

Mary and the Muslims

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I. A Clash of Civilizations: Islam vs. Christianity.

One of the greatest concerns of the Church today is the fate of Catholics who are living in Muslims countries—and especially those living in countries where Catholics are being persecuted for their faith. For Catholics living in countries ruled by Islamic Law are given only one of five alternatives: one, convert to Islam; two, pay a heavy fine for practicing the faith; three, work as a slave; four, leave the country as a refugee; or five, be killed.

What's more, the concern of the Church is well-founded, not only because now, for the first time in history, there are more Muslims than Catholics living in the world; but also because the gap between Catholics and Muslims seems to be growing at an alarming pace. For many Muslims practice polygamy and have correspondingly large families, while at the same time, many Catholics practice some form of birth control, and have correspondingly small families.

The continued expansion of the Muslim religion, then, in both numbers and political, as well as military influence can be disturbing, if not frightening, if we do not know a little something about the workings of God's mysterious divine providence. And so, we are led to ask ourselves today, how can this dangerous, disturbing state of affairs be reversed? How can the Catholic Church reassert herself, and become once again the largest Church in the world? Who will lead us in this spiritual battle? And what will be the catalyst for the conversion of the Muslims to Christianity?

The key not only for our own defense from the current Islamic invasion, but also the eventual conversion of the Muslims themselves lies in and through the arms of Mary. How and why this will happen is the purpose of this talk today. But before we begin, though, it may prove helpful for our own perspective of the current world situation to have some understanding—not only of the Muslim religion itself—but also of the current threat that is directed against the Catholic Church in various parts of the world.

First of all, we should be aware of the fact that Islam is not really another completely different religion from Catholicism, like Hinduism or Buddhism are. For it is not a complete denial of Christian doctrine, but rather it is at one and the same time, both an adaptation of and a misuse of Catholic teaching. In other words, we could say that Islam is actually a heresy practiced by a large denomination in much the same way as Protestantism is a heresy of the Catholic faith. And this important, but little known distinction, was pointed out by the English historian, Hilaire Belloc, about a hundred years ago.¹

It should be mentioned at this point, though, that his view is not universally accepted by all authorities on Islam. For some believe it to be a kind of pseudo-religion that was fashioned from not only parts of Judaism and Christianity, but also from some of the pagan religions that existed at the time of Mohammed, the founder of Islam in the early six hundreds , about whom more will be said later on. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this talk today, we will operate under the assumption that Islam is, indeed, a kind of Christian heresy. For if this is, in fact, the case, then the conversion of the Muslims to the one, true faith could be made much easier than we may have ever thought possible before.

For Mohammed showed great reverence and esteem to Our Lord and His mother. In fact, he regarded Jesus as the greatest of all the prophets. However, he denied that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. And by doing this, he eliminated in one stroke the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. And so with that denial went the entire sacramental structure of the Church.²

What's more, for an accurate appreciation of Islam's influence in the world today we must review its attitude to the West in general, and the Catholic Church in particular. For there is a lot of talk today that tries to promote the idea that Islam is a religion of peace. But this is not, we could say, an accurate appraisal of what is taught in the Koran, that is, the Muslim equivalent of our Bible.

For serious scholars of Islam state in no uncertain terms that the Islamic Jihad—or Holy War—that we are witnessing in many parts of the world today—is not a passing phase of Islamic activity. But rather that it is an actual Islamic institution.³ An institution that makes up an essential part of the Koran's teaching. For in Islam the Jihad is a religious obligation. In fact, "It forms part of the duties that the believer must fulfill"⁴. For this reason, the Jihad is considered to be "Islam's normal path to expansion." And this teaching is repeatedly emphasized in the Koran.⁵

And so, in order to achieve this goal of imposing a universal submission to Allah, there is but one effective means according to the teaching of Mohammed and Islamic theology. And that is the practice of a "Holy War." The practice of a Holy War, then, a Holy War that includes not only the forcible conversion of non-Muslims, but also a bloody persecution of all so-called infidels or non-believers, is clearly an Islamic institution. And not just a passing phenomenon practiced by a radical fringe group of extremists. In short, the Jihad forms an essential part of the thought, organization, and structure of the Islamic religion.⁶

What's more, Islam is unique among world religions, because it is the only religion whose theology specifically calls for the destruction of Christianity as a whole, regardless of its form.⁷ In other words, all Christians, whether they be Catholics, Protestants or Eastern Orthodox Christians, are seen as enemies of Islam. Enemies that must be either forcibly converted, enslaved, leveled with crippling taxes, exiled, or killed.

