

Franciscan-Muslim Relations:

From Vatican II until Today

Presentations 5 & 6

I. Vatican II and *Nostra Aetate*

- A. Any discussion of Christian-Muslim (or Franciscan-Muslim) Relations today must necessarily begin with the Landmark Document of Vatican II:

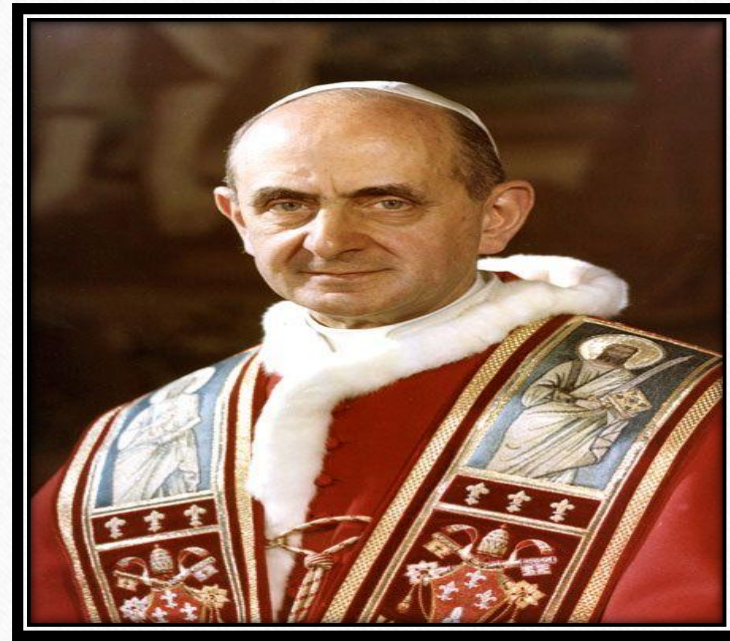
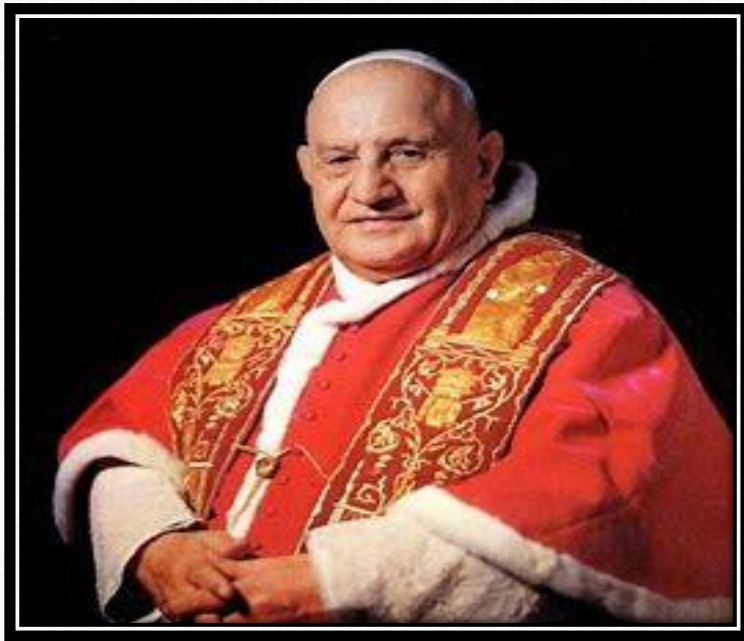
- **Nostra Aetate**
 - (*"In our own time..."*)
 - 28 October 1965, Paul VI

Nostra Aetate

- *Nostra Aetate* =
- **The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions**



Vatican II (1963-65)



Nostra Aetate

- 1. It is one of only 3 “declarations” of the Second Vatican Council, along with:
 - ❖ Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis humanae*)
 - ❖ Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*)
 - ❖ Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum educationis*)

