

Go,
Rebuild
My Church!

**Comprehensive
Course on the
Franciscan
Mission
Charism**



Encounter
With the
Muslims

Lesson Unit 16

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The documents of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* have deeply affected the understanding of mission. Constant efforts are being made to clarify its purpose and objectives, and to determine the most appropriate methods to carry it out. *Go, Rebuild My Church: A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism*, provides a particular context to stimulate dialogue about the many dimensions of mission and the inevitable recognition of the equality, dignity and humanity of all persons. The course is unique, since it is genuinely inter-Franciscan and inter-cultural. An ongoing process for exchange among all members of the Franciscan Family from six continents provides for a creative meshing of the best in current theology, Franciscan research and pastoral practice. The vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent our search for a fuller understanding of humanity in the light of the Gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ.

As Franciscans, with the world as our *cloister*, we welcome this refreshing moment of intercultural dialogue. Francis was the first among founders to situate the missionary dimension of the Gospel call clearly within his rule. This study reawakens us to the challenge and genuineness of Francis' message for our own times.

Imprint

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Second revised edition including the suggestions of the International Congress of the CCFMC, Assisi 1994

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Africa Edition

Publisher: Comprehensive Course
on the Franciscan Mission Charism
CCFMC Africa Secretariat
PO Box 21197, Nairobi, Kenya



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Kolbe Press

Printed by:

Kolbe Press, PO Box 468, Limuru, Kenya

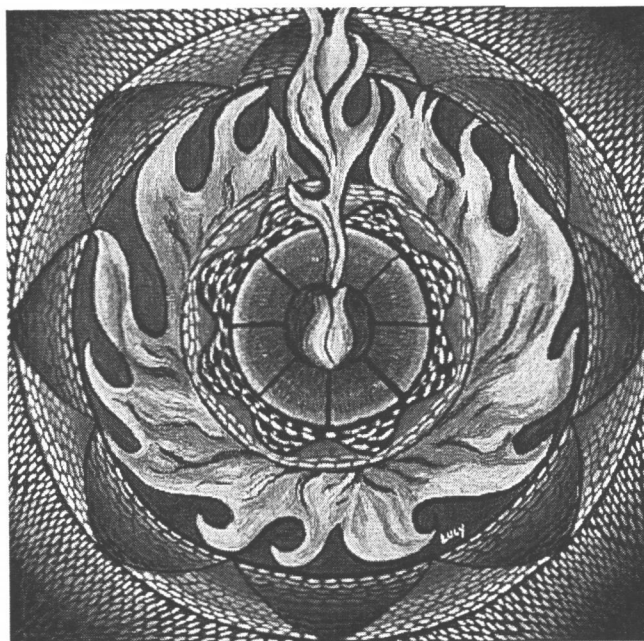


Page 2

Lesson Unit 16 - Encounter with the Muslims

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*A Comprehensive
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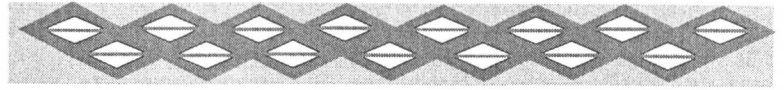
Encounter With the Muslims



Lesson Unit 16



CONTENTS



Encounter With the Muslims

Modern Fioretti

How Clare approaches the Saracens

A. Introduction

B. Survey

C. Information

1. The Second Vatican Council

1.1. High regard

1.2. Dialogue

1.3. Consequences

2. Francis and the Sultan

3. Francis' change of attitude

3.1. Devotions

3.2. Experience of transcendence

4. First International Franciscan Conference on Islam in Assisi

5. Practical Consequences

6. Basic Information about Islam

6.1. A short summary of the history of Islam

6.2. The most important groups and Schools of Law

7. Fundamentalism - threat to the faith and to respect for the *Other*

7.1. See

7.2. Judge

7.3. Act

D. Exercises

E. Applications

F. Bibliography

G. Picture Credit





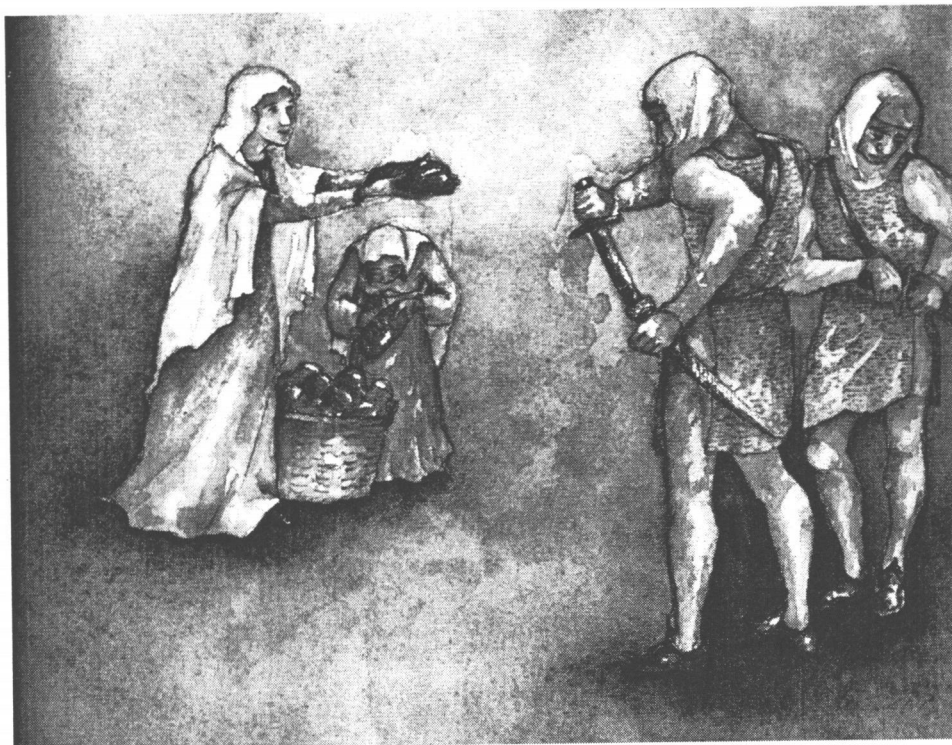
How Clare approaches the Saracens

Fear swept through the town of Assisi and even to the gates of the Sisters of St. Clare: Soldiers in the service of the Emperor, Saracens, were passing through the region. Day and night the Sisters knelt before the Blessed Sacrament.

There Clare remembered the night before Jesus died, and how He took bread...

Clare baked bread, many loaves of bread. And one morning Clare and her sisters carried baskets filled with bread to the camp where the soldiers were waiting for a favourable moment for a sudden attack on the town.

Before the soldiers who were standing guard could see the sisters, the aroma of freshly baked bread spread. When the commander came in front of his tent to call together the soldiers, he sniffed the air. In his imagination he saw his mother, how she used to bake bread years ago. Then he caught sight of Clare and her sisters. He was about to draw his sword, but she held the freshly-baked bread out to him. Clare said softly, "Pace e bene", that is, "peace and all good things, which you need to be good yourself."



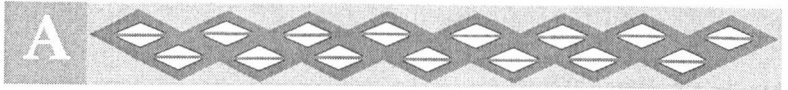
St. Clare offers bread to the Saracens.

Surprised, the soldiers took the bread and sat down around the baskets. The bread tasted better than any they had ever tasted before. When they were satisfied they decided to strike camp, and went away. The town was saved.

(By Elisabeth Bernet, freely created, based on the statements of witnesses in the process of canonisation).



Introduction



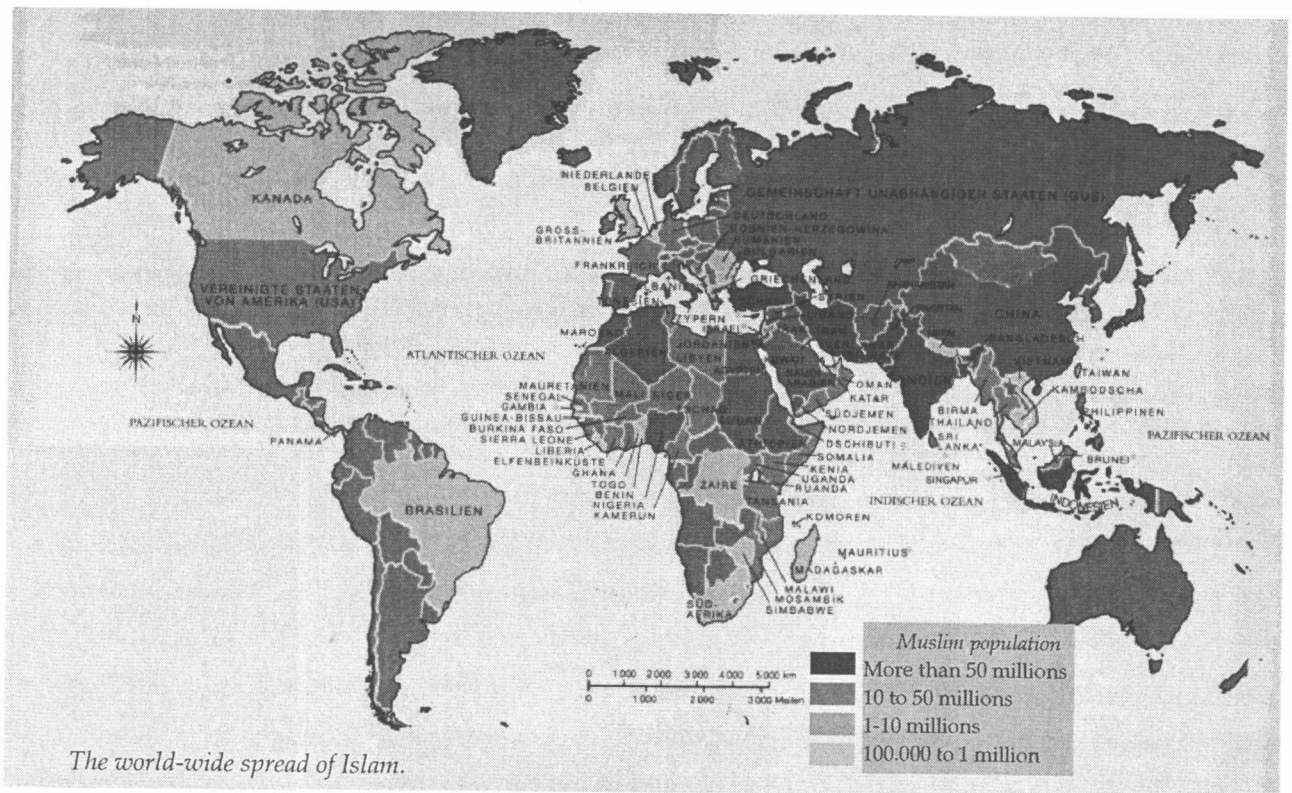
Dealing with the Muslims

When Francis speaks about mission, he is thinking primarily of the mission to the Muslims. Hence we must ask ourselves whether or not it is one of the essential tasks of the Franciscans today to search for new paths in this thorny missionary endeavour. One must, however, realise that new, less belligerent relations do not depend on the Christian side alone, but also on the Muslims.

