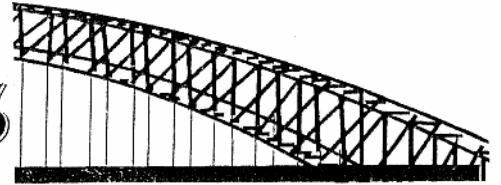


BRIDGES



A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM NETWORK

Sponsored by the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

Number 28

November 2004

TO ALL OUR READERS

May the Peace and Joy of Christmas be Yours
as we sing with the angels at the birth of Jesus
Glory to God in the Highest
And peace on earth to all people of goodwill

Editorial

Over the last couple of years Christmastide has rather closely paralleled the celebration of Eid, at the conclusion of the month of Ramadan. But this year Eid was celebrated on 11th-13th November. Those of us who have been able to join our Muslim friends at *itfar* (breaking of the fast) or visit homes during this season, are conscious of the privilege this is, and have been enriched by the experience. Celebrations centred on a meal, have a deep spiritual significance for both Christians and Muslims, another of the things we have in common.

While we have been coming together in friendship and celebration, we are nevertheless aware of those parts of the world where Eid has been marked by fear or sorrow or even terror. We have only to look to Palestine and Iraq to know Eid has not been a time of joy and happy celebration for many Muslims or Christians. And, unfortunately, even here in Australia, the joy of Eid was marred for Muslims in Melbourne. On the very night that 250 Catholics and Muslims gathered for *itfar*, on 10th November, the Isak Turkish Muslim School at Broadmeadows was set on fire.

Although relationships between Christians and Muslims in Australia are undoubtedly closer and warmer than they have ever been, we are aware of the elements within our community who do not share this goal. And some of them will be singing Christmas carols in the next few weeks, many of which will include some form of the Angels announcement to the shepherds at Jesus' birth, "Glory to God in the highest and peace to all of goodwill." It is the inability to see and recognise goodwill in those who differ from us which leads to intolerance and conflict.

In the interview with Archbishop Fitzgerald in this Issue, to recognise the good whether it be in another faith or one's own, along with the capacity to critique elements in one's own faith or another, is evident. This is an attitude we all need to develop. Unfortunately, our tendency, sometimes, is to uphold the good in our own and resist critique, while critiquing the other and denying the good.

Among the Items of Interest are examples of the positive effects of acknowledging the goodwill extended by Muslims and Christians towards each other: the shared UNESCO Peace Prize received by the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mustafa Ceric, and Cardinal Roger Etchegaray; the action of Abdurrahman Wahid on behalf of Indonesian Catholics and the "conversion" that can take place through involvement in initiatives such as the Journey Promise.

Maybe we can make our New Year's Resolution a Christmas one this year - to create peace around us and to show goodwill to all people.

Pauline Rae smsm

Bridges

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Comments and insights are very welcome

Items of Interest

UNESCO PEACE PRIZE

The retired president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, and the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mustafa Ceric, jointly received the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize from UNESCO. The award was instituted in 1991 to "honour persons in their lifetime, and public or private institutions that have made a significant contribution to the promotion, search and preservation of peace, in keeping with the United Nations Charter and UNESCO's Constitution. In presenting the prize, former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger said, "These two religious personalities have been chosen in recognition of their action in favour of interfaith dialogue, tolerance and peace. ... The jury (awarding the prize) believes reconciliation of religious views to be one of the great challenges of our age."

Last year, Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric, was the international guest at the Christian, Muslim and Jewish international conference in Melbourne. Originally he was also scheduled to speak in Sydney, but due to unforeseen circumstances he had to cancel this engagement.

A LOCAL INITIATIVE

In the rural city of Shepparton in Victoria, the local inter-Church Council has for some time worked with people from Albania and Iraq, accepting and supporting them in whatever ways seemed best. Then the school hostage crisis in Beslan in North Ossetia filled the world with horror. In Shepparton the local Ministers' Association, approached Mgr Peter Jeffrey and asked what local response to the tragedy in Beslan would be possible. As a result of a meeting between the two groups a committee has been established composed of members from each of the church groups and the leader of the Iraqi community in Shepparton.

As with so many other small seeds of interfaith relations that have germinated across our country in the last decade, this will also enable the people of the refugee communities and the church communities in Shepparton to come together.

