

## Milestones and Signposts in Interfaith Relations

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**Abstract:** The following papers were initially delivered at *The Parliament of World Religions*, Melbourne, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009, in a forum entitled: "Milestones and Signposts in Interfaith Relations: the view from Hindu, Christians and Islamic Perspectives". They provide unique but complementary insights into the challenges and possibilities of interreligious dialogue. Islamic and Christian perspectives are presented here. A third perspective from the Hindu tradition, by Anita Ray, will be presented in the next AEJT issue. These are all invited presentations. [Editor]

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### Constitution of Medina

***İsmail Albayrak***

In this short paper, I shall first focus on the status of the Medina Charter, its historical reliability, Medinan society during the confirmation of its constitution, important clauses and articles of the charter and finally its significance from the perspectives of contemporary inter-religious dialogue, multiculturalism and pluralism.

According to Islamic sources, when Prophet Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Medina, he commenced by taking the following course of action: establishing a special kind of brotherhood between Meccan immigrants and Medinan Muslims (to obtain social and economical support from Medinan Muslims for the Meccan immigrants),<sup>1</sup> building a mosque at the heart of the city and thus providing a place for daily prayer and venue for the discussion of social, religious and financial problems, re-establishing the municipality borders of Medina,

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\* Short version of this paper was presented in *Parliament of the World's Religions* (09 December 2009) in Melbourne and published in *Dialogue Asia-Pacific Magazine*.

<sup>1</sup> It is reported that 45 families from each side participated in the first brotherhood relation. During the fifth year of the *hijrah* (immigration), this number reached 186 families. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab Tabaqat*, Leiden: Brill Pub. 1912, II.1, Muhammed Hamidullah, *İslam Peygamberi*, (trs.) M. Said Mutlu-Salih Tuğ, İstanbul 1966, I.181).

conducting a census to determine the Muslim population in Medina. When the Prophet re-defined the Medinan city border, he realised that Medina was composed of a pluralistic society.

It is worthwhile considering the social, cultural, religious and political environment at the time. Muslim immigrants who came to Medina, had suffered significantly at the hands of Pagan persecutors in Mecca. Prior to the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers, the population of Medina (Yathrib) was ten thousand. Before the Muslim migration, Medinan society was made up of various clans comprised of approximately twenty-five tribes.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Muslims were not the only residents of Medina. There were two important clans who had been living in this oasis for quite a long time, namely the Jews and Pagan Arabs. Amongst this population of ten thousand only fifteen-hundred were Muslims and the remainder were non-Muslims.<sup>3</sup> Historical records suggest that at the time there were approximately 4500 Jews and 4000 Pagan Arabs, in addition to the 1500 Muslims living in Medina. Clearly, Medina was a place of diversity. There were the Muslim immigrants (*muhajir*) from Mecca who came from various clans, but primarily from Quraysh and there were the Medinan Muslims who belonged to two different clans in Medina, namely Aws and Khazraj. Before the arrival of the Prophet, these two powerful clans of Medina had fought one another for over a century. Tribal fighting and the lack of central authority in the city had added fuelled the conflict. Karen Armstrong competently elucidates the mentality and function of a tribal system scattered and torn apart through continuous war. This was the medium in which Prophet Muhammad showed great effort to establish peace<sup>4</sup> during his initial days in Medina. It is safe to assume that the people of Medina did not have a centralized authority to

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<sup>2</sup> Yetkin Yıldırım, 'Peace and Conflict Resolution in the Medina Charter', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 18 (2006), 110.

<sup>3</sup> M. Tayyib Okic, 'İslamiyette İlk Nüfus Sayımı', *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 7 (1958), 11; Because there was no significant Christian community in Medina, the treaty does not mention them. However, when Muslims later encountered various Christian groups in the years of migration, they made an agreement with them also.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet of Our Time*, London: HarperCollins Pub., 2006, 19.

establish unity amongst its clans. Unlike the Meccans who were ruled by the powerful clan of Quraysh. Quraysh was the traditional owner of the House of God in Mecca and without doubt, Quraysh had the necessary power and authority to unite the people of Mecca.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, in Medina no tribe had authority or autonomy over the rest of the population. Furthermore, the Jews of Medina were made up of more than twenty different tribes. Although there were three major Jewish clans (Qaynuqa', Nadir and Qurayza) who supported Arab tribes on both sides of the continuous conflicts, these Jews also faced some opposition from the members of their own faith. The difficulty surrounding the establishment of the constitution of Medina is realized when we consider the social structure of the city that was composed of various tribes of Pagan Arabs, many different tribes of Jews and Muslims from both Medina and Mecca.