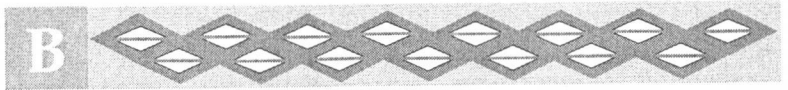
Not only in Africa and in certain parts of Asia, but also in Europe where an increasing number of Muslims are now living, Islam is experienced in its fundamentalist form. A dialogue is scarcely possible where the spirit of the Crusades is still the determining factor and where - in many countries - an all too close relationship exists

between religious convictions and state power. In spite of this, we still want to seek dialogue with the Muslims in the spirit of St. Francis and of the Second Vatican Council.

Throughout the world there is hardly a country without Muslims. Therefore we should take note of the increasing influence of Islam and its increasing economic and religious power. It is primarily Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and Australia that are affected by this fact, but Latin America also has to deal with it, because even there are Islamic centres and communities. Thus, we should take our example from the way Francis approached the Muslims; his was really an example of how to deal with people whose way of life is unfamiliar to us.



Survey



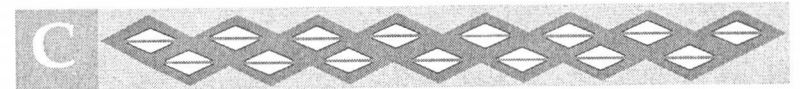
Approaches to Islam

Each approach to Islam must first consider the changes that the Second Vatican Council, and even the post-conciliar period, has brought to the Church and to the religious orders. In its shortest document, the *Decree on the Church's Relations to non-Christian Religions* (Nostra aetate), Vatican II states clearly that the Church has a high regard for the Muslims and is striving for a new kind of relationship. In his encounter with the Sultan, Francis has given us an example on which we can base our encounter with the Muslims. This encounter was so meaningful for Francis that it provoked a change in his own attitude: he translates Islamic customs and basic experiences into his own

faith. On this basis, in 1982 the first Islam-conference of the Franciscans took place, which, in a letter written in St. Francis' style, describes the basic attitudes for our encounter with Islam. The encounter with the Muslims takes place on the level of daily life; therefore we will offer some concrete suggestions for daily living.

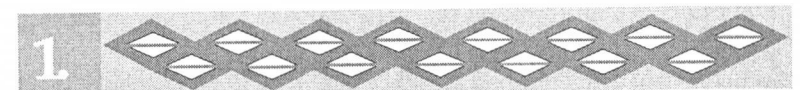
Over and over again we are made to realise how little we know about Islam, and so we are going to provide some basic information about its history and a short survey of Islam's most important religious divisions and schools of law. Finally, we will give some ideas about how to deal with aggressive fundamentalism.

Information



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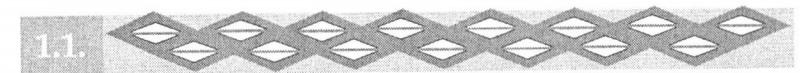
Second Vatican Council



High regard

In the Council's *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions*, the Church states simply and directly: "The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims" (NA 3).

We are only beginning to understand what such a declaration must mean for a theology and un-



derstanding of mission that want to take the non-Christian religions seriously. Vatican II's document not only lists the positive aspects of Islam, which Christians can readily accept; it also calls for mutual understanding and "pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be



made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values" (NA 3). A new attitude is needed, one that strives to ap-

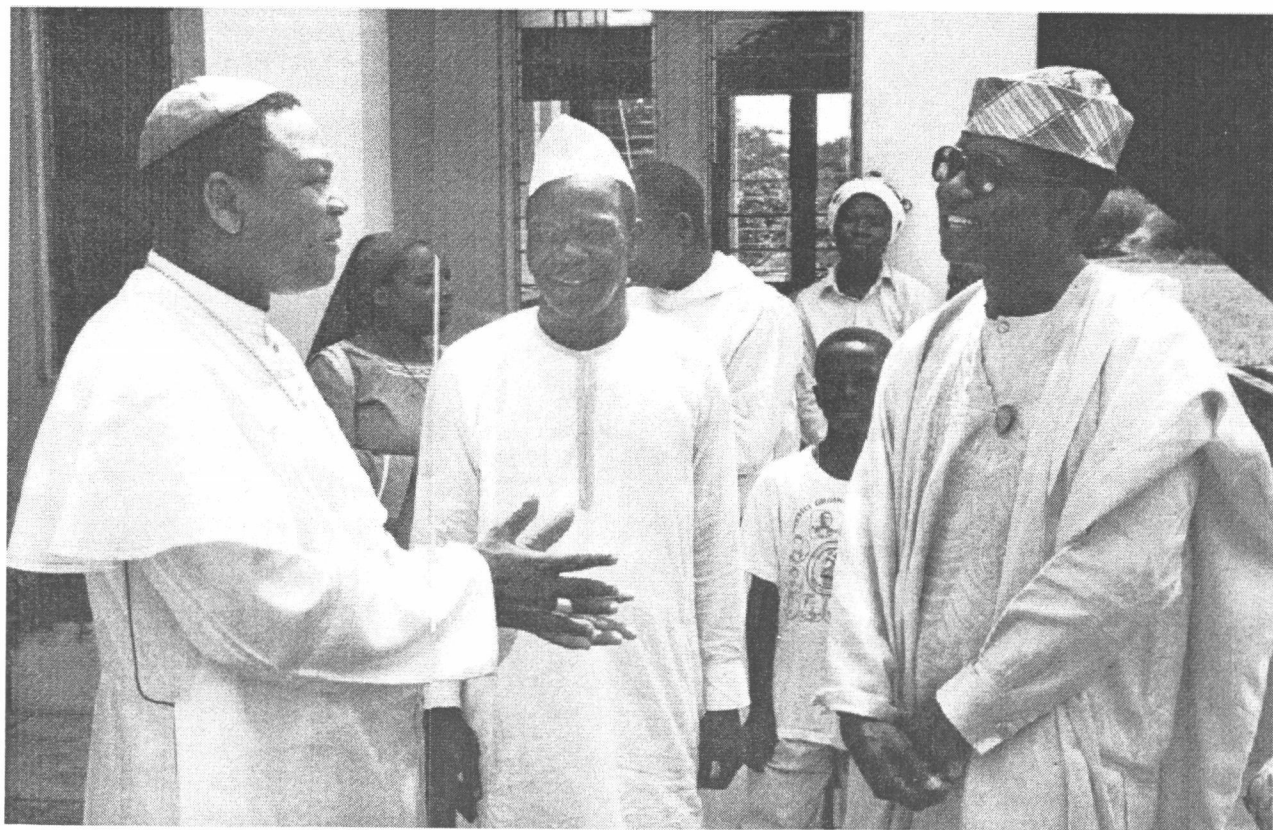
proach Islam with an attitude of humility and minority, and we feel Francis provides the inspiration for such an approach.

Dialogue

1.2.

Vatican II's positive approach to non-Christian religions has led theologians to re-examine their missiological stance and to come up with a theological understanding that does justice to the life and example of practising Muslims. Furthermore, if we really take dialogue seriously, we cannot continue to speak the same triumphalistic language, as if we alone possessed the whole truth and that others have none of it, or only the "seeds of truth" (see Lesson 15: 3.3).

Basically, Christians and Muslims have some religious convictions in common. Unfortunately, a tragic history and bad experiences, even in the present, separate us. Therefore, it is very important that Christians and Muslims should approach each other in a friendly and open way and even become true friends in order to share their common values and convictions in dialogue.



Sharing of common religious convictions in friendly dialogue helps to dispel mutual distrust.



Two important consequences flow from this. In our relationship with Muslims we must avoid all that in word or deed tends to look down on them and their beliefs and actions. All comparisons between *good* Christians and *bad* Muslims, and vice versa, are to be avoided. The search for the good and the positive must continue on both sides. There are good and sincere people among Muslims and Christians alike. The possibility of conversion from one faith to another must be seen as God's work. It is our task to bear witness to our faith through the life we live and the way we relate to others. Secondly, there is a real and urgent need to re-think and re-formulate

our faith. This is required because of the history of the development of our doctrine as well as by the concrete situation in which we live today. In order to understand Christian doctrines we must be aware of the historical and cultural milieu in which they were formulated. But today's situation also requires that we speak about our faith in a way that others can understand. We must always distinguish between the content of our faith and the way in which we speak about it to others. This is particularly true when we speak about the Triune God and the divinity of Jesus Christ in relation to the Muslims' strict belief in one God.



Francis and the Sultan

We need to reflect on Francis' experience with the Sultan in Egypt in order to come to a true Franciscan understanding of presence among Muslims. The story is well known, but there are different versions depending on what aspect of Francis' mission is emphasised. It makes interesting reading to study the differences of authors within the Order, like Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure, and authors outside the Order, like Jacques de Vitry, the Bishop of Acre, Ernout and Henri d'Avranches, who wrote his *Versified Life of St. Francis*, i.e. a Franciscan legend told in verse.

In his *First Life of St. Francis* (1228), **Thomas of Celano** stresses that Francis visited the Sultan of Egypt "in order to attain the palm of martyrdom". He embarked at a time when the Fifth Crusade, the aim of which was to win back the Holy Land, was at its height.

Francis arrived in Damietta and managed to meet the Sultan, to whom he preached openly about Christ. The Sultan received him kindly and saw that Francis was different than the Crusaders (cf. 1C 57).



Francis before the Sultan of Egypt.



In the *Second Life* (1246-1248), Celano describes how Francis was trying to dissuade the Crusaders from fighting, and he predicted their defeat because they were not led by the Spirit of God but by their own arrogance and belligerence (2Cel 30).

Bonaventure offers a more detailed account in his *Major Life of St. Francis* (1260-62). The war is raging and it is dangerous to venture out, yet Francis with another friar, Brother Illuminatus, moves out towards the Muslim camp and ultimately reaches the Sultan.

Then he preached to the Sultan, boldly and enthusiastically, and proclaimed the Triune God and Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all with such steadfastness, with such courage and spirit... When the sultan saw his enthusiasm and courage, he listened to him willingly and pressed him to stay with him (LMj IX:8).

Francis promised to do that if the Sultan and his people were prepared to convert to Christ, but the Sultan did not allow this to happen, (not even after Francis offered to undergo the trial by fire to prove the truth of his words). Francis therefore had to return to the Crusaders' camp without any visible sign of success.