CLOSURE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL CONDEMNED

Speaking before Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid criticised the forced closure by local Muslim militants of St Bernadette Catholic School in Cileduk, near Jakarta. He challenged the local mayor to reopen the school, adding that if such action was not taken he would bring the matter to the court. Speaking to journalists, he stressed that the perpetrators of the attack against the Catholic school violated Indonesia's constitution. "Every Indonesian citizen has the right to express his or her religious beliefs and the state has a duty to facilitate it," he said.

The former president urged all Indonesians to oppose the fundamentalists and fight any form of religious intolerance.

BOTH MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE IN IRAQ

In the face of the attacks and kidnappings taking place in Iraq, the Chaldean Patriarch of Baghdad appealed for aid and prayers. Commenting on the cold-blooded killing of several Christians, the Patriarch said, "The violence strikes Christians and Muslims. Muslims are kidnapped and killed. In these harsh and dark days, the destiny is common for both

communities. ... We are one family and we must work together so that peace will prevail in a country tormented for many years.

Zenit 06 October 2004

POPE WELCOMED IRAQI PRIME MINISTER

In his meeting with Mr Ayad Allawi, Prime Minister of Iraq, the Pope assured him of his constant prayer for all victims of terrorism and wanton violence, for their families, and for all who are working for the reconstruction of Iraq. He endorsed and encouraged the efforts of the people to establish democratic institutions which will be representative and committed to defend the rights of all, in complete respect for the ethnic and religious diversity which has always been a source of enrichment for the country. He added, "I am confident that the Christian community, present in Iraq from Apostolic times, will make its own contribution to the growth of democracy and the building of a future of peace in the region."

THE ART OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

2005 will be the 40th anniversary of the Vatican Council's document on interreligious dialogue, *Nostra Aetate*. On October 28 a conference in Rome was the first of many events to celebrate this. Speakers at the Roman conference included Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Archbishop Michael Miller, secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education. On the same day an exhibit opened consisting of 50 small etchings inspired by the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, by Roman artist Vittorio Pavoncello. Figurative art does not play a large role in Jewish tradition. The Chief Rabbi of Rome pointed out that when interacting with the sacred, sight is not usually the first form of contact. "Hearing is the primary sense and vision is secondary". While the Christian tradition is highly visual, with a rich body of figurative art underlining the visibility of the Divine in Jesus, and the Jewish tradition is auditory, dwelling on the voice or call of God, both people have a common desire: They are "the generation that longs to see Your face" (Psalm 24:6)

REFLECTION ON "JOURNEY OF PROMISE"

Like some Catholics, I've looked at interfaith dialogue with caution. I assumed that interfaith dialogue was fuelled by an agenda which said that all religions were the same and, therefore, as good as each other. With this preconception, I felt a little defensive about the concept, as I figured it would undermine the need for Christ and his Church and ultimately, my identity as a Catholic.

However, I knew that many people, including Pope John Paul II, were extolling the virtue of dialogue with those of different faiths. After spending a week with 10 Muslims, 10 Jews and 9 Christians ... I have come to understand that interfaith dialogue does not seek to blur the fundamental differences between religions, but rather starts with the premise that we all have something to learn about God, and we can learn holiness from each other."

Realising that the Muslims and Jews I met on the camp were good and holy people, and could teach me a thing or two about the nature of God and (indirectly) about the identity of Jesus, was humbling. While Christ and the Church are "the way", I discovered that although I am Catholic, individually, I don't possess the whole "truth". Like everyone, I am on a journey, and grow when I take time to listen.

*Kirrily McDermott of St Patrick's Parish Parramatta
Quoted in Aust. Bishops' Social Justice Statement '04, p. 06.*

A Bridge Across the Divide

Excerpts from an interview by Austen Ivereigh with Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue – “The Tablet” 09 October 2004

Never has the future of the globe seemed to hinge so starkly on relations between Christianity and Islam. If Christians and Muslims can build bridges, and dissociate their faiths from violence committed in the name of God, then the world may yet know peace.

This makes Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, in charge of the Vatican's relations with other faiths, a very important man. He is one of the Church's foremost experts on Islam.

Commenting on that morning's radio debate on “Islamic terrorism”, Ivereigh said, “He surprised me at once by not rejecting it.” Fitzgerald remarked that the program of Al Qaeda “is not just to gain power but to install an Islamic regime. It is carried out in the name of religion. This is what makes Islamic terrorism different from the Shining Path, say, or the IRA or Eta.” The difficulty is “the globalising vision of Islam”, the idea that “Islam embraces the whole of society, and not just as principles that you are given to apply, but as precepts.” This was a major difference with Christianity – and a stumbling block to dialogue.