Moreover, integration of the newcomers, changes in the demographical and economical structure of the city, securing the trust of Jewish and Pagan Arabs and above all, the continuous tribal rivalry were of the serious challenges confronted by the Prophet who wished to form a society based on the fundamentals of citizenship. One of the options was to propose a charter that embraced expectations of everyone and was also approved by the three major powers of the community within Medina. This meant that the charter had to be accepted by Muslims, Pagan Arabs and the Jews. It is also important to note that in comparison to the general population, Muslims constituted only 15% of the people of Medina. Therefore, it would be quite illogical to assume that the Prophet forced the pluralistic Medinan society into signing an agreement that revealed essential principles of living together in harmony.

Perhaps, in order to get a better understanding of the process, we should first look at the historical background of the Charter. According to Muslim sources, Ibn Hisham was the first person who had mentioned the charter. He narrated a report from Ibn Ishaq who passed away in 151h. After Ibn Hisham there were other early sources that mentioned the Charter such as Ibn Kathir's *Bidayah*,

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<sup>5</sup> Ali Bulaç, 'Medine Vesikası Hakkında Genel Bilgiler', *Birikim Dergisi*, 47-48 (1993-4), 46.

Abu Ubayd's *Gharib al-Hadith*, Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqat*, and the six major hadith collections.<sup>6</sup> Some of these sources provide all the articles of the charter whilst others refer only to a certain part. In addition, some contemporary scholars define forty-seven articles of the Charter whilst others increase the number to fifty-two by dividing two clauses into sub-articles. Although a few Muslim intellectuals question the historical reliability of the Charter, the views of the majority concludes that the articles of the charter are authentic and the agreement process took place at the house of Anas b. Malik, a renowned companion of the Prophet.<sup>7</sup> However, it is almost impossible to prove that these articles were recorded and placed together at the same time. Nevertheless, this uncertainty does not lessen the value of the Charter.

Before moving to the contents of the Charter, it is also important to note that the Constitution of Medina frequently talks about itself as *kitab* (book) or *sahifah* (page) to indicate that the articles in it are prepared thoughtfully and were recorded in a logical order (not randomly). In addition to this, the following two important Arabic terms that signify the charter is binding and authoritative. If we analyse some of the Arabic terms used for the holy Qur'an, we realize that *kitab* is a term used quite frequently.<sup>8</sup> The text of the Qur'an is also called *mushaf* in Arabic. This word is derived from the same root as *sahifah*. I think this significant detail indicates clearly to the binding nature of the Charter. In short, modern Muslim scholarship considers the Medina Charter as the first written legal agreement signed by diverse communities in the history of humanity.<sup>9</sup> Evidence suggests that the Charter was not only a theoretical framework but it was implemented by all the tribes of the Medinan pluralistic community.

One might ask 'what was the driving force behind the Charter?' First of all, it is not plausible to assume that the Prophet acted in the absence of Qur'anic

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<sup>6</sup> Mustafa Kelebek, 'İslam Hukuk Felsefesi Açısından Medine Vesikası', *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*,

<sup>7</sup> Bukhari, *Sahih*, Kafala, 2; Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, Faraid, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Ali Bulaç, *ibid.*, 48.

