

MUSLIMS, CATHOLICS AND THE COMMON PURPOSE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

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Introduction

It is the argument of this paper that Muslims and Catholics are natural partners in the work of justice and peace. This partnership comes from their mutual respect for each other's religions, that allows them to identify commonalities in beliefs and values. It also comes from the common ground of the belief they share in the unity of God, and in his attributes of mercy, compassion and forgiveness. Finally it comes from the example of Muhammad and Jesus themselves, who advocated and practised peace, and from the Holy Books that guide the lives of Muslims and Christians. This paper identifies a common platform of belief which puts Muslims and Catholics together in a world where the work for justice and peace is paramount. Then it identifies four particular areas-human dignity, freedom of religion and conscience, the drive to eradicate poverty and the search for peace- in which Muslims and Catholics are natural collaborators. In doing this it draws on the words of Fetullah Gulen as he speaks of these four areas of social justice.

The Catholic Church teaching about Islam¹

From the Second Vatican Council and in numerous other instances the Church has pointed out that every religion is an effort on the part of human beings to ponder the divine mystery at the centre of life. They are ways in which the spirit of humanity finds expression.² This search for understanding of God brings all people together in a common humanity, and into a unity under God of the entire human race, and the common Fatherhood of God. “God is the common Father of the entire human family. His design for humanity embraces the life and well being of every human person” declared Pope John Paul II in 1989.³ This common Fatherhood is both the platform for and the imperative towards dialogue. So the first thing that brings Catholics and Muslims together in faith is their common monotheism. This principle of divine unity and oneness (*Tawhid*) is the knowledge that God has revealed to humankind in all ages through his prophets from Abraham down to Muhammad (PBUH). In *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church from the Second Vatican Council, the Church declares:

The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, **along with us** adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. (16)

It is not surprising that the Council gave recognition to the monotheistic nature of Islam, for this is the fundamental characteristic of Islam and the first of its five pillars. What is significant is the phrase “together with us”. Muslims **together with us** adore the one God. Our differences about the nature of Jesus Christ do not, in the mind of the Church, take away

¹ Qur’anic verses in this chapter are taken from *The Qur’an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, by Ali Unal, New Jersey: Light Publications and the New Testament references are taken from the *Holy Bible, New revised Standard Version*, Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² *Nostra Aetate*, 1: Pope John Paul II speaking to the 50th General Assembly of the United Nations Organization. New York, October 5th, 1995.

³ Address to the Latin Bishops of the Arab regions on their Ad Limina visit, Rome, February 3rd, 1989.

from the fact that we are united in the worship of the one true God. “We would like you to know that the Church recognises the riches of the Islamic faith-a faith that binds us to the one God”⁴ declared Pope Paul VI in 1972. In another speech in 1976 he referred to Muslims as: “Our brothers in faith in the one God”⁵.

In another significant document, *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council acknowledged some of the Beautiful 99 names of God, and in so doing recognised that for Muslims Allah is not one dimensional. His unity is a richly layered and complexly beautiful amalgam of Creator, the One who is all Merciful, the One who is All Powerful, the One who Judges, the One who Forgives and many other Beautiful names. Catholics also admit these characteristics of God as they have been revealed to us through Jesus Christ. (Psalm 8; Psalm 139; Exodus 19).

A further factor that unites us is that we both look to Abraham, father of Ishmael and Isaac, as prophet and forefather in faith. This is acknowledged not only in *Nostra Aetate* but in many other papal speeches and writings. The common family legacy we have of Abraham’s response to his call, his fidelity to the one God, his unwavering faith in God’s plan for him and for his descendents, gives us a familial bond from which we can collaborate for the common good. “We assure our Muslim brethren” declared Pope John Paul II in 1994, “who freely laid claim to faith in Abraham, that we wish to collaborate with them...in working for the peace and justice which alone can give glory to God.”⁶ In the holy Qur’an the covenant bond between Jews, Christians and Muslims is expressed in this way. “And remember when we took from the prophets their covenant, and from you (O Muhammad) and

⁴ To the new ambassador of Pakistan, Rome, September 9th, 1972.

⁵ To the new ambassador of Morocco, Rome, June 4th, 1976.