“Muslims may rightly be complimented, however,” as Dr. Jude Dougherty, former Chairman of the Philosophy Department at the Catholic University of America points out, “for their piety and good works, but the voluminous record of Islamic violence cannot be ignored. And neither” as he goes on to explain, “can the self-proclaimed goals of the Muslim world as articulated by its current leaders be disregarded. Because from the time of the Prophet Mohammed, Jihad has been a potent political force that has conquered and in some cases extinguished once powerful centers of Jewish, Christian, and even Hindu and Buddhist civilization in Asia, Africa, and Europe.”⁸

This is not to deny, of course, that there are many Muslims of good will who not only are friendly towards Christians in general, but also Catholics in particular. It is just to stress the reality that the official teaching of Islam is, in fact, anti-Christian.⁹

We might be curious to know at this point, then, why is Islam so hostile to Christianity? Well, it is because of the Christian teaching that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God. For Islamic theology teaches that belief in the divinity of Jesus is a blasphemy. And so, since professing faith in Islam means renouncing the truth that Jesus Christ is God, while being a Christian, on the other hand, means embracing the truth of the divinity of Jesus, then this would seem to mean, then, that there must be an unbridgeable chasm between Islam and Christianity. And it is this belief that has motivated the followers of Mohammed to forcibly convert, suppress, and even to kill Christians on a wide scale for the past fourteen hundred years.¹⁰

We have all read and seen stories about the brutal persecution of Christians that is taking place at this very minute in Syria, Iraq, and other parts of the Middle East. In fact, the Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria stated at a talk that he gave at Fordham University in New York City on September 26, 2014 that the current invasion that is being carried out in his country by Muslim extremists and terrorists is an invasion, he stressed, that is even more terrible than the ones that were carried out by Attila the Hun in the fifth century and the Mongols in the middle ages. So it is hard to imagine, then, the ferocity of the persecution that the Christians of Syria are undergoing at the present time.¹¹

It should be mentioned at this point, too, that April of 2015 marked the one hundredth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the first genocide in the history of civilization.¹² For at this time, just over a hundred years ago, the government leaders of Turkey, who were radical Muslims, managed to kill over a million and a half Armenian Christians in about three years time. The persecution of Christians that is going on at the present time is, indeed, horrific. But it is, in fact, small in comparison to the persecution of the Armenians that was carried out by the Turks a little more than a century ago.¹³

It is not the purpose of this talk today, though, to give a detailed theological explanation of the Muslim religion, or a history of the Islamic persecution of Christians, so we will stop here for the present moment. But it would seem, though, from this brief review of Islamic theology and public policy, that any kind of meaningful dialogue between Muslims and Christians would be not only unfeasible; but also that the conversion of

Muslims to Christianity would be extremely difficult, especially since under Islamic Law the penalty for a Muslim converting to Christianity is the death sentence.

II. Mary and the Koran.

Bishop Sheen, however, in a prophetic article that he wrote over fifty years ago stated, and I quote, “It is my firm belief,” he stressed, “that the fears some Christians entertain concerning the Muslims will not be realized.”¹⁴ But rather, he said, the Muslims “will eventually be converted to Christianity—and in a way that even some of our missionaries may never suspect.”¹⁵ For this reason, “It is my belief,” as he went on to explain, “that this will happen not through the direct teaching of Christianity, but through a summoning of the of the Muslims to a veneration of Mary.”¹⁶

But how and why will this mass conversion take place, when it seems that the Muslims are more hostile to Christians today than they have been since the time of the Crusades? Well, Bishop Sheen explains that this conversion can take place because the Muslims have not only a great love for Mary, but also a great devotion to her as well. And this love, veneration, and devotion to Mary is expressed by the Muslims in a striking way in many passages in the Koran.¹⁷

First of all, the Koran professes belief not only in Mary’s Immaculate Conception, but also her Perpetual Virginity.¹⁸ What’s more, Mary is the only woman whom Mohammed refers to by her proper name. And of her alone he writes at length “with outspoken admiration.”¹⁹ For Mary, then, the Koran “reserves a position of privilege that is both singular and imminent.”²⁰ In fact, her position is shared by no other woman in all of Islam. Not even the wives of Mohammed, or even his favorite daughter, Fatima, of whom more will be said later on.²¹

