



# bridges



COLUMBAN  
MISSION INSTITUTE

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Christian-Muslim Relations

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims

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## EDITORIAL

You, our regular and longstanding readers will notice a significant change in the presentation of *Bridges* with this issue. After 12 years we decided we needed to update a little and put on a fresh face. We hope you like it.

It is an appropriate time to make a change for other reasons too. Times are changing rapidly in the area of interreligious dialogue. In just the last two months several very significant events have taken place.

The first and most publicised of these was the pilgrimage made by Pope Benedict XVI to the Holy Land. This journey received a lot of coverage in the media but not much detail of what was actually said and done. This issue of *Bridges* makes available one Muslim address of Welcome to His Holiness and the Pope's Response.

Prince Ghazi in formally welcoming Benedict to the Kingdom of Jordan recognised him as the spiritual leader of 1.1 billion Catholics; as a Christian theologian with the moral courage to speak his conscience; as a Head of State concerned with morality, ethics, the alleviation of poverty and suffering; and as a simple pilgrim of peace who comes in humility and gentleness to pray where Jesus Christ the Messiah was baptised and began his mission 2000 years ago.

In thanking the Prince, Pope Benedict said in part, "Muslims and Christians, precisely because of the burden of our common history so often marked by misunderstanding, must today strive to be known and recognised 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."

The Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations is making available a small publication containing excerpts from all the major addresses made by Pope Benedict during his pilgrimage. This is a collection of the latest and most authoritative teaching of the Catholic Church on interfaith relations. (See page 6 for details.)

The second event of importance was the Cairo Speech given by President Obama. This has been seen as a reaching out to the Muslim world, not just by the President, or even of the United States, but by the Western world.

The third event was a local one but touched the whole Australian church through those who attended. The annual Conference of the Catholic Religious of Australia has just concluded in Sydney. The theme of the Conference this year was "Australian Religious in a Multi-Faith Society: Reality, Gift and Challenge. It is indicative of the growing awareness within the Australian church of the importance of interreligious dialogue in our own multi-faith society that this topic was chosen. (See page 3 for details.)

We live in a time of great challenge and opportunity. May the Holy Spirit guide the efforts of all working towards interfaith harmony and peace.

*Pauline Rae smsm*  
Editor

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### Columban Mission Institute

Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

167 Albert Road, Strathfield NSW 2135 • Postal Address: Locked Bag 2002 Strathfield NSW 2135

Phone (02) 9352 8011 • Fax (02) 9746 8033 • Email [cmr.cmi@columban.org.au](mailto:cmr.cmi@columban.org.au) • [www.columban.org.au](http://www.columban.org.au)

**“Memorandum of Understanding” signed between the Vatican Secretariat of State and the League of Arab States.**

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Vatican and the League of Arab States was signed at the Vatican Apostolic Palace in April 2009. It was signed by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Secretary for Relations with States, and Amr Moussa, Secretary General of the League.

The agreement consolidates the existing ties of collaboration between the Holy See and the League of Arab States, especially at a political and cultural level, in favour of peace, security and stability, both regionally and internationally. It also proposes instruments for consultation between the two sides, with particular emphasis on initiatives of inter-religious dialogue.

*Fides Service 24/4/2009*

**Pope Benedict calls Interfaith Dialogue the Road to Peace**

In his second public address in Israel, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed the importance of interreligious dialogue in the pursuit of peace. The Pope said this in a reception hosted by President Shimon Peres at the presidential palace in Jerusalem on the first day of a visit to Israel on the second leg of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

During the visit, the Pontiff symbolically planted a tree in the palace garden in the presence of numerous political and religious personalities. After this there was a moment of spontaneous exchange between the Israeli leader and the Holy Father.