<sup>9</sup> M. Hamidullah, *İslam Anayasa Hukuku*, (ed.) Vecdi Akyüz, İstanbul 1995, 95; Hayreddin Karaman, *Ana Hatlarıyla İslam Hukuku*, İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat 1987, I.167.

guidance when he encouraged people to sign this constitution. The Qur'an emphasizes the separate character of each human community as a specific entity (5:48) *'For each, We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had Allah willed He could have made you one community.'* The great commentator, Ibn Kathir (d.1372) interprets this verse as follows: An agreement concerning God and diversity concerning the community are the will of God. In other words, existence of religious plurality is a phenomenon willed by God. In addition to this, the Qur'an states, *'And of His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. Lo! Herein indeed are portents for men of knowledge.'* (30:22). There is a divine wisdom in racial, cultural and religious diversity and the Qur'an encourages us to recognize this. The divine intention behind pluralism should not be overlooked. One word of wisdom that is worth mentioning in this context is *ta'aruf*, namely the purpose of getting to know each other *'O mankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct (Taqwa)...'* (49:13). It is important to notice that one of the key words of the Qur'an concerning plurality lies in this verse. *Ta'aruf* (mutual recognition) necessitates dialogue and living in harmony. In this verse, the Qur'an addresses all human beings and draws attention to equality in regards to gender, race and tribe, proposing dignity for all. Therefore, no race or clan has the right to claim an inherent superiority over others. Just as the Qur'anic verses, the Medina Charter also rejects cultural homogeneity. It is incorrect to assume that the Charter was a new concept or an innovation. Despite the existence of various motives behind the Medinan Charter, total credit belongs to Qur'anic teachings and it is quite safe to say that the charter is based on inspirations derived from the holy Qur'an. In other words, the charter is a practical manifestation of the pluralistic nature of the Qur'an. Like the Qur'an, the constitution also brought a peace and serenity to the people of Medina, who had suffered from never-ending conflicts until the arrival of Prophet Muhammad.

In addition to the Qur'anic flavour that the Charter contains, we also realize the presence of a great esteem for the customs and traditions of the people of

Medina. Let us not forget, that the charter was not decided by one person only or a specific group. On the contrary, it was accepted with the consensus of many different tribes in Medina. A number of Prophetic reports suggest that the Prophet Muhammad consulted the leaders and the elders of each tribe during the negotiating and drafting process of the constitution. The Prophet did not finalize the constitution before listening to the needs and demands of the other clans in Medina.<sup>10</sup> Thus, he never disregarded the opinion of the tribal leaders. Conversely, he behaved like an arbitrator in solving the disputes among the people of Medina. Therefore, this alternative community model was developed by the participation of various groups, in order to give equal rights to the people and to create a society that functions on the basis of justice, respect, pluralism and peace. It was a political unity that did not discriminate against people from different backgrounds, religions, ethnicities and social strata. The Charter was designed to protect even the rights of the Medinan Pagans. The frequency of the key words, such as justice, peace, trust and living together, used in the text of Medina Charter, proves beyond doubt that the Prophet, as an initiator of the project, offers the utmost freedom for the non-Muslims to participate in the process of preparing the constitution.

When we scrutinize the clauses of the charter, we see that the first twenty-three articles relate to Meccan and Medinan Muslims while articles from twenty-four to forty-seven concerns the Jews of Medina. One of the most striking aspects of the charter is the frequent usage of the Arabic term *ummah* (community). It is common knowledge that Arabs use different words to describe human clusters in their communities. Some of these terminologies could be classified as; *ashirah* (a small group), *fasila* (a branch of people), *qabila* (consists of a number of *ashirah*), *qawm* or *qarn* (community larger than a *qabilah*), and *sha'b* (a large cluster of different communities).<sup>11</sup> However, the term *ummah* (united society)

<sup>10</sup> Yıldırım, *ibid.*, 111

<sup>11</sup> There are various divisions of the communities in Arab traditions and it generally follows body part:

<u>Division</u>	<u>Bodypart</u>
<i>Sha'b</i>	suture
<i>Qabila</i>	skull bones

describes an immense society where people of different background, race and religion live together in harmony. The Medina Charter gives equal rights to all those considered as being part of this *ummah*. Interestingly, article twenty-five of the Charter states, 'the Jews of Banu Awf and the Muslims of Medina will be considered as a single community.' In Ibn Hisham version of the Charter, the preposition *ma'a* (with) is used while Ibn Ubayd's version the preposition *min* (from) is used. Both versions indicate that the Charter considers the members of all groups in Medina, as citizens of the Medinan society. The nuances in the prepositions clearly point out this notion. A statement in another article of the Charter protects the rights of the Jews with the following clause, "no Jew will be discriminated against for being a Jew."