The difference between the two faiths lies in their “founders”, he explains. Whereas Jesus is the Son of God but never had secular power or authority, Muhammad “was the head of the community he founded, so the religious and the secular authority went together”. Later they became divided, “but in him, they were together.”

“It is a recurring theme in Islamic history”, says Fitzgerald, “that movements constantly rise up to tell people they must get back to the “true” Islam, harking back to an imagined golden era of the ‘rightly guided caliphs’, before the *Umayyads* came to power, who were accused of being too kingly. In the past these movements were circumscribed to particular areas”, Fitzgerald says. “But it's one effect of globalisation that they are connected now”.

The Pontifical Council can point to some fruits of its dialogue with Muslims: the International Islamic Committee for Relief, a large mainstream Muslim organization, has created an international “Committee for Dialogue”, while Cairo's Al-Azhar Institute – dubbed the “Vatican of the Islamic world” – has created a permanent committee for dialogue with the other monotheistic religions. Both happened as a result of contacts with the Church.

But this is not a business in which progress is easily measured. Religious leaders meet to issue declarations condemning violence while extremists let off bombs in the name of Allah. Interreligious dialogue is slow, patient, and seldom newsworthy work.

The Pontifical Council grew from the once frosty soil broken by the Second Vatican Council's statement on other faiths, *Nostra Aetate*, forty years ago. The church “rejects nothing of what is true and holy” in other religions. The Church has a “high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although

differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth with enlightens all.”

That approach – respectful but not uncritical – guides the Council. “We should not be afraid to take a critical stance with regard to other religions,” he said, “as long as we are ready, at the same time, to acknowledge the many beautiful and noble elements they contain.”

When asked what he admired in Islam, Fitzgerald replied: “There is a great sense of community which can have its negative points in that it limits individual freedom, but opposed to our individualistic approach it has great benefits. I think there is a kind of egalitarianism – you just have to line up, there's no preference given, or certain sections reserved to certain people.”

His study of Islamic spirituality showed him that it was a “bit like reading the Desert Fathers.” The mystical strain in Islam demands a dissociation of anything with God – not just idols but ambition, or self-interest; it can go very far.” But “the orthodox Islamic ideal is really to have a nearness to God rather than intimacy or union with God,” he says.

“The real distinction between Christianity and Islam is the Incarnation: God becomes a human being so that we can become divine. In Islam you don't have a concept – although you have a reality, I would argue – of sanctifying grace, of sharing in divine life.”

The question of the relationship between interreligious dialogue and the proclamation of the Gospel is a complex one. Reconciling proclamation and dialogue is not easy, either in theory or in practice. They are clearly distinct, says Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, but at the same time connected. Fitzgerald suggests that the connection can be expressed thus: “Dialogue always contains something of proclamation, in that Christians entering into dialogue are called to witness to Christ, by their life first, and then, if judged appropriate, in words; whereas, proclamation, to be effective, must always be undertaken in a spirit of dialogue.”

Fitzgerald told a recent gathering of priests that some 10 percent of converts to Catholicism in France were of a Muslim background. Muslims became Catholics, he said, because of the attractiveness of the figure of Jesus – who appears in the Qur'an as a prophet – or of Christian forgiveness. Many are attracted by freedom beyond the law and a personal intimacy with God. On the other hand, he told me, Catholics become Muslims because they were “often looking for security. They say: ‘Islam is clear, it is a simple religion, we know where we stand – and that's what I want.’”

The model for dialogue, Fitzgerald said, was the Trinity – three divine persons perfectly united, yet remaining distinct. No one is excluded from God's love: “through the Incarnation, the Son of God has come into contact with every single member of the human race. This means that we are able to meet Christ in the other, to whatever the religion that other may belong.”

BOOK REVIEW

Ozalp, Mehmet. *101 Questions You Asked About Islam*. Blackheath, NSW: Brandl & Schlesinger, 2004 (pages 350).

This book, launched in Sydney on the 13th October 2004, is worth reading for three reasons.