Benedict XVI then addressed those present, affirming that peace is above all a divine gift that we find when we seek God “with all our heart”. He noted that “the particular contribution of religions to the quest for peace lies primarily in the wholehearted, united search for God”. “Security, integrity, justice and peace,” the Pontiff said, are inseparable “in God’s design for the world”. “I hear the cry of those who live in this land for justice, for peace, for respect for their dignity, for lasting security, a daily life free from the fear of outside threats and senseless violence.” “And I know that considerable numbers of men and women and young people are working for peace and solidarity through cultural programs and through initiatives of compassionate and practical outreach; humble enough to forgive, they have the courage to grasp the dream that is their right.”

*Source: Zenit.org/article-25867?1=english*

**How Tragedy Brings us Together**

The plane crash in the Atlantic from Rio de Janeiro to Paris on June 1 claimed 228 lives. A few days later these lives were symbolized by candles on the altar of Notre Dame Cathedral where people of many faiths gathered to pray for the victims and their grieving families and friends. The French President, Nicolas Sarkozy was present along with government officials, Air

France workers, Christians, Jews and Muslims, families and friends.

Rabbi Haim Korsia, chaplain of the air personnel, involved the “Fraternity that unites us, believers and non-believers”.

Mohammed Moussaoui, President of the French Council of Muslim Faith, directed some words of support and compassion to the families and sang the first Sura of the Koran.

Claude Bay, President of the Protestant Federation of France also expressed his sympathy, followed by the Metropolitan Emmanuel on behalf of the French Assembly of Orthodox Bishops.

The Catholic Archbishop of Paris concluded the ceremony with a message of encouragement and support for the families.

*Source: Zenit June 4 2009*

**President Obama Reaches out to the Islamic World in Cairo Speech**

President Obama raised many issues of world importance in his recent Cairo speech. One of these which may have been overlooked by most in light of the grave significance of the ongoing conflicts to which he referred, was the reference to human rights.

One of the specific examples was in relation to women, saying that a woman who is denied education is denied equality.

To quote: “Our daughters can contribute just as much to society as our sons. Our common prosperity will be advanced by allowing all humanity – men and women – to reach their full potential.”

*Source: www.whitehouse.gov/the\_press\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09*

**Women of Faith Dinner**

The annual *Women of Faith Dinner* was held on May 24 in Sydney. The event attracted some 250 women of different faiths who came to share each other’s company with a good meal, excellent talks from Jewish, Christian and Muslim women and musical entertainment. The event is becoming more popular each year and ever more faith traditions are being represented.

A multi-religious community sharing the same socio-economic, political and cultural structures is called to build up a secular society that is open to all religions. While each person seeks to be rooted and to find motivation in his own religion, all the religions are called to provide collectively a moral and religious basis for the pursuit of the common good.

*Michael Amaladoss SJ Walking Together:  
The Practice of Inter-Religious Dialogue*

## **A Common Word**

On Friday the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2009 Father Patrick McInerney from the Columban Mission Institute's *Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations* gave a formal response to *A Common Word*, the 2007 open letter from Muslim leaders to Pope Benedict XVI, the Orthodox Patriarchs, the heads of the Protestant churches and "leaders of Christian Churches, everywhere".\* When the letter was first issued the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations recognized its significance and published it in English and Arabic so that it would have a wider readership in Australia.

The *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* of the Vatican, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the World Council of Churches, and many other Christian organizations have already made formal responses to the letter. The gathering at Greenacre in inner Western Sydney was the first public forum of Christians and Muslims on this topic in Australia. It was hosted by Archbishop Issam Darwish of the Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Australia and New Zealand, the Australian Christian-Muslim Friendship Association, and the Melkite Welfare Association.

Ms Amal Dardass introduced the document. She summarised its background and content. The Muslim religious leaders propose that love of God and love of neighbour are common to both Christianity and Islam, and form a basis for common agreement and cooperation. Given that the authors represent a broad consensus across the spectrum of Muslim groups, the document is authoritative and merits the consideration of Christians and Muslims alike.

In his response Fr Patrick expressed his appreciation for the many positives in the document and indicated his basic agreement with the authors' direction and intent. He acknowledged the scholarship of the authors and their very positive example of dialogue. They put their case simply, respectfully, and eloquently, backing their arguments with texts from the Qur'an and the Bible, inviting intelligent and informed response. However, Fr Patrick proposed some qualifications and nuances. For example, while love of God and love of neighbour are very important in Christianity, the true foundation of Christianity is not our love for God, but God's love for us. This grounds the Christian acknowledgement that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8), and the Christian confession of God as a community of love between the three persons of the Blessed Trinity.