In the Charter, the Prophet addresses each clan individually and explains to them their communal and individual responsibilities of the people of Medina. According to the article of responsibility, each clan would deal with its own affairs. However, in times of emergency or threats against Medina, each clan would be obligated to provide both financial and physical support to the entire society of Medina (see articles 38 and 44).

According to historical records no tribe in Medina objected to the formation of the Charter initiated by Prophet Muhammad. In addition to this, none of the groups claimed that they were being pressurized by the Muslims. Article twenty-five of the Charter clearly proves this. It states that the people of Medina have the right to practice their own particular religions and customs. Another significant issue was the fact that Prophet Muhammad, who followed the Qur'anic instruction 'unto you your religion and unto me my religion' (109:6), never imposed Islam on other groups in Medina. As mentioned before, local customs of Medina were never denounced by the Prophet. On the contrary, the people of Medina were united by the Prophet under a common and universal ethics and morals. The religion of Islam was not forced upon anyone. Obviously,

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<i>Imara</i>	breast
<i>Batn</i>	belly
<i>Fakhidh</i>	thigh
<i>Fasila</i>	lower leg

Prophet Muhammad drew upon the essence of unity, respect, tolerance and love to form a plural society.

To an untrained eye, many of the articles appear to be repetitions. However, when analyzed thoroughly, it becomes evident that the Prophet had spent the utmost effort to create an environment of trust in Medina. He encouraged each tribe to integrate into the larger Medinan society. It is also quite meaningful that we come across many articles regulating various issues related to blood money and treatment of treachery in Medina. For instance, article thirty-seven calls for alliance of all clans against all those who move against the people of Medina. Obviously, peace is the corner stone of a pluralistic society and it can only be achieved on the basis of mutual understanding. Medina Charter demands from each party to seek mutual advice and consultation concerning any unexpected issues. The Charter frequently places great emphasis on the importance of acting in good faith towards one another during religious or political disputes. Prophet Muhammad was always prepared to confront any situation in Medina and to act as a third party mediator to resolve conflicts among the tribes.<sup>12</sup>

Articles 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 25, 36, 37, 40, 43 guaranteed the security and protection of every citizen in Medina, whilst articles 13, 14, 15, 21, 22 placed great responsibility on the shoulders of each Muslim citizen. Muslims were obligated to work hard to establish peace and to support others in time of insurgency in Medina. Article 39 states that inside of the Medinan valley is a protected area and no one will be allowed to violate its borders. In various articles, the Medina Charter widens the scope of protection to the allies of both Muslim and Jewish tribes. It seems to me that the Medina Charter forms a real intercultural society, unlike modern multicultural society where many of its minorities or disadvantaged groups are marginalized and pushed into a life in ghettos. Thus it is safe to say that the Prophet's Charter successfully created an atmosphere of unity in the diverse society of Medina.

In conclusion, the Medina Charter rejects cultural homogeneity. The principles in the charter are a clear antidote to cultural homogenization and a solution to the

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<sup>12</sup> Yildirim, *ibid.*, 110.

destruction of a fruitful cultural diversity. In a world where globalised conflicts and peace efforts continue, our mutual understanding of one another, together with our distinctive faiths, is important point for achieving permanent peace and stability. I feel that the Medina Charter has much to offer to the modern world. Medinan society was the first real community to display an example of a harmonious coexistence between different religious and ethnic groups. It provides great opportunity for us to explore the roots of the modern pluralistic societies. Prophet Muhammad displays the essence of unity, respect, tolerance and love to combine and create a plural community through the Medinan Charter. This Charter is the blueprint of an active and participant plural societies based on justice and mutual respect. The clauses of the Charter are documented openly and clearly indicate real unity in diversity. Unfortunately, the life of the constitution did not last long. Nonetheless, as Fethullah Gülen, the renowned Islamic scholar states, "there is great potential in this Charter for the future of our common values and ideal pluralistic societies."

