



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

“Sincerely exercising mutual understanding”



Within the framework of a conference organised in Paris by the International Observatory of Religions (CREC Saint-Cyr), on 23 and 24 May, at the École Militaire, I was invited to give a lecture on the theme: 'A new perspective? Jihad and human fraternity'. Here is an excerpt of my talk on the theme of Islamic-Christian dialogue, which is a dimension of our Order's mission in the Holy Land in the spirit of the Abu Dhabi Declaration signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Ahzar University.

“Our era is witness to an innovate and original approach to relations between the Islamic world and the Catholic world, initiated by Pope Francis and the Sunni Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayyeb, with the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity - For World Peace and Common Coexistence in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019. A year ago, the Pope also met with Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani, in Najaf (Iraq) opening up a very high level of contact between Catholics and the Shia world; a contact that could lead to important juxtapositions also between Sunnis and Shias and a desirable revision of their historical differences.

It is interesting to note that both the Pope and the Grand Imam begin the Document, not by touching on controversial religious topics (which would generate new difficulties), but by what they have in common: faith in a clement and merciful God, creator of all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, who generates fraternity and friendship and produces the values of goodness, charity and peace. These are expressions of the highest theological and anthropological value that lead, in my opinion, to the emptying of that most aggressive and intolerant jihadist current. Who is the #non-believer” if the appealing principle is that #clever and merciful God” shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims, creator of all human beings equal in rights and dignity?

Abandoning the terrain of conflict and religious disputes (each person will keep for themselves those doctrinal principles that form the core and the intrinsic diversity of their faith), opens a window that brings a breath of fresh air; this common vision, in fact, weakens the power of intolerance; but it must also be said that inter-religious and extra-religious provocations, which tend to stir up aggression and offend the other side, must also cease.

Today, especially in the Islamic majority world, but also in the minority world, every form of Jihad feeds on real or alleged injustice, on offences against Islamic beliefs and values. While it is legitimate to nourish a sense of respect alive, there is no justification for terrorism or the killing of people: here it is worthwhile to echo the cry of Pope Francis and Grand Imam al-Tayyeb: *Whoever kills one person is as if he has killed the whole of humanity; We therefore condemn all those practices that are a threat to life such as genocide, acts of terrorism, forced displacement, human trafficking, abortion and euthanasia. We likewise condemn the policies that promote these practices. Moreover, we resolutely declare that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course of history, have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women in order to make them act in a way that has nothing to do with the truth of religion.* These are clear and precise words.

Incidentally, I like to think that this view ideally fomented the so-called #Abraham Accord" between Israel, Bahrain and the Arab Emirates and opened processes with other Islamic-led countries.

For the Catholic Church, the revision of inter-religious relations had already formally begun with the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (NA), when the Council Fathers felt it their duty to execrate all past persecutions and manifestations of intolerance and called for the overcoming of those "dissensions and enmities (that had) arisen between Christians and Muslims", inviting "to forget the past and sincerely exercise mutual understanding, (...) to defend and promote together (...) the values of the Church and the world, and to promote the values of the Church and the world".) to defend and promote together (...) all men, social justice, moral values, peace and freedom" (NA 3-5).

If history is not a teacher, mistakes will repeat themselves; human history is not built by pure determinism, but is a web of freedoms that must be recognised and mutually respected."

This aspect of the Order's mission is discussed in my book *And the Whole House Was Filled with the Fragrance of Ointment* (Sophia Institute), in the chapter on the ecclesiological dimension of the Order's spirituality.

Fernando Cardinal Filoni

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