

*Bism Illah Al-Rahman Al-Raheem  
Wa Al-Salatu wal-Salaamu 'ala al-Nabi Al-'Arabi Al-Hashimi Al-Ameen,  
Khatim Al-Anbiya wal-Mursalin*

**ADDRESS TO H.H. POPE BENEDICT XVI  
AT THE KING HUSSEIN MOSQUE, AMMAN, JORDAN**

By: H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal  
Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009 CE, 14<sup>th</sup> Jamada Al-Uwla, 1430 AH

*Al-Salaam 'Aleikum,  
Pax Vobis,*

On the occasion of this historic visit to the King Hussein bin Talal Mosque here in Amman, Jordan, I bid Your Holiness Pope Benedict XVI welcome in four ways.

First, as a Muslim, I bid Your Holiness welcome today, as we understand this visit to be a deliberate gesture of goodwill and mutual respect from the Supreme Spiritual Leader and Pontiff of the largest denomination of the world's largest religion to the world's second largest religion. Indeed, Christians and Muslims together make up over 55% of the world's population and so it is especially significant that this is only the third time in history a reigning Pope has visited a mosque; the first being by Your Holiness's much beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II to the historical Umayyad Mosque in Damascus (which contains the remains of John the Baptist [may peace be upon him]) in 2001, and the second being by Your Holiness to the Magnificent Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed in Istanbul in 2006. The beautiful King Hussein Mosque here in Amman, Jordan is Jordan's State Mosque and it was built and personally supervised by His

Majesty King Abdullah II in loving honour of his late father, Jordan's great King Hussein (may God have mercy on his soul). Thus, this is the first time in history that a Pope has ever visited a *new* mosque. Hence we see in this visit a clear message of the necessity of interfaith harmony and mutual respect in the *contemporary* world, as well as concrete proof of the willingness of Your Holiness to personally take a leading role in this. This gesture is all the more remarkable given the fact that this visit to Jordan by Your Holiness is primarily a spiritual pilgrimage to the Christian Holy Land (and in particular to the Site of the Baptism of Jesus Christ [may peace be upon him] by John the Baptist [peace be upon him] at *Bethany beyond the Jordan* (John 1:28 and John 3:26), and yet Your Holiness has made time in your intense and tiring schedule — tiring for a man of any age — for this visit to the King Hussein Mosque in order to honour Muslims.

I must also thank Your Holiness for the “regret” you expressed after the Regensburg lecture of September 13<sup>th</sup> 2006, for the hurt caused by this lecture to Muslims. Of course, Muslims know that nothing said or done in this world can harm the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him), who, as his last words attested, is with the Highest Companion — God Himself — in Paradise, but Muslims were nevertheless hurt because of their love for the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him), who is, as God says in the Holy Quran, *closer to the believers than their own selves* (*Al-Ahzab*, 33:6). Hence, Muslims also especially appreciated the clarification by the Vatican that what was said in the Regensburg lecture did not reflect Your Holiness's own opinion, but rather was simply a citation in an academic lecture.

It hardly needs to be said, moreover, that the Prophet Mohammad (may peace and blessings be upon him) whom Muslims love, emulate and

know as a living reality and spiritual presence, *is completely and entirely different* from the historical depictions of him in the West since St. John of Damascus. These distorted depictions by those who either do not know Arabic or the Holy Quran and the *Hadith*, or who do not understand the historical and cultural context of the Prophet's life — and thus misunderstand and misconstrue the spiritual motives and intentions behind many of the Prophet's (may peace and blessings be upon him) actions and words — are unfortunately responsible for much historical and cultural tension between Christians and Muslims. It is thus incumbent on Muslims to explain the Prophet's example (may peace and blessings be upon him) above all with deeds of virtue, charity, piety and goodwill; recalling that the Prophet himself (may peace and blessings be upon him) was of an *exalted standard of character* (*Al-Qalam*, 68:4). For God says in the Holy Quran:

*“Verily ye have in the Messenger of God a beautiful pattern of conduct for whosoever hopes in God and the Last Day, and remembereth God much”. (Al-Ahzab, 33:21)*

