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## FROM AMMAN TO ASSISI

SUMMARY: The Document on *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* (HF) declares that is “in accordance with previous International Documents that have emphasized the importance of the role of religions in the construction of world peace”. This article examines the influence of one such document, the Amman Declaration, on HF. After examining the background to the Amman Declaration, it traces points of contact between the two documents. It then presents the contacts between HF and the encyclical letter of Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*.

The Document on *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* (HF) declares that is “in accordance with previous International Documents that have emphasized the importance of the role of religions in the construction of world peace” (22)<sup>1</sup>. Though not in itself an “international document” the Amman Declaration (AD) made public on 9 November 2004, can be considered among the statements that have influenced HF and in this way to have had an influence on the encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* (FT) which Pope Francis signed in Assisi on 3 October 2020. Before detailing some of these influences, it may be useful to give some background to the Amman Declaration.

*Background to the Amman Declaration*

Prince Ghazi, the cousin of King Abdullah II of Jordan, in his introduction to the Amman Declaration<sup>2</sup>, speaks of a universal consensus (*iğmā'*) among Islamic political and acknowledged religious leadership upon what are termed the “The three points of

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers in brackets after citations from HF refer to the numbering of the document given in *Islamochristiana* 45 (2019) 1-15.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. <http://ammanmessage.com> Introduction by HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad.

the Amman Message”<sup>3</sup>. He explains further: “The process that led to this consensus began by the grace of God on the eve of the 27th of Ramadan 1425 AH / 9th November 2004 CE in Amman, Jordan, at the Hashemite Mosque, H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein launched what was called the ‘Amman Message’. This message was basically a detailed statement declaring what Islam is and what it is not, and what actions represent it and what actions do not.”

It may be useful here to explain the role of Prince Ghazi. King Hussein, who ascended to the throne of Jordan in 1953, had no son by his first wife. Although in 1962 his second wife, Princess Muna, bore him a son, Abdallah, in 1965 he appointed his brother, Prince Hassan bin Talal, as the *walī al-‘ahd*, Crown Prince. Hassan maintained this position, in which he frequently had to replace Hussein when the latter was absent for medical treatment or for other reasons, almost until the death of the king. Hussein, however, a few weeks before his death in 1999, transferred the position of Crown Prince to Abdallah who then succeeded him as Abdallah II.

Prince Hassan had shown great interest in religious affairs, founding in 1980 the Royal Āl al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, as also the Āl al-Bayt University in Mafrāq and the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies. He had also engaged in dialogue with Christians, first with Anglicans, then with the Orthodox of Constantinople, and finally with Catholics through the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. When King Abdallah came to power he removed his uncle, Prince Hassan, from all positions of influence, including the Royal Āl al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. As head of this body he appointed his cousin, Prince Ghazi, a notable scholar of Islam. It soon became evident that Prince Ghazi’s interest was not so much in dialogue with Christians but rather with intra-Islamic dialogue. Evidence for this is found both in the follow-up of the Amman Declaration and in the letter following the lecture of Pope Benedict XVI in Regensburg, a letter facilitated by Prince Ghazi and addressed to the Pope by 38 Muslim scholars belonging to different traditions, and the subsequent Common Word document calling for a theological dialogue<sup>4</sup>.

After the Amman Message or Declaration had been proclaimed, in order to clarify further the true nature of Islam and, more importantly, to reaffirm the basic unity and fundamental common ground of all Muslims, H.M. King Abdullah II sent three questions to 24 of the most senior scholars from all around the world representing all the branches of Islam. Based on the *fatwas* provided by these great scholars (who included the *Šayḥ al-Azhar* – the traditionally most respected authority in Sunni Islam; the foremost Shi’i Ayatollahs of Najaf (Iraq) and Iran; the *Zaydi marāḡj*’ of the Yemen; the *Ibādī* Grand Mufti of Oman, and, where they exist, the

<sup>3</sup> The following are the three points: (1) the definition of who is a Muslim; (2) who has the right to issue *fatwas* in the name of Islam, and (3) who and under what circumstances has the right to call someone else a *kāfir* (an unbeliever or apostate).

<sup>4</sup> See the DOSSIER REGENSBURG in *Islamochristiana* 32 (2006) 273-297 and the DOSSIER “OPEN LETTER OF 138 MUSLIM LEADERS” in *Islamochristiana* 33 (2007) 241-288.

Grand Muftis and Supreme Fatwa Councils of the major Islamic countries). After having received their responses, H.M. King Abdullah II convened an international Islamic conference of approximately 200 of the world's leading Islamic scholars (*'ulamā'*) in Amman, Jordan, on 27th-29th *Jumada I*, 1426 AH / 4th-6th July 2005 CE. In Amman, these scholars agreed by unanimous consensus – and signed their names to – a statement which became known as the “Three Points of the *Amman Message*”<sup>5</sup>.

