

THE CATHEDRAL ADDRESS/GERMANY

Bishop of Aachen,
Friends and Colleagues,
Gentlemen,

Firstly I should like to thank you for your kind invitation and warm welcome; this is not for the first time, since we have already been your guests on an earlier occasion when you received us at the Cathedral.

When we speak of the many areas of belief and experience that we share in common, we are not merely hiding behind a verbal courtesy or attempting to cover up certain periods in our past during which relations were not as they should be. For centuries there were military confrontations between the armies of our two sides, and rebuttals and refutations were issued in Latin, Greek and Arabic against the other side's faith, beliefs and traditions.

Relations between our religions experienced numerous ups and downs. Sometimes there was peace and co-operation, while at other times there was antipathy and conflict. This cannot be denied or forgotten. Indeed, there are lessons to be learnt from past experience; one of the distinctive things about us as human beings is an ability to profit from experiences, learn from mistakes and benefit from the higher values embodied in the true religions and schools of ethics. The Holy Qur'an says: "O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes that you may know each other."

In the view of the Qur'an, then, "knowing each other" is the key to relationships between people. And since the Qur'an is the Muslims' Revealed and Sacred Book, and therefore binding upon everyone who believes that Islam is the True Faith, all Muslims are required to extend recognition to the "different other".

The Qur'an also makes it clear that, while all people share a common humanity, they belong to different races and have different social systems. This is an essential precondition for "knowing each other" or "recognizing" – that is to say, it entails an acceptance of differences and a readiness to interact with them, along with an assumption that other human beings will be responsive, with the result that there will be a meeting of minds.

Although the first Islamic State was in many ways like other states in the Middle Ages, this Qur'anic concept of "knowing each other" was the underlying principle of the treaties and covenants between Muslims and other peoples. Those treaties stipulated that Muslims – whether as a state or as individuals – were bound to respect other people's freedom to worship and live according to their own social systems. Consequently, our societies were never mono-religious communities; they also comprised Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Buddhists, all of whom were able to practice their faiths and conduct

their lives in freedom, to the extent that each community's affairs were regulated by its own courts.

The other point I should like to make is that the Middle Ages themselves were a time of significant cultural encounters between Christianity and Islam in several regions such as Spain and the Italian islands. Moreover, with the fall of Andalusia and Sicily it was not only the conquered Muslims who fled to *Dar al Islam* – the “Territory of Islam”; they were also joined in their flight by the Jews and some Eastern Christians.

Since the 17th century we in Oman have had Jewish and Hindu citizens and people of every race and creed have come to our shores to live and trade.

Bishop,
Gentlemen,

There is always a tendency to look at the glass as being half empty. This is something we and you have both done in recent decades and, rather than proving a useful exercise, it has led to a number of serious problems. Relations between peoples, states and religions are a serious matter and it is unacceptable to mess around with them or entrust them to hotheaded or short-sighted people, or to those who can only look at things from a partial point of view and fail to comprehend them as a whole.

These are not just my own ideas. In his book *Islam in Europe* the renowned Cambridge University anthropologist Jack Goody observes that for around fifteen hundred years Arabs and Muslims have always been a part of European culture and European societies, while Europeans have been attracted by the East's heritage, civilization and resources for over two thousand years.

After pointing to the similarities in their customs and religious and intellectual backgrounds, Goody suggests that the disagreements between the two sides could be due to the fact that they are so alike rather than because they are so different. For my part, I agree with him. I have never felt strange or alien in Germany, England or France, particularly in religious circles, because there are so many similarities between us and the rapport we share strengthens the bonds between us.

Bishop,
Brothers,

We are living in the Age of Dialogue. We all want it, particularly when it is between Christianity and Islam. Although it has only begun to yield its limited results in the last three decades, it is something we have been trying to achieve for some fifty years, particularly since the Second Vatican Council of 1962 to 1965.

I believe this dialogue is extremely useful. It is a dialogue about co-existence - whether in the Arab world, where millions of Christians have lived together with Muslims for some fifteen hundred years, or in Europe, where the millions of Muslims in the early 21st century are now entering their third generation. Today there is dialogue between institutions and states which is not exclusively religious in nature; at the same time, however, the parties involved in it continue to be very much the product of their own cultures and faiths, while seeking to live together in a state of mutual dependence. In the final analysis, this dialogue which has brought us together at numerous international conferences and other events is a meeting of broad religious and human values.

We shall continue to hold these meetings – in fact we are all determined to do so – for the sake of world peace and security, while lending our active support to the cause of justice, equity and morality and at the same time endeavouring to ensure that such values have a genuine impact at international gatherings. Our ongoing discussions and fruitful deliberations are of the utmost importance.

Bishop,
Gentlemen,

As we meet to hold our assembly and pursue our common interests here in this Cathedral, surrounded by the elements of venerable tradition as well as those of the modern world, our cultural heritage continues to live on and flourish in our memories. While the great problems of modernity and globalisation were not caused in any way by our religions, Islam cannot be ignored in the search for a solution to them. Therefore we hope our determination to continue with our dialogue and meetings will not waver, and that we shall also continue to work for justice and peace around the world.

Thank you again for your kind invitation and welcome. We shall be truly delighted if you will accept our invitation to visit Oman so that we can take another step forward along the path of dialogue and co-operation.

Wassalamu 'alaykum. May peace be upon you.