

# Dialogue with Islam needed



**George Weigel**

The Catholic Difference

Islamicists while strengthening the hand of devout Muslims interested in building free societies and a new, law-governed world order? It would be fanciful to suggest that there is a lot the Catholic Church can do. But the church's official dialogues with Muslims can avoid giving credibility to Islamicist radicals by deeming them fit dialogue partners. At the same time, the church can help give visibility to Islamic scholars, lawyers and religious leaders who are wrestling in good faith with some very tough questions:

Is it possible to ground a theory of religious freedom in the Quran and other authoritative Muslim sources? Is it possible to imagine in Islam something similar to Augustine's distinction between the City of God and the earthly city — a distinction that helped make possible pluralism and democracy? Can Islam develop a capacity for self-criticism, so Muslims who argue against the Islamicists are neither in mortal peril nor religiously and socially ostracized? Can Islam imagine something like the Great Jubilee of 2000 "Day of Pardon" during which the pope and senior leaders of the Catholic Church asked God's forgiveness for the sins of the people of the church against those of other faiths?

A lot of 21st-century history is riding on the answers to those questions. Archbishop Fitzgerald has his work cut out for him.

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The French literary gadfly, André Malraux, once shocked (shocked!) the devoutly secular French professoriate by observing that "the twenty-first century will be religious, or it will not be." Like other former Marxists, Malraux instinctively understood that the 20th century's lethal flirtations with utopian politics had included a diminished sense of human dignity. Only religious convictions, he suggested, were capable of lifting our eyes to a nobler horizon of human possibility.

Malraux was right: The West's seduction by secularism is not going to be replicated globally. Nor can that seduction sustain itself indefinitely within the West, if the West is not to commit demographic suicide. Religious conviction is now the primary culture-shaping agent in many parts of the world, from the favelas of Brazil to the forests of Africa to the teeming cities of the Asian subcontinent. The 21st century is going to be emphatically, assertively, boisterously religious.

The real question: what kind of cultures (and what kind of politics and economics) will resurgent religion shape in the new century?

The Catholic Church is committed to interreligious dialogue believing that all truths come from, and lead toward, the one Truth — God. Such dialogue, from a Catholic point of view, cannot be an exercise in political correctness governed by the notion that, since no one really knows the truth of anything, everyone's opinions about truth should be "tolerated." That anorexic

concept of interreligious dialogue is a subtle disrespect for others' deepest convictions. Genuine dialogue means real conversation that takes differences seriously, in the conviction that those differences make a real difference in individual lives, cultures, and history.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has a new president, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald of the Missionaries of Africa. He has been a student of Islam for decades. Dialogue with Islam is fraught with the most danger, and the greatest possibilities. What would a reinvigorated Catholic-Islamic dialogue look like?

It would begin by recognizing that there is a tremendous contest for the soul of Islam going on throughout the Muslim world. Islamicists, bent on turning Islam into a violent, revolutionary ideology with global reach, are not only a threat to the West. They are a threat to Muslims who wish to promote their faith through persuasion rather than coercion. Only the latter seem likely to build Islamic societies that can enjoy political and economic freedom without becoming Muslim imitations of Western decadence.

How can the Catholic Church help marginalize the



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

pion King" and a Barbie video.

I suggest that you check all advertisements to make sure they meet the mission of the *Courier* and the Catholic Church. Perhaps you could encourage advertisers to showcase merchandise, programs and services that promote Christian values.

Thank you for the wonderful article by Mike Lafont.

Lynda Greve  
 Lawton Drive, Pittsford

## Prayer must glorify God

To the editor:

I found the article "Rosary gets raves at adult care," in the Oct. 10 *Catholic Courier*, to be alarming. The quote "There have been some studies that show the repetition of the prayer synchronizes the breathing and the heart-lung rhythm," appears to reveal purposes of the prayers aside from glorifying God. Looking for personal benefits seems to be contradictory to what God commands. Should we not be seeking to live a life pleasing to God through

His son Jesus rather than coordinating our respiratory and circulatory systems? The next paragraph goes on to say, "Spiritual benefits are available as well." As well? Like, in addition to health benefits? I thought spiritual reasons would be number one on the list, and who do they benefit? God?

Ashley Koch  
 Lakeville

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Recitation of the rosary is traditional for Catholics, but not for those of other faith traditions. The rosary sessions featured in the article included many non-Catholics, for whom the health benefits of repetitive prayer may have been a motivating factor.

## Admires new Courier look

To the editor:

I am very impressed with the new *Courier* format. It's interesting and easy to read. I find your newspaper very stimulating and look forward to receiving it each week.

Marie Gibson  
 Albemarle Street  
 Rochester

**Letters Policy**

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Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

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