However, although Christians and Muslims disagree over the nature and role of Jesus Christ, the Trinity, and the Church, we do agree on love and service of neighbour. Fr Patrick again quoted from the Bible to deepen and broaden the topic. When Jesus was asked "Who is my neighbour?" he recounted the familiar story of the Good Samaritan, and then asked "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (Lk 10:25-37) Jesus turned the original question inside out. It is no longer "who is my neighbour?" with me at the centre—but the

focus turns to the periphery, to those in need, and acting neighbourly towards them. What matters is not geographical proximity, who lives next door, but whether one shows practical compassion for those who suffer, no matter their tribe, nation or religion. In our world, where Christians and Muslims together make up over fifty percent of the world's population, there is much that we can do together in responding to the needs of the poor, the hungry, the refugees and those who suffer injustices, war, and natural disasters.

Irfan Yousaf, a free-lance journalist and social commentator, then made a response. Irfan is Pakistani-born Muslim who migrated with his family as a young boy. He related his experiences of growing up and going to school in urban Australia. He argued that the recent tensions and conflicts that are reported in the media are cultural rather than religious, and commended *A Common Word* for bringing us back to the fundamentals of our respective religions, namely love of God and love of neighbour. His sociological analysis complemented Fr Patrick's theological response.

Questions and answers followed. Then, after official thanks from the organizers, the evening concluded with Christians and Muslims continuing the conversation over refreshments.

\* Details of the document, the signatories and the official responses are available from the dedicated website [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com).

## **Catholic Religious of Australia**

The National Assembly of Catholic Religious of Australia took place from 23-26 June. Their theme this year was "Australian Religious in a Multi-Faith Society: Reality, Gift and Challenge".

Fr Patrick McInerney addressed them on the topic of "Why Dialogue?" He first explained what dialogue is not, what it is, the four different types of interreligious dialogue, and how these are complemented by ecumenical, intercultural, ecological and other dialogues. Then he indicated some reasons for dialogue drawn from nature – common humanity, peace and harmony, one earth, and so on. Next he proposed that theology elevates the reflection to another level. Where nature is understood as creation, as a gift from God the Creator, this creates a bond whereby all people are acknowledged as the one family of God. Finally, using texts from the Vatican Council and subsequent Catholic teaching, Fr Patrick proposed some motivations for dialogue which flow from specifically Christian concerns, including respect for the universal presence and action of the Holy Spirit, uncovering the seeds of the Word, and the gifts of the Father, and so on. The presentation was very well received by the religious leaders, who followed up the theme with other speakers and workshops in the remaining days of the Conference.

## WELCOME SPEECH BY MUSLIM PRINCE GHAZI TO POPE BENEDICT XVI ON HIS VISIT TO JORDAN'S STATE MOSQUE

*Prince Ghazi is an advisor to King Abdullah II and also the organizer of the Muslim initiative called "A Common Word," sent by 138 Muslim scholars to Christian leaders.*

*Al-Salaam 'Aleikum, Pax Vobis.* On the occasion of this historic visit to the King Hussein bin Talal Mosque here in Amman, Jordan, I bid Your Holiness Pope Benedict XVI welcome in four ways.

First, as a Muslim, I bid Your Holiness welcome today, as we understand this visit to be a deliberate gesture of goodwill and mutual respect from the Supreme Spiritual Leader and Pontiff of the largest denomination of the world's largest religion to the world's second largest religion. Indeed, Christians and Muslims together make up over 55% of the world's population and so it is especially significant that this is only the third time in history a reigning Pope has visited a mosque; the first being by Your Holiness's much beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II to the historical Umayyad Mosque in Damascus (which contains the remains of John the Baptist [may peace be upon him]) in 2001, and the second being by Your Holiness to the Magnificent Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed in Istanbul in 2006.