Interestingly, too, the Koran goes on to speak about the Annunciation,²² the Visitation,²³ and even the Birth of Mary.²⁴ What’s more, angels are depicted in the Koran as accompanying Mary, and saying to her, “O Mary, God has chosen you above all the women of the earth”²⁵ As we can recognize readily here, this is a verse that is remarkably similar to the one that can be found in the Gospel of St. Luke, where the Angel Gabriel says to Mary, “Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you.... For you have found favor with God”²⁶

Finally, in the nineteenth chapter of the Koran there are over forty-one verses that mention the name of Mary and Jesus.²⁷ And so, we can see clearly, then, from this short review of the Koran that Mary for the Muslims is indeed the true “Lady.” That is, the model and example of what the ideal woman should be in Muslim society. The only possible rival to her greatness in the Muslim world, then, would be Fatima, the favorite daughter of Mohammed. In fact, in order to express his high esteem for both Mary and his daughter, Mohammed once wrote in reference to Fatima, “You shall be the most blessed of all women in paradise—but after Mary.”²⁸ These words from the founder of Islam, therefore, show us again in a striking way the exceptionally high regard that Mary is held in the Muslim world.

For this reason, many Muslim women have a deep devotion and love for Mary that is expressed in a variety of ways; one of which is the making of pilgrimages to her shrines in various parts of the world, to include, among others, the shrine at Fatima, Portugal.²⁹

III. Fatima and Islam.

Now this brings us to the second point made by Bishop Sheen about Mary's relationship to the Muslims, namely, why should she have chosen the tiny town of Fatima to make what many Mariologists believe to be her most important apparition in the history of the Church? What possible reason could Mary have had for deciding to appear in a village named after the daughter of a heretic, and one of the greatest enemies of Christianity in history? Would it not have been more appropriate and fitting for Mary to have made her revelations in a town named after a saint or some Christian mystery? But no. Mary chose to appear not only in a nation that for five centuries was under the domination of Muslim oppressors, but also in the town named after the favorite daughter of one of the greatest enemies of the Church.

Since nothing ever happens by chance—either in Heaven or on earth—and since the decision of Mary to appear in the tiny town of Fatima was, no doubt, part of the providential plan of God for the salvation and sanctification of the whole human race, we need to reflect, then, at greater length and in more depth, on this mysterious decision of divine providence.

It is both interesting and significant to note, then, that Bishop Sheen states on this question, that "I believe," he said, "that the Blessed Virgin Mary chose to be known as 'Our Lady of Fatima,' not only as a pledge to, but also as a sign of hope to the Muslim people, and as an assurance that they, who have shown her so much respect, will one day accept her Divine Son as well."³⁰

At this point, then, before we go any further, it may be helpful for our understanding of the relationship that exists between Mary and the Muslims to know a little something more about how that little village in Portugal came to be called by the name of "Fatima." Well, first of all, we should be aware of the fact that the name "Fatima" is given to Muslim girls in much the same way as a Catholic family would name their daughter after a saint or Mary herself. What's more, it can be interesting for our study of this question to know that the name "Fatima" means the "weaned one" in Arabic.³¹ And so, this suggests to us that Mohammed's favorite daughter may have been a small or sickly child when she was born. More importantly, though, we should be aware of the fact that in Islamic tradition the name "Fatima" is associated with the virtue of purity.³²

The Fatima to whom the present town in Portugal is named after, though, is not the actual daughter of Mohammed, as some people believe; but rather another young woman who was given this name at birth. The woman in question was a daughter of a Muslim prince who ruled the area around the present town of Fatima in the eleven hundreds, almost a thousand years ago. She was captured in a battle that was fought between her father and a

Portuguese prince by the name of Count Hermigues. The battle was fought on the Feast of St. John the Baptist, that is on June 24th in the year 1158.³³

Shortly after the princess Fatima was captured in the battle, she not only fell in love with the Count and married him, but she also converted to the Catholic faith. Later on, her husband named the area where the present day village of Fatima exists after her in order to express his love for her, as well as to perpetuate her memory.³⁴

The little village of Fatima, then, remained hidden and unknown to the world for centuries until Mary, by a divine decree, decided to appear to three shepherd children in 1917, and reveal to the world through them the urgent need for prayer, penance, and sacrifice. It has not been known, however, until Bishop Sheen pointed out the possibility, that part of the Fatima message may include a plan for the conversion of the Muslims as well. How Our Lady will accomplish this feat, we do not know at the present time. But nevertheless, we do know that it is indeed possible for Mary, as Our Lady of Fatima and Our Lady of the Rosary to bring about the miraculous conversion of many Muslims in a short span of time.

