



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 5 May 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Continuing our discussion of interreligious dialogue, today we will reflect on dialogue with Muslims, who “together with us adore the one, merciful God” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 16; cf. *CCC*, n. 841). The Church has a high regard for them, convinced that their faith in the transcendent God contributes to building a new human family based on the highest aspirations of the human heart.

Muslims, like Jews and Christians, see the figure of Abraham as a model of unconditional submission to the decrees of God (*Nostra aetate*, n. 3). Following Abraham's example, the faithful strive to give God his rightful place in their lives as the origin, teacher, guide and ultimate destiny of all beings (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Message to Muslims for the end of Ramadan, 1417/1997*). This human docility and openness to God's will is translated into an attitude of prayer which expresses the existential condition of every person before the Creator.

Along the path marked out by Abraham in his submission to the divine will, we find his descendant, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, who is also devoutly invoked by Muslims, especially in popular piety.

2. We Christians joyfully recognize the religious values we have in common with Islam. Today I would like to repeat what I said to young Muslims some years ago in Casablanca: “We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection” (*Insegnamenti*, VIII/2, [1985], p. 497). The patrimony of revealed texts in the Bible speaks unanimously of the oneness of God. Jesus himself reaffirms it, making Israel's profession his own: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (*Mk* 12:29; cf. *Dt* 6:4-5). This oneness is

also affirmed in the words of praise that spring from the heart of the Apostle Paul: "To the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 *Tm* 1:17).

We know that in the light of the full Revelation in Christ, this mysterious oneness cannot be reduced to a numerical unity. The Christian mystery leads us to contemplate in God's substantial unity the persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: each possesses the divine substance whole and indivisible, but each is distinct from the other by virtue of their reciprocal relations.

3. Their relations in no way compromise the oneness of God, as the Fourth Lateran Council explains (1215): "Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature.... It does not generate, is not begotten and does not proceed" (DS 804). 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 compenetration (*perichoresis*) of the three divine Persons is not something added to their unity but is its most profound and characteristic expression.

On the other hand, we should not forget that the Trinitarian monotheism distinctive of Christianity is a mystery inaccessible to human reason, which is nevertheless called to accept the revelation of God's inmost nature (cf. *CCC*, n. 237).

4. Interreligious dialogue which leads to a deeper knowledge and esteem for others is a great sign of hope (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Message to Muslims for the end of Ramadan*, 1418/1998). The Christian and Muslim traditions both have a long history of study, philosophical and theological reflection, literature and science, which have left their mark on Eastern and Western cultures. The worship of the one God, Creator of all, encourages us to increase our knowledge of one another in the future.

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.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I extend a special welcome to the members of the Catholic Biblical Federation who are celebrating the Federation's 30th anniversary, and I encourage you to do all you can to ensure that the inexhaustible riches of God's word become ever more truly the heart of the prayer and daily lives of Christ's faithful. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, the Philippines, Japan and the United States of America, I invoke the joy and peace of the risen Saviour.

Attending the General Audience were His Beatitude Jean-Pierre XVIII, Patriarch of Cilicia for Armenians, and the Bishops of the Armenian Catholic Church, who were holding a Synod at the Vatican. The Pope expressed his best wishes to the prelates in French:

Dear Brother Bishops of the Armenian Catholic Church,

As you hold a Synod at the Vatican dedicated to important issues in the life of your communities, the Church is grateful to your people for their witness of fidelity to Christ, and she rejoices over the celebration of the 1,700th anniversary of your evangelization. It is with courage, faith, enthusiasm and prayer that you have been called to new apostolic fervour. Your people are expecting a bold word and concrete actions which confirm it.

I offer my wish for fruitful work to His Beatitude Jean-Pierre XVIII, Patriarch of Cilicia for Armenians, and to all the Bishops, and I invoke upon them the help of the Holy Spirit, praying that he will give strength and courage to the Armenian Catholic community at this important turning-point in its history.

At the General Audience, the Holy Father spoke of the meeting under way at the United Nations headquarters in New York, USA, on implementation of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo:

In these days an important meeting is being held at the United Nations headquarters in New York on the implementation of the decisions taken at the Cairo Conference in 1994.

At that time the Holy See had insistently stated that the human person must be put at the centre of every development programme. This means that the solution of population problems must respect the dignity of every human being and, at the same time, promote his fundamental rights, first of all

the right to life. To this should be added the right to health and education, involving the family in its irreplaceable role as teacher of human, spiritual and moral values.

Five years after the International Conference on Population and Development, Governments must renew the commitments they signed to ensure genuine and lasting human development.