

The Fourth Pope John Paul II Annual Lecture on Interreligious Understanding
The Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas 'Angelicum'

with

The Russell Berrie Foundation

Rome, April 5th 2011

Jews, Christians and Muslims Meet around their Scriptures: An Inter-faith Practice for the 21st Century

By

David F. Ford

Regius Professor of Divinity and Director of the Cambridge Inter-faith
Programme, University of Cambridge

Opening

It is a great honour to be invited to deliver this lecture by the Angelicum and the Russell Berrie Foundation, and I am delighted to be here, all the more so as the lecture itself is named after one of the greatest figures of the twentieth century. I like the comment in Jonathan Kwitny's biography of Pope John Paul II, after describing the controversy surrounding the Pope's summoning of the 1986 Assisi inter-faith meeting: 'John Paul willed the event to fruition, and talked about it with delight frequently afterward, though in the end it proved but one step on a long journey.'¹

We are still on that journey, and the imaginative initiatives sponsored by the Russell Berrie Foundation here in Rome and elsewhere are among the things that are helping us to move forward. It has been a special delight to meet the present Russell Berrie Fellows from so many continents (I think I counted five) and traditions. Looking ahead to the coming decades, this programme promises to generate a network of those committed to inter-faith engagement around the world. And it is worth noting that this long term fruitfulness is based on dedicated hard work in building the appropriate institutional bases in the Angelicum and in the Russell Berrie Foundation. One key element that might be learnt from in other settings is the close connection here between Christian ecumenism and inter-faith understanding and collaboration. Fr Fred Bliss's twenty-one years teaching ecumenical theology in the Angelicum has been the ideal setting for a new dimension dealing with other faiths, especially Judaism and Islam. Rabbi Jack Bemporad's experience and wisdom, rooted in his long and distinguished service to interreligious understanding in the USA and elsewhere, has complemented this. The vision and resources of Angelica Berrie and her

¹ Jonathan Kwitny, *Man of the Century. The Life and Times of Pope John Paul II* (Warner Books, New York 1997), p. 552.

trustees have enabled the realization of something that deserves to be a model to others. And the Angelicum itself, whose welcoming of this new dimension to its mission and teaching has been well expressed this evening by the Dean, Fr Agius, has shown something of the prophetic spirit of its most distinguished twentieth-century student, Pope John Paul II.

A Threefold Deepening

What does interreligious understanding aim to do at its best? I suggest that it seeks wisdom in three ways: by going deeper into the faiths of others; deeper into one's own faith; and deeper into understanding the common good. Such threefold deepening can only be achieved through continual, long term engagement. Of the many ways of trying to do this I want to concentrate mainly on one: the practice known as Scriptural Reasoning. In this, Jews, Christians and Muslims meet together to read and discuss their scriptures - Tanakh, Bible and Qur'an. It is the interreligious practice that attracted me into the field and into joining with others to found the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme. I will approach my discussion of it through a little autobiography.

Dublin – Birmingham – Textual Reasoning

As a Dublin Anglican, a member of the 3% Protestant minority in the Republic of Ireland, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) was one of the memorable events of my teenage years. There was a profound change, which few had dreamt possible, in the atmosphere between Catholics and Protestants. That experience of ecumenical openness, and its later outworking between many Christian churches in shifts from confrontation, and even conflict, to conversation and collaboration, has been a sign of encouragement to me in more recent inter-faith engagements. There are still many apparently intractable problems in ecumenical relations among Christians, but it is undeniable that at all levels – local, regional and international – there have been major transformations during the twentieth century. I just look around me in Cambridge and see among my University Faculty of Divinity colleagues not only Anglicans, Methodists and Reformed but also Catholics such as Eamon Duffy, Janet Soskice, Richard Rex and Julius Lipner – and, until his retirement, Nicholas Lash, the first Roman Catholic holder of a professorship in the Faculty since before the Reformation; and I look at the Cambridge Theological Federation, with which our Faculty collaborates closely and offers a degree in theology for ministry, and in which there are constituent colleges from Anglican, Methodist, Reformed, Orthodox and Catholic traditions. I now ask with some hope whether, without ignoring all the differences between intra-Christian relations and inter-faith relations, it might be possible in the twenty-first century to see comparable – and, perhaps, even more significant - transformations in relations between faiths. And, again, I look around my Faculty in Cambridge and see among my close colleagues two Jews, one a rabbi, and one of Britain's leading Muslims, who has recently led the successful effort to found the Cambridge Muslim College.