Finally, I must also thank your Holiness for many other friendly gestures and kindly actions towards Muslims since your ascension in 2005 — including graciously receiving both H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein of Jordan in 2005 and H.M. King AbdAllah bin Abd Al-Aziz of Saudi Arabia, the Custodian of the Two Holy Places in 2008 — and especially for your warm reception of the historical “*A Common Word Between Us and You*” Open Letter of October 13<sup>th</sup> 2007, by 138 leading international Muslim scholars (whose numbers continue increasing to this day). It was as a result of this initiative — which, based on the Holy Qur'an and the Bible, recognised the primacy of the Love of God and Love of the Neighbour in both Christianity and Islam — that the Vatican under your

personal guidance held the first seminar of the International Muslim Catholic forum from November the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> 2008. We will be shortly *Deo Volente* following up with H.E. the very able Cardinal Tauran the work initiated by this meeting, but for now, I would like to cite and echo your words from the speech your Holiness gave on the occasion of the end of the First Seminar:

‘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 the 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. .... 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. .... 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....’

Now I cannot help but remember God’s words in the Holy Qur’an:

*Yet they are not all alike; some of the People of the Scripture are a community upright, who recite God’s verses in the watches of the night, prostrating themselves. / They believe in God and in the Last Day, enjoining decency and forbidding indecency, vying with one another in good works; those are of the righteous. / And whatever good they do, they shall not be denied it, and God knows the God-fearing. (Aal-‘Imran, 3:113-115)*

And:

*...[A]nd you will truly find the nearest of them in love to those who believe to be those who say ‘Verily, we are Christians’;*

*that is because some of them are priests and monks, and because they are not proud. (Al-Maida, 5:82)*

Second, as a Hashemite, and a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him), I also bid Your Holiness welcome to this mosque in Jordan, remembering that the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) welcomed his Christian neighbours from Najran to Medina and invited them to pray in his own Mosque, which they did, in harmony, without either side compromising their own spiritual beliefs. This, too, is an invaluable message which the world desperately needs to remember.

Third, as an Arab — a direct descendant of Ishmael (peace be upon him) of whom the Bible says God would make him *a great nation* (Genesis, 21:18) and that God *was with* him (Genesis, 21:20) — I bid Your Holiness welcome. One of the cardinal virtues of the Arabs — whom traditionally have survived in some of the hottest and most inhospitable climates in the world — is *hospitality*. Hospitality is born of generosity and it recognises the needs of the neighbour and considers those who are far or who come from afar as neighbours, and indeed this virtue is confirmed by God in the Holy Qur'an with the words:

*And worship God, and associate nothing with Him. Be kind to parents, and near kindred, and to orphans, and to the needy, and to the neighbour who is near, and to the neighbour who is a stranger, and to the friend at your side, and to the wayfarer, and to what your right hands possess. Surely God loves not the conceited, and the boastful. (Al-Nisa, 4:36)*

Arab hospitality means not only loving to give and help, but also being generous of spirit and thus appreciative. In 2000, during the late Pope

John Paul II's visit to Jordan, I was working with the Jordanian Tribes, and some tribesmen were saying they really liked the late Pope. Someone asked them why they liked him, since he was a Christian and they were Muslims. They smiled and said: "because he visited us!", and of course the late Pope John Paul II, like yourself could have easily just gone to Israel and Palestine, but instead chose to start his pilgrimage with a visit to us here in Jordan, which we appreciate.

Fourth and finally, as a Jordanian, I bid Your Holiness welcome. In Jordan, everyone is equal before the law regardless of religion, race, origin or gender, and those who work in the government are responsible to do their utmost to care for everyone in the country with compassion and with justice. This was the personal example and message of the late King Hussein who over his long reign of forty-seven years felt for everyone in the country as he did for his own children. It is also the message of his son, H.M. King Abdullah II who accordingly has made it the singular goal of his life and reign to make the life of every Jordanian — and indeed every person in the world that he can reach — as decent, dignified and happy as he possibly can with Jordan's meagre resources.