1. It relates the questions Australians are asking about Islam.

In recent years thousands of Australians have visited the Gallipoli Mosque at Auburn in Sydney. Seeking knowledge and understanding about Islam and Muslims, they asked questions - showing their interest, curiosity, at times ignorance, and occasionally even being offensive to their hosts. Muslim tour guides noted and collated all their questions. Accordingly, readers will find in this book the "real questions" they - or their neighbors - are asking about Islam and Muslims.

2. It details the answers a Muslim gives to his fellow Australians.

The author researched each topic and presents his answers with reference to the Holy Qur'an, the Traditions of the Prophet, and other sources. His replies are a personal testimony of faith by an Australian Muslim who conducts courses on Islam. His conversational style makes for easy reading, and his moderate confessional approach is a welcome antidote to the sensationalized media stereo-types that are all too common in the popular mind.

3. It raises more questions than it answers.

Do his answers satisfy? There is scholarship in his work but it is not a work of critical scholarship. The question-answer format tends to a positivist, rationalist approach, but some issues need more than the clinical answers this allows. His soothing positive manner counterbalances the more strident polemical voices, but misses the genuine grievances that continue to affect the relationship between believers from the two religions.

Ozalp presents his personal view of Islam. Muslim readers might ask whether and how this accords with their own view, with traditional teaching, with contemporary scholarship? Ozalp also presents his views on other religions. Readers from those religions might similarly ask whether they are accurately presented?

I highlight the importance of precision in the use of language by one example. Ozalp asserts: "According to Islam, only God has divinity." (p. 42) Christians readily agree with this statement. He then asserts that the Holy Spirit is 'a created being without divinity.' Christians respectfully disagree. The disagreement is clarified by the footnote on the previous page: "the Holy Spirit in Islam is believed to be the Archangel Gabriel." Christians agree that the Archangel Gabriel is 'a created being without divinity' - but when Christians talk about "the Holy Spirit" they are not referring to the Archangel Gabriel. So Muslims and Christians are using the very same words to refer to two different realities. Ozalp's supposed refutation of the divinity of 'the Holy Spirit' refutes what Christians also refute, but does not address what Christians actually believe. Readers are advised that there is similar imprecision and misunderstanding in the treatment of other core Christian beliefs - the identity and role of Christ, incarnation, Trinity.

Besides Christian theology, the questions cover a wide range of other topics - Islamics, philosophy, comparative religions, history and so on. Given the precision and expertise that each of these disciplines requires, Ozalp's answers would have been enhanced by wider consultation or by contributions from experts in the more specialized technical areas.

Conclusion: After reading *101 Questions*, the discerning reader will have an insight into the faith and mindset of a committed Muslim, thus provoking many further questions, and motivating Christians and Muslims to develop a more accurate understanding and appreciation of their own and each others' faiths.

Patrick J. McInerney

For Your Diary

The Destiny of Mankind

*ANZ Theatre, Australian National Maritime Museum
2 Murray Street, Darling Harbour
Friday 10 December 7.00 pm*

Imam Zaid Shakir of Zaytuna Institute, California.
Dr Tracey Rowland, Dean of John Paul II Institute for
Marriage & Family, Melbourne.

For further information contact: 9488884

Email: paulinemrae@hotmail.com

inter-faith@accsoft.com

mozalp@affinity.org.au

Introducing Islam A Summer School,

January 12 – 18, 2005

9.30 am – 4.00 pm weekend excluded.

Catholic Institute of Sydney, 99 Albert Road, Strathfield.

Fr Patrick McInerney, Sr Pauline Rae and Muslim guest
speakers.

Registration closes: 15 December 2004

Phone: (02) 9752 9500; fax: (02) 9746 6022

Email: cisinfo@cis.catholic.edu.au

Web: www.cis.catholic.edu.au



BUILDING GOOD RELATIONS

With People Of Different Faiths And Beliefs

The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom

In Britain today, people of many different faiths and beliefs live side by side. The opportunity lies before us to work together to build a society rooted in the values we treasure. But this society can only be built on a sure foundation of mutual respect, openness and trust. This means finding ways to live our lives of faith with integrity, and allowing others to do so too. Our different religious traditions offer us many resources for this and teach us the importance of good relationships characterised by honesty, compassion and generosity of spirit. The Inter Faith Network offers the following code of conduct for encouraging and strengthening these relationships.

As members of the human family, we should show each other respect and courtesy.

