



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO TOGO, IVORY COAST, CAMEROON,  
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, ZAIRE, KENYA AND MOROCCO

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO YOUNG MUSLIMS**

*Morocco*

*Monday, 19 August 1985*

*Dear Young People,*

1. I give thanks and glory to God who has granted that I should meet with you today. His Majesty the King did me the honour of visiting me in Rome some years ago, and he had the courtesy to invite me to visit your country and meet you. I joyfully accepted the invitation from the Sovereign of this country to speak with you in this Year of Youth.

I often meet young people, usually Catholics. It is the first time that I find myself with young Muslims.

Christians and Muslims, we have many things in common, as believers and as human beings. We live in the same world, marked by many signs of hope, but also by multiple signs of anguish. For us, Abraham is a very model of faith in God, of submission to his will and of confidence in his goodness. We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection.

It is therefore towards this God that my thought goes and that my heart rises: it is of God himself that, above all, I wish to speak with you; of him, because it is in him that we believe, you Muslims and we Catholics. I wish also to speak with you about human values, which have their basis in God, these values which concern the blossoming of our person, as also that of our families and our societies, as well as that of the international community. The mystery of God, is it not the

highest reality from which depends the very meaning which man gives to his life? And is it not the first problem that presents itself to a young person, when he reflects upon the mystery of his own existence and on the values which he intends to choose in order to build his growing personality?

For my part, in the Catholic Church, I bear the responsibility of the successor of Peter, the Apostle chosen by Jesus to strengthen his brothers in the faith. Following the Popes who succeeded one another uninterruptedly in the passage of history, I am today the Bishop of Rome, called to be, among his brethren in the world, the witness of the Christian faith and the guarantee of the unity of all the members of the Church.

Also, it is as a believer that I come to you today. It is quite simply that I would like to give here today the witness of that which I believe, of that which I wish for the well-being of the people, my brothers, and of the people, my brothers, and of that which, from experience, I consider to be useful for all.

2. First of all, I invoke the Most High, the all-powerful God who is our creator. He is the origin of all life, as he is at the source of all that is good, of all that is beautiful, of all that is holy.

He separated the light from the darkness. He caused the whole universe to grow in a marvellous order. He willed that the plants should grow and bear fruit, just as he willed that the birds of the sky, the animals of the earth and the fish of the sea should multiply.

He made us, us men, and we are from him. His holy law guides our life. It is the light of God which orientates our destiny and enlightens our conscience. He renders us capable of loving and of transmitting life. He asks every man to respect every human creature and to love him as a friend, a companion, a brother. He invites us to help him when he is wounded, when he is abandoned, when he is hungry and thirsty, in short, when he no longer knows where to find his direction on the pathways of life.

Yes, God asks that we should listen to his voice. He expects from us obedience to his holy will in a free consent of mind and of heart.

That is why we are accountable before him. It is he, God, who is our judge; he who alone is truly just. We know, however, that his mercy is inseparable from his justice. When man returns to him, repentant and contrite, after having strayed away into the disorder of sin and the works of death, God then reveals himself as the One who pardons and shows mercy.

To him, therefore, our love and our adoration! For his blessing and for his mercy, we thank him, at all times and in all places.

3. In a world which desires unity and peace, and which however experiences a thousand tensions

and conflicts, should not believers favour friendship between the men and the peoples who form one single community on earth? We know that they have one and the same origin and one and the same final end: the God who made them and who waits for them, because he will gather them together.

For its part, the Catholic Church, twenty years ago at the time of the Second Vatican Council, undertook in the person of its bishops, that is, of its religious leaders, to seek collaboration between the believers. It published a *document on dialogue between the religions* ("Nostra Aetate"). It affirms that all men, especially those of living faith, should respect each other, should rise above all discrimination, should live in harmony and serve the universal brotherhood (cf. document cited above, n. 5). The Church shows particular attention to the believing Muslims, given their faith in the one God, their sense of prayer, and their esteem for the moral life (cf. n. 3). It desires that Christians and Muslims together "promote harmony for all men, social justice, moral values, peace, liberty" (ibid.).

4. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is today more necessary than ever. It flows from our fidelity to God and supposes that we know how to recognize God by faith, and to witness to him by word and deed in a world ever more secularized and at times even atheistic.

The young can build a better future if they first put their faith in God and if they pledge themselves to build this new world in accordance with God's plan, with wisdom and trust.

Today we should *witness* to the spiritual values of which the world has need. The first is *our faith in God*.

God is the source of all joy. We should also witness to our worship of God, by our adoration, our prayer of praise and supplication. Man cannot live without prayer, any more than he can live without breathing. We should witness to our *humble search for his will*; it is he who should inspire our pledge for a more just and more united world. God's ways are not always our ways. They transcend our actions, which are always incomplete, and the intentions of our heart, which are always imperfect. God can never be used for our purposes, for he is above all.