Jacques de Vitry gives a negative picture of the Muslims. He calls the Sultan a "cruel beast", but he cannot deny that the ruler and his people were fascinated by the figure of St. Francis clad in the garb of a *Sufi*. In his *History of the Orient*, Jacques de Vitry continues:

The Sultan kept Francis with him for a few days and with a great deal of attention listened to him preach the Faith of Christ to him and to his followers. But in the end he was afraid of seeing some of his soldiers whom the effective words of this man would have converted to the Lord go over to the army of the Christians. He, therefore, had Francis led back to our camp with many signs of honour and with security precautions, but not without saying to him: "Pray for me, that God may reveal to me the law and the faith that is the more pleasing to him" (HO 32).

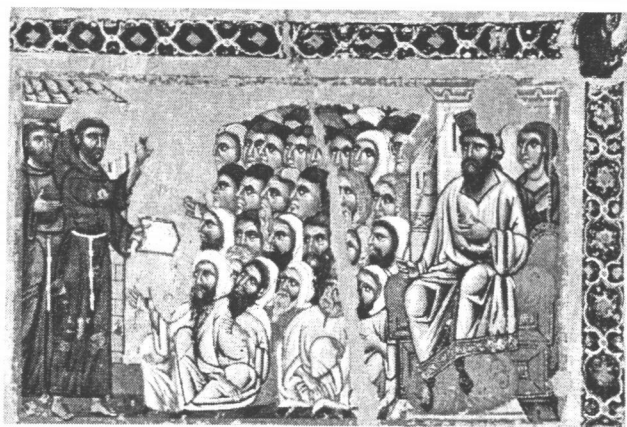
The first thing to learn from these reports is the undeniable fact that Francis really visited the Sultan of Egypt and spoke with him. Even Arabic sources testify to this fact (W. Roncaglia).

Jacques de Vitry complements and supports moreover what Jordan of Giano, Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure mention only casually. The latter two are almost ashamed of their Father and Founder's lack of success and they excuse him by remarking that God was sparing him the crown of martyrdom for "the privilege of a unique grace" (1C 57), i.e. the stigmata.

Secondly, there can be no doubt of Francis' profound and determined pacifism. The words of the French Bishop reveal with unmistakable clarity that Francis wanted no armed guard for his safe-conduct. During the military operation which was proceeding apace, he was moved only by zeal for the Faith and by his missionary spirit. The Muslims were his brothers as far as he was concerned, who must be shown the true path to salvation that only Jesus Christ can give.

At first glance Francis' exhausting mission journey to the Saracens met with little success. Francis did not achieve any of his goals: he neither obtained the martyr's crown nor the Sultan's conversion; neither peace between Christians and Muslims, nor a new concept of a Crusade without weapons. It seems as if this failure was a confirmation of Francis' mission program, for it is not the visible results that count but witnessing with one's life and even risking it. In his contacts with the Muslims, Francis became aware that they were not the "cruel beasts" that European war propaganda made them out to be.

On the contrary, he saw their high moral standards, and admired, above all, their deep ven-



St. Francis proclaims the Gospel to Muslims.



eration and submission to God. For Francis this was a sure sign of the presence of God and of His divine action. That none of the Muslims was ready to be converted, indicated to Francis that the time had not yet come. For Francis, God's Will was not expressed in an unconditional obligation to preach the Gospel, but in awaiting the right moment, which God Himself would designate. He clearly understood that the Muslims had to be respected as they were, for thus had they been created by God (ER 16).

His disciples will then have to be patient and ready to serve with a humble spirit, in the spirit of minority and submission (1 Pet 3:15). The Friars Minor were generally well accepted and kindly received by the Muslims, when they came in this spirit. However, as soon as they approached them with a *crusading* spirit, or preached against Mohammed and his followers, they were put to death, sometimes under cruel tortures, as happened to St. Daniel and his companions (cf. Lesson 8, paragraph 1).



Francis' change of attitude

Devotions

We do not know how long Francis stayed with the Sultan, but we do know that he went through an experience there that deeply influenced his life.

We have already discussed this in lesson unit 7: Francis introduces a custom similar to the *salât*. What we want to say in this lesson is summarised in the following text by Leonhard Lehmann OFMCap:

Francis was so impressed by the 'salât', which he had experienced in the East during his missionary journey of 1219-1220 that he wanted to introduce it in a modified form to the West. Just as he demanded of all the responsible superiors of the Order to preach to everyone about the signal for prayer that should unite 'all people on the whole earth' in praise and thanksgiving before God, in like manner he also addressed all the authorities in the city-states. As he wanted to introduce and adapt this Islamic custom of the salât to Christianity, where the practice of ringing the 'Angelus Bell' had not yet been established, he attempted to attain this goal by two means:

First of all, the superiors and the preachers of the Order should explain the meaning and purpose of the sign of prayer to the whole people. Secondly, those who bore responsibility in the secular sphere were to take up the Islamic custom and make it a part of their system of laws. In both cases, the aim Francis had in mind, was to reach all people.

In working towards this end from two starting points simultaneously— through the religious superiors and the secular authorities – Francis proved his tendency towards unity and completeness, totality and universality, not only in the range of his thoughts but also in the pastoral practice. He would have liked to involve all existing authorities so that 'praise and thanksgiving' might be shown the Almighty all over the world.

He had to proclaim his idea of an all-embracing praise of God, which would unite Christians and Muslims in the same intention; he did it loudly and emphatically in both letters; he felt that such an ecumenical sign that would have united in prayer two antagonistic religions was still inconceivable to the ears of

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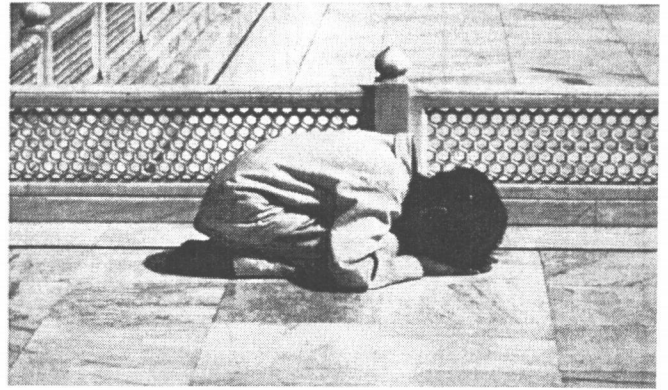
3.1.



those accustomed to the Crusading sermons and to hearts blinded by hatred for Islam.

Francis also noted the way Muslims prostrated themselves on the ground or paid reverence to the Almighty with deep bows. In his *Letter to the Entire Order*, Francis urges his friars to adopt a similar prayer posture. He writes:

When you hear His name,... adore His name with fear and reverence, prostrate on the ground! ... Incline the ear of your heart and obey the voice of the Son of God... for this reason He has sent you into the whole world: that you may bear witness to His voice in word and deed and bring everyone to know that there is no one who is all-powerful except Him (LtOrd 4.6.9).



A young Pakistani at prayer.

Not only does the above refer to the external attitude of prayer, but the expression “*there is no other Almighty God besides Him*” is also similar to the Muslim *kalma*: “*There is no God but Allah.*”

Experience of transcendence

3.2.

The deepening awareness of the transcendence of God also becomes clear in the songs Francis composed. It is well-known that Francis brought about a great devotion to the Humanity of Christ and made Bethlehem and Calvary a living experience for himself and the friars through the celebration of Greccio and the stigmata he received at La Verna, yet there is a clear development towards the Transcendent after his return from Damietta to Italy:

All-powerful, most holy, Almighty and supreme God, Holy and just... He alone is true God, Who is perfect and good, and He alone is good, loving and gentle, kind and understanding. He alone is holy, just, true and right... (ER 23:1.9).

In his *Letter to the Faithful* and in the *Praises of God* at La Verna, Francis speaks in similar terms of the Omnipotence and Sublimity of God, but at the same time he stresses God’s goodness, a goodness he praises again and again (cf. 2LtF 61-62; PrsG 1-2).

Another result of Francis’ experience among the Muslims is the way he writes about the sacred words and writings of the Scriptures. These, too,

remind him of the deep respect the Muslim has for the written word of the Qur’an, as he strives not to desecrate God’s Word.

Let the names and written words of the Lord, whenever they are found in dirty places, be also gathered up and kept in a becoming place (1LtCus 5; cf. LtCI 12; Test 12).

Tradition has it that the Sultan wanted to load Francis with all sorts of presents, but in the end Francis accepted only one horn which, - like the muezzin - was used to call the people to prayer (cf. LFI 24). Such a horn is still on display today in the Chapel of the Relics in the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi.

Finally we see a new attitude developing in Francis when he writes the Rule and tells his brothers how they should go through the world and how they should deal with people of other faiths. They should testify to their Christian faith by a simple, peaceable presence and an attitude of service and only explicitly preach the Word of God “*when they see it pleases the Lord*” (ER 16:7; cf. LR 12:1).





First International Franciscan Conference on Islam in Assisi

At the invitation of the Secretariat for the Missions in Rome, a conference on Islam was summoned to meet for the first time at Assisi from October 5-12, 1982. The thirteen participants, coming from ten countries with a Muslim population, discussed very seriously the possibility of establishing a new kind of relationship towards Islam. The "return to the sources of the Franciscan movement" desired by the organisers, had to search for its justification in the life and the writings of St. Francis. Therefore, the document issued at the end of the conference starts its considerations with the experience Francis had, when he met the Sultan, and with the ensuing changes in his attitude

The group assembled at Assisi were aware of the difficult times some of the Christian peoples were going through especially in parts of Africa. Nevertheless they encouraged everyone to continue to live *among* the Muslims in a humble and tolerant attitude. They were also aware that the attitude towards Muslims in predominantly Christian countries is different from that of Christians who suffer difficulties when they are in the minority.

The result is a document of value, composed in a style typical of Francis, as if it were a letter written by him to all Franciscans in the world today.

This letter cannot be summarised, it has to be read in its entirety. It is basically a commentary on the 16th Chapter of the Rule of 1221, and was accepted unanimously by all participants of the conference.

Addressed to the four Ministers General, the provincial ministers, mission secretaries, and all Brothers and Sisters, it reads as follows:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Peace and all Good!

We are writing this letter to you from Assisi where we gathered to represent all Friars working among our Muslim brothers. The occasion for our meeting was the eighth centenary of Francis' birth. We hope and pray that our meeting may give new life to our presence among and service to our Muslim brothers, as friars before us experienced following the inspiring example of Francis' visit to the Sultan at Damietta in 1219.

We are convinced that to find new inspiration and to draw new strength for this apostolate, we must go back to the source of our Franciscan life and listen to what Francis told us in Chapter 16 of the Rule of 1221, when he wrote:

"The friars who are inspired by God to work as missionaries among the Saracens and other unbelievers must get permission to go from their minister, who is their servant. The minister, for his part, should give them permission and raise no objection, if he sees that they are suitable; for he shall be bound to give an account to the Lord, if he is guilty of imprudence in this or any other matter.



Friars in Germany promoting an atmosphere of understanding and respect for Muslim guestworkers.



The brothers who go can conduct themselves among them spiritually in two ways. One way is to avoid quarrels or disputes and be subject to every human creature for God's sake, so bearing witness to the fact that they are Christians. Another way is to proclaim

the word of God, when they see that it pleases the Lord." What follows is the outcome of our prayers, reflections and sharing. We hope that it will be received by all of you and prove helpful in your selfless service to the Kingdom and Glory of God.



