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UDIENZA AI PARTECIPANTI AL FORUM CATTOLICO-MUSULMANO PROMOSSO DAL PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER IL DIALOGO INTERRELIGIOSO

Alle ore 12 di questa mattina, nella Sala Clementina del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI riceve in Udienza i partecipanti al primo Seminario organizzato dal Forum cattolico-musulmano, istituito dal Pontificio Consiglio per il Dialogo Interreligioso e da esponenti musulmani.

Dopo gli indirizzi di saluto dell'Em.mo Card. Jean-Louis Tauran, dello Shaykh Mustafa Cerif e del Sig. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, il Papa rivolge ai presenti il discorso che riportiamo di seguito:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to receive you this morning and I greet all of you most cordially. I thank especially Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran as well as Shaykh Mustafa Cerić and Mr Seyyed Hossein Nasr for their words. Our meeting takes place at the conclusion of the important Seminar organized by the "Catholic-Muslim Forum" established between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and representatives of the 138 Muslim leaders who signed the Open Letter to Christian leaders of 13 October 2007. This gathering is a clear sign of our mutual esteem and our desire to listen respectfully to one another. I can assure you that I have prayerfully followed the progress of your meeting, conscious that it represents one more step along the way towards greater understanding between Muslims and Christians within the framework of other regular encounters which the Holy See promotes with various Muslim groups. The Open Letter "A Common Word between us and you" has received numerous responses, and has given rise to dialogue, specific initiatives and meetings, aimed at helping us to know one another more deeply and to grow in esteem for our shared values. The great interest which the present Seminar has awakened is an incentive for us to ensure that the reflections and the positive developments which emerge from Muslim-Christian dialogue are not limited to a small group of experts and scholars, but are passed on as a precious legacy to be placed at the service of all, to bear fruit in the way we live each day.

The theme which you have chosen for your meeting – "Love of God, Love of Neighbour: The Dignity of the Human Person and Mutual Respect" – is particularly significant. It was taken from the Open Letter, which presents love of God and love of neighbour as the heart of Islam and Christianity alike. This theme highlights even more clearly the theological and spiritual foundations of a central teaching of our respective religions.

The Christian tradition proclaims that God is Love (cf. *1 Jn 4:16*). It was out of love that he created the whole universe, and by his love he becomes present in human history. The love of God became visible, manifested fully and definitively in Jesus Christ. He thus came down to meet man and, while remaining God, took on our nature. He gave himself in order to restore full dignity to each person and to bring us salvation. How could we ever explain the mystery of the incarnation and the redemption except by Love? This infinite and eternal love enables us to respond by giving all our love in return: love for God and love for neighbour. This truth, which we consider foundational, was what I wished to emphasize in my first Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, since this is a central teaching of the Christian faith. Our calling and mission is to share freely with others the love which God lavishes upon us without any merit of our own.

I am well aware that Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters regarding God. Yet we can and must be worshippers of the one God who created us and is concerned about each person in every corner of the world. Together we must show, by our mutual respect and solidarity, that we consider ourselves members of one family: the family that God has loved and gathered together from the creation of the world to the end of human history.

I was pleased to learn that you were able at this meeting to adopt a common position on the need to worship God totally and to love our fellow men and women disinterestedly, especially those in distress and need. God calls us to work together on behalf of the victims of disease, hunger, poverty, injustice and violence. For Christians, the love of God is inseparably bound to the love of our brothers and sisters, of all men and women, without distinction of race and culture. As Saint John writes: "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (*1 Jn 4:20*).

The Muslim tradition is also quite clear in encouraging practical commitment in serving the most needy, and readily recalls the "Golden Rule" in its own version: your faith will not be perfect, unless you do unto others that which you wish for yourselves. We should thus work together in promoting genuine respect for the dignity of the human person and fundamental human rights, even though our anthropological visions and our theologies justify this in different ways. There is a great and vast field in which we can act together in defending and promoting the moral values which are part of our common heritage. Only by starting with the recognition of the centrality of the person and the dignity of each human being, respecting and defending life which is the gift of God, and is thus sacred for Christians and for Muslims alike – only on the basis of this recognition, can we find a common ground for building a more fraternal world, a world in which confrontations and differences are peacefully settled, and the devastating power of ideologies is neutralized.

My hope, once again, is that these fundamental human rights will be protected for all people everywhere. Political and religious leaders have the duty of ensuring the free exercise of these rights in full respect for each individual's freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. The discrimination and violence which even today religious people experience throughout the world, and the often violent persecutions to which they are subject, represent unacceptable and unjustifiable acts, all the more grave and deplorable when they are carried out in the name of God. God's name can only be a name of peace and fraternity, justice and love. We are challenged to demonstrate, by our words and above all by our deeds, that the message of our religions is unfailingly a message of harmony and mutual understanding. It is essential that we do so, lest we weaken the credibility and the effectiveness not only of our dialogue, but also of our religions themselves.

I pray that the "Catholic-Muslim Forum", now confidently taking its first steps, can become ever more a space for dialogue, and assist us in treading together the path to an ever fuller knowledge of Truth. The present meeting is also a privileged occasion for committing ourselves to a more heartfelt quest for love of God and love of neighbour, the indispensable condition for offering the men and women of our time an authentic service of reconciliation and peace.

Dear friends, let us unite our efforts, animated by good will, in order to overcome all misunderstanding and disagreements. Let us resolve to overcome past prejudices and to correct the often distorted images of the other which even today can create difficulties in our relations; let us work with one another to educate all people,

especially the young, to build a common future. May God sustain us in our good intentions, and enable our communities to live consistently the truth of love, which constitutes the heart of the religious man, and is the basis of respect for the dignity of each person. May God, the merciful and compassionate One, assist us in this challenging mission, protect us, bless us and enlighten us always with the power of his love.

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