This witness of faith, which is vital for us and which can never tolerate either infidelity to God or indifference to the truth, is made with respect for the other religious traditions, because everyone hopes to be respected for what he is in fact, and for what he conscientiously believes. We desire that all may reach the fullness of the divine truth, but no one can do that except through the free adherence of conscience, protected from exterior compulsions which would be unworthy of the free homage of reason and of heart which is characteristic of human dignity. There, is the true meaning of religious liberty, which at the same time respects God and man. It is the sincere veneration of such worshippers that God awaits, of worshippers in spirit and in truth.

5. We are convinced that "we cannot truly pray to God the Father of all mankind, if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all mankind is created in God's image". (Decl. *Nostra Aetate*, n. 5).

Therefore we must also *respect, love and help every human being*, because he is a creature of God and, in a certain sense, his image and his representative, because he is the road leading to God, and because he does not fully fulfil himself unless he knows God, unless he accepts him with all his heart, and unless he obeys him to the extent of the ways of perfection.

Furthermore, this obedience to God and this love for man should lead us *to respect man's rights*, these rights which are the expression of God's will and the demands of human nature such as it was created by God.

Therefore, respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom. They favour peace and agreement between the peoples. They help to resolve together the problems of today's men and women, especially those of the young.

6. Normally the young look towards the future, they long for a more just and more human world. God made young people such, precisely that they might help to transform the world in accordance with his plan of life. But to them, too, the situation often appears to have its shadows.

In this world there are frontiers and divisions between men, as also misunderstandings between the generations; there are, likewise, racism, wars and injustices, as also hunger, waste and unemployment. These are the dramatic evils which touch us all, more particularly the young of the entire world. Some are in danger of discouragement, others of capitulation, others of willing to change everything by violence or by extreme solutions. Wisdom teaches us that self-discipline and love are then the only means to the desired renewal.

*God does not will that people should remain passive.* He entrusted the earth to them that together they should subdue it, cultivate it, and cause it to bear fruit.

You are charged with the world of tomorrow. It is *by fully and courageously undertaking your responsibilities* that you will be able to overcome the existing difficulties. It reverts to you to take the initiatives and not to wait for everything to come from the older people and from those in office. You must build the world and not just dream about it.

It is *by working in harmony* that one can be effective. Work properly understood is a service to others. It creates links of solidarity. The experience of working in common enables one to purify oneself and to discover the richness of others. It is thus that, gradually, a climate of trust can be born which enables each one to grow, to expand, and "to be more". Do not fail, dear young

people, to collaborate *with the adults*, especially with your parents and teachers as well as with the "leaders" of society and of the State. The young should not isolate themselves from the others. The young need the adults, just as the adults need the young.

In this working together, the human person, man or woman, should never be sacrificed. *Each person is unique* in God's eyes. Each one ought to be appreciated for what he is, and, consequently, respected as such. No one should make use of his fellow man; no one should exploit his equal; no one should condemn his brother.

It is in these conditions that a more human, more just, and more fraternal world will be able to be born, a world where each one can find his place in dignity and freedom. It is this world of the twenty-first century that is in your hands; it will be what you make it.

7. This world, which is about to come, depends on the *young people of all the countries of the world*. Our world is divided, and even shattered; it experiences multiple conflicts and grave injustices. There is no real North-South solidarity; there is not enough mutual assistance between the nations of the South. There are in the world cultures and races which are not respected.

Why is all this? *It is because people do not accept their differences*: they do not know each other sufficiently. They reject those who have not the same civilization. They refuse to help each other. They are unable to free themselves from egoism and from self-conceit.

But God created all men equal in dignity, though different with regard to gifts and to talents. Mankind is a whole where each one has his part to play; the worth of the various peoples and of the diverse cultures must be recognized. The world is as it were a living organism; each one has something to receive from the others, and has something to give to them.

I am happy to meet you here in Morocco. Morocco has a *tradition of openness*. Your scholars have travelled, and you have welcomed scholars from other countries. Morocco has been a meeting place of civilizations: it has permitted exchanges with the East, with Spain, and with Africa. Morocco has a *tradition of tolerance*; in this Muslim country there have always been Jews and nearly always Christians; that tradition has been carried out in respect, in a positive manner. You have been, and you remain, a hospitable country. You, young Moroccans, are then prepared to become citizens of tomorrow's world, of this *fraternal world* to which, with the young people of all the world, you aspire.

I am sure that all of you, young people, are capable of this dialogue. You do not wish to be conditioned by prejudices. You are ready to build a civilization based on love. You can work to cause the barriers to fall, barriers that are due at times to pride, but more often to man's feebleness and fear. You wish to love others, without any limit of nation, race or religion.

For that, *you want justice and peace*. "Peace and youth go forward together", as I said in my message for [this year's World Day of Peace](#). You do not want either war or violence. You know the price that they cause innocent people to pay. Neither do you want the escalation of armaments. That does not mean that you wish to have peace at any price. Peace goes side by side with justice. You do not want anyone to be oppressed. You want peace in justice.