"Inspired by God"

Sensitive to the Word of God, Francis sees the events of his life and of his brotherhood in the light of faith. Recalling his own conversion, and the beginning of the Order, he attributes all initiatives to God and considers them as gifts of the Lord: "When God gave me some brothers, there was no one to tell me what I should do, but the Most High ... " Under divine inspiration, he left the world of the great and the powerful to be among the little ones whom he considered God's special gift.

He clearly attributes the vocation of the Order also to divine inspiration: "If anyone is inspired by God to live our life and comes to our brothers, they should welcome him. ... the friars who are inspired by God

to work among the Saracens and other unbelievers..." Today, as in the days of Francis, it is God who calls labourers into His vineyard and sends them to do the work for which He has destined them. Because the Franciscan missionary vocation is a gift of God, friars who answer this missionary call do so solely for the love of God and of neighbour.

In their response to this call, friars are inspired by Francis' awareness of God's presence in all his creatures as well as in all events of history. This will lead them to a great respect for all peoples and cultures as a gift of God, recognising them as his brothers and sisters, and to a celebration of God's wonderful deeds manifest in them.



"Living among them"

The same respect for persons and cultures made Francis ill at ease with the directives of the Fourth Lateran Council. The Council had announced a Crusade against the Muslims (cf. "The Summa contra Gentiles", written in the same century). Francis could not recognise in this negative attitude the Spirit of Jesus Who had come among us as a messenger of peace, and revealed to Francis the greeting: "The Lord give you peace". Francis wished, therefore, not to go out to the Muslims or, what is worse, against them. Rather, in the Spirit of Jesus, he wanted to go among them and bring them peace, as he admonished all his

brothers to do wherever they went in the world. In this peaceful spirit, going among the Muslims and leaving behind the Crusaders and their arms, Francis was received by the Sultan with the same wish: "Assalam aleikum."

Impressed by his visit to the Sultan, Francis writes in the Rule of 1221, that the friars who wish to live among the Muslims, must avoid quarrels and disputes, apologetics, any spirit of controversy, wanting to win an argument, or power-seeking. On the contrary, as Francis admonished his brothers, not on his own au-

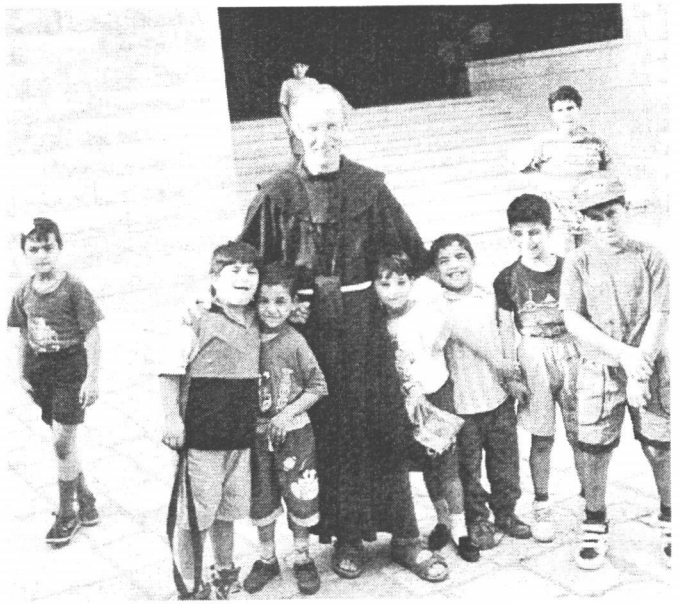


thority but "in the Lord Jesus Christ", they should not judge others, but be gentle, peaceful and modest, meek and humble.

In the course of history, many friars have not in fact lived up to the ideals, and for this we are all sorry and apologise to those whom we have offended. Yet we feel encouraged too by the example of those who have lived, and continue to live peaceably among Muslims.

To continue this tradition of living among the Muslims in a way adapted to the new situation, we feel that the friars not only should not engage in quarrels and disputes, but they should positively promote an atmosphere in which understanding of and respect for one another can grow, culminating in real love for one another in justice and peace. To this end we must remove prejudices and other obstacles which are a hindrance to our coming closer together. In this context we request those in authority to send to Muslim countries only those brothers who wish to encounter the Muslims in the respectful manner of St. Francis and have received an adequate preparation.

It is by sharing with each other who we are as believers that we can really enrich one another and stimulate each other mutually towards a continuous conversion.



The Brother who wish to live among the Muslims should be gentle, peaceful and modest, meek and humble.



"Subject to all creatures"

The admonition of Francis to his brothers to "live among them" is the direct consequence of his choice to be 'minor' at all times and everywhere. For this reason he rejected signs of power such as the Crusades and other ways of being 'major'. In opposition to the Crusaders' mentality of conquering the Muslims, Francis wanted his brothers to be subject to them for the love of God, and so to bear witness that they are Christians. This witness of life in 'minoritas' is very much in accordance with the exhortation of 'Evangelii Nuntiandi': "The Good News must be proclaimed through witnessing first of all...: comprehension, acceptance, communion of life, solidarity in all that is noble and good...; because of such a witnessing without words they provoke irresistible questions...: why are they like that? Why are they among us?... Such a

witnessing is already a proclamation, a silent but very strong and efficacious proclamation of the Good News..." (cf. EN 21,41).

'Minoritas' demands from us today that we abandon the spirit of superiority which so often leads us to place our Christian culture above theirs. This is not really Franciscan or Christian: Christ humbled Himself and came to serve, not to be served (Mk 10:45). Accordingly, we try to avoid positions of authority and prefer places of service.

'Minoritas' even affects our attitude to religious truths. It opens our hearts and minds to perceive different emphases in a commonly shared doctrine, e.g. God's transcendence in today's world, reverence for the Word, the holiness of God's Name and to recon-



sider the absoluteness of our own formulations of truth. God is greater than all formulations.

'Minoritas' will also favour our fraternity in being true brothers to the Muslims: fraternity demonstrated through our love for them, our participation in sorrow and joy with them in the events of life, and in being sensitive to whatever hurts them.

'Minoritas' also breaks down our ghetto walls and prefers to cooperate with Muslims in common projects rather than fostering our own.

'Minoritas' helps us to choose a simple way of life:

e.g. in housing, transportation, food; avoiding also whatever is offensive to them. This opinion in no way presents judgement on the method and achievements of friars in the past. We do, however, think that the future is asking for a fresh approach which avoids whatever may be understood as signs of prestige contrary to our mission.

We realise, of course, that living our 'minoritas' outside the Order depends upon the practice of 'minoritas' among ourselves. It should also help our own Christian community, and the ex-patriate Christian workers, to be sensitive and open to the Muslims.



"When it pleases God"

For Francis, the witness of life is the first method of evangelization. And so friars must at no time put aside the call to penance that comes from living as Francis did. At the same time Francis writes in the Rule of 1221 that his brothers explicitly proclaim the Gospel only when it pleases God.

We feel that, through the signs of the times, God is telling us that the 'when' of Francis' directive has not yet arrived. In many countries the open preaching of the Gospel is not possible; Islam is renewing itself. Do these facts not show us that, as Francis waited for God's pleasure, we too have to place ourselves in God's hands?

At the same time we are convinced that God is at work. The Holy Spirit is ahead of us, and many things happen altogether outside of and apart from our activity. The plan of God moves ahead independent of us. We adore Him in it. The present-day revival of Islam could well be seen as a renewed consciousness of the Word of God and man's submission to Him, a thought very dear to the heart of St. Francis: "Every creature in heaven and on earth and in the depths of the sea should give God praise and glory and honour and blessing. He has borne so much for us and has done and will do so much good to us. He is our power and our strength, and He alone is good, He alone most high, He alone all-powerful, wonderful, and glori-

ous, he alone is holy and worthy of all praise and blessing for endless ages and ages. Amen" (2LtF 61-62).

The witness of a truly Franciscan life, our activities for the poor, for social justice, for human rights according to situations in different countries; our openness and sensitivity to the persons around us; our submission to every creature; our patient dependence on the Will of God: these are more than enough to convince us that we can truly fulfil our Franciscan missionary vocation today.

This vision of our Franciscan missionary vocation is expressive of Francis' approach in regard to the Muslim world. Following the mandate of the Lord: "Francis, go and repair my church!" he tried in his gentle yet firm way to convert the attitudes of the Church, also with regard to Islam. He wished the Church to be among the Muslims as a poor and serving Church, powerless, identifying itself with the most marginalized persons.

To live like that does not come easily to anyone. But if we remember Francis' experience of perfect joy, we may also be helped towards the kenosis as his true disciples. The guidance of the Spirit will make this a fruitful experience because it will open our eyes for positive values in Islam.

In fact, in our many discussions, we found that this



experience is what dialogue is all about, precisely in as far as it demands the willingness to surrender oneself to the other, and accept the other as 'other'. It is not a question, then, of disputing which religion has the truth, or to what extent. It is a question, rather, of opening oneself to the truth of the other person. In this way, we Christians and Muslims, can hopefully discover our common concerns, our common problems; we can learn to appreciate that we have common human values, human needs, and can seek common solutions to these, always aware that we do not possess the truth but that the truth possesses us...



Jerusalem - the holy city
for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

We do not want to end this letter without expressing our deeply-felt sympathy for the loss of life and property which have caused untold sufferings to many Muslims and Christians, especially in the Middle East. We hope and pray that this expression of solidarity will be appreciated by all who are concerned about peace, and oppose every form of violence in society.

We also wish to inform you that we have pledged adherence to the letter of the four Ministers General on peace in the world and against nuclear arms, published on the occasion of the close of the eighth cente-

nary of the birth of Francis. Likewise, we give our support to the declaration against all arms, made by members of all the Franciscan Families of the Third World, gathered in Mattli, Switzerland, in September 1982.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us in humble and sincere prayer be united both with one another and with our Muslim brothers. – Peace to all of you!

On behalf of the participants:
Fr. Mel Brady, OFM,
President of the Conference,
Secretary General of the Missions OFM



Practical Consequences

For some time now scientific study centres in Muslim countries have been contributing towards a better understanding between religions. But it is also necessary for the brothers and sisters of the Franciscan family, as much as possible, to come into touch with the daily life of Muslims and learn from them. Let us look at a few ways in which this can be done:

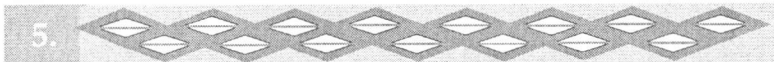
- **Living in a Muslim country.**

It gives a strangely negative impression to ob-

serve how some brothers and sisters – or even whole Christian communities – isolate themselves from a surrounding Muslim context.

At times, however, political and ethnic problems make such an attitude almost unavoidable.

On the other hand, it is a pleasant surprise to see friendly relations existing between Christians and Muslims who meet in daily life. In the long run, a good neighbourly relationship always helps to dispel mutual distrust.