IV. Fatima and the Grace of Conversion.

For example, Bishop Sheen tells us that the Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima was not only enthusiastically received by the Muslims of Africa and India when it was taken to those two continents, but also that in the nation of Mozambique the Muslims who saw the Fatima Statue when it was taken in procession were rapidly converted to the faith.³⁵

And who can forget the conversion of the Islamic assassin of Pope St. John Paul, namely, Ali Agca, who carried out the attempted assassination, most significantly on May 13th—Feastday of Our Lady of Fatima—in 1981. It is hard to imagine, then, anyone so far away from the faith as someone who would attempt to kill the Pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth. Yet this man, as far away from Christ and the Church as anyone could possibly be—announced in 2007, while he was still in prison—that he wanted to renounce the Muslim faith and to become a Catholic. And he undoubtedly made this decision because of the graces that he had received from our Lady of Fatima.³⁶ What's more, it is worthwhile to note that he made a pilgrimage to Rome in December of 2014 in order to lay some white roses on the tomb of St. John Paul.³⁷

Further, it should be noted that the conversion of Ali Agja began, we could say, on the very day that he shot Pope John Paul in St. Peter's Square at Rome. And we know this for a fact because when Pope John Paul went to the prison where his attacker was being held in order to express his forgiveness to him, Agja told the Pope of his fears that Our Lady of Fatima was going to kill him. For the assassination attempt and his subsequent escape had been planned so perfectly, he said, that he was astounded to find himself in prison. And so, therefore, he had come to attribute the Pope's survival and his imprisonment to a supernatural power. For he had read in prison that the assassination attempt had taken place on the anniversary of the Fatima apparitions. And so, he had concluded that the

“goddess of Fatima,” as he referred to Our Lady of Fatima, who had saved the Pope was now going to do away with him. Pope John Paul, of course, in order to reassure Agja, patiently explained to him that Our Lady of Fatima was Mary, the Mother of God, whom even the Muslims themselves venerate highly. And so, therefore, he should not be afraid of being killed or harmed by her.³⁸

And so, we can see here, then, that from these crude superstitious beliefs that Agja held, Our Lady of Fatima was able to lead him slowly, silently, but inevitably to the Heart of her Son. In a way, then, we could see the conversion of Ali Agja as a kind of model of the way in which Our Lady of Fatima may very well lead the Muslims back to the One, True Church. It is becoming increasingly apparent, then, that somehow in the designs of divine providence a little town in Portugal named after the daughter of heretic is destined to bring about the conversion of millions of Muslims. How and when this will happen in the future, we do not know. But we do know, however, that it can indeed happen. Even though, we may think at first that it might be an impossible feat to accomplish. For remember when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary at the Annunciation he revealed to her that “nothing will be impossible for God.”³⁹

V. The Rosary and Lepanto.

We are led to ask ourselves, then, in light of all these revelations and miracles: how can we more effectively call upon the help of Our Lady of Fatima in our struggles with the Muslims in the twenty-first century? What can we do that will help us to draw down the graces that will be instrumental in bringing about their conversion? The answer to all these questions can be given in just one word, namely, the Rosary. For Mary told us six successive times in each one of her six apparitions to the three shepherd children to “pray the Rosary every day for peace in the world and an end to war.”⁴⁰ What’s more, it should be noted here that Mary identified herself to the children—not as “Our Lady of Fatima”—as we might have expected that she would have done. But rather she identified herself as “Our Lady of the Rosary”—apparently in order to stress the importance that she places on the praying of the Rosary as often as we possibly can.⁴¹

And so, we can be absolutely certain, then, that there can be no true peace—either in the world at large, or between Muslims and Christians—unless and until more people pray the Rosary more often, and with greater zeal and devotion. We can be confident, then, that the key to victory in our current conflicts with the Muslims will be by praying the Rosary. And nowhere has this truth been taught to us more clearly or more dramatically than during the naval battle of Lepanto, which took place in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Greece in the year 1571.

At this time the Muslims were poised to take over all of Western Europe. And all that stood in their way was the poorly equipped Papal Navy. This was, undoubtedly, one of the most decisive battles in all of history. For if the Christians had been defeated, then Western Europe could have easily become as Islamic as the Middle East is today.