The beautiful King Hussein Mosque here in Amman, Jordan is Jordan's State Mosque and it was built and personally supervised by His Majesty King Abdullah II in loving honour of his late father, Jordan's great King Hussein (may God have mercy on his soul). Thus, this is the first time in history that a Pope has ever visited a *new* mosque. Hence we see in this visit a clear message of the necessity of interfaith harmony and mutual respect in the *contemporary* world, as well as concrete proof of the willingness of Your Holiness to personally take a leading role in this.

This gesture is all the more remarkable given the fact that this visit to Jordan by Your Holiness is primarily a spiritual pilgrimage to the Christian Holy Land (and in particular to the Site of the Baptism of Jesus Christ [may peace be upon him] by John the Baptist [peace be upon him] at *Bethany beyond the Jordan* (John 1:28 and John 3:26), and yet Your Holiness has made time in your intense and tiring schedule — tiring for a man of any age — for this visit to the King Hussein Mosque in order to honour Muslims.

I must also thank Your Holiness for the "regret" you expressed after the Regensburg lecture of September 13<sup>th</sup> 2006, for the hurt caused by this lecture to Muslims. Of course, Muslims know that nothing said or done in this world can harm the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him), who, as his last words attested, is with the Highest Companion — God Himself — in Paradise, but Muslims were nevertheless hurt because of their love for the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him), who is, as God says in the Holy Quran, *closer to the believers than their own selves* (*Al-Ahzab*, 33:6). Hence, Muslims also especially appreciated the clarification by the Vatican that what was said in the Regensburg lecture did not reflect Your Holiness's own opinion, but rather was simply a citation in an academic lecture.

It hardly needs to be said, moreover, that the Prophet Mohammad (may peace and blessings be upon him) whom Muslims love, emulate and know as a living reality and spiritual presence, *is completely and entirely different* from the historical depictions of him in the West since St. John of Damascus. These distorted depictions by those who either do not know Arabic or the Holy Qur'an and the *Hadith*, or who do not understand the historical and cultural context of the Prophet's life — and thus misunderstand and misconstrue the spiritual motives and intentions behind many of the Prophet's (may peace and blessings be upon him) actions and words — are unfortunately responsible for much historical and cultural tension between Christians and Muslims. It is thus incumbent on Muslims to explain the Prophet's example (may peace and blessings be upon him) above all with deeds of virtue, charity, piety and goodwill; recalling that the Prophet himself (may peace and blessings be upon him) was of an *exalted standard of character* (*Al-Qalam*, 68:4). For God says in the Holy Quran:

*"Verily ye have in the Messenger of God a beautiful pattern of conduct for whosoever hopes in God and the Last Day, and remembereth God much". (Al-Ahzab, 33:21)*

Finally, I must also thank your Holiness for many other friendly gestures and kindly actions towards Muslims since your ascension in 2005 — including graciously receiving both H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein of Jordan in 2005 and H.M. King AbdAllah bin Abd Al-Aziz of Saudi Arabia, the Custodian of the Two Holy Places in 2008 — and especially for your warm reception of the historical "*A Common Word Between Us and You*" Open Letter of October 13<sup>th</sup> 2007, by 138 leading international Muslim scholars (whose numbers continue increasing to this day). It was as a result of this initiative — which, based on the Holy Qur'an and the Bible, recognised the primacy of the Love of God and Love of the Neighbour in both Christianity and Islam — that the Vatican under your personal guidance held the first seminar of the International Muslim Catholic forum from November the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> 2008. We will be shortly *Deo Volente* following up with H.E. the very able Cardinal Tauran the work initiated by this meeting, but for now, I would like to cite and echo your words from the speech your Holiness gave on the occasion of the end of the First Seminar:

"The theme which you have chosen for your meeting — "Love of God, Love of Neighbour: the Dignity of the Human Person and Mutual Respect" — is particularly significant. It was taken from the Open Letter, which presents love of God and love of the neighbour as the heart of Islam and Christianity alike. This theme highlights even more clearly the theological and spiritual foundations of a central teaching of our respective religions. ....