Nostra Aetate

- 2. In terms of binding force (required obedience), a *“declaratio”* is the *least binding of three different levels of documents at Vatican II*
 - a. *Constitutions (4) – 2 on the Church, 1 on Divine Relation, 1 on Sacred Liturgy*
 - b. *Decrees (9)*
 - c. *Declarations (3)*
 - i. *though not binding, they represent the wisdom of the Council Fathers*
 - ii. *on three important issues facing the Church-in-the-world*

Nostra Aetate

- 3. In point of fact, this document had its genesis in a desire among some Council Fathers to address the Church's **troubled historical relationship with Judaism and Jews**
 - a. Indeed, **its first draft** was, very simply, a declaration on **this very subject**
 - b. real inspiration for several years had been by **John XXII and Cardinal Bea**

Nostra Aetate

- c. The concern was to:
 - Move the Church away from the centuries-long accusation of the Jews for “**Deicide**” & that *all* Jews for *all* time bear the guilt for the death of Jesus
 - And to apologize for the Church’s periodic and shameful fomenting of **Anti-Semitism**

Nostra Aetate

- d. But as the discussions unfolded at the Council, it became apparent that the **scope of the document** needed to be **broadened** to include the relationship of the Church with:
 - The Other Abrahamic traditions
 - The Other world religions

Nostra Aetate

- B. The Basic Content of *Nostra Aetate* = its Five Sections
 - 1. Humanity's Common Search for God
 - 2. On Religions outside Abrahamic Monotheism (e.g. Hinduism & Buddhism)
 - 3. On Islam
 - 4. On Judaism
 - 5. Respectful Treatment of all Religions

Nostra Aetate

- C. Some Highlights of the Document:
 - 1. Selected Passages, emphasizing:
 - a. The Human Desire and Search For God
 - b. The Diversity of Paths followed in that search

- 2. In particular: On Islam

- a. the One God
- b. the Merciful and All-powerful
- c. Creator of Heaven and Earth
- d. Faith as submission / surrender
- e. Their respect for Abraham, Mary and Jesus-as-Prophet
- f. Plea to “forget the past” and work for mutual understanding, social justice, moral welfare, peace and freedom

Nostra Aetate

- g. Section 5 (in its entirety):

Nostra Aetate

- 5. We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a fraternal manner any person created as he or she is in the image of God. The relationship of the human person to God the Father and his or her relationship to other human beings as brothers or sisters are so linked together that Scripture says: ‘The one who does not love does not know God’ [1 John 4, 8].

Nostra Aetate

- No foundation, therefore, remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between one human being and another, or between peoples and other peoples, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

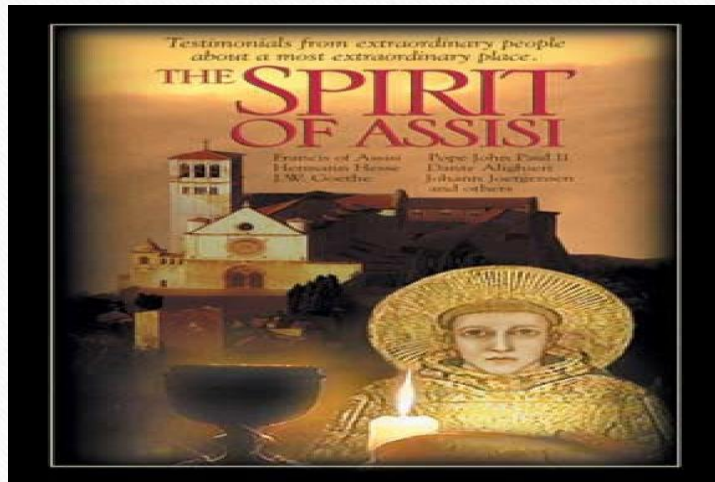
Nostra Aetate

- The Church reproves, as being foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against human persons or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to ‘maintain good fellowship among the nations [1 Peter 2, 12], and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all people so that they may truly be sons and daughters of the Father who is in heaven.