Many years after leaving Dublin, and then studying in England, the United States and Germany, my first academic post was in the University of Birmingham. I fell in love with that city, and the fifteen years there were packed with new involvements: teaching for the first time; immersion in an inner city Anglican

parish (multi-ethnic, multi-faith, with church schools, youth groups, home groups, a second-hand shop and much else, all re-energised part way through my time by a report called 'Faith in the City' initiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie); helping with a housing association that was trying to renovate decrepit buildings in the parish; all sorts of university and city commitments; and relationships with several Pentecostal and black-led churches through the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership.

The 1980s were also an energetic time for relations among faiths and between them and the city. The idea very slowly dawned on the mostly secularised minds of city politicians, managers and institutional leaders that the religious communities, including large numbers of immigrants, were an important dimension of the city's present and future as well as its past. There were many initiatives bringing people of various faiths together to get to know each other, and sometimes to collaborate practically, there was a good deal of engagement with faith communities in different spheres of city life, and on the academic side new centres relating to Islam and Judaism were set up and there was intensive discussion of the relations between faith traditions. But I felt a dimension was missing in all this, and could not get excited about the forms of inter-faith engagement that I experienced in Birmingham. As so often, it was only after finding the missing dimension that I realised what it was.

That happened in the early 1990s after moving to Cambridge, but the place where it began was the United States. To cut a long story short, a few Christians, including Daniel Hardy and myself, got to know members of a dynamic group of Jewish text scholars and philosophers called Textual Reasoning, and sat in on their fringe meetings at the American Academy of Religion. They were concerned with how to be Jewish after the Shoah (Holocaust), and had three main commitments: *to rereading their classic texts, especially Tanakh (Hebrew scriptures) and Talmud; to responding both critically and constructively to modernity; and to engaging with other people of faith, especially Christians and Muslims.* They were especially fascinated by the thought of some recent Jewish philosophers, such as Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. I had never before experienced the combined intensity of argument, scholarly acuity and humour that I found in their meetings. Before long some of them (including Peter Ochs,² Robert Gibbs,³ Steven Kepnes⁴ and Laurie Zoloth⁵) had come together with the Christian fringe to begin Scriptural Reasoning, soon to be joined by Muslims led by Basit Koshul.⁶ What was it about Scriptural Reasoning that made me realize what had been missing in earlier experiences of inter-faith engagement?

² Currently a professor of Jewish Thought in the University of Virginia.

³ Currently a professor of philosophy in the University of Toronto where he is also Director of the Jackman Humanities Institute.

⁴ Currently the Hassett Kehoe Visiting Professor of Jewish Studies in the Pontifical Gregorian University here in Rome, where he has been lecturing on Scriptural Reasoning.

⁵ Currently a professor of medical ethics and Jewish philosophy in Northwestern University, Chicago.

⁶ Currently a professor of humanities and social sciences in Lahore University of Management Sciences.

Scriptural Reasoning: Some Key Elements

I think the main thing was that Scriptural Reasoning gathered participants in a group that could at its best allow for at least four elements:

- *The faith of each could be articulated and explored* through discussion of texts at the heart of their tradition – it is surprisingly difficult in inter-faith engagement to find ways of allowing faith to be habitually central.
- *There was no pressure to come to agreement or consensus*, so differences and questions were as welcome as similarities and answers, and there could be open-ended discussion and argument. Much inter-faith engagement is focused on the need for common ground or on coming to conclusions about similarities and differences; Scriptural Reasoning may of course find common ground, but it can also be content to ‘improve the quality of our disagreements’ (Ben Quash).
- Scriptural Reasoning could become *a long term practice* – these scriptures and their traditions of interpretation are inexhaustibly rich and superabundant in meaning, and so could sustain year after year of reading them together; in this process there could be *mutual hospitality* (with each being both host and guest in turn around each scripture) that might, and in my experience often has, become *friendship*. I suspect that whenever in-depth reconciliation takes place across longstanding differences between communities you are likely to find that somewhere in that ‘ecology’ there are faithful (and often risky) friendships. That has certainly been so in the ecumenical movement, and from my observations it is so in inter-faith relations. For such friendships to be formed it is helpful to have shared, long term practices.
- *This practice of shared reading could be done for its own sake – or, better, for God’s sake*. Each of the three traditions has its own ways of valuing the study of its scriptures as something worth doing quite apart from any ulterior motive. Scriptural Reasoning might of course have all sorts of practical implications, but to do it above all for God’s sake – as Jews say, *l’shma* – encourages purity of intention and discourages the mere instrumentalising of inter-faith engagement - something that, sadly, is increasingly common, as it is seized on to solve problems from terrorism and social division to religious illiteracy and the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Summarised briefly, *Scriptural Reasoning can enable long term ‘partnerships of difference’ (Nicholas Adams) in which matters of faith can be explored and understanding deepened for the sake of God and God’s good purposes*. I had not found anything like this in Birmingham.⁷

⁷ Except partially in the work of Roger Hooker, an Anglican priest who had learnt Hindi and Sanskrit in India and studied with pundits – his immersion in Hindu texts and Hindi novels was an example of something like Christian-Hindu scriptural reasoning, though it did not become a group practice.