I am well aware that Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters regarding God. Yet we can and must be worshippers of the One God who created us and is concerned about each person in every corner of the world. ....

There is a great and vast field in which we can act together in defending and promoting the moral values which are part of our common heritage....'

Now I cannot help but remember God's words in the Holy Qur'an:

*Yet they are not all alike; some of the People of the Scripture are a community upright, who recite God's verses in the watches of the night, prostrating themselves. / They believe in God and in the Last Day, enjoining decency and forbidding indecency, vying with one another in good works; those are of the righteous. / And whatever good they do, they shall not be denied it, and God knows the God-fearing. (Aal-'Imran, 3:113-115)*

And:

*...[A]nd you will truly find the nearest of them in love to those who believe to be those who say 'Verily, we are Christians'; that is because some of them are priests and monks, and because they are not proud. (Al-Maida, 5:82)*

Second, as a Hashemite, and a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him), I also bid Your Holiness welcome to this mosque in Jordan, remembering that the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) welcomed his Christian neighbours from Najran to Medina and invited them to pray in his own Mosque, which they did, in harmony, without either side compromising their own spiritual beliefs. This, too, is an invaluable message which the world desperately needs to remember.

Third, as an Arab — a direct descendant of Ishmael (peace be upon him) of whom the Bible says God would make him *a great nation* (Genesis, 21:18) and that God *was with him* (Genesis, 21:20) — I bid Your Holiness welcome. One of the cardinal virtues of the Arabs — whom traditionally have survived in some of the hottest and most inhospitable climates in the world — is *hospitality*. Hospitality is born of generosity and it recognises the needs of the neighbour and considers those who are far or who come from afar as neighbours, and indeed this virtue is confirmed by God in the Holy Qur'an with the words:

*And worship God, and associate nothing with Him. Be kind to parents, and near kindred, and to orphans, and to the needy, and to the neighbour who is near, and to the neighbour who is a stranger, and to the friend at your side, and to the wayfarer, and to what your right hands possess. Surely God loves not the conceited, and the boastful. (Al-Nisa, 4:36)*

Arab hospitality means not only loving to give and help, but also being generous of spirit and thus appreciative. In 2000, during the late Pope John Paul II's visit to Jordan, I was working with the Jordanian Tribes, and some tribesmen were saying they really liked the late Pope. Someone asked them why they liked him, since he was a Christian and they were Muslims. They smiled and said: "because he visited us!", and of course the late Pope John Paul II, like yourself could have easily just gone to Israel and Palestine, but instead chose to start his pilgrimage with a visit to us here in Jordan, which we appreciate.

Fourth and finally, as a Jordanian, I bid Your Holiness welcome. In Jordan, everyone is equal before the law

regardless of religion, race, origin or gender, and those who work in the government are responsible to do their utmost to care for everyone in the country with compassion and with justice. This was the personal example and message of the late King Hussein who over his long reign of forty-seven years felt for everyone in the country as he did for his own children. It is also the message of his son, H.M. King Abdullah II who accordingly has made it the singular goal of his life and reign to make the life of every Jordanian — and indeed every person in the world that he can reach — as decent, dignified and happy as he possibly can with Jordan's meagre resources.

Today, Christians in Jordan enjoy, by law, 8% of the seats in Parliament and similar quotas at every level of government and society — even though their numbers are less than that in actual fact — in addition to their own personal status laws and Church courts. Their Holy Sites and legal Educational Institutes and other needs are safeguarded by the state — and Your Holiness has just seen this in person at the New Catholic University of Madaba, and will God Willing soon see the New Catholic Cathedral and the new Melkite Church at the Baptism Site — and so Christians prosper today in Jordan as they have for the last 2000 years in peace and harmony, and with goodwill and genuine brotherly relations between them and their Muslim neighbours. This is in part of course because Christians used to be more numerous in Jordan percentage-wise than they are today but declining Christian birth rates and conversely, high levels of education and prosperity (which has led to their being in demand as immigrants to the West) have reduced their numbers. It is also, however, due to the fact that Jordan appreciates that Christians were in Jordan for 600 years before Muslims. Indeed, Jordanian Christians are perhaps the oldest Christian community in the world — and the majority have always been Orthodox adherents to the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Holy Land — which, as Your Holiness knows better than I, is the Church of St. James, and was founded during Jesus's own lifetime (may peace be upon him).

