



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GERMANY

22-25 SEPTEMBER 2011

MEETING WITH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Reception room of the Apostolic Nunciature, Berlin

Friday, 23 September 2011

([Video](#))

Dear Muslim Friends,

I am glad to be able to welcome you here, as the representatives of different Muslim communities in Germany. I thank Professor Mouhanad Khorchide most sincerely for his kind greetings and for the profound reflections that he shared with us. His words illustrate what a climate of respect and trust has grown up between the Catholic Church and the Muslim communities in Germany and how the convictions we share are becoming visible.

Berlin is a good place for a meeting like this, not only because the oldest mosque in Germany is located here, but also because Berlin has the largest Muslim population of all the cities in Germany.

From the 1970s onwards, the presence of numerous Muslim families has increasingly become a distinguishing mark of this country. Constant effort is needed in order to foster better mutual acquaintance and understanding. Not only is this important for peaceful coexistence, but also for the contribution that each can make towards building up the common good in this society.

Many Muslims attribute great importance to the religious dimension of life. At times this is thought provocative in a society that tends to marginalize religion or at most to assign it a place among the individual's private choices.

The Catholic Church firmly advocates that due recognition be given to the public dimension of religious adherence. In an overwhelmingly pluralist society, this demand is not unimportant. In the process, care must be taken to guarantee that the other is always treated with respect. This mutual respect grows only on the basis of agreement on certain inalienable values that are proper to human nature, in particular the inviolable dignity of every single person as created by God. Such agreement does not limit the expression of individual religions; on the contrary, it allows each person to bear witness explicitly to what he believes, not avoiding comparison with others.

In Germany – as in many other countries, not only Western ones – this common frame of reference is articulated by the Constitution, whose juridical content is binding on every citizen, whether he belong to a faith community or not.

Naturally, discussion over the best formulation of principles like freedom of public worship is vast and open-ended, yet it is significant that the German Basic Law expresses them in a way that is still valid today at a distance of over sixty years (cf. Art. 4:2). In this law we find above all the common ethos that lies at the heart of human coexistence and that also in a certain way pervades the apparently formal rules of operation of the institutions of democratic life.

We could ask ourselves how such a text – drawn up in a radically different historical epoch, that is to say in an almost uniformly Christian cultural situation – is also suited to present-day Germany, situated as it is within a globalized world and marked as it is by a remarkable degree of pluralism in the area of religious belief.

The reason for this seems to me to lie in the fact that the fathers of the Basic Law at that important moment were fully conscious of the need to find truly solid ground with which all citizens would be able to identify and which could serve as the supporting foundation for everyone, irrespective of their differences. In seeking this, mindful of human dignity and responsibility before God, they did not prescind from their own religious beliefs; indeed for many of them, the real source of inspiration was the Christian vision of man. But they knew that everyone has to engage with the followers of other religions and none: common ground for all was found in the recognition of some inalienable rights that are proper to human nature and precede every positive formulation.

In this way, a society which at that time was essentially homogenous laid the foundations that we today may consider valid for a markedly pluralistic era, foundations that actually point out the evident limits of pluralism: it is inconceivable, in fact, that a society could survive in the long term without consensus on fundamental ethical values.

Dear friends, on the basis of what I have outlined here, it seems to me that there can be fruitful collaboration between Christians and Muslims. In the process, we help to build a society that differs in many respects from what we brought with us from the past. As believers, setting out from our respective convictions, we can offer an important witness in many key areas of life in society. I

am thinking, for example, of the protection of the family based on marriage, respect for life in every phase of its natural course or the promotion of greater social justice.

This is another reason why I think it important to hold a day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice in the world, which as you know we plan to do on 27 October next in Assisi, twenty-five years after the historic meeting there led by my predecessor, Blessed Pope John Paul II. Through this gathering, we wish to express, with simplicity, that we believers have a special contribution to make towards building a better world, while acknowledging that if our actions are to be effective, we need to grow in dialogue and mutual esteem.

With these sentiments I renew my sincere greetings and I thank you for this meeting, which for me has been a great enrichment of my visit to my homeland. Thank you for your attention!

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