Scriptural Reasoning Today

Scriptural Reasoning has now been happening for about fifteen years. It has been practised in many countries – mostly so far in USA and Canada, UK, continental Europe, the Middle East, Pakistan, Russia and Australia. It is also being done in diverse settings – universities and seminaries, schools, hospitals, local communities, prisons, international conferences, festivals, exhibitions, and so on. The American Academy of Religion has since 2006 had a regular unit on it at its annual meeting. The University of Virginia hosts the main website with the online Journal of Scriptural Reasoning (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/>), and runs a doctoral programme in which Scriptural Reasoning is central. This summer it will sponsor an international summer school in Dubai to teach Scriptural Reasoning. It is also leading ‘Thousand Cities’, a project based on the hope that, since there are at least a thousand cities in which Jews, Christians and Muslims read their scriptures separately, some may be willing also occasionally to read them together. The University of Toronto’s Jackman Humanities Institute is adapting Scriptural Reasoning to help in a project on Jewish and Islamic law. A consortium of organizations in Europe, North America and the Middle East is collaborating in building an online inter-faith platform that will support Scriptural Reasoning in Arabic and English. The Cambridge Inter-faith Programme hosts an annual conference, runs introductory sessions, sponsors various projects of which Scriptural Reasoning is a part, is integrating it into training programmes for religious leaders, and features it on its website (www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk). There is a growing literature in dissertations, books, periodicals and on the web, and a good deal of media interest.⁸

Scriptural Reasoning and Comparative Theology

It is worth reflecting now on how Scriptural Reasoning might be understood within the broader sphere of inter-faith engagement. In particular, since I have emphasized its distinctiveness, are there analogous practices with which it can be compared and contrasted? A forthcoming academic discussion of it by Michael

⁸ For further information about Scriptural Reasoning, see the website of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/>. For print resources on Scriptural Reasoning, see Chapter 8 in David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007), pp. 273-303; David F. Ford and C.C. Pecknold, *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2006); Peter Ochs, ‘Reading Scripture Together in Sight of Our Open Doors’ in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 26, no. 1, new series (2005), pp. 36-47; and Steven Kepnes and Basit Bilal Koshul (eds.), *Studying the ‘Other’, Understanding the ‘Self’: Scripture, Reason and the Contemporary Islam-West Encounter* (Fordham University Press, New York 2007). Many of the chapters in Peter Ochs and William Stacey Johnson (eds.), *Crisis, Call, and Leadership in the Abrahamic Traditions* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2009) are also relevant. Scriptural Reasoning can be practiced bilaterally too. One example of this is some meetings of the on-going Christian-Muslim ‘Building Bridges Seminar’, hosted annually by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Some of the proceedings from the second meeting of the seminar, in Doha in 2003, can be found in Michael Ipgrave (ed.), *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims Studying the Bible and the Qur’an Together* (Church House Publishing, London 2004).

Barnes SJ.⁹ (author of the masterly 2002 study, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*)¹⁰ compares Scriptural Reasoning with Comparative Theology, as developed in Harvard by Francis Clooney SJ, in which fresh theological insights are sought through dialogue with the symbols and thought-forms of another tradition – in his case mainly those of Hinduism.¹¹

Both are examples of faiths seeking understanding, and doing so through interreligious practices that resist any notion of ‘neutral space’ within which religious texts can be interpreted. Every interpreter stands somewhere, and it is as well to be open about this non-neutrality, enabling one’s particular commitment to meet with others and so constitute mutual, shared space. Each practice can extend the limits of the religious imagination and enable participants to reimagine their own faith through engaging with the faith of others. Barnes especially illuminates Scriptural Reasoning and Comparative Theology by his emphasis on the fact that both make the practice of reading texts central to inter-faith dialogue.

Drawing on Paul Griffiths’ exploration of the place of reading in the practice of religion,¹² Barnes contrasts reverential reading, articulated through images such as fishing, digging and savouring, with utilitarian reading, described in metaphors such as consumption, production and control. Neither Scriptural Reasoning nor Comparative Theology is primarily interested in a product in the form of agreements, conclusions or results. Rather, their reading is an intrinsically relational practice, relating readers to something and someone ‘other’, and in this way changing them. They are formative processes, shaping readers through exposure to ancient wisdom and the imaginative power of the worlds of texts. In this pedagogy, reading and re-reading foundational texts educates participants not only imaginatively and intellectually but also in virtues.