Many of them are descended from the Ancient Arab Ghassanid and Lakhmid Tribes, and they have throughout history shared the fate and the struggles of their Muslim fellow tribesmen. Indeed, in 630 CE during the Prophet Muhammad's own lifetime — may peace and blessings be upon him — they joined the Prophet's own army (led by his adopted son Zeid ibn Al-Haritha and his cousin Jafar bin Abi Taleb) and fought against the Byzantine army of their fellow Orthodox at the Battle of Mutha (it is because of this battle that they earned their tribal name "*Uzaizat*" which means "the reinforcements" — and Latin Patriarch Fuad Twal himself comes from these tribes); then in 1099 CE they were slaughtered by Catholic Crusaders at the Fall of Jerusalem alongside their Muslim comrades; later from 1916-1918 CE during the Great Arab revolt they fought against the Muslim Turks alongside Arab Muslim comrades; they thereafter languished for a few decades along with their Muslim fellows under a Protestant Colonial Mandate, and in the Israeli Arab Wars of 1948, 1967 and 1968 they fought with their Muslim Arab comrades against Jewish opponents. Christian Jordanians have not only always defended Jordan, but have also tirelessly and patriotically helped to build Jordan, playing leading roles in the fields of education, health, commerce, tourism, agriculture, science, culture and many other fields. All this is to say then, that whilst

Your Holiness may believe them to be your fellow Christians, we *know* them to be our fellow Jordanians, and they are as much a part of the country as the land itself.

We hope that this unique Jordanian spirit of interfaith harmony, benevolence and mutual respect will serve as an example to the whole world, and that Your Holiness will carry it to places like Mindanao and certain parts of sub-Saharan Africa where Muslim minorities are hard-pressed by Christian majorities, as well as to other places where the opposite is the case.

Now, just as we welcome Your Holiness today in four ways, we receive Your Holiness today in four ways:

First, we receive Your Holiness as the Spiritual Leader, Supreme Pontiff and the successor of St. Peter for 1.1

billion Catholics, who are neighbours of Muslims everywhere in the world, and who we greet through receiving you.

Second, we receive Your Holiness, as Pope Benedict XVI in particular whose reign has been marked by the moral courage to do and speak his conscience, no matter what the vogue of the day; who is personally also a Master Christian Theologian responsible for historical Encyclical Letters on the beautiful cardinal virtues of Charity and Hope; who has re-facilitated the traditional Latin Mass for those who choose it, and who has

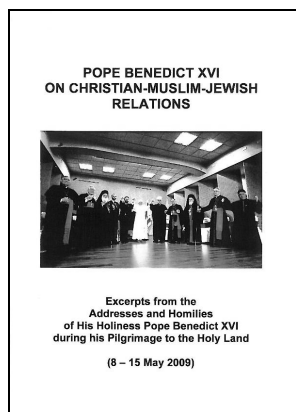
simultaneously made intra-faith and inter-faith dialogue a top priority of his reign in order to spread goodwill and understanding throughout all peoples of the world.

Third, we receive Your Holiness as a Head of State who is also a world and global leader on the vital issues of morality, ethics, the environment, peace, human dignity, the alleviation of poverty and suffering and even the global financial crisis.

Fourth and finally, we receive Your Holiness as a simple pilgrim of peace who comes in humility and gentleness to pray where Jesus Christ, the Messiah — may be peace be upon him — prayed, was baptised and began his mission two thousand years ago.

