

**Text of Pope Benedict XVI's Speech to Muslim Leaders, Diplomatic Corps and the Rectors of Jordan's Universities**

*9 May 2009*

Your Royal Highness,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

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 programmes, 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 neighbour, 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 neighbouring 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!