Such reading is a lifelong practice of learning that has immense implications for both intra-faith and inter-faith engagement. As Barnes writes: ‘People of faith may begin within a tradition and base their view of things on the reading of particular texts, but, in a world where other people’s texts are a familiar feature of a shared sacred landscape, questions which test the theological imagination are not an “added extra” to the religious life but its very heart.’ What Barnes felicitously calls ‘becoming interreligious readers’ is therefore vital to interreligious understanding, and it is necessarily long term.

⁹ Michael Barnes, ‘Reading Other Religious Texts – Intratextuality and the Logic of Scripture’ (Article forthcoming 2011). I am grateful to Fr Barnes for responding to a draft of this lecture.

¹⁰ Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

¹¹ See especially Clooney’s *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2010); *Beyond Compare: St. Francis De Sales and Sri Vedanta Desika on Loving Surrender to God* (Georgetown University Press, Georgetown 2008); *Seeing Through Texts: Doing Theology among the Srivaisnavas of South India* (State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1996); *Theology After Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi 1993); and the edited volume, *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation* (T&T Clark/Continuum, London 2010).

¹² Paul Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999).

Yet, for all the rich parallels with Comparative Theology, Scriptural Reasoning emerges from the comparison with some significant distinguishing marks. Clooney is a Christian scholar and theologian who is learned in both Christianity and Hinduism. In his Comparative Theology ‘texts are read prayerfully and their ideas pondered interiorly’ (Barnes). Scriptural Reasoning is by contrast a group practice. It does not assume that anyone knows more than one scripture, only that they are open to reading other scriptures with members of those traditions. Through mutual hospitality around three scriptures and their traditions of interpretation it enables a new sociality. It is also not confined to the academy. While it did begin there it can be at home in many other settings. Barnes sums this up as Scriptural Reasoning being able to relate to all three of what David Tracy calls the ‘publics’ of theology – academy, church (and, in this case, synagogue and mosque) and society.

Barnes also suggests another contrast. Clooney has a ‘generous Catholic vision of God at work in the world’, and Comparative Theology is at home in a Catholic tradition which Barnes traces back through Vatican II to the missiology of de Nobili and Ricci; whereas Scriptural Reasoning is on its Christian side more indebted to Protestant ways of engaging with the Bible. I think this is an oversimplification of its origins, which include Catholic, and especially Anglican, as well as various Protestant strands. It is certainly inadequate in relation to its present and, I hope, its future. I want to suggest that Scriptural Reasoning might be understood as being, like Comparative Theology, deeply in line with Vatican II and with much else in mainstream Catholic tradition before that. Indeed, I suggest that the possibilities opened up by Scriptural Reasoning could help to fulfil the promise of Vatican II in the inter-faith sphere in ways that go beyond the Vatican II documents usually associated with that sphere (especially *Nostra Aetate* – the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions; and *Dignitatis Humanae* – the Declaration on Religious Freedom) while also being enriched by Catholic scriptural practices.¹³

Ressourcement, Conversazione and Aggiornamento

I propose a seven-point thesis.

1. First, *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, was a key document in the *ressourcement* (renewed engagement with sources) that was so important in twentieth-century Catholicism, profoundly affecting its liturgy, ecclesiology, religious orders, spirituality, theological and religious education, and much else. In particular, *Dei Verbum* strongly affirmed the importance of the Bible together with tradition and Church teaching.¹⁴ It emphatically

¹³ For a theologically and historically sensitive account of Vatican II in this regard see Miikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council* (E.J.Brill, Leiden, New York, London 1992).

¹⁴ ‘The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy. She has always regarded the Scriptures together with the sacred tradition as the supreme rule of faith, and will ever do so. For, inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church

encouraged study of the Bible by laity,¹⁵ clergy and religious,¹⁶ scholars¹⁷ and theologians;¹⁸ it stressed the importance of good translations (and of cooperating with other Christians in producing them);¹⁹ it insisted on the vital importance of the Bible for preaching, catechetics and Christian instruction;²⁰ and overall it hoped for ‘a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God’s word...’²¹

2. Second, since Vatican II this has been followed through in many ways, culminating in the 2008 General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*.²² It has been a considerable change: the largest Christian Church has undergone a

must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life.’ (*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott SJ (Geoffrey Chapman, London, Dublin, Melbourne 1967), p. 125)

¹⁵ ‘Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful’ – Abbott, p. 125.