- **Celebrating Muslim feastdays.**

All people like to celebrate, and it is not difficult to participate in one of the important feasts of Islam. It would be good to deepen this experience by becoming better informed about the origin of such feasts, praying for their intentions, or even participating in preparatory fasts or common evening prayers. Why not even exchange greeting cards or mutual presents? Why not send sweets for the children? All these things help to promote friendship.

- **Participating in great events that mark the life of the people**

such as births, weddings or death. Occasions always arise which give an opportunity to reach out to one another or draw nearer to each other. People do not easily forget persons who have been a support to them in their joys and sorrows.

- **Collaborating at common projects**

such as a commitment for social security, health programs and education, the care of the physically and mentally handicapped, concern for drug addicts and AIDS victims, for sports and games, cleaning of the area, and supporting projects of ecology and justice and peace. This can lead to a solidarity surpassing all religious boundaries.

- **Praying together**

for health and happiness, asking for God's blessing, for the children and families. A praying community is never a menace. This refers especially to informal prayer rather than the official prayers.

- **Reading the news together,**

so as to understand, how the population in Islamic countries normally view the problems of daily life, how they strive for new laws and try to adapt to a modern context. All of this asks for intuition and mutual understanding.

- **Participating in *mushairas* (recitations of poems), musical performances, literary circles or other cultural events.**

In these situations in which discrimination is the



A good neighbourly relationship helps to dispel mutual distrust.

least noticeable. Cultural affinities are easily found, affinities that unite people despite their religious differences.

- **Avoiding everything in word and deed that might hurt the moral norms of average Muslims,**

be they related to the way one eats or drinks, dresses or speaks. Of special importance are all external attitudes of piety. Here our faith in God's omnipotence and greatness must come through, our respect for revelation and prophecy, our love for the poor and suffering, our care for widows and orphans.

- **Encouraging those in formation**

to spend their time of pastoral commitment among those working in Islamic countries. Even if afterwards they will never have an opportunity to serve in Islamic regions, their inner experiences would be enriched, their horizons widened and this will have a positive influence on their further activities.

- **Serving the Muslim community in small things of daily life,**

be interested in their children, share their joys and sorrows. In all these gestures it becomes apparent whether we take our faith seriously.

- **On an intellectual level**

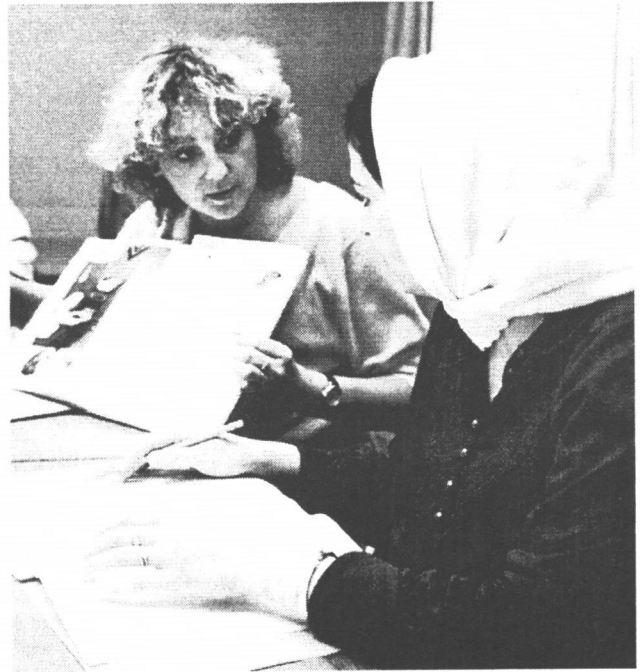
there are special opportunities for meeting one



another on this level:

- ◆◆◆ by sharing results of linguistic research on Islam, Muslim mysticism or Sufi-literature, by talking about religion;
- ◆◆◆ by collaborating to combat the excesses of materialism, consumer mentality or the destruction of the environment;
- ◆◆◆ by committing oneself to the movement for Justice and Peace;
- ◆◆◆ by discussing economic systems, political theories or today's moral problems.

These are some possibilities which could be helpful in approaching one another. They all require an attitude of *minoritas*, which shows a respect for those who do not share our faith. The necessary dialogue always requires a deep faith in the human spirit that is capable of overcoming any obstacles



Collaborating at common projects can lead to a solidarity surpassing all religious boundaries.



Basic Information about Islam

6.

A short summary of the history of Islam

6.1.

The term *Islam* means "total surrender" to the will of *Allâh*, the One God, understood in a strictly monotheistic sense. A faith-filled trust in God as well as the human duty to honour him are both included in the term. Mohammed, the prophet of the Arabs, personally named this religion when he proclaimed, "See, religion in the face of *Allâh* is *Islam*."

Mohammed, who brought the new message of Islam to his people, lived from 569 to 632 A.D. He came from Mecca, where he had a difficult youth, marked by the premature death of both his parents. In regard to material circumstances,

he began to live a trouble-free existence when he entered the service of Khadija¹, the wealthy widow of a merchant, whom he married when she was 40, and when he himself was 25.

He lived monogamously with this woman, who stood by him in unshakeable faithfulness during the time of the harshest opposition, until her death when he was about 50 years old. Only after her death did he contract polygamous unions. His later favourite wife was 'Á'isha, the daughter of Abû Bakr, who became the first Ca-

¹ Pronounced Khadi-ja.





lip after the death of Mohammed.

Mohammed was directed towards his future religious experiences through dreams and visions. When he was 40, in the solitude of Mount Hira, where he retired each year for a month, he received the first revelation from the Angel Gabriel. Other revelations followed.

These revelations entered into the Qur'an, the holy book, upon which the religion and legal tenets of the Islamic world are based.

The Qur'an has been handed on to posterity under exceptionally favourable circumstances.

Mohammed's very first successor as leader of the Muslim community, Caliph Abû Bakr (632-634), ordered a collection of all available texts of the Prophet's revelations, and the third Caliph, 'Utmân (644-656), decreed the establishment of a board of editors who, scarcely twenty years after the death of the Prophet, produced the definitive codified text that, to this very day, is guaranteed to be faithful to the original.

The Qur'an is divided into 114 sections, called *Surahs*. They are arranged according to their length, in decreasing order. Only the seven short opening phrases (*fatihah*) have been given first place, despite their brevity.

Mohammed's preaching, which was set down in the Qur'an, has two central premises. First, the monotheistic belief in Allah was in opposition to the polytheism of ancient Arabia. A short summary of this confession of faith can be found in the 112th Surah of the Qur'an:

Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Eternal, Absolute. He begetteth not nor is He begotten and there is none like unto Him.

Mohammed's second central concern was to prepare people for the Last Judgement at the end of the world. This can be seen especially from the fact that the Qur'an devotes much

space to descriptions of heaven and hell. In doing so it depicts life in the hereafter in terms of an ideal earthly existence.

The "*five pillars of Islam*", binding for every Muslim, are also derived from Mohammed's teachings. They include the profession of faith, the obligation of the five daily prayers, almsgiving, fasting during the month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim should undertake at least once in his life, if he is physically and financially able to do so.

Some additional precepts complement the *five pillars*. There can be a call and obligation to engage in the Holy War (*jihâd* = untiring effort). The use of wine and gambling are forbidden. Pork is considered unclean. Marriage laws allow a man to possess four wives and he is granted free disposition over his female slaves. These practices were limited, however, because they require a good deal of wealth.

At first Mohammed's teaching reached only a small group of the *faithful*. The powerful people in his hometown of Mecca regarded the movement with suspicion and hostility.

Things took a turn for the better after the *Hijra* when Mohammed fled Mecca in 622 A.D., the year from which Muslims reckon their dates. People from Jathrib, to the north of Mecca, invited Mohammed and his followers to settle in their town, which soon became known as the "*City of the Prophet*", [in Arabic] "*medinat an-nabi*" or *Medina* for short.

In Medina Mohammed began planning for a larger, Islam-dominated region. He set as a priority the reconquest of his native city, whose holy shrine, predating Islam, was the *Ka'ba*, which he had set as the goal of the Islamic pilgrimage, the *Hâji*.

Following an absence of eight years from Mecca and a series of skirmishes with the people of his hometown, he achieved a peaceful and triumphant return. The last two years of his life were devoted primarily to the organisation of the pilgrimage. He died on June 8, 632.

The spread of Islam began immediately after the Prophet's death. In a quick series of victories Islamic armies conquered the coast of northern

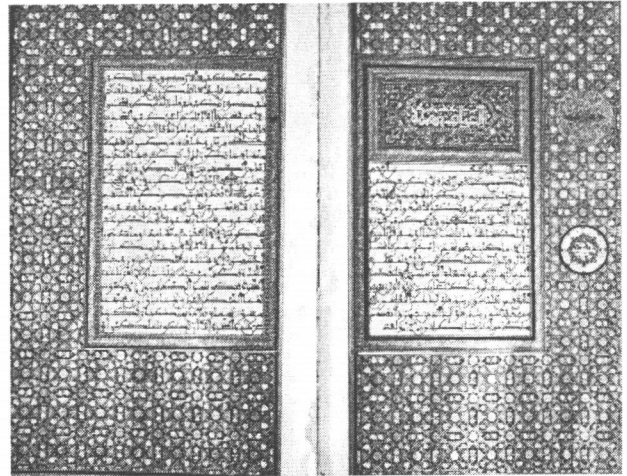


Africa, and, passing over the Straits of Gibraltar, they destroyed the Spanish Kingdom of the Visigoths in 711. Not until Charles Martel, the Visigothic King in Spain, met and defeated them on the battlefields between Poitiers and Tours (France) in 732 – one hundred years after Mohammed’s death – did they stop their advance.

At the same time as Islam was spreading, the two great powers of the Middle East, Byzantium and Persia, were engaged in a long struggle for supremacy. Their resources almost depleted, Islam was able to attack the East as well. In 642 the Persian Sassanid Empire was defeated.

In the 16th century, Islam experienced a “golden age” in India, during the time of the Great Mogul Empire. It reached Indonesia through Indian merchants.

As far as dogma is concerned, Islam has not maintained an absolute unity. The vast majority of Muslims follow the orthodox tradition and doctrine, or the *sunna*, the *custom*. Early on the followers of ‘Ali, the fourth Caliph and one of Mohammed’s sons-in-law, separated themselves from the Sunni Muslims. They form the “*shi’at ‘Ali*”, the “party of ‘Ali”.



Pages from an 18th - century Qur'an in Maghreb script.

These Shiites – most numerous in Persia (present-day Iran), although they themselves are split into various groups and sects – recognise only ‘Ali as the Prophet’s legitimate successor. According to the doctrine of the *Shiah*, shortly before his death Mohammed initiated only ‘Ali into the last secrets of Islam. ‘Ali passed on his esoteric knowledge to his family and his descendants are therefore considered to be the *imâms*, the spiritual leaders and the bearers of secret wisdom.

The most important groups and Schools of Law

6.2.