Today, Christians in Jordan enjoy, by law, 8% of the seats in Parliament and similar quotas at every level of government and society — even though their numbers are less than that in actual fact — in addition to their own personal status laws and Church courts. Their Holy Sites and legal Educational Institutes and other needs are safeguarded by the state — and Your Holiness has just seen this in person at the New Catholic University of Madaba, and will God Willing soon see the New Catholic Cathedral and the new Melkite Church at the Baptism Site — and so Christians prosper today in Jordan as they have for the last 2000 years in peace and harmony, and

with goodwill and genuine brotherly relations between them and their Muslim neighbours. This is in part of course because Christians used to be more numerous in Jordan percentage-wise than they are today but declining Christian birth rates and conversely, high levels of education and prosperity (which has led to their being in demand as immigrants to the West) have reduced their numbers. It is also, however, due to the fact that Jordan appreciates that Christians were in Jordan for 600 years before Muslims. Indeed, Jordanian Christians are perhaps the oldest Christian community in the world — and the majority have always been Orthodox adherents to the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Holy Land — which, as Your Holiness knows better than I, is the Church of St. James, and was founded during Jesus’s own lifetime (may peace be upon him). Many of them are descended from the Ancient Arab Ghassanid and Lakhmid Tribes, and they have throughout history shared the fate and the struggles of their Muslim fellow tribesmen. Indeed, in 630 CE during the Prophet Muhammad’s own lifetime — may peace and blessings be upon him — they joined the Prophet’s own army (led by his adopted son Zeid ibn Al-Haritha and his cousin Jafar bin Abi Taleb) and fought against the Byzantine army of their fellow Orthodox at the Battle of Muthah (it is because of this battle that they earned their tribal name “*Uzaizat*” which means “the reinforcements” — and Latin Patriarch Fuad Twal himself comes from these tribes); then in 1099 CE they were slaughtered by Catholic Crusaders at the Fall of Jerusalem alongside their Muslim comrades; later from 1916-1918 CE during the Great Arab revolt they fought against the Muslim Turks alongside Arab Muslim comrades; they thereafter languished for a few decades along with their Muslim fellows under a Protestant Colonial Mandate, and in the Israeli Arab Wars of 1948, 1967 and 1968 they fought with their Muslim

Arab comrades against Jewish opponents. Christian Jordanians have not only always defended Jordan, but have also tirelessly and patriotically helped to build Jordan, playing leading roles in the fields of education, health, commerce, tourism, agriculture, science, culture and many other fields. All this is to say then, that whilst Your Holiness may believe them to be your fellow Christians, we *know* them to be our fellow Jordanians, and they are as much a part of the country as the land itself.

We hope that this unique Jordanian spirit of interfaith harmony, benevolence and mutual respect will serve as an example to the whole world, and that Your Holiness will carry it to places like Mindanao and certain parts of sub-Saharan Africa where Muslim minorities are hard-pressed by Christian majorities, as well as to other places where the opposite is the case.

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Now, just as we welcome Your Holiness today in four ways, we receive Your Holiness today in four ways:

First, we receive Your Holiness as the Spiritual Leader, Supreme Pontiff and the successor of St. Peter for 1.1 billion Catholics, who are neighbours of Muslims everywhere in the world, and who we greet through receiving you.

Second, we receive Your Holiness, as Pope Benedict XVI in particular whose reign has been marked by the moral courage to do and speak his conscience, no matter what the vogue of the day; who is personally also a Master Christian Theologian responsible for historical Encyclical Letters on the beautiful cardinal virtues of Charity and Hope; who has re-

facilitated the traditional Latin Mass for those who choose it, and who has simultaneously made intra-faith and inter-faith dialogue a top priority of his reign in order to spread goodwill and understanding throughout all peoples of the world.

Third, we receive Your Holiness as a Head of State who is also a world and global leader on the vital issues of morality, ethics, the environment, peace, human dignity, the alleviation of poverty and suffering and even the global financial crisis.

Fourth and finally, we receive Your Holiness as a simple pilgrim of peace who comes in humility and gentleness to pray where Jesus Christ, the Messiah — may peace be upon him — prayed, was baptised and began his mission two thousand years ago.

So welcome to Jordan, Your Holiness Pope Benedict XVI!

God says in the Holy Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him):

*Glory be to your Lord, the Lord of Might, [exalted is He] above what they allege! / And peace be to the messengers. / And praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds. (Al-Saffat, 37:180-182)*

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