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## Milestones and Signposts in Interfaith Relations: the View from Christianity

***John Dupuche***

I would like to approach this theme by looking at two outstanding figures, Francis of Assisi and Pope John XXIII. I will say a few words about their lives and draw some conclusions.

### **St Francis of Assisi**

The slaughter had been terrible, on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1219 when the Christian and Muslim armies had clashed at near Damietta on the eastern branch of the Nile. The Sultan al-Malik al-Kâmil proposed a truce which was gladly accepted. Francis of Assisi, perhaps the best known and the best loved of all Christian saints, saw his opportunity and, accompanied by Brother Illuminatus, crossed the no-man's land separating the warring armies.

It was his third great transition. The first had been when, as a young man in the full flower of his youth, he chanced upon a leper. Impelled by an immense outpouring of compassion, Francis dismounted, embraced the unfortunate man and kissed him. Francis had effectively chosen to enter the company of the living dead. In the second great transition, Francis stood in the main square of Assisi and stripped himself of all his clothes, putting aside all the pretensions and materialism of the burgeoning Middle Ages. Henceforth, married to Lady Poverty, he would be free, living only as the Spirit of God inspired him.

This Poor Man of Assisi now advanced towards the Muslim lines, to the followers of Muhammad who in those days was considered to be the father of lies, the Antichrist, the blasphemer, the Beast. When challenged by the Muslim soldiers he replied simply that he was a Christian and wished to speak with the Sultan.

The Sultan al-Malik al-Kâmil graciously received Francis and for the ten days of the truce they conversed. Francis spoke passionately about Jesus and

the Blessed Trinity,<sup>13</sup> while the Sultan listened attentively, intrigued by this strange holy man, who seemed comparable to a Sufi. Francis for his part observed the Sultan praying five times a day and heard the call to prayer that rang out over the camp, and was amazed. After Francis had refused all manner of gifts, the Sultan provided Francis and Illuminatus with a safe escort back to the Christian lines.

In 1220 Francis returned to Italy and wrote the rule which was approved at the General Chapter of the Mats in 1221. The momentous chapter sixteen reads:

Indeed the friars, who go, can conduct themselves spiritually among [the Muslims] in two manners. One manner is, that they cause no arguments nor strife, but be subject "to every human creature for God's sake" (1 Pt 2:13) and confess themselves to be Christians. The other manner is, that, when they have seen that it pleases God, they announce the word of God, so that they may believe in God the Omnipotent, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all things, (and) in the Redeemer and Savior, the Son, and that they may be baptized and become Christians, because "he who has" not "been reborn of water and the Holy Spirit cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (cf. Jn 3:5).<sup>14</sup>

I would like to make a few comments on this extraordinary paragraph, never seen before in the history of the Church.

The rule commands: "let them they cause no arguments nor strife".

In these few words Francis rejects the whole manner of the Crusades which aimed to reconquer the former Christian territories of the Middle East by force of arms. Indeed, at the Fourth Lateran Council, Innocent III, whose jurisdiction extended from Scotland to the Black Sea, from Spain to Scandinavia, had called for a fifth crusade and had committed immense resources to this task. Francis

<sup>13</sup> Gwenolé Jeusset, *Saint François et le Sultan*. Paris, Albin Michel, 2006. p. 101.

<sup>14</sup> *Fratres vero, qui vadunt, duobus modis inter eos possunt spiritualiter conversari. Unus modus est, quod non faciant lites neque contentiones, sed sint subditi omni humanae creaturae propter Deum (1 Petr 2,13) et confiteantur se esse christianos. Alius modus est, quod cum viderint placere Domino, annuntient verbum Dei, ut credant Deum omnipotentem Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum, creatorem omnium, redemptorem et salvatorem Filium, et ut baptizentur et efficiantur christiani, quia quis renatus non fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu Sancto, non potest intrare in regnum Dei.*  
[http://www.francescanitor.org/letters/non\\_bullata.pdf](http://www.francescanitor.org/letters/non_bullata.pdf)

simply commands that there should be 'no strife'. Peter the Venerable, the great abbot of Cluny, the first to have the *Qur'an* translated into Latin, argued that if war could not be won with the sword it should be won with words. To this Francis states in his unauthorised rule that there should be "no arguments".