⁶ Pope John Paul II: A Message for the Special Assembly of the Synod of the Bishops of Africa: Rome, May 6th, 1994.

from Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant.” (S 33.7)

Other foundations of unity between Muslims and Catholics can be found in their common obedience to God, submission to God’s plan, commitment to prayer and to service of others. In this regard it is enlightening to draw some simple parallels between the holy Qur’an and the New Testament, and these are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Common ground between the Qur’an and the New Testament on almsgiving.

From the Qur’an	From the New Testament
<p>Those who believe in the Unseen, establish the Prayer in conformity with its conditions and out of what we have provided for them (of wealth, knowledge, power, etc) they spend (to provide sustenance for the needy and in God’s cause, purely for the good pleasure of God and without placing others under obligation (S.2: 3)</p>	<p>Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief draws near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also. (Luke 12: 32)</p>
<p>Now O Human kind, worship your Lord who has created you as well as those before you (and brought you up in your human nature and identity)so that you may attain reverent piety towards him and His protection. (S. 2: 21)</p> <p>Seek help through patience (and fasting</p>	<p>Rid yourselves then of all malice and all guile, insincerity, envy and all slander. Like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow into salvation (1 P. 2: 1)</p> <p>Humble yourselves therefore under the</p>

<p>which requires and enables great patience, and through the Prayer. Indeed the Prayer is burdensome, but not for those humbled by their reverence of God. (S. 2: 45).</p>	<p>mighty hand of God so that the may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. (1 P. 5:6).</p>
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There is certainly more common ground between the Catholic Church and Islam than the brief analysis given here, but these three foundations are those referred to most commonly in Catholic Church documents: that is the monotheism that brings Catholics and Muslims together in common worship of the one God, the common family relationship with Abraham, and their common desire to submit to the will of God, to commune with God in prayer, to seek humility and simplicity and to serve God in others. It is particularly this last foundation that we will now develop. What does the Church see as the work that Catholics and Muslims must do together into their service of humanity?

Catholics and Muslims working together.

Working together in support of human dignity

Human dignity is the first of the fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching and it refers to the inalienable dignity of every single person, for every person has been created by God and their destiny is in God's hands. St Paul has said that human beings are God's masterpiece, created for a life that God has prepared for us from the beginning (Eph 2: 10): This is echoed in the holy Qur'an: " He it is who created you from clay and then decreed a term of life for you, and there is with him another unchanging term determined by and known to him."(S. 6: 2). Created by God the person, body and soul, is a child of God. Yet around the world there are numerous abuses of human dignity, and *Gaudium et Spes* identifies some of

these as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, and disgraceful working conditions. In Australia we can add the desperate conditions in which some of our indigenous people live.(GS, 27)

In 1993 Pope John Paul II called Muslims and Catholics together to work for the upholding of human dignity particularly through education of the young⁷. Earlier, speaking to the leaders of Ghanaian Muslims in 1980 he had said: “I pray that the almighty and merciful God will grant peace and brotherhood to all the members of the human family. And may the harmony of creation and the great cause of human dignity be advanced through our fraternal solidarity and friendship.”⁸ So the first task to which Catholic-Muslim partnership should attend is the identification of local, national and global abuses of human dignity and work to eradicate these, a work called for in our sacred books.

*Humans, the greatest mirror of the names, attributes and deeds of God, are a shining mirror, a marvellous fruit of life, a source for the whole universe, a sea that appears to be a tiny drop, a sun formed as a humble seed, a great melody in spite of their insignificant physical positions, and the source for existence all contained within a small body. Humans carry a holy secret that makes them equal to the entire universe, with all their wealth of character; a wealth that can be developed to excellence.*⁹

Defence of freedom of religion and conscience

“There is no compulsion in Religion” declares the Qur’an (2:256). The right of religious freedom, according to the second Vatican Council, impels people to seek religious truth, and once it is known to order their lives in keeping with it. This is only possible if people are free

⁷ Address by Pope John Paul II to representatives of the Muslims of Benin, Parakou, February 4th, 1993.