II. “The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)

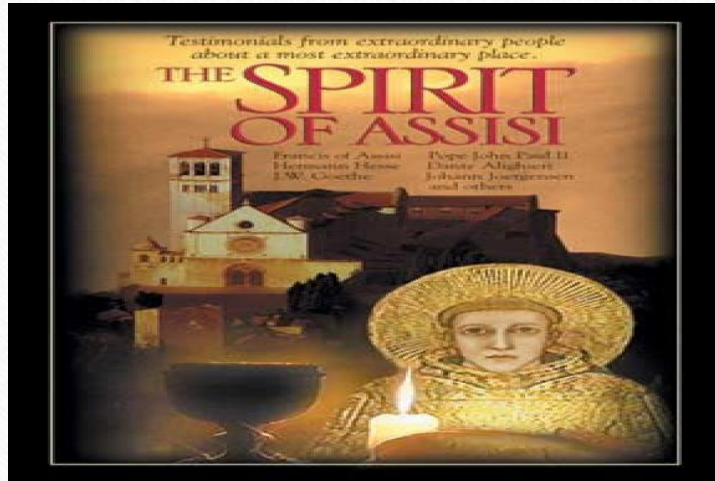
- A. On **27 October 1986**, in the very spirit of *Nostra Aetate* (1965), Pope John Paul II invited 160 religious leaders to gather in the city of Assisi in central Italy:
 1. The choice of Assisi was conscious and deliberate = it is the town of **Francis of Assisi**, the man of peace, *par excellence*
 2. Over-riding theme of the gathering was to be **peace and peaceful coexistence among the religions**

3. Those who answered the invitation were:



- a. 32 Christian Religious Groupings or Configurations
 - Roman Catholic Church
 - Greek Orthodox Church
 - Russian Orthodox Church
 - World Council of Churches
 - World YWCA
 - World Alliance of YMCA's
 - Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers)
 - Mennonite World Conference
 - Reformed Ecumenical Synod
 - Baptist World Alliance
 - Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 - World Alliance of Reformed Churches
 - Lutheran World Federation
 - Anglican Communion
 - Old Catholic Church of Utrecht
 - Assyrian Church of the East

b. Representatives of 11 non-Christian Religions



- Hinduism
- Sikhism
- Buddhism
- Jainism
- Judaism
- Islam
- African and North American Animism
- Shintoism
- Zoroastrianism
- Baha'i

“Spirit of Assisi” (1986)

- But even before this event was realized, John Paul II had issued a lengthy letter “for the celebration of the World Day of Peace” on 1 January 1986.

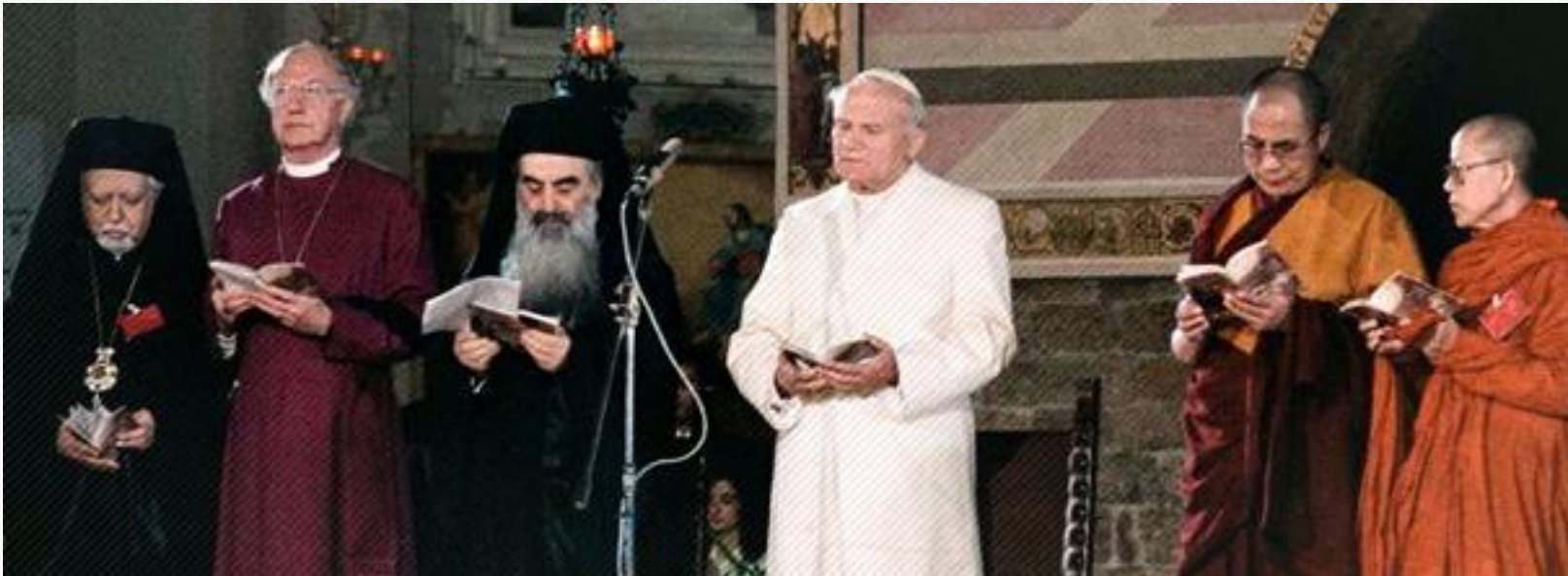
- It had for its title:

“Peace is a Value with No North-South, East-West Frontiers: Only One Peace”

“Spirit of Assisi” (1986)

- The Subdivisions within the Letter are indicative of his thinking on the matter:
 - 1. Peace as a Universal Value
 - 2. Threats to Peace
 - 3. Overcoming the Current Situation
 - 4. The Path of Solidarity and Dialogue
 - 5. New Relationships built on Solidarity and Dialogue
 - 6. The Christian Vision and Commitment
 - 7. International Year of Peace and Final Appeal

“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)



“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)

- B. John Paul II called this gathering:

- **“A World Day of Prayer for Peace”**

“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)

- 1. It was to simply be a day of **prayer, fasting and pilgrimage** –
together
- 2. Later, it would be stressed that this was a call:
 - a. **To come together to pray**; but not
 - b. **To pray together**

“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)

- 3. There would be criticism in some quarters of the dangers of:
 - a. **Surrender of the superiority of Christianity** over all other religions
 - b. **a tendency toward syncretism** = blending of rituals and their various significances (to the loss of Christian uniqueness and superiority)

“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)

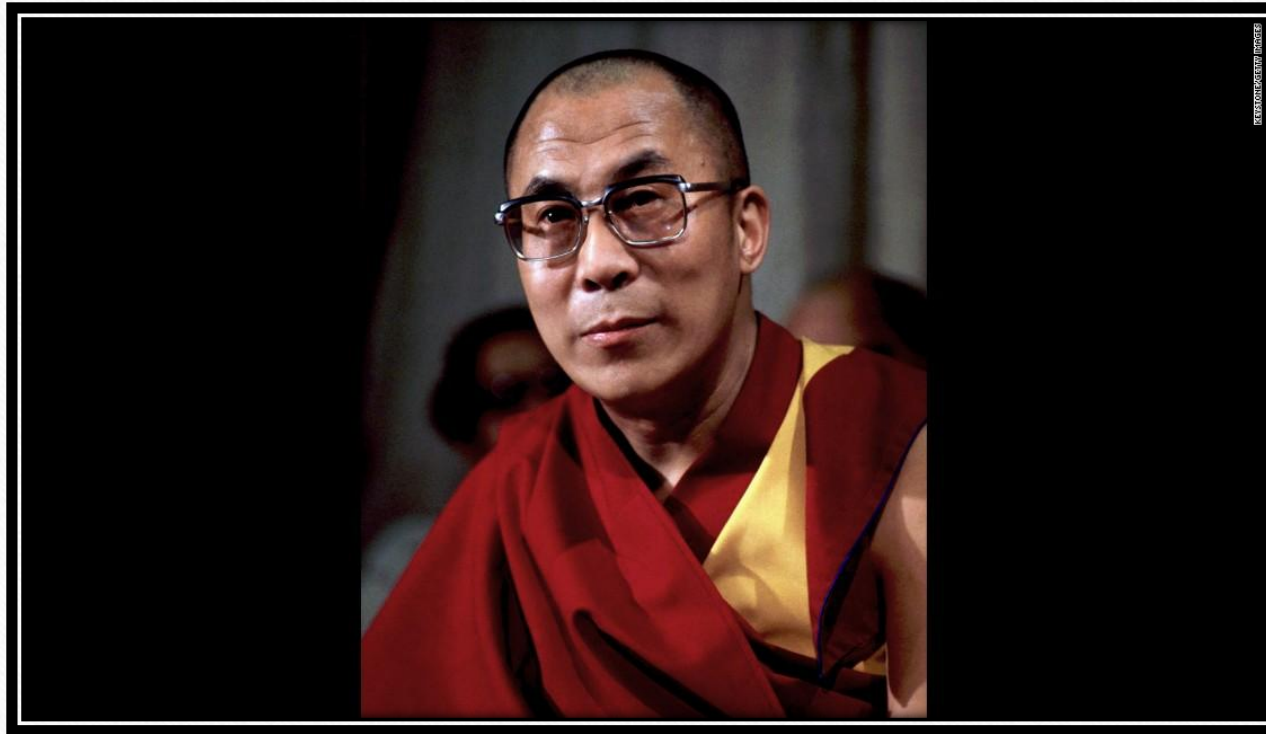
- 4. Hence, the very simple agenda:
 - a. Gather together and greet one another in one place: absolutely historic
 - b. Pilgrimage together (from Porziuncola to San Francesco)
 - c. Offer Individual Prayers for Peace
 - i. in one’s own way
 - ii. In one’s own words

“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)





“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)



