

The Pope's Words in Amman

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The Pope began his historic visit to the Middle East with his visit to Amman the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Hashemites (Hasimi) date back to the Quraish tribe that started with the great grandfather of Muhammad. The Pope spoke outside the King Hussein Mosque. This is the largest mosque in the Kingdom and was built in 1924 reputedly on the site of a mosque built by the Caliph Umar in the seventh century. It is a major cultural center in the Kingdom.

The Pope chose interreligious dialog as the theme of his first major speech—don't forget that there were many intellectual and cultural leaders in the audience. He raised the topic as follows—after the customary greetings: “Is it not also the case that often it is the ideological manipulation of religion, sometimes for political ends, that is the real catalyst for tension and division, and at times even violence in society?” Not shy about getting to the point! He has put his finger on the real source of the problems historically.

He then recognized that: “The burden of our common history so often marked by misunderstanding, must today strive to be known and recognized as worshippers of God faithful to prayer, eager to uphold and live by the Almighty's decrees, merciful and compassionate, consistent in bearing witness to all that is true and good, and ever mindful of the common origin and dignity of all human persons, who remain at the apex of God's creative design for the world and for history.” There is a common thread to the two religions—the search for the true and the good— that needs emphasizing.

Then he picked up a theme that runs through all of his speeches on interreligious conversation and that is the close interrelationship between truth and freedom. He says that “genuine adherence to religion – far from narrowing our minds – widens the horizon of human understanding. It protects civil society from the excesses of the unbridled ego which tend to absolutize the finite and eclipse the infinite; it ensures that freedom is exercised hand in hand with truth, and it adorns culture with insights concerning all that is true, good and beautiful.” He has sketched out a psychology for conflict here and has touched on all of the transcendentals—the true, the good, the one, and the beautiful. These strictly apply to God who is the One, the True, the Good, the Beautiful.

Here is a masterful picture of the truly religious person who seeks the truth and the good, who avoids manipulating religious urges and who builds a society that focuses on the true and the good and that nourishes a culture that does the same. Good start!