The Christian Navy was commanded by the young and inexperienced Admiral Don Juan from Austria, who was only twenty four years old at the time of the battle. What's more, he directed a fleet that was both inferior in size and strength to Muslim armada that opposed him. For the Muslims had not only fifty ships more than the Christians had, but also twenty thousand sailors more than the Christians had mustered for the battle.⁴²

And so, we can see, then, that the Christian Navy entered into this most important and decisive of naval battles out manned and out gunned. And that is not all. For at the time the battle began there was a strong east wind that was blowing favorably in the direction of the Muslim fleet. At the outset of the conflict, then, it seemed as if victory was assured for the Muslim force.

VI. Guadalupe and Lepanto.

However, the Muslims had not counted on the opposition of Our Lady of the Rosary—and –Our Lady of Guadalupe. For not only did Pope Pius V request a Rosary procession through the streets of Rome; but he also asked that all the Rosary confraternities in the city to pray the Rosary unceasingly until victory was assured. What's more, Admiral Don Juan placed a replica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the cabin of his ship. The image had been painted at the request of the Archbishop of Mexico City, and then touched to the original image that had been imprinted on the tilma or cloak of Juan Diego. Afterward, the Archbishop had sent the replica of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a present to King Philip of Spain, who in turn had given it to Don Juan.⁴³

And so, when this most strategically important of naval battles began the Christian fleet was at a decided disadvantage. But then, suddenly and unexpectedly—when the two fleets were about two miles apart—a “tremendous wind came up at that critical moment which threw the whole Muslim navy into complete confusion.”⁴⁴ What's more, at the same time the Blessed Mother appeared in the air hovering above the Christian fleet while blessing the ships and the sailors.⁴⁵

The grace for this miraculous turn of events—which resulted in the resounding defeat of the Muslims by the Christians—was no doubt obtained through the intercession of Mary—by not only the Rosary campaign organized by Pope Pius V, but also by the placement of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the cabin of the commanding admiral of the Christian fleet. The victory of Lepanto, then, brought an end to Muslim sea power, which to this day has no longer been a threat to the Western World, with the possible exception of some sporadic attacks by Muslim pirates off the coast of West Africa.

The part that the Rosary played in the victory of Lepanto is well-known. But this does not exclude, of course, the graces that could have been obtained through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe by the placement of her image in the flagship of the Christian Navy.

It is worth noting at this point, then—in order to refresh our memories—that Our Lady of Guadalupe is standing upon a crescent moon in the image that she left of herself on Juan Diego's tilma. For the crescent moon is the representative symbol of the Muslims in much the same way as the Cross is the representative symbol of Christianity. And so, the fact that Our Lady of Guadalupe is depicted as standing upon a crescent moon may call to mind for us the many statues and paintings of Mary that depict her as standing upon a serpent in order to indicate to us that she is destined to defeat the devil.

The fact that Mary is standing upon the crescent moon of Islam, then, may very well indicate to us that she—in her role as Our Lady of Guadalupe is destined—according to the designs of divine providence to defeat the influence of the Islamic invasion of the Western World. What's more, maybe we can hope that what Our Lady of Guadalupe did for the Aztec Indians of Mexico, she will be able to do again today—as Our Lady of Fatima—for the Muslim people of the modern day world. In other words, maybe we can hope that just as Our Lady of Guadalupe brought about the rapid conversion of millions of Indians some five hundred years ago, so too, as Our Lady of Fatima, she can do the same for the Muslim nations of today.

VII. Our Lady of Kazan and Islam.

It seems clear, then, that Mary will play an increasingly “important role in the years ahead as the Muslim-Christian conflict continues to grow sharper”.⁴⁶ And so, maybe as Bishop Sheen has noted, Mary will not only “the bridge that connects two vastly different cultures”, but also “the common mother who keeps her children talking.”⁴⁷

There is, in fact, some evidence to indicate that Mary has already begun to establish peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims in our modern world. And this has taken place in the city of Kazan, Russia, which is about five hundred miles east of Moscow. Kazan is a city of about a million persons, half of whom are Muslim, and the other half Christians. What's more, the Mayor of the city is a Muslim.⁴⁸ Under these conditions, then, we would expect that tensions might be high between members of these two religions. But nothing could be further from the truth. For the Muslims and Christians of this ancient city live and work together in unparalleled peace and harmony.⁴⁹

How can we explain, then, this astounding phenomenon? The answer is, again, Mary. Specifically, under her title as Our Lady of Kazan. For Our Lady of Kazan is the patroness and protectress of Russia. Therefore, her icon, which has been venerated for centuries is the most beloved and esteemed one in all of Russia.