“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)



“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)

- <https://www.papalartifacts.com/october-27-1986-pope-john-paul-ii-calls-the-world-day-of-prayer-for-peace-in-assisi/>

“The Spirit of Assisi” (1986)

- C. Important Excerpts from John Paul II’s Concluding Text:
 - (see handout)

III. After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- A. The Pontificate of Benedict XVI:
 - 1. Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) was more dubious about such gatherings
 - a. He strongly feared the giving the impression of the **loss of Christian unique possession of the Truth** and the **dangers of syncretism**

After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- b. But he clouded the environment by the disastrous **Regensburg Address**, on 12 September 2006, in which:



After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- i. For, Benedict seemed to **aver** that **Islam** was a religion of violence
 - aa. His Lecture was actually concerned with the relationship between religion and violence
 - bb. And at a certain point in the lecture, Benedict cited a work (polemic) by the Byzantine Emperor, Manuel II Paleiologus who was in dialogue with a Persian Muslim leader

After the “Spirit of Assisi”



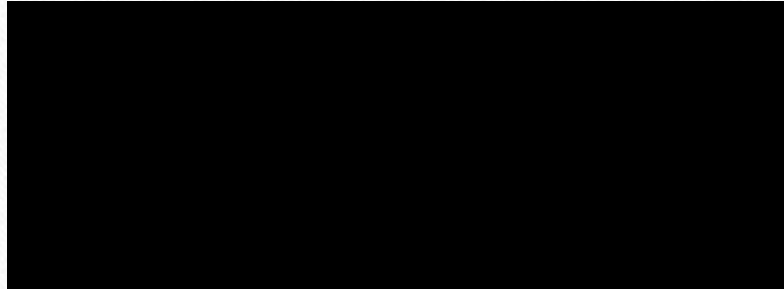
Michael II Palaiologus

After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- cc. the point turned on whether forced conversions – an issue in this 15th century dialogue - were moral (and against “reason”)
- dd. Benedict cited the emperor, who was claiming they were not “reasonable” but coercive and a violation of freedom
- ee. The inference was that Islam was a religion of violence

