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Both Muslims and Christians prize their places of prayer,
as oases where they meet the All Merciful God
on the journey to eternal life, and where they meet
their brothers and sisters in the bond of religion.

JOHN PAUL II

Speech at Damascus in the Omayyad Mosque, 6 May 2001



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Layout

Anna Wawrzyniak Maoloni

Alessandro Bellucci [arabic]

French translation

Viviane Dutaut Ceccarelli

Claire Perfumo

English translation

Catharine de Rienzo

Matthew Fforde

Arabic translation

François Eid

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LEADER

THE HUMBLE ATTEMPT TO CONSTRUCT PEACE
A TEMPTATION AND A HYPOTHESIS

CARD. ANGELO SCOLA
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FOCUS

Religions as the cause of wars or only as an alibi? This old dilemma has been voiced frequently over the last few months, most particularly in relation to a Middle East set ablaze by ISIS. To try to provide an answer one can examine, on the one hand, how Christianity has definitively taken its leave of violence and, on the other, the Sunni and Shi'ite conceptions of jihad and their conflicting visions ranging from the most irenic to the most bloodthirsty. Whilst the Caliphate's appearance confirms that extremism in God's name is a global virus that is contagious for young people in search of glory, the forms of persecution suffered by Christians prove that the value of their testimony lies precisely in their vulnerability.

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The usefulness of changing vantage point in order to go deeper into the truth about reality. This is one of the several lessons imparted from Albania by Pope Francis, who chose this country on the periphery for his first apostolic visit in Europe. With its still gaping wounds and the great energy it is channelling into coming out of its corner, the country offers itself as a case for serious comparison. 90

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The Humble Attempt to Construct Peace

CARD. ANGELO SCOLA, ARCHBISHOP OF MILAN

THE TRAGIC EVENTS OF RECENT MONTHS HAVE LED TO, and almost imposed, the subject of this edition of *Oasis*: violence and in particular religiously motivated violence. In order to clear the field immediately of useless and false guilt complexes, it is advisable to observe that the religious component did not have during the last century that preponderant role that a certain ideological reading persists in giving it. Neither the First World War, whose centenary we have just celebrated, nor the Second World War or the Cold War had religious origins and the worst forms of totalitarianism of the last century were purposely atheistic in nature. It is, therefore, profoundly wrong to attribute to religions – a term for that matter which is too generic – the responsibility for every explosion of violence, in opposition to the healthy and peaceful rationality of purported secular reason.¹ Nor can one arbitrarily divide the category of religions in two, establishing a structural link between monotheism and violence as opposed to a tolerant polytheism of values.

However, the events of recent months remind us with painful confirmatory evidence how much religious motivations can become factors for violence. The thesis that has been so often repeated, namely that religions are always elements for peace and the responsibility for their transformation into factors for war is unfailingly that of politicians or capital, in essential terms does not hold up, although it contains obvious elements of truth. Rather one should speak about a continuous intertwining where it is difficult to establish who exploits whom, between politicians who don religious symbols in which they do not believe and men of religion who try to use the state to pursue their own personal agendas.²

A TROUBLING TENANT OF THE HUMAN HEART

It is probably the anthropological approach that is most suited to exploring an aggressiveness that expresses itself in a worrying cyclical way and which at the

¹ ² See next page.