¹⁶ ‘All the clergy must hold fast to the sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists, who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word... since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred liturgy. The sacred Synod earnestly and specifically urges all the Christian faithful, too, especially religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the ‘excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (Philippians 3:8). ‘For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.’ (St Jerome) therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself...’ – Abbott, p. 127.

¹⁷ ‘This sacred Synod encourages the sons of the Church who are biblical scholars to continue energetically with the work they have so well begun, with a constant renewal of vigour and with loyalty to the mind of the Church.’ – Abbott, p. 126.

¹⁸ ‘Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. For the sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and, since they are inspired, really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology.’ – Abbott, p. 127.

¹⁹ See Abbott, pp. 125-6, 128.

²⁰ ‘By the same word of Scripture the ministry of the word also takes wholesome nourishment and yields the fruit of holiness. This ministry includes pastoral preaching, catechetics, and all other Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should have an exceptional place.’ – Abbott, p. 127.

²¹ Abbott, p. 128.

²² There has been a series of official documents, notably *On the Historical Truth of the Gospels* (1964), *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) and *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2001) and ‘Let Us Approach the Table of the Word of God’, the concluding message of the 2008 General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church* (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20080511_instlabor-xii-assembly_en.html).

transformation in its relation to the Bible, and the prominence of the Bible in the teachings of Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI is just one indication of this. ‘Fresh interpretation of the Bible (by the more conservative as well as the more liberal) [has been] essential to rethinking major issues in fundamental, doctrinal, liturgical, pastoral, moral and political theology... Perhaps the most pervasively influential transformation in the reception of the Bible among the world’s Roman Catholics [has been] the post-Vatican II changes in the lectionary and the liturgy of the Mass. The change to Mass in the vernacular meant that people heard far more of the Bible in their own language, and new translations allowed scriptural references to speak more clearly; changes in the lectionary greatly increased exposure to the New Testament (from roughly a third of it to more than four-fifths) and to the Old Testament (an even greater proportional increase); and priests were expected to preach on the readings. Overall, these changes in the Roman Catholic Church... were perhaps the most important events in the reception of the Bible in the twentieth century, and in the course of Christian history probably only the formation of the New Testament and the Protestant Reformation deserve to be compared to it.’²³

3. Third, this has been of great importance in relations with other Christians, especially Protestants – ‘– joint scripture study was a key factor in reinterpreting divisive issues, perhaps most dramatically in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) with the Lutheran World Federation.’²⁴ The 2008 Synod gave specially strong recognition to this: ‘In the house of the word we also encounter brothers and sisters from other Churches and ecclesial communities who, even with the still existing separations, find themselves with us in the veneration and love for the word of God, the principle and source of a first and real unity, even if not a full unity. This bond must always be reinforced through the common biblical translations, the spreading of the sacred text, ecumenical biblical prayer, exegetical dialogue, the study and the comparison between the various interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, the exchange of values inherent in the various spiritual traditions and the announcement and the common witness of the word of God in a secularized world.’

4. Fourth, that 2008 Synod went further. In relation to the Jews and their scriptures it said: ‘The divine word generates for us Christians an equally intense encounter with the Jewish people, who are intimately bound through the common recognition and love for the Scripture of the Old Testament... Every page of the Jewish Scriptures enlightens the mystery of God and of man... These are a way of dialogue with the chosen people... and they allow us to enrich our interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures with the fruitful resources of the Hebrew exegetical tradition.’²⁵ In relation to Muslims and

²³ David F. Ford, ‘The Bible’ in *Oxford Handbook to the Reception History of Christian Theology*, edited by Sarah Coakley and Richard Cross (forthcoming).

²⁴ Ford in Coakley and Cross (see previous note).

²⁵ The full text reads: ‘Along the roads of the world, the divine word generates for us Christians an equally intense encounter with the Jewish people, who are intimately bound through the common

their scriptures it said: ‘We, also as Christians are invited, along the roads of the world - without falling into a syncretism that confuses and humiliates our own spiritual identity, to enter into dialogue with respect towards men and women of the other religions, who faithfully hear and practice the directives of their sacred books, starting with Islam, which welcomes many biblical figures, symbols and themes in its tradition, and which offers the witness of sincere faith in the One, compassionate and merciful God, the Creator of all beings and Judge of humanity.’ It also affirms the role of scriptures in engagement with Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians, those without written scriptures, and all who want to work for a just and peaceful world.²⁶ I see this as an appropriate way to combine the implications of *Dei Verbum* with *Nostra Aetate*. *The return to sources that was perhaps the deepest impulse of Vatican II has opened up scriptural paths of engagement with other faiths, especially with Judaism and Islam*. It encourages practices of *conversazione* that might help those of different faiths to follow these paths with Christians.²⁷