After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- ii. But the lecture and its contentious contention was being made in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001
- iii. At the very least: poor choice of example to make his point

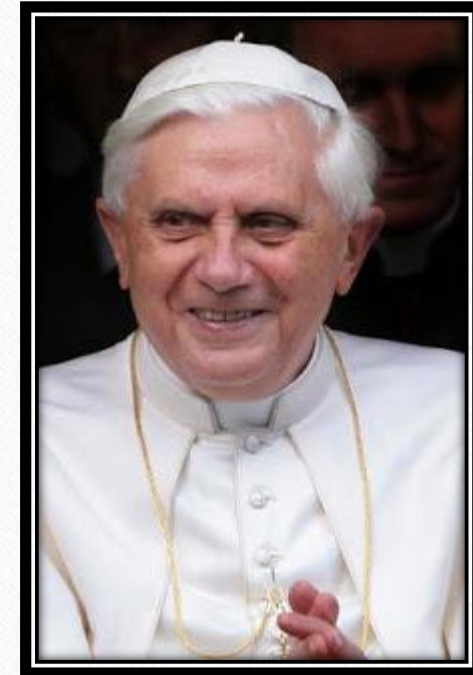


- ff. The Lecture was roundly denounced by Muslims the world over.
- gg. In a sense, Benedict spent the rest of his pontificate walking back the inference his lecture had unleashed

After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- 2. Nevertheless, in spite of his theological misgivings, Benedict did host another “**Assisi World Day of Prayer**” in 2011

“Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Justice & Peace in the World” (2011)



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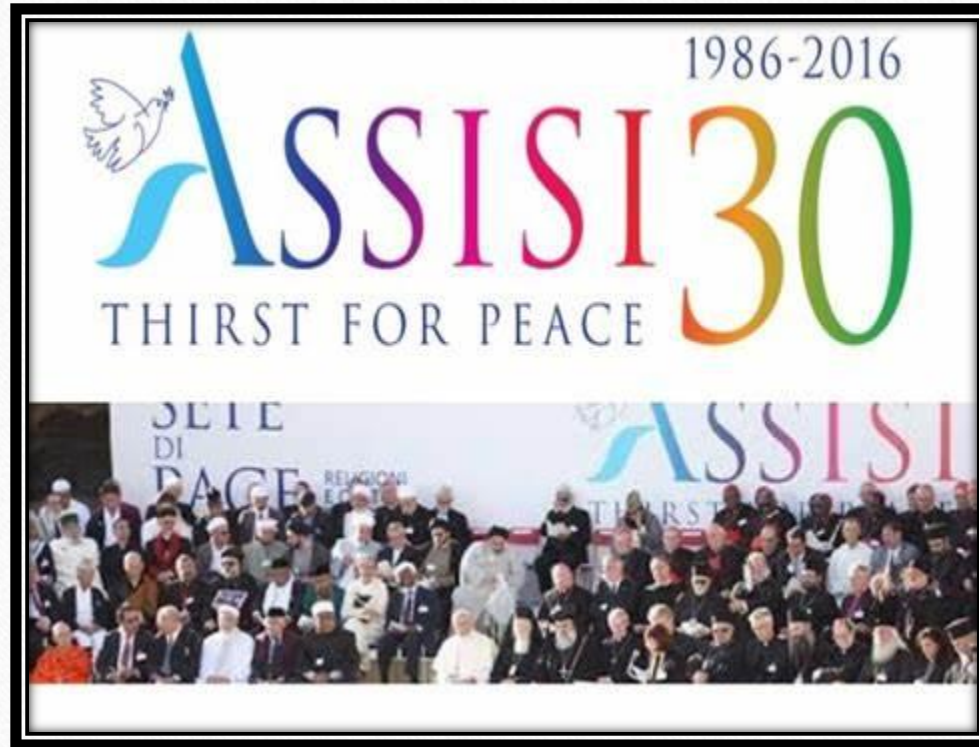