The rule also commands that the friars should "be subject 'to every human creature for God's sake' (1 Pt 2:13)". This contradicts the Third Council of the Lateran, whose canon 26 reads:

Jews and Saracens are not to be allowed to have Christian servants in their houses, either under pretence of nourishing their children or for service or any other reason. Let those be excommunicated who presume to live with them.<sup>15</sup>

Francis stresses that the friars should "confess themselves to be Christians". They should not hide the fact of who they are, but nothing more needs yet to be done. The Christian message may of course be proclaimed, but only at the appropriate moment, "when they have seen that it pleases God". This attitude, too, is remarkable and contrasts so vividly with the approach of some other Franciscans who travelled to Morocco at this time and denigrated all things Muslim. They were martyred and became the ideal to be followed by other Franciscans.

The rule approved at the so-called General Chapter of the Mats in 1221 did not obtain papal approval and so is called the *Regula non-bullata*. The *Regula bullata*, officially approved by Pope Honorius III on 29 November 1223, reduces the extraordinary paragraph to just a couple of bland sentences:

Let whoever of the friars who by divine inspiration wants to go among the saracens and other infidels seek permission for that reason from their minister provincial. Indeed the ministers are to grant permission to go to none, except those who seem to be fit to be sent.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.piar.hu/councils/ecum11.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Quicumque [fratrum](#) divina inspiratione [voluerint ire](#) inter [saracenos](#) et alios [infideles petant](#) inde [licentiam](#) a suis [ministris provincialibus](#). [Ministri](#) vero nullis eundi [licentiam](#) tribuant, nisi eis quos [viderint](#) esse idoneos ad mittendum. *Regula Bullata*, [chapter XII](#).

The *regula non-bullata* was incomprehensible to Francis' contemporaries. It lay dormant for 750 years.

In what way is Francis' experience a signpost for interreligious relations? I would like to make four points.

1. Participants in dialogue can honestly draw near to each other only in poverty and powerlessness. Francis crosses the no-man's land and declares simply that he is a Christian. He does not claim to be a legate or ambassador. He has no authority, no title, no education and makes no reference to his fame. He comes empty-handed, without escort, without weapons, without gifts, in utter poverty.
2. Participants on dialogue approach each other best on the presumption that they each live in the truth. Francis approaches the Sultan who in general estimation among Christians was considered to be the devil incarnate. But Francis is amazed when he sees the spiritual depths of those whom all the crusaders considered to be minions of Satan. He will never speak ill of the Muslims or Islam.
3. The dialogical relationship can develop only on the basis of a sense of mutual service. Francis advocates service and subjection; he seeks neither power nor influence. He seeks only to imitate Christ Jesus who declares that those who wish to be first must make themselves last of all and servants of all. (Mark 9.35)
4. Dialogue can proceed only on the basis of openness and candour. Neither party should conceal who they are. When invited by the Sultan, Francis proclaims his faith but does not enter into a battle of words.

### **John XXIII**

During his years as apostolic delegate in Turkey during the Second World War, Archbishop Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, witnessed the persecution of

the Jews but could do virtually nothing.<sup>17</sup> This sense of powerlessness had an immense impact on him. Thus, after he had been elected pope in 1959 and had summoned the Second Vatican Council, before even there was talk of a draft document on relations with the other Christian Churches, he gave Cardinal Bea, Prefect of the Secretariat for Unity, on 18 September 1960 the oral mandate<sup>18</sup> to develop a statement concerning the Jews.<sup>19</sup>

The huge impetus which John XXIII gave to developing relations with the Jews had already a certain history. As this is not the place to give a full account of the background to the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, a couple of quotations must suffice. In his address to the pilgrimage from Belgian Catholic Radio Pius XI made the memorable statement: "We are all spiritually semites."<sup>20</sup> And before this, the Holy Office in its Decree of 25 March 1928 stated:

"The Apostolic See utterly condemns the hatred held towards the people whom God had chosen long ago, namely that hatred which is now generally called 'anti-Semitism'."<sup>21</sup>

This statement concerning the Jews went through various stages.<sup>22</sup> In November 1964 it had been broadened into a separate *Declaration on the*

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<sup>17</sup> Laurentin, René *Bilan du concile, Histoire – textes – commentaires avec une chronique de la quatrième session*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966. p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph M. Wiltgen svd *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*, New York City, Hawthorn Books Inc. 1966. p. 167.