⁸ Pope John Paul II to the leaders of the Ghanaian Muslims, Accra. May 8th, 1980

⁹ Gulen, F. (2004). Human Beings and their Nature. Towards a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance. Ed M.Enes Ergene, New jersey, Light Publishing.

of coercion, both physical and psychological. This right of religious freedom applies not only to individuals but also to religious communities, and the related rights of religious communities are self government, public worship, assistance and instruction of their members, and the development of institutional infrastructures to support their members in the practice of their religions. Religious communities have the right to select and train their own ministers, communicate freely with other groups within their religion, build places for prayer and worship, raise funds and purchase property. They have the right not to be hindered in their teaching and public witness when this is without coercion and unworthy persuasion, and to establish educational, social and charitable organizations. In addition, according to Vatican II, parents have the right to determine the kind of religious education that their children are to receive, and the right to freedom of choice in education. To quote *Dignitatis Humanae*, (5) “The rights of parents are violated, if their children are forced to attend lessons or instructions which are not in agreement with their religious beliefs, or if a single system of education, from which all religious formation is excluded, is imposed upon all.” Religious freedom must be protected by government, citizenry and social and religious groups, with Government in particular having a duty not only to protect but to foster favourable conditions for the practice of religions.

Abuses of religious freedom include state control of and repression of religions, imprisonment, torture and other ill treatment of religious leaders, and the imprisonment and harassment of people who attend non- state controlled religious worship. Religious freedom is abused when particular religions are denied legal status, resulting in arrest and imprisonment of people for their religious practice; when governments intimidate religious minorities or fail to address intolerance and attacks against religious groups; when there is state favoritism towards majority religions, and discrimination against others. Religious freedom is also in danger when public vilification or blasphemous portrayals of religions go

unchecked. Public debate about religions needs to take into account the rights of those who practice them, and to temper these considerations with the necessary principle of freedom of speech.

In 1980, speaking to the Catholic bishops of Burkina Faso in West Africa, Pope John Paul II urged them to work with the Muslims, the other principal religious group in the country, to understand the requirements of religious freedom and to work together to promote it.¹⁰ Ten years later he used these words to the Bishops of the Philippines.

I would encourage you to seek agreement with your Muslim brothers and sisters on the fundamental question of religious freedom. The foundation of mutual respect and understanding among those of different religious beliefs lies in the right of every individual to freedom of conscience. Everyone has an inalienable right and a solemn duty to follow his or her upright conscience in seeking and obeying religious truth. Religious freedom is not a privilege but a requirement of human dignity.¹¹

Here then, the understanding and promotion of religious freedom and concerted protest when it is abused, is the second work of collaboration between Catholics and Muslims.

We must realize that we are living in a world where diversities are becoming more and more salient. We will choose to regard these diversities either as causes for conflict or as additional assets. Mr. Gülen has recommended that Muslims treat them as assets by empathizing with diverse people and creating reasonable grounds for dialogue and peace.

The ways available for this purpose were the expanded freedom of religion and conscience, pluralism, accountability, fair distribution of income and transparency.¹²

Working for human development and the elimination of poverty

In 1967 in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI called development “the new name for peace” and argued that:

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of Upper Volta, Ouagadougou, May 10th, 1980

¹¹ Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of the Philippines on their Ad Limina visit, Rome, November 30th, 1990.

¹² *Listening to Gulen: Last Updated on Wednesday, 03 June 2009 08:23 Written by Hüseyin Gülerce, Today's Zaman Thursday, 28 May 2009 06:32*

When we fight poverty and oppose the unfair conditions of the present, we are not just promoting human well-being; we are also furthering man's spiritual and moral development, and hence we are benefiting the whole human race. For peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men. (76),

This document is still the benchmark of the Catholic Church's commitment to the eradication of poverty and the development of the world's struggling nations. In February 2009, speaking to the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development, Pope Benedict XVI reminded his audience that the Catholic Church shared its commitment to overcome poverty and hunger and to come to the aid of the world's poorest people. Through its many social justice agencies, the Catholic Church supports projects that assist indigenous communities around the world to flourish on their own soil, and to live in harmony with their traditional culture, instead of being forced to uproot themselves in order to seek employment in overcrowded cities, teeming with social problems. The teaching of the Church is a preferential option for the poor and a consistent love that cannot tolerate injustice or deprivation, love that refuses to rest until poverty and hunger are banished from the globe.