The history of the icon is, however, a tangled and complicated web of stories and events that is hard to follow. And it is not the purpose of this talk to sort through them all. But anyone who might want more information about this fascinating subject can consult the excellent series of articles that were written about it in “Inside the Vatican Magazine”⁵⁰

Nevertheless, it can be helpful for our own perspective of the situation to know a few basic facts about the icon's history. First of all, it is believed that the icon was originally

painted in the twelve hundreds, but then later on disappeared during an invasion by the Tartars. It then mysteriously reappeared almost four centuries later. It disappeared again in 1904 when it was stolen by a thief. And then reappeared at an art show in London, where it was bought by an art collector. From the hands of the art collector, the venerable icon was purchased by the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima in 1970, which then placed it in their chapel near the Fatima shrine in Portugal. The icon remained in Fatima until 1993, when it was given by the Blue Army to Pope St. John Paul, who placed it in his personal chapel. Finally, in a gesture of good will, the pope returned the icon to the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2004.⁵¹

Now comes the most amazing part of the story. For after the icon was returned to Russia, the Mayor of Kazan—who remember was a Muslim—asked for and received permission from the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church to install the precious icon of Our Lady in the Cathedral of Kazan at the city's own expense. Remember, too, that for the mayor to do this the cathedral itself had to be renovated. For it had been closed for over seventy years during the time when the communist atheistic government ruled the country, and closed—or destroyed—almost all the churches and chapels of the nation. What's more, the mayor also built with city funds a chapel for the small Catholic community of Kazan.⁵²

The city of Kazan, then, in the heart of Russia can provide us with an ideal model, not only of how Muslims and Christians can live and worship together in peace and harmony; but also it can provide us with a blueprint of how the future conversion of Muslims could proceed on a wide scale.

VIII. Conclusion: A Message of Hope.

Let us now try to sum up everything that has been said so far by connecting the dots, so to speak, which go from Mary and the Koran, to Guadalupe and Fatima, to Lepanto and the Rosary, and finally from Rome to Russia. First of all, we learned that Mary is loved, venerated, and revered by the Muslims as no other woman in the world is.

Second, we learned that Fatima and Guadalupe are linked together not only as the largest and most visited of Marian shrines in the world, but also by the extraordinary number of conversions brought about by Mary at these two locations.

Third, we learned at Lepanto that the Rosary is the key to winning extraordinary and miraculous graces from Our Lady whenever we have to engage in any kind of physical or spiritual combat with the Muslims.

Finally, we learned at Kazan that through Mary's intercession, Muslims and Christians can live and work together in peace and harmony.

It seems clear, then, that God is writing straight with crooked line in His efforts to bring the souls of the Muslims to Jesus through Mary. Where the Lord will lead us in the years to come is known to no one but divine providence. Nevertheless, we can be sure, if the

city of Kazan is any indication, that even though tensions between Muslims and Christians may increase in different parts of the world, still, there will be at the same time an increasing openness on the part of many Muslims towards the truth and the beauty of the Catholic faith, as well as greater expressions of trust and friendship between the followers of Mohammed and the followers of Christ.

Let us return now to where we began, that is, with the plight of the persecuted Christians in Aleppo, Syria. For when the archbishop of that city concluded his talk at Fordham University in New York City, he reminded those present that “no one could forget Pope Francis’ call to the entire Church to participate in a day of prayer and fasting on the Vigil of the Birth of Mary in 2013 in the face of growing tensions between Syria and the United States.”⁵³ For some political and military experts believed that Syria would be bombed by the Americans within hours.

“People of good will throughout the whole world, however, generously responded to the Pope’s plea by praying and fasting on the appointed day. And then the following week the result of all this prayer and fasting was revealed:”—war was avoided.⁵⁴

And so, let us then today, in the face of rising tensions between Muslims and Christians throughout the world, recommit ourselves to following the basic requirements of the Fatima message, namely, prayer, especially the prayer of the Rosary, and penance—especially some kind of sacrifice or self-denial. For if we do this, we can be sure that not only will war between Muslims and Christians be averted in the future, but also and above all that many Muslims will receive the light and the strength that they will need in order to convert to the Catholic faith.

The message of Mary and the Muslims, then, is ultimately a message of hope. For it is a message that holds out for us the possibility that the greatest enemies of the Catholic Church today can be converted. And so, we must always keep in mind, then, as Mary told us at Fatima—that even though the Holy Father will have much to suffer—and even though many good people will be martyred—and even though various nations will be annihilated—still in the end, she promised, “My Immaculate Heart will triumph, and there will be peace.”⁵⁵ Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us.