<sup>19</sup> *Decretum pro judaeis*. Laurentin, René *Bilan du concile*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>20</sup> Pie XI "Nous sommes tous spirituellement des sémites." *Discours au pèlerinage de la Radio Catholique Belge*, 6 septembre 1938. DC 39 (1938), col. 1460.

<sup>21</sup> "Apostolica sedes .... *maxime damnat* odium adversus populum olim a Deo collectum, odium nempe illud, quod vulgo *antisemitismi* nomine nunc significari solet." AAS 36 (1928), p.103. The italics are from the original.

<sup>22</sup> In November 1963 it constituted chapter four of the draft called 'On Ecumenism' (*De ecumenismo*), a short text of 42 lines. In September 1964 it had expanded into a declaration on Jews and non-Christians, as an appendix of the same schema, 70 lines in length.

"It was obvious to all that there had been a threefold reaction to the chapter. One was, "Why treat of the Jews at all?" The second was, "Why treat of the Jews in a schema on ecumenism, which deals with Christian unity?" And the third was, "Why not include other non-Christians religions as well?" The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Council as a whole realized that the only solution was to have a document, distinct from the schema on ecumenism, in which the Jewish and

*relation of the Church to non-Christian religions*<sup>23</sup> which was one of the most innovative texts of the highly innovative Council.

In fact, throughout most of Christian history, non-Christian religions were generally seen as the work of Satan, 'the Father of lies'. A major shift had occurred in 1951 with the encyclical *Evangelii Praecones*<sup>24</sup> of Pius XII who states "The Catholic Church does not despise or reject the teachings of other peoples (*ethnorum*)".<sup>25</sup> In an official letter to Cardinal Biondi in 1950 he had earlier stated that:

"The Church has no intention of dominating other peoples, or of having any control in worldly matters, since it burns with the simple desire to give the supernal light of faith to all nations, to promote human and civic values and brotherly concord between peoples."<sup>26</sup>

All this is to find its supreme development in the watershed statement of Vatican II which reads:

"The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. ... Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture."<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusion:

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also other non-Christian religions would be mentioned, especially Islam ..." Ralph M. Wiltgen *svd The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*, p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> 177 lines in length.

<sup>24</sup> AAS 1951 p.497-528.

<sup>25</sup> "... Catholica Ecclesia ethnorum doctrinas neque despexit neque respuit..." AAS 1951 p.522.

<sup>26</sup> "Ecclesia equidem nullum habet propositum in populos dominandi, aut imperio in res modo temporales potiundi, uno cum flagret studio omnibus gentibus supernum fidei lumen afferendi, humanis civilisque cultus incrementum fovendi fraternamque populorum concordiam". Quote from letter 'Perlibenti equidem' to Cardinal F. Biondi. AAS 1950 p.727.

<sup>27</sup> 'Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions' (*Nostra Aetate*), in Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II, the Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents*, Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1975. p.739.

From this discussion of St Francis and John XXIII, four salient points can be made:

1. Interreligious dialogue depends on an experience of powerlessness: chosen by Francis during the Crusades, and imposed on Archbishop Roncalli during World War II.
2. Like St Francis who witnesses the piety of the Sultan, the Second Vatican Council states that 'the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions'.
3. Like St Francis who identifies himself as a Christian and proclaims to the Sultan the central teachings of the faith, the Council speaks of 'Christians ... witnessing to their own faith and way of life'.
4. Like St Francis who sought to serve, Christians are to 'acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.'

In short both Francis of Assisi and John XXIII are happy to be powerless, perceptive, servant and faithful. Those involved in interreligious dialogue might do well to follow their example.

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