Just as important as our every-day life encounters are, so we must also look at the most important groups and schools of law of Islam, which are comparable to our Christian denominations. Shortly after the death of the Prophet questions about legitimate succession caused a split in the Islamic community, the *umma*. This split is at the basis of the emergence of the groups that continue to exist, essentially, up to our day. The reason for the split was a different concept about the qualities and origin of the leader of the community, whom the Sunna calls the *Caliph* (successor) and the Shiah the *Imâm*.

After the death of ‘Utmân, Mohammed’s son-in-law and cousin, ‘Ali, was chosen as the Fourth Caliph. This brought about a conflict with the governor of Syria, Mu’âwiya, of the family of the Umayyads, to which ‘Utmân had also belonged. The followers of ‘Ali, “*shi’at ‘Ali*”, supported him in his claim as Caliph. Armed conflict broke out and eventually Mu’âwiya proposed an arbitration court, to which ‘Ali agreed; the *Kharijites* (“the marching off, setting out, departing”), who had previously supported ‘Ali broke away, reproaching him for subjecting his God-given right of succession to human judge-



ment. After 'Ali responded with force to the Kharijite insurrection, he was murdered by a Kharijite in 661. The majority of the Arab Muslims recognised Mu'âwiya and the subsequent Umayyad Caliphs as the political power, while the Shiah opposed them and considered 'Ali's sons, Hasan and, after his death, Husayn, as the leader of the Muslim community.

• The Sunni

Only 200 years after these events, a new group developed within Islam, whose adherents saw themselves as the repository of orthodoxy in opposition to the rationally-based speculative theology of the Mu'tazila and their opposition group, the Shi'ites. This group eventually came to be known as the "People of the Sunna and of the community", a name derived from the *Sunna*, the example of the Prophet, which is, after the Qur'an and together with the consensus of the community of the faithful, the foundation of the faith.

This orientation recognises Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmân and 'Ali alike as the first four "correctly led" Caliphs. Nowadays, the Sunni – this group of more than 800 million members, represents the majority of Muslims.

Regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an in questions of law (*ijtihâd*) various schools of thought developed among the Sunni; the four most important ones found today are:

◆◆◆ The Shafi School of Law

Its founder Shâfi'î (+ 820), one of the greatest theoreticians of Islamic law, laid down four sources or roots of law: the Koran, the Sunna of the Prophet, the consensus of the community (*ijmâ'*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) from the Qur'an and Sunna. He wanted to make the responsible individual opinion subject to these criteria. The Shafi school of law is most commonly found among Muslims in East Africa, South-east Asia, Southern Arabia, but also in Lebanon.

◆◆◆ The Hanafi School of Law

Abû Hanîfa (+ 767) is said to be its founder. Besides Koran, Sunna, consensus, and systematic reasoning, the Hanafi recognise two additional means of determining justice: responsible individual opinion and the common good. Thus, in addition to faith and tradition, common sense is given decisive importance in determining what is right. The Hanafi school of law is the largest in number, and is spread mostly in Turkey, Central Asia, Pakistan and India.

◆◆◆ The Maliki School of Law

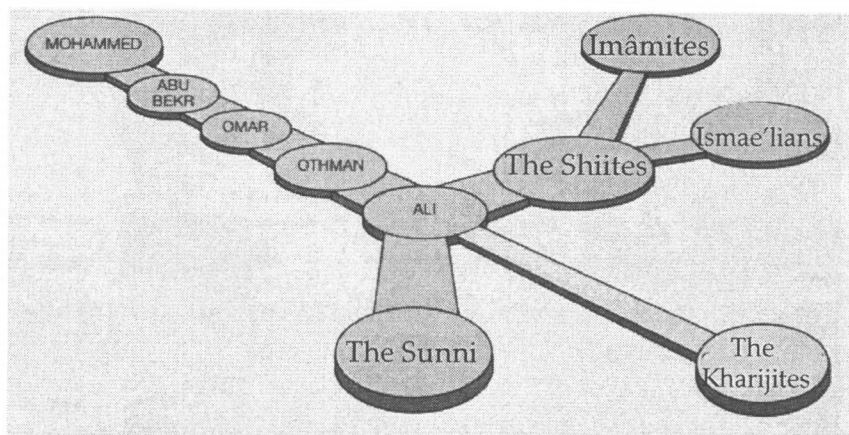
Founded by Mâlik ibn Anas (+ 796), this school of law developed from the School of Medina. Along with the four roots of law recognised by the Shafi, this school, which is spread throughout North, West and Central Africa, recognises the consideration of public interest in determining what is right and cites tradition and the common law of Medina.

◆◆◆ The Hanbali School of Law

This traditionalistic school is named after its founder Ibn Hanbal (+ 855). It rejects analogical reasoning as the source of law and is widespread primarily in Saudi Arabia, in parts of Syria and Palestine.

• The Kharijites

The Kharijites, whose branch of the Ibadites can still be found in Oman, in some cities of Algeria and on the Island of Jerba (Tunis), separated from the Shi'ites and from the followers of Mu'âwiya in 657. They claim that the most pious and best



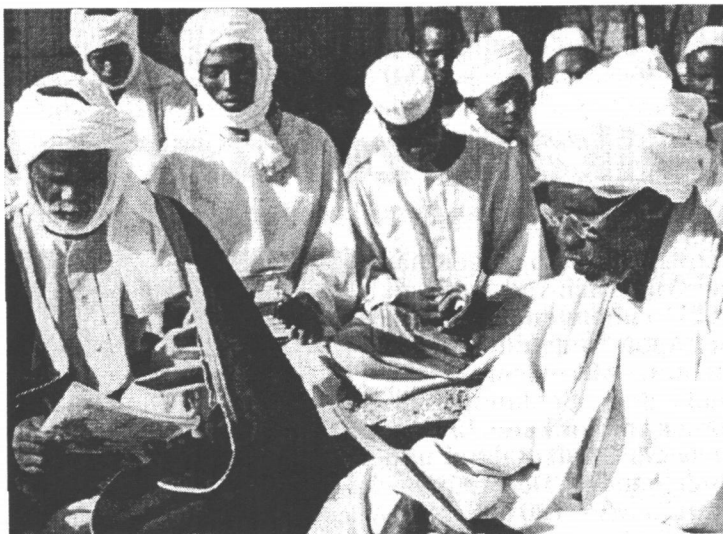
The separation of the early Islam.



Muslim, regardless of his origin, should lead the community. There are approximately 1.5 million Kharijites.

• The Shiites

10% to 15% of the Muslim world population are Shiites. The Shiah, which had its first centre in the Arab milieu around Kufa, regards 'Ali as Mohammed's rightful successor (*imâm*). Only descendants of the families of the Prophet and of 'Ali are recognised as leaders of the community. Based on differing opinions about which imams continued the legitimate succession, different branches of the Shiah can be distinguished:



Chad: Islamic jurist in class.

◆◆◆ The Imâmites

The largest Shiite group, with about 100 million followers, is also known as the *Twelver Shiah* after the twelfth Imâm, who, according to their belief, was taken into hiding and is living still until he will return as *Mahdi* (one guided aright). During his concealment, qualified theologians shall lead the community, as is the case in today's Islamic Republic of Iran. The *Twelver Shiah* are found mostly in Iran and southern Iraq. In Afghanistan, Lebanon and other countries, there are sizeable Imâmite minorities.

◆◆◆ The Ismae'lians

They recognise Isma'il as the seventh legitimate Imâm, who died in 760 before his father, the sixth Imâm. Another group of Ismae'lians believes that this role, which was not exercised by his father, was passed on to his son, Mohammed. The seventh Imâm was taken into hiding and will come back to the world as the Mahdi. In him the lineage of the imams was continued; therefore this group has been called *Sevener Shiah*. One of the sub-groups of Ismae'lians are the *Nizârîtes*. Today they are found in Yemen, Iran, India, Syria and Africa, with approximately 25 million followers. They stress the importance of the inner enlightenment of their spiritual leader. Their present leader is the Aga Khan. The *Druse*, who are found in Lebanon and Syria and who number around 500 thousand, also belong to the Ismae'lians.

◆◆◆ The Zaydites

Unlike the Ismae'lians and the Imâmites, they consider Zayd, the son of the Fourth Imâm, as the legitimate Fifth Imâm. They claim that the Imâm, who is chosen from among the descendants of 'Ali, must earn his office, keep it, and must also have some degree of theological knowledge. This group has approximately five million followers, including about half of the population of Yemen. In questions of law and faith they are very close to the Sunni.

◆◆◆ The Extreme Shiah

The extreme Shia refers to groups who believe that God dwells in 'Ali and the other Imams. They include the *Nusayrîs* or *'Alawites*, who live in Northwest-Syria and number more than one million members.

They should not be confused with a religious group found in Turkey, the *Alevites*, who show some similarities in their reverence of 'Ali, but who have some unorthodox elements in their ceremonies. It would require too much at present to go into the various theological orientations and the many reform movements in Sunna and Shiah.

There are the somewhat politically-motivated differences regarding Muslim leadership and theological distinctions concerning, for example, the possibility of creative judgements in legal



questions (*ijtihād*), which the Shiah allow but which the Sunni have rejected since the 9th century, separating the Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

However, in questions of faith and law, there is more that they hold in common than that separates them.



undamentalism – threat to the faith and to respect for the *Other*

See

In 1989, during a summer academic convoked by the Pope in Castel Gandolfo on the topic of “*Europe and the civil society*”, Ralf Dahrendorf described fundamentalism as the “*greatest threat to civil society today*”. The term *fundamentalism* is used in a variety of ways. It originated with a periodical, “*The Fundamentals*”, published in the USA from 1910 to 1915; its purpose was to spread the beliefs of a conservative-Protestant movement whose roots go back to mid 18th century. In 1919 the groups, which were independent of one another in their action, merged to form the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association. The first fundamentalists fought against modernism and the corruption of morals. Their basic principles were:

- ◆ the literal interpretation and infallibility of the Bible;
- ◆ the invalidity of modern science, when it does not agree with the Bible (e.g. the theory of evolution);
- ◆ the conviction that they alone are *true* Christians and the recipients of salvation;
- ◆ the rejection of secularism;
- ◆ opposition to the traditional Church.

The evangelical fundamentalists today are widespread throughout the United States in many different groups. Many of their “television evan-

gelists” use the modern media in spreading their missionary zeal. Fundamentalist-political renewal movements have as part of their platform the protection of the family, the fight against feminism and equal rights for women, the criminal prosecution of homosexuals, the prohibition of pornography and much more.