So welcome to Jordan, Your Holiness Pope Benedict XVI! God says in the Holy Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him): *Glory be to your Lord, the Lord of Might, [exalted is He] above what they allege! / And peace be to the messengers. / And praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds. (Al-Saffat, 37:180-182)*

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<http://acommonword.com/en/a-common-word/11-new-fruits-of-a-common-word/256-address-to-hh-pope-benedict-xvi-at-the-king-hussein-mosque-amman-jordan-by-hrh-prince-ghazi-bin-muhammad-bin-talal.html>



The Columban Mission Institute's *Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations* has collated excerpts from the addresses and homilies of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land that concern the relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims and published them in a small booklet (41 pages). As such, it is a wonderful compendium of contemporary papal teaching on interreligious dialogue, particularly as it applies to the Middle East. Since this is where all three religions originated, achieving peace here brings the hope of peace flowing out to the rest of the world.

The booklet is available from the Centre. To order please contact Pauline Rae on 02 9352 8011 or [paulinerae.cmi@columban.org.au](mailto:paulinerae.cmi@columban.org.au)

## POPE BENEDICT XVI'S RESPONSE TO PRINCE GHAZI

It is a source of great joy for me to meet with you this morning in this magnificent setting. I wish to thank Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammed Bin Talal for his kind words of welcome. Your Royal Highness's numerous initiatives to promote inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue and exchanges are appreciated by the people of the Hashemite Kingdom and they are widely respected by the international community. I know that these efforts receive the active support of other members of the Royal Family as well as the nation's government, and find ample resonance in the many initiatives of collaboration among Jordanians. For all this, I wish to express my own heartfelt admiration.

Places of worship, like this splendid Al-Hussein Bin Talal mosque named after the revered late King, stand out like jewels across the earth's surface. From the ancient to the modern, the magnificent to the humble, they all point to the divine, to the Transcendent One, to the Almighty. And through the centuries these sanctuaries have drawn

men and women into their sacred space to pause, to pray, to acknowledge the presence of the Almighty, and to recognize that we are all his creatures.

For this reason we cannot fail to be concerned that today, with increasing insistency, some maintain that religion fails in its claim to be, by nature, a builder of unity and harmony, an expression of communion between persons and with God. Indeed some assert that religion is necessarily a cause of division in our world; and so they argue that the less attention given to religion in the public sphere the better. Certainly, the contradiction of tensions and divisions between the followers of different religious traditions, sadly, cannot be denied. However, is it not also the case that often it is the ideological manipulation of religion, sometimes for political ends, that is the real catalyst for tension and division, and at times even violence in society? In the face of this situation, where the opponents of religion seek not simply to silence its voice but to replace it with

their own, the need for believers to be true to their principles and beliefs is felt all the more keenly. 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.

The resolve of Jordanian educators and religious and civic leaders to ensure that the public face of religion reflects its true nature is praiseworthy. The example of individuals and communities, together with the provision of courses and programs, manifest the constructive contribution of religion to the educational, cultural, social and other charitable sectors of your civic society. Some of this spirit I have been able to sample at first hand. Yesterday, I experienced the renowned educational and rehabilitation work of the Our Lady of Peace Centre where Christians and Muslims are transforming the lives of entire families, by assisting them to ensure that their disabled children take up their rightful place in society. Earlier this morning, I blessed the foundation stone of Madaba University where young Muslim and Christian adults will side by side receive the benefits of a tertiary education, enabling them to contribute justly to the social and economic development of their nation. Of great merit too are the numerous initiatives of inter-religious dialogue supported by the Royal Family and the diplomatic community and sometimes undertaken in conjunction with the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. These include the ongoing work of the Royal Institutes for Inter-faith studies and for Islamic Thought, the *Amman Message* of 2004, the *Amman Interfaith Message* of 2005, and the more recent *Common Word* letter which echoed a theme consonant with my first encyclical: the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbor, and the fundamental contradiction of resorting to violence or exclusion in the name of God (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 16).

Such initiatives clearly lead to greater reciprocal knowledge, and they foster a growing respect both for what we hold in common and for what we understand differently. Thus, they should prompt Christians and Muslims to probe even more deeply the essential relationship between God and his world so that together we may strive to ensure that society resonates in harmony with the divine order. In this regard, the co-operation found here in Jordan sets an encouraging and persuasive example for the region, and indeed the world, of the positive, creative contribution which religion can and must make to civic society.