5. Fifth, besides the impulses of *ressourcement* and *conversazione* Vatican II also embodied the impulse of *aggiornamento*, ‘bringing up to date’. There were and still are, of course, many tensions between this and *ressourcement*, and this aspect of the Council has caused much debate and dispute – as it does in all Churches, and indeed in all religious and secular traditions, that desire both to be true to their main sources in the past and also relate to the contemporary world.²⁸ The leading statement here was *Gaudium et Spes* – the

recognition and love for the Scripture of the Old Testament and because from Israel “so far as physical descent is concerned, came Christ” (Rm 9:5). Every page of the Jewish Scriptures enlighten the mystery of God and of man. They are treasures of reflection and morality, an outline of the long itinerary of the history of salvation to its integral fulfillment, and illustrate with vigor the incarnation of the divine word in human events. They allow us to fully understand the figure of Christ, who declared “Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill them” (Mt 5:17). These are a way of dialogue with the chosen people, “who were adopted as children, the glory was theirs and the covenants; to them were given the Law and the worship of God and the promises” (Rm 9:4), and they allow us to enrich our interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures with the fruitful resources of the Hebrew exegetical tradition. “Blessed be my people Egypt, Assyria my creation, and Israel my heritage” (Is 19:25).’

²⁶ The Christian also finds common harmony with the great religious traditions of the Orient that teach us, in their Scriptures, respect for life, contemplation, silence, simplicity, renunciation, as occurs in Buddhism. Or, like in Hinduism, they exalt the sense of the sacred, sacrifice, pilgrimage, fasting, and sacred symbols. Or, as in Confucianism, they teach wisdom and family and social values. Even to the traditional religions with their spiritual values expressed in the rites and oral cultures, we would like to pay our cordial attention and engage in a respectful dialogue with them. Also to those who do not believe in God but who endeavour to “do what is right, to love goodness and to walk humbly” (Mi 6:8), we must work with them for a more just and peaceful world, and offer in dialogue our genuine witness to the Word of God that can reveal to them new and higher horizons of truth and love.’

²⁷ The significance attached by Pope Benedict XVI to the 2008 Synod is underlined by his own response to it which develops further many of its themes – Benedict XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Verbum Domini* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2010).

²⁸ The most comprehensive account of Vatican II is the five-volume work *History of Vatican II* edited by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Orbis, Maryknoll and Peeters, Leuven 1995-2006). For two recent reassessments of Vatican II see Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (eds.), *Vatican II. Renewal Within Tradition* (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 2008), which takes its cue from Pope Benedict XVI’s December 2005 address to the Roman Curia ‘Ad Romanam Curiam ob omnia natalicia’ in which he said that a proper hermeneutic for

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. For our purposes now its significance lies in its address to all humanity, its vision of the Church in the service of the common good of all humanity, its core affirmation of human dignity, its recognition of the scale and profundity of the changes the world has been going through in recent centuries, its naming of the great problems facing the world, and its clear commitment to conversation and collaboration with all who work for peace and human flourishing. In a lecture honouring the memory of Pope John Paul II it must be recognized how thoroughly (if at times controversially) he followed through on the agenda of *Gaudium et Spes* in his social teaching and his exercise of political and cultural influence.

6. Sixth, by now it should be clear that *the small community of Jewish Textual Reasoners, in their commitment to a post-Shoah Judaism shaped by rereading their classic texts, responding critically and constructively to modernity, and engagement with other people of faith, strongly resonate with some of the main thrusts of Vatican II – ressourcement, conversazione and aggiornamento.* Those Muslims and Christians who have joined with Textual Reasoners in doing Scriptural Reasoning have recognized the wisdom of these three elements and their analogous relevance to their own traditions. There can, of course, be great differences in how each element is understood, both within Judaism, Christianity and Islam and between them, but that only underlines the need for practices of engagement that permit mutually respectful discussion and argument year after year in many settings.
7. Seventh, what might be possible future Catholic contributions to Scriptural Reasoning? In its present form it is quite young, though many analogous practices have happened in the past. Catholics are already among its participants and conversation partners, and their contributions tend to emphasise the importance of attending to the reception of the Bible through the centuries and to the ways the Church has engaged with scripture in both theology and liturgy. These are immensely rich sources upon which to draw in Scriptural Reasoning. For now, I want to mention just one possibility that is currently being explored. Last year some members of a community of Benedictine nuns approached us in the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme asking whether it might be possible to connect Scriptural Reasoning with their practice of *lectio divina*. As it happens, this is a practice that also takes place regularly in my own Anglican church in Cambridge, named after St. Benedict, and at an inter-faith conference in Cambridge in 2008 the Benedictine Dom Timothy Wright had enthusiastically discussed the possibility. I have recently been learning about the worldwide spread of *lectio divina*, not least among young people, and how it is being assisted by collaboration between the Bible Society and Roman Catholic dioceses and organizations. It seems appropriate that such a classic Christian way of reading scripture should enrich inter-faith study too. There is an exploratory day arranged with the Benedictine sisters