We see this command to succour and support the world's poor in the Muslim imperative of Zakat. The holy Qur'an in numerous verses exhorts almsgiving to the poor in ways that preserve the dignity of the poor and do not profit the giver: "If you dispose your alms openly it is well, if you conceal it and give to the poor in secret this is better for you, and God will make it an atonement to blot out some of your evil deeds. God is fully aware of all that you do (S 2: 271) and" God deprives interest (which is thought to increase wealth) of any blessing and blights it, but makes almsgiving (which is thought to decrease wealth) productive" (S. 2: 276). Work for human development, and for the ultimate eradication of world poverty is thus the third area on which Muslims and Catholics can collaborate in a spirit of honour for their respective sacred books which call them to this task.

Kimse Yok Mu is the main channel of aid and relief for the Gülen community. One of its initiatives in Turkey is the "Sister Family Project" which seeks to "twin" middle- and upper-income families with poorer families to help the needy families confront their economic crises, support the education of children, and reach a dignified standard of living. There is also the Istanbul Food Campaign which provides various staple foods for hundreds of families, and, for victims of natural disasters, food parcels as well as help to homes and mosques, and to distribute refrigerators, home furnishings, blankets, food and clothing to families who had taken refuge in tents. During the month of Ramadan in 2007, Kimse Yok Mu fed over 1,800,000 people both in iftars and with food packages. In 2006, Ramadan tents were constructed not only in seven cities in Turkey but also in the Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan, Lebanon and Ethiopia; by 2007, the number of fast-breaking tents reached 22 cities in Turkey and in another ten countries (Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Lebanon, Sudan, Afghanistan, Kenya, Ethiopia and the Philippines.) In the city of Denizli alone, over 4000 persons were fed daily during the month of Ramadan. Kimse Yok Mu was one of a host of international agencies that responded to the tsunami that devastated parts of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia AND India provided emergency relief and engaged in the effort at reconstruction of the region. Kimse Yok Mu undertook a campaign to raise funds for the affected regions and delivered clothing, food, and medicine to those who had taken refuge in camps, and provided chemicals to purify drinking water. The association funded repairs to houses and schools and reactivated a school destroyed by the tsunami.¹³

Building peace nationally and internationally

In his social justice encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991) Pope John Paul II claimed that religions, now and in the future, would have a prominent role in building peace. (*Centesimus Annus*, 1991). Previously, speaking in Kenya in 1985, he had observed that in light of the human dignity of all, the challenge facing the Church and its collaborators in other religions was to help the world to live in peace and harmony.¹⁴ The work for peace and harmony requires reconciliation of nations and groups who have been estranged from each other, even

¹³ *Fighting Poverty with Kimse Yok Mu. Last Updated on Wednesday, 19 November 2008 11:49 Written by Thomas Michel, S.J. Saturday, 15 November 2008 12:00 . <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/conference-papers/gulen-conference-in-washington-dc/3090-fighting-poverty-with-kimse-yok-mu.html>*

¹⁴ Address to Muslim and Hindu representatives of Kenya, Nairobi, August 18th, 1985.

at war with each other. In following the just, forgiving and merciful God, Pope John Paul II said, this can be achieved.

Both the Bible and the Qur'an teach that mercy and justice are two attributes most characteristic of God. He, 'the Just One' the 'Merciful and Compassionate' can bring about these qualities in mankind if only we open our hearts to allow him to do so. He wants us to be merciful toward each other. Along this path there are new solutions to be found to the political, racial and confessional conflicts that have plagued the human family throughout history.¹⁵

Muslims and Christians agree that the call to be peace-makers issues from the God who is peace. The Qur'an says that "God isthe sovereign, the All Holy and All Pure, the supreme author of peace and salvation and the supreme author of safety and security. (S.59: 23). St Paul prayed for the believers that the God of peace would be with them (Rom 15:33) and said that "God is not a God of disorder but of peace (1 Cor 14:33).

