



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING SPONSORED BY
THE PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE FOR ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF ITS ESTABLISHMENT IN ROME**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 24 January 2015*

[Multimedia]

Your Eminences, Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you at the conclusion of the conference organized to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome. I thank Cardinal Grocholewski for the words he addressed to me on behalf of all, and Cardinal Tauran for his attendance.

In recent years, despite some misunderstandings and difficulties, progress has been made in interreligious dialogue, and also with the Islamic faithful. *Listening* is essential for this. It is not only a *necessary condition* in a process of mutual comprehension and peaceful coexistence, but is also a *pedagogical duty* in order to be able to “acknowledge the values of others, appreciate the concerns underlying their demands and shed light on shared beliefs” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 253). The basis of all this is the necessity of an adequate formation in order that, secure in one’s own identity, it is possible to grow in mutual understanding.

One needs to pay attention to avoid falling into the snare of a *facile syncretism* which would ultimately be an empty harbinger of a *valueless totalitarianism* (*ibid.*, nn. 251, 253). A soft and accommodating approach, “which says ‘yes’ to everything in order to avoid problems” (*ibid.*, n. 251), ends up being “a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others” (*ibid.*). This invites us, firstly, to return to the *basics*.

When we approach a person who professes his religion with conviction, his testimony and thoughts ask us and lead us to question our own spirituality. Dialogue, thus, begins with *encounter*. The first knowledge of the other is born from it. Indeed, if one begins from the premise of the common affiliation in *human nature*, one can go beyond prejudices and fallacies and begin to understand the other according to a new perspective.

The history of the *Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies* has gone in this very direction. It is not limited to accepting superficial statements, giving rise to stereotypes and preconceptions. Academic work, the fruit of daily effort, seeks to investigate sources, fill in the gaps, analyze etymology, propose a hermeneutics of dialogue and, through a scientific approach inspired by *astonishment* and *wonder*, is able to avoid losing the bearings of mutual respect and reciprocal esteem. With these premises, one tip-toes toward the other without stirring up the dust that clouds one's vision.

The 50 years of PISAI in Rome — after its birth and first steps in Tunisia, thanks to the great work of Missionaries in Africa — show how much the Universal Church, in the climate of Post-Conciliar renewal, has understood the impending need for *an institute dedicated explicitly to research and the formation of those who promote dialogue with Muslims*. Perhaps there has never been a greater need, since the most effective antidote to violence is teaching the discovery and acceptance of difference as richness and fruitfulness.

This task is not simple, but is born and grows out of a strong sense of responsibility. Muslim-Christian dialogue requires, in a particular way, *patience and humility along with extensive study*, because approximation and improvisation can be counterproductive, or can even cause discomfort and embarrassment. A lasting and continuous commitment is needed in order not to be caught unprepared in various situations and in different contexts. For this reason, there is need for a specific preparation, not limited by sociological analysis, but having the characteristics of a journey among members of religions who, although in different ways, refer to the spiritual paternity of Abraham. Culture and education are in no way secondary to a true process of approaching the other which respects in each person “his life, his physical integrity, his dignity and the rights deriving from that dignity, his reputation, his property, his ethnic and cultural identity, his ideas and his political choices” (*Message for the End of Ramadan*, 10 July 2013).

This Institute is very precious among the academic institutions of the Holy See, and still needs to become better known. My desire is that it increasingly become a point of reference for the *formation of Christians who work in the field of interreligious dialogue*, under the auspices of the Congregation for Catholic Education and in close cooperation with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. On the journey of exploring truth, toward the full respect of the person and of his dignity, may the PISAI instill a fruitful collaboration with the other Pontifical Universities, with study and research centres, both Christian and Muslim, scattered throughout the world.

On the happy occasion of this Jubilee I wish the PISAI community may never betray its primary purpose of listening and dialogue, founded on distinct identities, on the passionate, patient and vigorous search for truth and beauty, sown by the Creator in the heart of every man and woman and truly visible in every authentic religious expression. I ask you to please pray for me and I wholeheartedly wish you all blessing.