In our dealing with people of other faiths and beliefs this means exercising good will and:

- Respecting other people's freedom within the law to express their beliefs and convictions
- Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms
- Respecting the convictions of others about food, dress and social etiquette and not behaving in ways which cause needless offence
- Recognising that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our own traditions and never comparing our own ideals with other people's practices
- Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict
- Always seeking to avoid violence in our relationships

When we talk about matters of faith with one another, we need to do so with sensitivity, honesty and straightforwardness. This means:

- Recognising that listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine conversation
- Being honest about our beliefs and religious allegiances
- Not misrepresenting or disparaging other people's beliefs and practices
- Correcting misunderstanding or misrepresentations not only of our own but also of other faiths whenever we come across them
- Being straightforward about our intentions
- Accepting that in formal inter-faith meetings there is a particular responsibility to ensure that the religious commitment of all those who are present will be respected

All of us want others to understand and respect our views. Some people will also want to persuade others to join their faith. In a multi-faith society where this is permitted, the attempt should always be characterised by self-restraint and a concern for the other's freedom and dignity. This means:

- Respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone
- Avoiding imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities who are in vulnerable situations in ways which exploit these
- Being sensitive and courteous
- Avoiding violent action or language, threats, manipulation, improper inducements, or the misuse of any kind of power
- Respecting the right of others to disagree with us

Living and working together is not always easy. Religion harnesses deep emotions which can sometimes take destructive forms. Where this happens, we must draw on our faith to bring about reconciliation and understanding. *The truest fruits of religion are healing and positive.* We have a great deal to learn from one another which can enrich us without undermining our own identities.

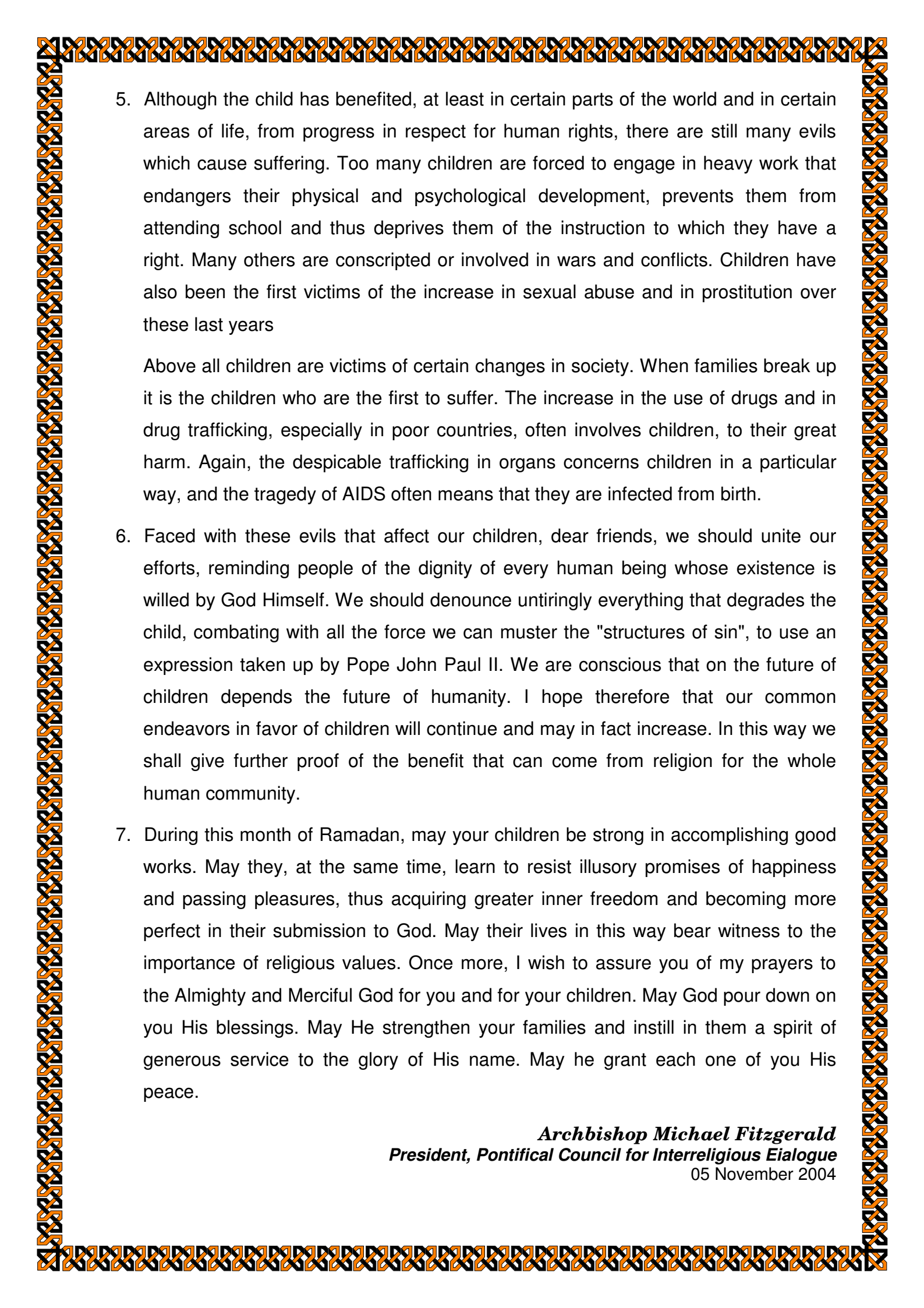
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**Children, Gift of God for the Future of Humanity
Vatican's Message for End of Ramadan
November 2004**