Distinguished friends, today I wish to refer to a task which I have addressed on a number of occasions and which I firmly believe Christians and Muslims can embrace, particularly through our respective contributions to learning and scholarship, and public service. That task is the challenge to cultivate for the good, in the context of faith and truth, the vast potential of human reason. Christians in fact describe God, among other ways, as creative Reason, which orders and guides the world. And God endows us with the capacity to participate in his reason and thus to act in accordance with what is good. 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.

Before I leave you this morning I would like to acknowledge in a special way the presence among us of His Beatitude Emmanuel III Delly, Patriarch of Baghdad, whom I greet most warmly. His presence brings to mind the people of neighboring Iraq many of whom have found welcome refuge here in Jordan. The international community's efforts to promote peace and reconciliation, together with those of the local leaders, must continue in order to bear fruit in the lives of Iraqis. I wish to express my appreciation for all those who are assisting in the endeavors to deepen trust and to rebuild the institutions and infrastructure essential to the well-being of that society. And once again, I urge diplomats and the international community they represent together with local political and religious leaders to do everything possible to ensure the ancient Christian community of that noble land its fundamental right to peaceful coexistence with their fellow citizens.

Distinguished friends, I trust that the sentiments I have expressed today will leave us with renewed hope for the future. Our love and duty before the Almighty is expressed not only in our worship but also in our love and concern for children and young people – your families – and for all Jordanians. It is for them that you labor and it is they who motivate you to place the good of every human person at the heart of institutions, laws and the workings of society. May reason, ennobled and humbled by the grandeur of God's truth, continue to shape the life and institutions of this nation, in order that families may flourish and that all may live in peace, contributing to and drawing upon the culture that unifies this great Kingdom! Thank you very much!

Source Vatican Website  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20090509\\_capi-musulmani\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090509_capi-musulmani_en.html)

**WHAT'S COMING UP**

**July**

**5<sup>th</sup> "Interfaith Issues: Diversity and Challenge in the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India today"**

Speaker: **Dr. Geoff Oddie**, formerly Senior Lecturer in Indian history in the University of Sydney, and author of *Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793 to 1900*.  
 Venue: All Saints Anglican Church Hall, Ambrose Street, Hunters Hill  
 Time: 3.30pm for 4pm  
 Refreshments before and after.  
 Donation.

**19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> National Social Cohesion Conference**

**19<sup>th</sup> SYMPOSIUM – Challenging Islamophobia: towards social justice & inclusion**

Time: 7pm to 9:30pm  
 Venue: Auditorium, Law Building, Sydney University  
 Cost: \$15  
 Registrations: [info@affinity.org.au](mailto:info@affinity.org.au); [www.affinity.org.au](http://www.affinity.org.au); or 02 9702 0789

**20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> CONFERENCE:**

**Day 1**

Time: 8.30am – 4.30pm

**Day 2**

Time: 9.10am – 5pm

Venue: Room 022, Law School Building, Eastern Avenue, Camperdown Campus, Sydney University

Registrations: [info@affinity.org.au](mailto:info@affinity.org.au); [www.affinity.org.au](http://www.affinity.org.au); or 02 9702 0789



**August**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sydney Pre-Parliament Event**

Venue: Lachlan's Garden Marquee, Old Government House Parramatta Park Cnr Macquarie & Pitt Street Parramatta

Time: 10.00am – 4.00pm  
 Cost: \$20 (including light vegetarian lunch)  
 Registrations: [kmoroney@ncca.org.au](mailto:kmoroney@ncca.org.au)

**18<sup>th</sup> Pre-Parliament of World Religions Event**

**"Many Faiths One Humanity: A Professional Development Seminar on Interfaith Education for Justice and Peace"**

Venue: Christian Brothers High School 68 The Boulevard Lewisham

Time: 9am – 3pm

Cost: \$30

For more information please contact Donna Mulhearn on 02 9810 3922.

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