*Points of contact between the Amman Declaration and the Document on Human Fraternity*

First a general observation on the Amman Declaration. It is a defensive document, responding to “perils that beset it (i.e. Islam)”, to challenges, to threats to its identity, “to attacks against its tenets”, to those who work to distort the image of Islam, trying to portray it as an enemy. It aims to do this by “promoting the true luminous image of Islam”. It is addressed principally to Muslims, to “our brethren in the lands of Islam and throughout the world”, “to the [Islamic] nation”, the *Umma*. Yet it is obviously hoped that non-Muslims will also take note of it.

After having recalled the five Pillars of Islam, AD states that “over history these [basic principles] have formed a strong and cohesive nation and a great civilization. They bear witness to noble principles and values that verify the good of humanity, whose foundation is the oneness of the human species, and that people are equal in rights and obligations, peace and justice, realizing comprehensive security, mutual social responsibility, being good to one's neighbor, protecting belongings and property, honoring pledges, and more”. The appeal to “the oneness of the human species” is echoed in HF which “invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in *human fraternity* to unite and work together so that it [the document] may serve as a guide for future generations” (introduction, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph). The same idea is found in the first invocation: “In the name of God who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and who has called them to live together as brothers and sisters, to fill the earth and make known the values of goodness, love and peace” (1).

AD insists that Islam urges tolerance and forgiveness, justice, the safeguarding of [people's] rights, respect for pledges. Similarly HF expresses “the firm conviction that authentic teachings of religion invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace, to defend the values of mutual understanding, *human fraternity* and harmonious coexistence” (23). With regard to people's rights, HF states further: “It is likewise important to reinforce the bond of fundamental human rights in order to help ensure a dignified life for all” (31).

AD goes on to state that “no day has passed but that this religion [Islam] has been at war against extremism, radicalism and fanaticism... They are not from the true character of the tolerant, accepting Muslim”. Consequently “Islam rejects extremism,

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<sup>5</sup> For these Three Points see at the reference given in note 1.

radicalism and fanaticism.... We denounce and condemn extremism, radicalism and fanaticism today, just as our forefathers tirelessly denounced and opposed them.... we denounce the contemporary concept of terrorism that is associated with wrongful practices, whatever their source and form may be”. HF for its part weighs against “religious extremism, national extremism and also intolerance” (16). It dedicates a whole paragraph to terrorism, stating: “Terrorism is deplorable...Such terrorism must be condemned in all its forms and expressions” (29).

Furthermore AD appeals for cooperation in achieving justice for all. It declares: “The way of this great religion that we are honored to belong to calls us to affiliate with and participate in modern society, and to contribute to its elevation and progress, helping one another with every faculty [to achieve] good and to comprehend, desiring justice for all peoples, while faithfully proclaiming the truth [of our religion], and sincerely expressing the soundness of our faith and beliefs – all of which are founded upon God’s call for coexistence and piety. [We are called] to work toward renewing our civilization, based upon the guidance of religion, and following upon established practical intellectual policies”. HF in several places echoes these aspirations: its title includes “living together” (*al-‘ayš al-muštariċ*), the equivalent of coexistence; it issues a call to the leaders of the world to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace” (12); it calls upon “men and women of culture in every part of the world, to rediscover the values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence” (13).

To further its aims AD counts on the contribution of preachers who have not only a sound knowledge of their own religion but also are conversant with contemporary culture. They expect them to be able to “enlighten the intellects of our youth.... [to] illuminate for them the paths of tolerance, moderation, and goodness, and prevent them from [falling] into the abysses of extremism and fanaticism that destroy the spirit and body”. Similarly HF emphasizes “the importance of awakening religious awareness and the need to revive this awareness in the hearts of new generations through sound education and an adherence to moral values and upright religious teachings” (19).

#### *Contacts between the document on Human Fraternity and Fratelli Tutti.*

In FT 5 Pope Francis recognizes that just as he derived inspiration from Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople for writing his encyclical *Laudato Si’* so he has felt “particularly encouraged” by the Grand Imam [of al-Azhar], Ahmad al-Tayyeb, in composing *Fratelli Tutti*. He then quotes the first invocation of HF in which it is recalled that “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters”.

This is the first of 9 references that FT makes to HF. These are few in relation to the 288 notes to the encyclical, and yet they are significant, especially since it is unusual for an official document of the Holy See to quote from extraneous sources. The other 8 references are as follows.

In the first chapter *Dark Clouds over a Closed World*, Pope Francis refers to how he and Dr Al-Tayyeb are aware of much progress in the world, but also discern the presence of “a moral deterioration that influences international action and a weakening of spiritual values and responsibilities” (FT 29 quoting HF 27). It could be noted here that HF is a realistic document in which the Pope and the Grand Imam do not pull their punches.

Chapter 4 of FT, *A Heart Open to the Whole World*, deals with the concept of citizenship. Quoting the Document on Human Fraternity it says that citizenship “is based on the equality of rights and duties, under which all enjoy justice. It is therefore crucial to establish in our societies the concept of *full citizenship* and to reject the discriminatory use of the term *minorities* which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority” (FT 131 quoting HF 30). What is meant exactly by *full citizenship* is not spelt out – this could perhaps be a task for the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity which has been set up to foster and monitor the application of the document.

