



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MUSLIM CHRISTIAN COLLOQUIUM
ON "RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND MODERN SOCIETY"**

Thursday, 7 December 1989

*Your Eminence,
Distinguished Visitors,*

I am pleased to welcome you, the participants in the Muslim Christian Colloquium on "Religious Education and Modern Society", jointly organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Al al-Bait Foundation of Amman, Jordan. I congratulate you on the choice of this theme, which deserves careful attention on the part of religious educators.

In the contemporary world, great challenges are facing humanity. Advances in the fields of science and technology, in communications, in health care and social services – to mention but a few – offer the promise of a better life for the human family. But in many ways these same advances present ambiguous and even negative aspects, including the fact that the ease of modern life is sometimes accompanied by the danger that people may forget or ignore the transcendent, spiritual aspect of the human person before God.

On the one hand, material comforts and advances are not distributed equally within the human family. Poverty is a widespread and oppressive factor in the lives of millions and raises issues of justice and the defence of human dignity. On the other, increasing material well-being sometimes leads to an exaggerated individualism, a frantic quest for self-fulfilment, a sense of lonely isolation within society, and violent or self-destructive practices. Such circumstances often contain an implicit refusal to acknowledge God as the Creator and Lawgiver, whose will mankind should respect and obey.

Although there are specific differences between us, Christians and Muslims both hold that the true

path towards human fulfilment lies in carrying out the divine will in our personal and social lives. For this reason we have much to discuss concerning the ways of teaching religious values to the younger generations.

Our youth need to learn the transcendent sense of human life, so that they may be equipped to view critically all aspects of modern living. They must know how to discern between those scientific and technological advances which enhance human life and those which plant seeds of destruction. They must be educated to understand that an uncritical acceptance of all that modern life has to offer can lead to selfishness and unchecked ambition.

At the same time, turning backwards and rejecting development is unrealistic and implies a lack of confidence in the intellectual powers with which God has endowed humanity. It amounts to an abdication of the very vocation which God has given to man – the vocation to collaborate with him in the work of creation.

Young people are best served by being taught to discover God and his will within the new confines of their modern surroundings. This includes rediscovering the social nature of human life, and the inalienable rights and pressing responsibilities of individuals. They should understand the changes taking place in our world, so that they can continue to bear a dynamic message of transcendent hope to the society of our time. Furthermore, religious education, of its very nature, must teach respect for others and openness to them as children of God independently of race, religion, economic status, gender, language or ethnic group.

Ultimately, the heart of all religious education is the endeavour to bring the student to a personal awareness of and encounter with the Living God. Thus, religious education is not merely talking about God, but accompanying young people in their search for God, deepening their desire to know him and to do his will. Through the work of your Colloquium, may you all, Christians and Muslims, advance in the knowledge of the ways of communicating better the religious values which the contemporary world so urgently needs. I pray that your meeting will be a further step forward in the spirit of collaboration and in common witness to the One God.

May the blessings of the Most High God be upon you!

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