Further, both Holy books call on believers to be peacemakers, drawing in this on the examples of their leaders and prophets, Muhammad and Jesus, who were people of peace. Table 2 shows close comparisons between the Qur'an and certain Hadiths regarding the peace-making characteristics of Muhammad and Jesus, and the call to be peacemakers in both the Qur'an and the New Testament.

Table 2: Muhammad and Jesus and the requirement for their followers to be peacemakers

The holy Qur'an	The New Testament
There was a dispute amongst the people	He came and proclaimed peace to you

¹⁵ Address to a group of Christians, Jews and Muslims , Rome, Febraury 26th, 1986.

<p>of the tribe of Bani 'Amr bin 'Auf. The Prophet went to them along with some of his companions in order to make peace between them.</p> <p>Once the people of Quba fought with each other till they threw stones on each other. When Allah's Apostle was informed about it, he said, "Let us go to bring about a reconciliation between them." (Sahih Hadith Bakhari, 3: 49).</p>	<p>who were far off and peace to those who were near. (Eph 2:17)</p> <p>Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you.</p>
<p>No good is there in most of their secret counsels except for him who exhorts to a deed of charity, or kind equitable dealing and honest affairs and setting things right between people. (S. 4: 114)</p>	<p>Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God (Mtt 5: 8-10)</p>
<p>Do not make thoughtless oaths by God and do not in striving to keep your oaths, make Him a hindrance by your oaths to doing greater good, acting from piety and making peace among people. (S.2. 224)</p>	<p>If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Rom 12:18)</p>
<p>And their greeting to each other and from God and the angels will be Peace. (S.</p>	<p>Let us therefore pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. (Rom</p>

10:10)	14:19).
Make peace between your brothers and keep from disobedience from God (S. 49:10).	Agree with one another, live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you. (2 Cor 13:11).

In 1988, on the basis of this common concern for peace and the common expectation of peace-making between the two religions, Pope John Paul II reiterated the respect of the Church for Muslims, a respect which includes readiness to cooperate with them for the good of humanity and to search with them for peace and justice.¹⁶ Later, speaking to Islamic representatives in Assisi in 1993 and referring to the war torn regions of the Balkans, he used these words, calling on the witness of Christianity and Islam to search for peace,

We stand in solidarity with these victims of oppression hatred and atrocities, with all those whose villages have been burned and bombed, with those who flee their own homes and seek refuge elsewhere, with those unjustly arrested and placed in camps. Both Christianity and Islam inculcate in us a commitment to persevere in the pursuit of justice and peace for them and all victims of conflict.¹⁷

The style adopted by those who treat others with hatred and hostility, whose opposition to Muslims, Jews and Christians apart from themselves has been sharpened with anger and who smear them by calling them "infidel" is not in keeping with Islam at all. Islam is a religion of love and tolerance. Muslims are the bodyguards of love and affection, who shun all acts of terrorism and who have purged their bodies of all manner of hate and hostility.

While the Prophet (pbuh) went out of his way to show respect for others, the fact that today people are citing religion when being offensive to others means that they have not properly

¹⁶ Address to the new Ambassador of Nigeria, Rome, October 27th, 1988.

¹⁷ Address to the representatives of the European Islamic community, Assisi, January 10th, 1993.

understood their Prophet. This is because there is no room for hate and hostility either in Islam or in the multicolored world of its envoy Muhammad (pbuh).¹⁸

Therefore, in response to the God who is peace, and in following the directives of the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus Christ, Muslims and Christians are united in their common vocation to be peace-makers, on family, neighbourhood, national and global levels.

Conclusion

I have argued that Muslims and Catholics are natural collaborators on social justice and peace issues because their common beliefs, their holy Books and their respective religious leaders (the prophet Muhammad and Jesus Christ) call them to this. It is relevant to conclude the arguments of this chapter with a quote from *A Common Word between Us and You* (13/10/2007) an open letter from leaders of Islam to leaders of Christianity.

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity.

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¹⁸ *Fetullah Gulen: True Muslims Cannot be terrorists. Taken from the book, "Tolerance and Atmosphere of Dialogue in Fethullah Gulen's Writings and Sayings."* 09.17.2001

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