

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

For Cardinal Zuppi Lent parallels Ramadan

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The problem is not to wish a Muslim friend a happy Ramadan; nor is it that a religious or civil authority offers these wishes informally to the imam of the neighbouring Islamic community. The problem emerges when it is a Catholic archbishop, on behalf of his diocese, writes a sort of 'pastoral letter' to his 'brothers and sisters who believe in Islam'. That is, to do what the Archbishop of Bologna, Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, also

President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, did. Who, sensing that the next conclave is approaching, wants to reassure the supporters of Pope Francis that there is a worthy successor on the market for the next supreme pontiff.

And so, he aims for consecutive victories: within just a few of days, he first sends the veiled message that the problem of remarried divorcees can be 'pastorally resolved' with a more generous recourse to the competent Tribunals ([see here](#)); then he credits the gay world, purposely looking the other way when his vicar, Fr Davide Baraldi, decides to go and introduce the lecture by Fr Simone Bruno, who explains that there are many forms of family and that adulterous and homo relationships are not sinful ([see here](#)); finally, he throws his weight behind inter-religious dialogue, writing a long [public message](#) precisely to 'brothers and sisters believers in Islam' (which, had he been addressing Catholics, would have followed the politically correct line of putting females before males).

So, what happens when an archbishop, instead of making a simple phone call to the imam, sets out to write a quasi-pastoral letter to Muslims? Only one thing can happen: that he chooses the path of the most irenic approach possible, which results in the meanest religious indifferentism. In fact, Zuppi draws a parallel between Lent and Ramadan that begins with 'Ramadan, as well as Lent', and ends with the equation 'Ramadan-Lent'. An equation that obviously requires a small sacrifice: Jesus Christ. Because it is only at this price that the fasting, prayer and almsgiving of the faithful of the two religions, on which the cardinal bases his message, end up being equal.

Indeed, the message becomes banal, which could not be more banal. The letter reads, "The most intense reading of the sacred texts, for us the Bible and for you the Koran, support the spiritual life and urge it to acts of mercy": we the Bible, you the Koran, just so as not to forget that we are all passionately together part of the religions "of the book"... A little further on: 'Ramadan-Lent as the month that opens to joy: for us it is the feast of Easter, in which we celebrate the triumph of Jesus over death and evil, for the benefit of all men and women, of all times and all places; for you it is the feast of the breaking of the fast, an extraordinary wave of communal joy'. Yes, we this way, you that way: beyond the details, a great union...

On the other hand, continues the Archbishop of Bologna, 'in our as in your celebration I read the profound truth of Joy, which, to be truly such, must have no boundaries. Joy, truly such and even capitalised, without Jesus Christ; who, however, seems to have said something about the fact that full joy depends on His joy being in us, and that this joy of His is possible if we remain in His love, and that this abiding depends

on keeping His commandments (cf. Jn 15:10-11). Just to leaf through our Sacred Text.

Even in Bergamo they don't mess around. The director of the Interreligious Dialogue Office of the Diocese of Bergamo, Don Massimo Rizzi, sent a letter to all the priests of the diocese on 4 March ([see here](#)), with the aim of urging parish priests to invite the faithful to pray for the beginning of Ramadan. An auspicious occasion would be, according to him, the prayers of the faithful during Holy Masses on the 4th Sunday of Lent. The strange purpose of such a prayer would be the 'continuous realisation of all the dimensions that make up humanity willed by the Creator and continuous growth in dialogue between peoples and different faiths'. The undertone of the Abu Dhabi document is more than recognisable.

Don Rizzi, with the endorsement of his bishop, to be taken for granted, Monsignor Francesco Beschi, has also launched the proposal 'to experience moments of encounter during the month of Ramadan, such as the shared Ifṭār, an initiative that the Interreligious Dialogue Office has been supporting for years, a moment of sharing in the breaking of the daily fast. Organised by Muslim Associations or Cultural Centres, in collaboration with Parishes and Oratories, I think it can foster mutual knowledge and collaboration between Christian and Muslim believers'. A curious initiative, since one participates in the Islamic feast of the breaking of the fast... without having fasted. Not even during Lent, since for us Catholics neither fasting nor abstinence for all forty days are compulsory any more.

Since there is not much hope that bishops and priests will understand, we have to hope that it will be a Muslim brother who will throw our Catholic brothers and sisters, who have come to celebrate, out the door with a nice 'No fasting? No party'.