After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- **B. The Pontificate of Francis I:**

- 1. In general, Francis has been, throughout his ministerial life, **very comfortable** with representatives of other religions (**Buenos Aires**)
- 2. Hence, when it came to celebrating the **30th Anniversary** of the “**Spirit of Assisi**” in **2016**, he was “all in”

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- a. Event spanned 3 days: **18-20 September 2016**
 - b. Comprised of **several General Sessions** and **30 discussion panels**





After the “Spirit of Assisi”



After the “Spirit of Assisi”



After the “Spirit of Assisi”



After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- c. Also good to note that the 30th Anniversary celebration occurred:
 - i. just after another event sponsored by the Pope in Assisi on 1 September = “Care for Creation Day”; and
 - ii. And two years after his Historic Trip to Jerusalem to mark the 50th Anniversary of Paul VI’s visit there

After the “Spirit of Assisi”



After the “Spirit of Assisi”

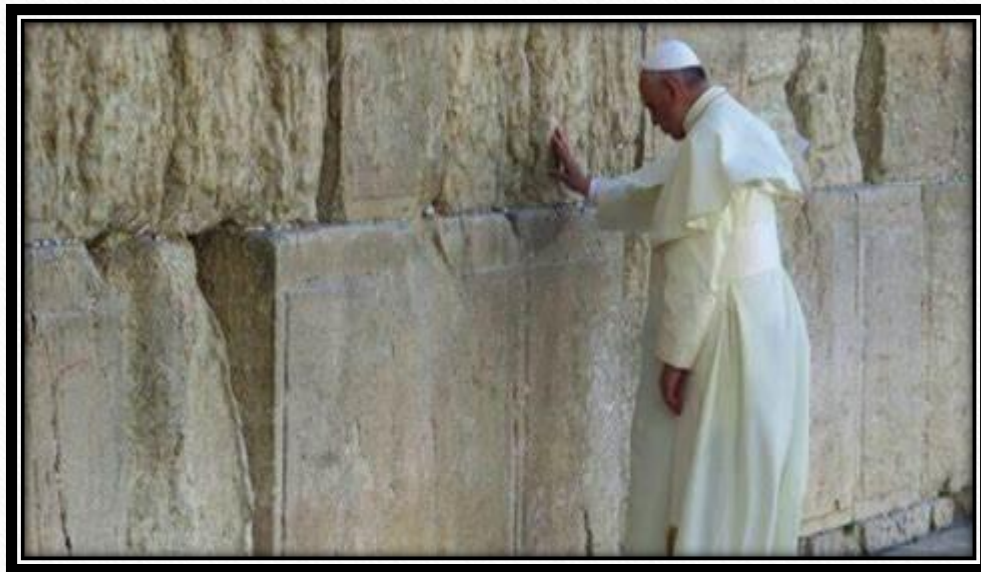


After the “Spirit of Assisi”



MUSLIM – CHRISTIAN - JEW

After the “Spirit of Assisi”



After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- **3. Another Historic Event took place on 4 February 2019**
 - **A. Meeting between Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), specifically in Abu Dhabi**
 - **1. This was the first visit ever of the Roman pontiff to the Arabian peninsula – birthplace of Islam**
 - **2. Ahmed Tayeb is the former President of Al-Azhar University (Cairo, Egypt) = the most revered seat of learning and scholarship in the Sunni Islamic world**

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- B. The Reason for the Encounter: to Issue an important Document on Cooperation between Sunni Islam and the Catholic Church
 - i. but with universal ramifications
 - ii. Based on and framed on the notion of “Human Fraternity”

After the “Spirit of Assisi”

- C. Selected passages from:
 - “A Document on Human Fraternity
for World Peace and Living Together”
 - (4 February 2019)
 - Pope Francis I and Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayeb

After the “Spirit of Assisi”



After the “Spirit of Assisi”



After the “Spirit of Assisi”