Dear Friends,

1. This year again, at the time when you are preparing to celebrate 'Id al-Fitr at the end of the month of Ramadan, I wish to offer you very best wishes on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the office of His Holiness the Pope for relations with people of other religions. In their prayers many Christians have been thinking about you and accompanying you during this month of fasting, a month which occupies such an important place in the life of your community. At the earliest age possible you teach your children to observe this month of fasting, thus developing in them a sense of God and a spirit of religious obedience, at the same time helping them to train their will and to acquire self-discipline. In this way the family is, par excellence, the place where your children receive their first religious education.
2. Today I would like to call attention to children in general and to the welcome they should receive, at different moments of their life, from their parents, their family and from society. Every child has an inalienable right to life and, in so far as this is possible, to be welcomed within a natural, stable family. All children have moreover the right to nourishment, clothing and protection, and furthermore to be educated so that there may develop in them, and that later they may develop in themselves, all their capacities. In this perspective the child, when sick or victim of an accident, has the right to receive all necessary care. The life of the child, just as the life of every human person, is sacred.
3. You consider the child to be a blessing from God, in particular for the parents. As Christians we share with you this religious attitude, but our Christian faith teaches us also to discover in the child a model for our relationship with God. Jesus has given us as an example the child's simplicity and trust, docility and liveliness, showing us in this way how we should live in trusting submission to God.
4. On several occasions these last years representatives of the Holy See and of countries with a Muslim majority have defended together in international fora fundamental human values. It was often a matter of defending the rights of those who are the weakest, and notably the family as the natural environment in which children are nurtured and their rights are better preserved.

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5. Although the child has benefited, at least in certain parts of the world and in certain areas of life, from progress in respect for human rights, there are still many evils which cause suffering. Too many children are forced to engage in heavy work that endangers their physical and psychological development, prevents them from attending school and thus deprives them of the instruction to which they have a right. Many others are conscripted or involved in wars and conflicts. Children have also been the first victims of the increase in sexual abuse and in prostitution over these last years

Above all children are victims of certain changes in society. When families break up it is the children who are the first to suffer. The increase in the use of drugs and in drug trafficking, especially in poor countries, often involves children, to their great harm. Again, the despicable trafficking in organs concerns children in a particular way, and the tragedy of AIDS often means that they are infected from birth.

6. Faced with these evils that affect our children, dear friends, we should unite our efforts, reminding people of the dignity of every human being whose existence is willed by God Himself. We should denounce untiringly everything that degrades the child, combating with all the force we can muster the "structures of sin", to use an expression taken up by Pope John Paul II. We are conscious that on the future of children depends the future of humanity. I hope therefore that our common endeavors in favor of children will continue and may in fact increase. In this way we shall give further proof of the benefit that can come from religion for the whole human community.
7. During this month of Ramadan, may your children be strong in accomplishing good works. May they, at the same time, learn to resist illusory promises of happiness and passing pleasures, thus acquiring greater inner freedom and becoming more perfect in their submission to God. May their lives in this way bear witness to the importance of religious values. Once more, I wish to assure you of my prayers to the Almighty and Merciful God for you and for your children. May God pour down on you His blessings. May He strengthen your families and instill in them a spirit of generous service to the glory of His name. May he grant each one of you His peace.

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald
President, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
05 November 2004