Since the 1960’s a movement has been gaining influence in many Islamic countries, a movement called “Islamic fundamentalism”, although its followers prefer to call themselves *Islamists*. In the western world it is regarded as being connected to the religious-political practice of the “Islamic Republic of Iran”, which was founded by Ayatollah Khomeini through the Islamic Revolution in 1979 after the elimination of the Shah’s regime. A characteristic of this movement is the idea of restoring Islam to its original state, as it had existed in the times of the Prophet and his companions. This movement does not represent *Islam* and is actually in opposition to conservative religious trends in Islam, because it rejects traditions developed over the centuries, considering them to be *deviations* from true Islam. It sees in the re-establishment of Sharia², based on

²Religious law that is written in the words and deeds of the Prophet, passed on in the Koran and canonical collections.



a literal interpretation of Qur'an and Hadith³, a decisive requirement for the establishment of an ideal Islamic society. Reasons for this movement are certainly a hostility towards the western industrialised nations, which have been experienced as dominating politically, economically and culturally since the age of colonisation, and a realistic assessment of capitalism's and socialism's attempts to solve the social problems of the predominantly Islamic countries. The cultural and social changes, triggered by western influence, and social problems such as unemployment and a widening gap between the rich and poor have led to an identity crisis in many countries, and the response to it is being sought in a return to the roots, to the *foundations*. The fundamentalist movements in Islamic countries, however, are not uniform, and they are not all militant or prone to violence.

Since the 1980's the term *fundamentalism* has been used increasingly, eventually becoming an *in* word, one needing clarification. It implies behaviour that has as its reference point some kind of fundament (foundation): a holy book, a law, a dogma, a doctrine. Most of all, this *foun-*

dation is given a very precise interpretation, an interpretation that is seen as the only true one, and which its adherents are prepared to impose it fanatically and militantly on others. In recent times *fundamentalism* has been linked to the religious-political practice, which was established by the Ayatollahs in Iran. As a phenomenon it long ago passed beyond the borders of the Iranian State and the Islamic religion. There are fundamentalist trends in every religion, in Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christianity, in Islam and Judaism as well as in political parties and in the field of economic theories.

However, what is important for our present understanding of fundamentalism – and decisive for this lesson – is the Shiite Ayatollah Khomeini who, as we have already noted, eliminated the regime of the Shah of Iran in the course of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. He stands for the belief in the exclusive truth of the Koran in its pristine form as well as for the unity of politics and religion, with the consequence that religious laws and prescriptions are applicable and enforceable in public life.

Judge

7.2.

Religious fundamentalism gives a distorted image of the living source of faith. Even Francis realised this danger and pointed it out in his *admonition*: “*Those people are put to death by the letter who only wish to know the words alone*” (cf. Adm 7:2ff.). Neither in Christianity nor in Islam does fundamentalism have anything to do with the foundation on which the true faith is based. God is made into “a thing”, something that people can exploit, can use for their own power-play.

A return to the sources, however, fulfils a deep human desire. Social insecurity, a lack of orientation, meaninglessness serve as fertile soil for its growth. Threats to the dignity and life of the

Other, discord, intolerance, discrimination, hate, murder and drug addiction are equally superficial and inadequate responses to human longing as is the phenomenon of fundamentalism. Therefore, we must learn to understand the reasons behind fundamentalism and to deal with them. This means changing the conditions that give rise to fundamentalism and to tap the true sources of life.

In the course of the history of Islam and Christianity, there have been times of tolerance and respect between the adherents of the two faiths. Proof of this can be found in documents and events such as Vatican II's *Declarations on religious freedom* (*Dignitatis humanae*) and on *the Church's*

³ Hadith or Hadit: a narrative record of the sayings or customs of Mohammed and his companions.



relationship to non-Christian religions (Nostra aetate), the prayer for peace in Assisi, the invitation to the Pope to address young people in Morocco, a Turkish university's request to the Vatican to send someone to lecture on the Christian religion.

Both religions, however, must also admit that

in the name of the Christian and Islamic faiths appeals have been made to intolerance and war, something that is still going on today: in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants, in Algeria in the murder of Muslims and Christians, including religious and a bishop, to cite but a few examples.

Act

7.3.

Whenever it becomes militant, fundamentalism can be a threat to the dignity and the life of the other, cause discord, intolerance, discrimination and even justify hate and murder. How should one act in such a situation?

We could, for example seek a basis for dialogue at an interpersonal level;

◆◆◆ seek a basis for dialogue at an interpersonal level;

◆◆◆ study together the social causes of fundamentalism, such as injustice, poverty, destitution;

◆◆◆ clearly denounce militant fundamentalism and the injustices it provokes (such as the violation of human rights or restrictions on religious freedom) and assist its victims;

◆◆◆ jointly commemorate Francis' encounter with the Sultan Malik-al-Kamil; the peace between this sultan and Frederick II during the crusades; the protection of the persecuted Jews; the protection granted during the Ottoman Empire to Christians who practised their own faith;

◆◆◆ we should also remember the shadow and the light: the refuge given to persecuted Jews in convents and monasteries during the Third Reich, by Franciscans and others, but also the pogroms against Jews, which were also supported by Franciscans; the efforts for respect and peaceful dialogue with the Muslims throughout the centuries, despite the many martyrs and victims, but also the abuses and the sermons in favour of the Crusades.

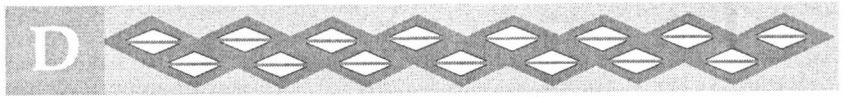
Church Documents and Franciscan Sources

Scripture	1 Pet 3:15
Documents of the Church	NA 3
Franciscan Sources	PrsG 1-4; 2LtF 61f.; LtC1 12; 1LtCus 5,8; LtR 1,7; LtOrd 4,6,9; Adm 7:2ff.; ER 16; 23:1.9; LR 12:1; Test 12; 1C 57; 2C 30; LMj IX:8; LFI 24; JdV 32.
Inter-Franciscan Documents	Mattli 1982
OFM, OFM ^{Cap} , OFM ^{Conv}	GGCC: 95,3
Poor Clares	
Third Order Regular	
Secular Franciscans	

Please, add your own documents!



Exercises



Exercise

A Role-play: The Quarrel over the Prophet's Beard

The leader presents the following story (preferably narrating it rather than reading it):

This evening, like every other evening, the men were sitting in front of the coffee-house, drinking their raki,⁴ smoking their cheap, strong cigarettes and chatting. Gradually the conversation turned to the bridge, which the citizens had been talking about for years now, to finally connect the two parts of the village, which are separated by a torrent. Most days of the year the people can manage well without it, the poor little trickle can be crossed without difficulty. After a thunderstorm, however, or when it had been raining all day, when it seemed as if the sky had opened all the floodgates, or in spring, when the snow melted, there was no way to get across. At such times there is no school for the children on this side of the river – literally, a gift from heaven! However, important people such as the baker, the blacksmith, the midwife and the priest cannot be reached for days. Therefore, the people of the village had long ago unanimously agreed that they needed a bridge again. The old one had collapsed and been swept away by the torrent.

However, there was general disagreement on where the new bridge should be built. The village is located on both sides of the torrent, which divides it in two almost equal halves. On the one side are the mosque, the more important farmers, the baker, the blacksmith, the midwife, but above all the coffee-house. On the other side of the torrent are the church and the school and the cemetery in which Muslims and Christians lie in wait for paradise or heaven. There were

simple conditions for determining the site of the bridge: the width of the torrent, the firmness of the banks and the depth of the streambed, which should be safe against flood. However, any possible place seemed to favour either some Muslim or some Christian, and so for a long time there had been a smouldering feud.

Who knows if it was the raki or one of those oppressively hot summer days that make people itch for a fight? When they had finally exhausted all the arguments about where the bridge should be placed, someone said: *"That is just like you Mohammedans, you want a bridge but you are not ready to recognise objective facts."* Mohammedan instead of Muslim: that really hurt; it was a deliberate insult. The offended party was not about to put up with that from a non-believer, as he called him now with disgust. Suddenly everyone was shouting in confusion and, like so many other times, the people were divided into two camps: Muslims and Christians. Fortunately, however, following an old, daily ritual, the Imam and the priest were also on their way to the coffee-house.

They were wise men. Both of them had studied a lot about the history of their country and their faith and they respected one another. The Imam was a Sufi, and the priest was, like most of the priests in this region, a Franciscan. Once again fighting over "the beard of the prophet", they both thought. Both clergymen came up to the squabblers, looked at each other, and almost at the same time they said: *"Shame on you! You are fighting like silly schoolboys."* The Imam contin-

⁴ raki: Turkish liqueur distilled from fermented raisins.



ued: "In the name of Allah, the All-merciful. Dispute not with the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) save in the fairer manner, and say: 'Our God and your God is One and to Him we have surrendered'" (Surah 29, verse 45).⁵ The son of Francis then did not want to miss out, so he searched his mind for an appropriate passage from the Christians' holy book. This one came to mind: "Everyone who grows angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement" (Mt 5:22). It worked. The men were really ashamed. They remembered what they had heard so often from the mouth of their ministers: Quarrelling does not please Allah or God, as the Christians call Him. And it is pointless to help the Almighty or to try to defend His honour, by abusing, trashing or even killing His creatures. Such terrible things must have taken place in the village in former times. The old ones can still talk about it.

"Let us draw lots for the right place for the bridge. With the help of Allah we will build it then", the Imam suggested. And he interpreted the general murmur of the men as agreement. The Franciscan also found the proposal good and added: "The bridge will serve all God's children and as a community project it will give honour to the Almighty" (Othmar Noggler, OFM Cap).

Instructions:

1. Beforehand the facilitator prepares seven signs representing the following roles in the sketch and places them on the walls around the room:

- ◆ Keeper of the coffee-house, a Muslim in front of whose coffee-house the inhabitants of the village meet;
- ◆ Midwife, a Christian,
- ◆ Imam,
- ◆ Priest,
- ◆ Bridge,
- ◆ Rivers,
- ◆ Others.

2. The facilitator then gives the following instructions:

a) Assuming roles

- ◆◆◆ Try putting yourself in the story: which role do you like, can you sympathise with? Which role do you find unpleasant, unfamiliar or alien?
- ◆◆◆ In silence, attentive to your inner self, choose a role and go stand by the corresponding sign (Several persons might choose the same role and some roles might not be chosen by anyone).
- ◆◆◆ After some time for reflection ask if everyone is comfortable in his/her place, or whether anyone wants to change.

b) Acting out the roles

- ◆◆◆ Divide into small groups for acting out the roles. Within the group, discuss the question: *Why did you choose this role and not some other role? (Make sure you devote enough time to this discussion).*
- ◆◆◆ The facilitator opens the discussion by asking the whole group: *Where shall the bridge be built? (Discuss that in the whole group, sticking to the role you have chosen. Remain in your place in the room).*
- ◆◆◆ When the allotted time is up, the facilitator interrupts the process and gives a new instruction: *Discuss the following questions: How did I feel? How did I experience the others? Would I have played the others' roles differently?*

c) Shared reflection:

- ◆◆◆ After a while the facilitator calls the small groups back to the large circle and ask the following questions: *What did I think about during the role-playing? What did I experience? What did I learn? Where have I experienced anything similar? How would I now behave*

⁵ Taken from: *The Koran. Interpreted. The World's Classics.* Translated with an Introduction by Arthur J. Arbery. Oxford 1983.





Exercise

2.

