. Indifference, in fact, does not look to the future; it does not care about the future of creation, it does not care about the dignity of the stranger and the future of children.

Francis, Address to the Christians of Morocco, March 31, 2019
(First Apostolic Pilgrimage under the Rubric of Fraternity)

“Dear brothers and sisters, in thinking of this setting in which you are called to live your baptismal vocation, your ministry and your consecration, I recall the words of Pope Saint Paul VI in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*: “The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which she lives. She has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make” (No. 65). To say that the Church has to enter into dialogue is not to follow a fashion – dialogue is in vogue today but that is not the reason for dialogue – or much less a strategy for increasing her membership, no, it is not a strategy. The Church has to enter into dialogue out of fidelity to her Lord and Master, who from the beginning, moved by love, wished to enter into dialogue as a friend and asks us to enter into friendship with him (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 2). As disciples of Jesus Christ, from the very day of our baptism we have been called to be a part of this *dialogue of salvation and friendship*, from which we are the first to benefit.

“Christians, here in these lands, learn to be a living sacrament of the dialogue that God wants to initiate with each man and woman, wherever they are. A dialogue that we are nonetheless called to take up following the example of Jesus himself, who is meek and humble of heart (cf. *Mt* 11:29), with fervent and disinterested love, without calculations and limitations, and with respect for the freedom of others. In this spirit, we can find elder brothers and sisters who show us the way, for by their lives they testify that this dialogue is possible; they point to a “high standard” that challenges us and spurs us on. How can we fail to think of Saint Francis of Assisi, who at the height of the Crusades went to encounter Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil? Or Blessed Charles de Foucault, so deeply impressed by the humble and hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth, whom he silently adored, that he wished to be a “brother to all”? Or again, those of our fellow Christians who chose to live in solidarity with another people, even to the point of giving their lives? When the Church, in fidelity to the mission she has received from the Lord, *enters into dialogue with the world and gives her message*, she takes part in the advent of that fraternity whose deepest source is not in ourselves but in the fatherhood of God.

Compiled by John Borelli, June 25, 2020