8. First of all, you wish that people should have enough on which to live. Young people who have the good fortune to pursue their studies have the right to be solicitous about the profession that they will be able to exercise on their your own behalf. But they also must concern themselves with the living conditions, often more difficult, of their brothers and sisters who live in the same country, and indeed in the whole world. How can one remain indifferent, in fact, when other human beings, in great numbers, die of hunger, of malnutrition or lack of health help, when they suffer cruelly from drought, when they are reduced to unemployment or to emigration through economic laws that are beyond their control, when they endure the precarious situation of refugees, packed into camps, as a consequence of human conflicts? God has given the earth to mankind as a whole in order that people might jointly draw their subsistence from it, and that every people might have the means to nourish itself, to take care of itself; and to live in peace.

9. But important as the economic problems may be, man does not live on bread alone, he needs an intellectual and spiritual life; it is there that he finds the soul of this new world to which you aspire. Man has need to develop *his spirit and his conscience*. This is often lacking to the man of today. Forgetfulness of values and the crisis of identity which frustrate our world oblige us to excel ourselves in a renewed effort of research and investigation. The interior light which will thus be born in our conscience will enable meaning to be given to development, to orientate it towards the good of man, of every man and of all men, in accordance with God's plan.

The Arabs of the Mashriq and the Maghrib, and Muslims in general, have a long tradition of study and of erudition: literary, scientific, philosophic. You are the heirs to this tradition, you must study in order to learn to know this world which God has given us, to understand it, to discover its meaning, with a desire and a *respect for truth*, and in order to learn to know the peoples and the men created and loved by God, so as to prepare yourselves better to serve them.

Still more, the search for truth will lead you, beyond intellectual values, to the spiritual dimension of the interior life.

10. Man is a *spiritual being*. We, believers, know that we do not live in a closed world. We believe in God. We are worshippers of God. We are seekers of God.

The Catholic Church regards with respect and *recognizes the quality of your religious progress*, the richness of your spiritual tradition.

We Christians, also, are proud of our own religious tradition.

I believe that we, Christians and Muslims, must recognize with joy the religious values that we have in common, and give thanks to God for them. Both of us believe in one God the only God, who is all Justice and all Mercy; we believe in the importance of prayer, of fasting, of almsgiving, of repentance and of pardon; we believe that God will be a merciful judge to us at the end of time, and we hope that after the resurrection he will be satisfied with us and we know that we will be satisfied with him.

Loyalty demands also that we should recognize and respect our differences. Obviously the most fundamental is the view that we hold on the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. You know that, for the Christians, this Jesus causes them to enter into an intimate knowledge of the mystery of God and into a filial communion by his gifts, so that they recognize him and proclaim him Lord and Saviour.

Those are important differences, which we can accept with humility and respect, in mutual tolerance; there is a mystery there on which, I am certain, God will one day enlighten us.

Christians and Muslims, in general we have badly understood each other, and sometimes, in the past, we have opposed and even exhausted each other in polemics and in wars.

I believe that, today, God invites us *to change our old practices*. We must respect each other, and also we must stimulate each other in good works on the path of God.

With me, you know what is the reward of spiritual values. Ideologies and slogans cannot satisfy you nor can they solve the problems of your life. Only the spiritual and moral values can do it, and they have God as their fundament.

Dear young people, I wish that you may be able to help in thus building a world where God may have first place in order to aid and to save mankind. On this path, you are assured of the esteem and the collaboration of your Catholic brothers and sisters whom I represent among you this evening.

11. I should now like to thank His Majesty the King for having invited me. I thank you also, dear young people of Morocco, for having come here and listened with confidence to my witness.

But still more, I would like to thank God who permitted this meeting. We are all in his sight. Today he is the first witness of our meeting. It is he who puts in our hearts the feelings of mercy and understanding, of pardon and of reconciliation, of service and of collaboration. Must not the believers that we are reproduce in their life and in their city the Most Beautiful Names which our religious traditions recognize for him? May we then be able to be available for him, and to be

submissive to his will, to the calls that he makes to us! In this way our lives will find a new dynamism.

Then, I am convinced, a world can be born where men and women of living and effective faith will sing to the glory of God, and will seek to build a human society in accordance with God's will.

I should like to finish by invoking him personally in your presence:

O God, you are our creator.

You are limitlessly good and merciful.

To You is due the praise of every creature.

O God, You have given to us an interior law by which we should live.

To do Your will is to perform our task.

To follow Your ways is to find peace of soul.

To You we offer our obedience.

Guide us in all the steps that we undertake on earth.

Free us from evil inclinations which turn our heart from Your will.

Do not permit that in invoking Your Name we should ever justify the human disorders.

O God, you are the One Alone to whom we make our adoration.

Do not permit that we should estrange ourselves from You.

O God, judge of all mankind, help us to belong to Your elect on the last day.

O God, author of justice and peace, grant us true joy and authentic love, as also a lasting fraternity among all peoples.

Fill us with Your gifts for ever. Amen!