Further in the same chapter cultural enrichment is encouraged between East and West: the West discovering in the East “remedies for those spiritual and religious maladies that are caused by a prevailing materialism”, and the East finding in the West “many elements that can help it from weakness, division, conflict and scientific, technical and cultural decline” (FT 136 quoting HF 31). Here again terms would need to be clarified. What is meant by the East? Is it the world of Islam? But Islam is also to be found in the West – the oft-used classification “Islam and the West” does not correspond to reality. Moreover East would include, India, China and Japan, which have perhaps little to learn from the West. Nevertheless it is interesting to note the importance given to paying “attention to religious, cultural and historical differences that are a vital component in shaping the character, culture and civilization of the East” (*ibid.*), and the idea of learning from one another. This comes in a section of the chapter entitled *Reciprocal Gifts*. It could call to mind the idea of “receptive ecumenism” which could be applied also in interreligious relations.

Chapter Five wishes to promote *A Better Kind of Politics*. Here there is an explicit reference to HF: “In this regard, Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb and I have called upon ‘the architects of international policy and world economy to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace, to intervene at the earliest opportunity to stop the shedding of innocent blood’ [HF 12]. When a specific policy sows hatred and fear towards other nations in the name of its own country’s welfare, there is need to be concerned, to react in time and immediately to correct the course” (FT 192). “The culture of tolerance” which is advocated would seem to go beyond mere tolerance understood as the acceptance of something which cannot be changed, in other words a form of resignation. Yet perhaps this too would need to be spelt out further.

Chapter Eight deals explicitly with *Religion at the Service of Fraternity in our World*, so it is not surprising to find in it direct references to the Document on Human Fraternity. The first comes in a diagnosis of the modern world’s poor state of health: “It should be acknowledged that ‘among the most important causes of the crises of the

modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and the prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles” [HF 14] (FT 275). The Italian version of the Document on Human Fraternity speaks of “una coscienza umana anestetizzata” which would seem to be stronger since implying a deliberate blunting of the appeals of conscience. Islam is constant in its reminder to human beings to avoid *širk*, associating something with God, pursuing a finality other than God. In this quotation from HF it is the danger of putting the human person in the place of God that is recalled.

Later in this chapter, in a section dealing with religion and violence, there is a further quotation from HF. “Sincere and humble worship of God ‘bears fruit not in discrimination, hatred and violence, but in respect for the dignity and freedom of others, and loving commitment to the welfare of all’ [a quotation from a homily of Pope Francis in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 14 January 2015]... For this reason ‘terrorism is deplorable and threatens the security of people – be they in the East or in the West, the North or the South – and disseminates panic, terror and pessimism, but this is not due to religion, even when terrorists instrumentalize it. It is due, rather, to an accumulation of incorrect interpretations of religious texts and to policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression and pride. That is why it is so necessary to stop supporting terrorist movements fuelled by financing, the provision of weapons and strategy, and by the attempt to justify these movements, even using the media. All these must be regarded as international crimes that threaten security and world peace. Such terrorism must be condemned in all its forms and expressions” (FT 283 quoting HF 29).

This is a long quotation. It has been given in full here because it is often said that Muslim leaders never condemn terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam. This is not true; there are many condemnations by Muslims of such terrorism, but the Western media rarely echoes them. Hence the importance of this round condemnation of terrorism on the part of the Grand Imam, together with the Pope, with its invitation to “stop supporting terrorist movements”.

FT ends with *an appeal* based entirely on the meeting in Abu Dhabi and the document which resulted from it: “In my fraternal meeting, which I gladly recall, with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, ‘we resolutely [declared] that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence and the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course of history, have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women... God, the Almighty, has not need to be defended by anyone and does not want his name to be used to terrorize people’ [HF 21]. For this reason I would like to reiterate here the appeal for peace, justice and fraternity that we made together” (FT 285). There follows the full list of invocations with which the Document on Human Fraternity begins (HF 1-11).

Surely no greater proof could be given of the importance for Pope Francis of the meeting in Abu Dhabi and the impact of the ensuing Document on Human fraternity on his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*. Since the Amman Declaration would seem to have prepared the way for the Document on Human Fraternity, and this Document certainly had an influence on *Fratelli Tutti*, it would not be unrealistic to see a road leading from Amman to Assisi.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Le document sur *La Fraternité humaine pour la Paix mondiale et la Coexistence commune* se déclare « en accord avec les précédents *Documents internationaux* qui ont souligné l'importance du rôle des religions dans la construction de la paix mondiale ». L'article examine l'influence d'un de ces documents, la Déclaration d'Amman, sur le document sur la *Fraternité humaine*. Ayant tracé les origines de la Déclaration d'Amman, il relève les points de contact entre les deux documents. Ensuite il présente les points de contact entre le document sur la *Fraternité humaine* et la lettre encyclique du pape François, *Fratelli Tutti*.