One of the religious duties of the Muslims the daily prayer, the *salât*.

Five times a day the Muslim prays in a prescribed way: in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon, at dusk and before going to bed. The ablutions that precede these prayers also follow a set pattern. The prayer begins with the prayer of praise (*thana*):

"O God, to Your glory and to Your praise; blessed is Your Name, and there is no God except You."

Then the first Surah of the Koran, the *Fatiha*, which is prescribed for all prayers, is recited,

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise belongs to God, Lord of all beings. The Merciful, the Compassionate. Ruler of the Judgement day. Only You do we serve and only from You do we seek aid. Guide us along the straight path. The path of those whom You have blessed. Not those against whom You have sent Your wrath nor those who are astray."

This is followed by a reading of a passage from the Qur'an; then the Muslim bows and places the palms of the hands on the knees without folding them, and in this position says three times: *"Glory be to God, the Great One."*

Standing erect, he then says:

*"God listens to whoever praises Him.
O our Lord, Praise be to You!"*

Then he kneels, with the forehead, nose and palms touching the ground, and in this position prays three times:

"Glory be to God, the most High!"

Next he sits on his left foot and lets the right free, in such a way that the toes are turned outwards and the heel pointing to the sky. And in this position he asks God for forgiveness. Then he prostrates again and once again repeats three times the words of the first prostration. And then he stands. All the rising, bowing and prostrating describe a circle: the *rak'at*.

Assignments:

Compare the Muslim prayers and postures described here

◆◆◆ with Francis' Praises of God on La Verna.

You are the holy Lord God

Who does wonderful things.

You are strong. You are great. You are the most high.

*You are the almighty king. You holy
Father, King of heaven and earth.*

You are three and one, the Lord God of gods;

*You are the good, all good, the highest
good, Lord God living and true.*

You are love, charity ... (PrsG 1-4).

◆◆◆ with prayers and postures which are familiar in our communities.

Questions:

1. What similarities do you find?
2. What differences do you detect?





Exercise

3.

The so-called “*five pillars of Islam*” summarise the most typical aspects of the practices of the Islamic faith:

1. *shahâda*: belief in monotheism: there is no other God than Allâh and Mohammed is his prophet;
2. *salât*: the prayer recited five times a day (with prescribed words and postures);
3. *zakât*: an obligatory contribution (alms) from the wealthy for the poor;

4. *ramadân*: the month of fasting, in which no food or drink is taken during daylight;
5. *haji*: pilgrimage to Mecca during the month of pilgrimage (at least once in a life time if finances and circumstances permit).

Assignment:

Name some comparable practices in Christianity and discuss them with the others.

Applications

E



Application

In the First World, most of all in countries belonging to the European Union, the problem of Christian-Muslim mixed marriages is growing.

Questions:

1. Do you know of any cases of mixed marriages?
2. What positive and negative aspects do you see in them?



Application

2.

Bernard of Clairvaux (+ 1153) played an important role in the preparations for the Second Crusade (1147-1149), in which the German Emperor

Conrad III and the French King Louis VII both participated.



Read the following texts:

• **From a sermon on the Crusades by Bernard of Clairvaux:**

What are you doing, brave men? What are you doing, Servants of the Cross? So you want to give the Holy Places up to the dogs and the pearls to the swine? How many sinners have confessed their sins there with tears in their eyes and have obtained pardon since the sword of our fathers has expelled the heathen rabble?

The Evil One sees and looks with mistrust at it; he grinds his teeth and turns pale; he stirs up the vessels of his malice and is certain that he will leave no trace of such piety if he should ever, God forbid, be strong enough to conquer the Holy Places. That would indeed be an incurable pain and an irreparable harm for all future times. For this generation, however, for this impious generation, it would be everlasting shame and an eternal reproach.

Your fame runs through all the world and the renown of your heroism fills the whole earth because your country is fruitful in brave men and strong through the fullness of its youth. So gird your loins like men, and take up the happy weapon in zeal for Christ's Name. Let there be an end to the noble practice, nay, rather the ignoble practice according to which you are accustomed to attack one another. What evil pleasure seizes the accursed, for them to pierce the body of their neighbour with a sword and perhaps send his soul to perdition, too? Even the victor does not come off unscathed: a sword pierces his soul if he rejoices over the death of his enemy. It is madness, not courage, to sanctify such injustice; it is not boldness, but stupidity that is its cause.

Thou, brave knight, Thou, man of war, now you have a blood-feud without danger where victory will bring fame, and death is a gain. Thou, clever merchant, a man of profit in this world, I announce a great market. See to it that it does not escape you. Take up the Cross, and all that you confess with a penitent heart, you will have forgiven straight away. The goods are cheap, if you buy them, and if one pays for them piously, without a doubt they are worth the Kingdom of God ...

• **A prayer based on the joint declaration of Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras (1982):**

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God.

◆◆◆ *We regret the offensive words, the reproaches without foundation, and the reprehensible gestures which, on both sides, have marked or accompanied the sad events of our Muslim-Christian history.*

◆◆◆ *We regret and remove both from memory and from the midst of the Church the statements and attitudes of anger and accusation which followed these events.*

◆◆◆ *We realise that this gesture of reparation and mutual forgiveness is not enough to end both the old and the recent differences between the Muslim and the Christian communities.*

◆◆◆ *Abba, Father, through the action of your Holy Spirit those differences will be overcome through the cleansing of our hearts, through our regret for historical wrongs and through our efficacious determination to arrive at a common understanding and respect for our respective Faiths and traditions and their demands.*

◆◆◆ *We hope nevertheless, Most High, All-powerful and Supreme God, that this act may be pleasing to you who are prompt to pardon us when we pardon one another.*

◆◆◆ *We pray for all people who try to live the truth which you entrusted to us in the holy Books, so that our Islamic-Christian dialogue will grow in depth and mutual knowledge and will lead to our living and working together in brotherhood.*

Assignments:

1. Compare this prayer with St. Bernard's sermon on the Crusades. Note the change of attitude.
2. Add to the prayer petitions that voice concerns for an Islamic-Christian dialogue.





Application

The following are examples from texts of Islamic mystics (Sufi).

Yahya ibn Muadh (+ 871), from Persia:

"O God, Thou art pleased when I love Thee, although Thou hast no need of me. How should I not be pleased then, that Thou lovest me who needs Thee so very much?"

Abu Yazid (Bayayid) Bistami (+ 874), from northern Persia:

"I summoned my soul to God, but it refused to follow me and made trouble. So I turned my back on it and continued going to God."

"He was asked: 'When does a man reach God?' He answered: 'Poor man, does he ever reach God at all?'"

Abu Abdallah Ibn Chafif (+ 982), from Shiraz:

"If you hear the call to prayer and do not find me in the first row in the mosque, then go look for me in the graveyard."

Abul-Hasan Charaqqani (+ 1033), an Iranian:

"O God, You have created me for your sake, my mother gave birth to me for your sake – so do not let me fall prey to any of your creatures!"

"O God, one group of men will arise on Judgement Day as martyrs, for they were killed for your sake. And I shall arise, too, as a martyr, for I am killed by the sword of yearning for Thee."

Ainul-Qudat Hamadani (+ 1131), imprisoned in Baghdad for heresy:

"O God, let me rise blind at my resurrection. Let me be blind, for Thou art too great and too sublime for my eyes to look upon Thee."

Pir Sultan Abdal (+ 1560), Turkish:

"I am turned into streams that are lost in the river, I am turned into roses that bloomed out of season, I have become ashes, cold without fire.

O friend, I am burnt, consumed by Thy love."

Dara Shikoh (+ 1659), son of the Mogul ruler Shah Dshahan, executed by his brother for heresy:

"The lighter the load on his back, the more carefree is the wanderer on the road.

You are a wanderer in this world, too.

Remember this and soberly tie your shoe.

The more riches you have, the more worries,

The heavy turban with many swathes oppresses you.

Throw self-seeking out of your mind,

A heavy burden it is, like an erroneous intent.

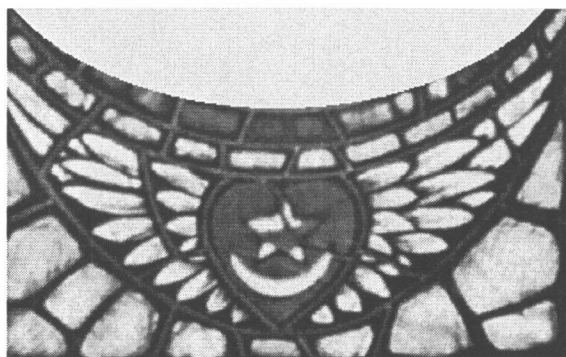
Be free in this world for your whole life.

Heed this advice that Qadiri gave!"

Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan (+ 1927), successor in the line of Indian Sufi-masters and mystic Chishti:

"One spirit and one life is behind all of us;

So how can we be happy, when our neighbour is sad?"



Question:

How do these Sufi poems strike you? Discuss them together.



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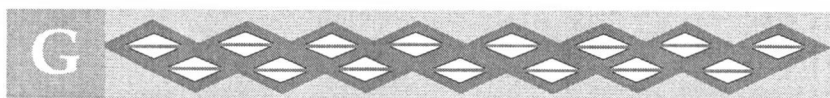
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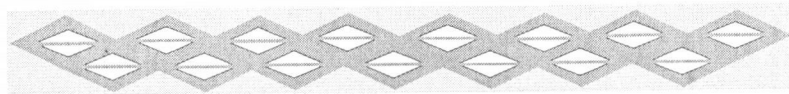
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Interreligious understanding and co-operation

◆◆◆ Religious leaders have a weighty responsibility. The various Christian confessions, as well as the world's great religions, need to work together to eliminate the social and cultural causes of terrorism. They can do this by teaching the greatness and dignity of the human person, and by spreading a clearer sense of oneness of the human family. This is a specific area of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and co-operation, a pressing service which religion can offer to world peace.

◆◆◆ I am convinced that Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious leaders must now take the lead in publicly condemning terrorism and in denying terrorists any form of religious or moral legitimacy.

◆◆◆ The various religions cannot but pursue the path for forgiveness, which opens the way to mutual understanding, respect and trust. The help that religions can give to peace and against terrorism consists precisely in their teaching forgiveness, for those who forgive and seek forgiveness know that there is a higher Truth, and that by accepting that Truth they can transcend themselves.

◆◆◆ I have invited representatives of the world's religions to come to Assisi, the town of St. Francis, on 24. January 2002, to pray for peace. In doing so we will show that genuine religious belief is an inexhaustible wellspring of mutual respect and harmony among peoples; indeed it is the chief antidote to violence and conflict. At this time of great distress, the human family needs to be reminded of our unfailing reasons for hope. It is precisely this hope that we intend to proclaim in Assisi, *asking Al-*

mighty God - in the beautiful phrase attributed to St. Francis himself - *to make each of us a channel of his peace*

(From: Pope John Paul's Message for 'World Day of Peace', 1-1-2002)



Peace Prayer meeting, Assisi 24. 1. 2002.

