
Text of Pope's speech

The following is the text of Pope Benedict XVI's speech to Muslim envoys, in which the pontiff tried to defuse tensions between the Catholic Church and Islam over comments he made earlier this month in southern Germany.

I am pleased to welcome you to this gathering that I wanted to arrange in order to strengthen the bonds of friendship and solidarity between the Holy See and Muslim communities throughout the world.

I thank Cardinal Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, for the words that he has just addressed to me, and I thank all of you for responding to my invitation.

The circumstances which have given rise to our gathering are well known. I have already had occasion to dwell upon them in the course of the past week.

In this particular context, I should like to reiterate today all the esteem and the profound respect that I have for Muslim believers, calling to mind the words of the Second Vatican Council which for the Catholic Church are the Magna Carta of Muslim-Christian dialogue:

"The Church looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God" (Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 3).

Placing myself firmly within this perspective, I have had occasion, since the very beginning of my pontificate, to express my wish to continue establishing bridges of friendship with the adherents of all religions, showing particular appreciation for the growth of dialogue between Muslims and Christians (cf. Address to the Delegates of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Other Religious Traditions, 25 April 2005).

As I underlined at Cologne last year, "Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra.

"It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends" (Meeting with Representatives of Some Muslim Communities, Cologne, 20 August 2005).

In a world marked by relativism and too often excluding the transcendence and universality of reason, we are in great need of an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures, capable of assisting us, in a spirit of fruitful co-operation, to overcome all the tensions together.

Continuing, then, the work undertaken by my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, I sincerely pray that the relations of trust which have developed between Christians and Muslims over several years, will not only continue, but will develop further in a spirit of sincere and respectful dialogue, based on ever more authentic reciprocal knowledge which, with joy, recognises the religious values that we have in common and, with loyalty, respects the differences.

Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is a necessity for building together this world of peace and fraternity ardently desired by all people of good will.

In this area, our contemporaries expect from us an eloquent witness to show all people the value of the religious dimension of life.

Likewise, faithful to the teachings of their own religious traditions, Christians and Muslims must learn to work together, as indeed they already do in many common undertakings, in order to guard against all forms of intolerance and to oppose all manifestations of violence; as for us, religious authorities and political leaders, we must guide and encourage them in this direction.

Indeed, "although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, the Council urges all parties that, forgetting past things, they train themselves towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people" (Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, 3).

The lessons of the past must therefore help us to seek paths of reconciliation, in order to live with respect for the identity and freedom of each individual, with a view to fruitful co-operation in the service of all humanity.

As Pope John Paul II said in his memorable speech to young people at Casablanca in Morocco: "Respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom. They favour peace and agreement between peoples" (no. 5).

Dear friends, I am profoundly convinced that in the current world situation it is imperative that Christians and Muslims engage with one another in order to address the numerous challenges that present themselves to humanity, especially those concerning the defence and promotion of the dignity of the human person and of the rights ensuing from that dignity.

When threats mount up against people and against peace, by recognising the central character of the human person and by working with perseverance to see that human life is always respected, Christians and Muslims manifest their obedience to the Creator, who wishes all people to live in the dignity that he has bestowed upon them.

Dear friends, I pray with my whole heart that the merciful God will guide our steps along the paths of an ever more authentic mutual understanding.

At this time when for Muslims the spiritual journey of the month of Ramadan is beginning, I address to all of them my cordial good wishes, praying that the Almighty may grant them serene and peaceful lives. May the God of peace fill you with the abundance of his blessings, together with the communities that you represent.

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