Vatican II which should be a 'hermeneutic of reform' rather than a 'hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture'; and John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Belknap Press at Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, and London 2008). I am grateful to my colleague Professor Eamon Duffy for assistance in researching and understanding the history of Vatican II.

later this year. And why stop there? Having learnt from typically Jewish *chevrutah* study and *lectio divina*, what is the potential of typically Muslim practices? How might the liturgical use of scriptures in all three traditions be studied and discussed together?²⁹ And, as the work of Paul Griffiths, Francis Clooney and others has shown, and as the 2008 Synod encouraged, there might be analogous learning through reading the classic texts of Asian religions too.

Scriptures, Universities and Two Twenty-first Century Inter-faith Initiatives³⁰

I turn now briefly from mainly Catholic matters to two twentieth-first century inter-faith initiatives towards Christians by Jews and Muslims.

The first is an initiative by over by over 150 rabbis and Jewish scholars, philosophers and theologians from the U.S., Canada, UK and Israel. In September 2000 they issued the statement called *Dabru Emet (Speak the Truth)*, 'A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity'.³¹ It was issued as a press statement³² and as part of a book *Christianity in Jewish Terms*³³, that had essays on thirteen topics by Jewish signatories and by Christian respondents. *Dabru Emet*, with the accompanying book, is a fascinating blend of scholarship, theology, historical discernment and some daring, provocative thinking that moves beyond any Jewish or Christian consensus. There has predictably been controversy about it, especially among Jews. The explanatory paragraphs accompanying each statement,³⁴ and even more the essays in

²⁹ For a pioneering exploration of this within Judaism by a philosopher who helped found Scriptural Reasoning, see Steven Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007).

³⁰ Much of what follows draws on Chapter 7, 'Inter-faith Blessing', and Chapter 8, 'New Theology and Religious Studies', in David F. Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2011), pp. 130-47 and 148-67.

³¹ The title *Dabru Emet, 'Speak the Truth'*, is taken from Zechariah 8:16.

³² It was published in the *New York Times* and *Baltimore Sun* during September 2000, and received coverage on radio, television and in other media. See website <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=1014>.

³³ *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, edited by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel and Michael A. Signer (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 2000).

³⁴ *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., pp. xvii-xx:

Jews and Christians worship the same God. Before the rise of Christianity, Jews were the only worshippers of the God of Israel. But Christians also worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; creator of heaven and earth. While Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews, as Jewish theologians we rejoice that, through Christianity, hundreds of millions of people have entered into relationship with the God of Israel.

Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book – the Bible (what Jews call 'Tanakh' and Christians call the 'Old Testament'). Turning to it for religious orientation, spiritual enrichment, and communal education, we each take away similar lessons: God created and sustains the universe; God established a covenant with the people Israel, God's revealed word guides Israel to a life of righteousness; and God will ultimately redeem Israel and the whole world. Yet, Jews and Christians interpret the Bible differently on many points. Such differences must always be respected.

Christianity in Jewish Terms, are realistic about the deep and 'humanly irreconcilable' differences and the extent of disagreement within as well as between both traditions. They are exemplary in modeling a scholarly, faithful and creative

Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel. The most important event for Jews since the Holocaust has been the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Promised Land. As members of a biblically based religion, Christians appreciate that Israel was promised -- and given -- to Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God. Many Christians support the State of Israel for reasons far more profound than mere politics. As Jews, we applaud this support. We also recognize that Jewish tradition mandates justice for all non-Jews who reside in a Jewish state.

Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah. Central to the moral principles of Torah is the inalienable sanctity and dignity of every human being. All of us were created in the image of God. This shared moral emphasis can be the basis of an improved relationship between our two communities. It can also be the basis of a powerful witness to all humanity for improving the lives of our fellow human beings and for standing against the immoralities and idolatries that harm and degrade us. Such witness is especially needed after the unprecedented horrors of the past century.

Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon. Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out. Too many Christians participated in, or were sympathetic to, Nazi atrocities against Jews. Other Christians did not protest sufficiently against these atrocities. But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity. If the Nazi extermination of the Jews had been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly to Christians. We recognize with gratitude those Christians who risked or sacrificed their lives to save Jews during the Nazi regime. With that in mind, we encourage the continuation of recent efforts in Christian theology to repudiate unequivocally contempt of Judaism and the Jewish people. We applaud those Christians who reject this teaching of contempt, and we do not blame them for the sins committed by their ancestors.

The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture. Christians know and serve God through Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. Jews know and serve God through Torah and the Jewish tradition. That difference will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other; nor by exercising political power over the other. Jews can respect Christians' faithfulness to their revelation just as we expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community.

A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice. An improved relationship will not accelerate the cultural and religious assimilation that Jews rightly fear. It will not change traditional Jewish forms of worship, nor increase intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, nor persuade more Jews to convert to Christianity, nor create a false blending of Judaism and Christianity. We respect Christianity as a faith that originated within Judaism and that still has significant contacts with it. We do not see it as an extension of Judaism. Only if we cherish our own traditions can we pursue this relationship with integrity.

Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace. Jews and Christians, each in their own way, recognize the unredeemed state of the world as reflected in the persistence of persecution, poverty, and human degradation and misery. Although justice and peace are finally God's, our joint efforts, together with those of other faith communities, will help bring the kingdom of God for which we hope and long. Separately and together, we must work to bring justice and peace to our world. In this enterprise, we are guided by the vision of the prophets of Israel: It shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established at the top of the mountains and be exalted above the hills, and the nations shall flow unto it . . . and many peoples shall go and say, "Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in his paths." (Isaiah 2:2-3)

approach to issues central to the identities of Jews and Christians, and in drawing readers into the current drama of Jewish-Christian relations.

Before *Dabru Emet* there had been no such joint Jewish response to post-Holocaust developments among Christians; but it is more than a response to Christians. These Jewish voices are concerned simultaneously with the classic forms of their own faith, with the forms it might take in modernity for those living as Jews after the trauma of the Holocaust, and with inter-faith relations that include, but move beyond, toleration and respect. In other words, it has the ‘DNA’ of Textual Reasoning, and it is no accident that most of the members of Textual Reasoning were signatories, and several were contributors to the book *Christianity in Jewish Terms*.

The second initiative is better known. In October 2007 138 Muslim scholars and leaders sent a letter called *A Common Word Between Us and You* (usually known as *A Common Word*) to the leaders of Christian churches on the subject of love of God and love of neighbor.³⁵

It is hard to think of any more significant approach by senior Muslim figures towards Christians. Responses have come from most of the major Christian churches and organizations, including the Roman Catholic Church (which has begun meetings every two years with the signatories), the World Council of Churches, Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed Churches, Methodists, Orthodox of various traditions and Evangelicals – one of the most striking acts of reception was by a large group of American Evangelicals who signed a welcoming statement published as a full-page

³⁵ For the full text of the letter and responses to it see the website www.acommonword.com. The summary included in the letter reads:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

A Common Word between Us and You

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world’s population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.

The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity. The following are only a few examples: Of God’s Unity, God says in the Holy Qur’an: *Say: He is God, the One! / God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all! (Al-Ikhlās, 112:1-2)*. Of the necessity of love for God, God says in the Holy Qur’an: *So invoke the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with a complete devotion (Al-Muzzammil, 73:8)*. Of the necessity of love for the neighbour, the Prophet Muhammad r said: “None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself.”

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ said: *‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. / And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. / And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.*” (Mark 12:29-31)

advertisement in the *New York Times*. Some Jews have also welcomed the letter, and there is a growing literature on it as well as a great deal of internet material.³⁶

For now I want to offer just two reflections on it.

First, there was some input by signatories involved in Scriptural Reasoning, especially Dr Aref Ali Nayed, who for some time was the main spokesperson for the signatories and has continued as a member of the core group attending to the reception of the letter, including participation in the two Catholic-Muslim consultations held in Rome. He had both studied at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome and also been a visiting professor there. In addition Scriptural Reasoning has been one of many forms of follow-up since the letter was written. It has proved to be a practice that can bring Christians and Muslims together in the spirit of *A Common Word* and help sustain the sort of peaceful relations it advocates. The letter itself is centred on passages from the Qur'an and the Bible, and underlines the potential of scriptures to be a catalyst for inter-faith engagement. In the most substantial official response so far, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, draws on scripture extensively and both pays special attention to the differences between the Bible and Qur'an and emphasizes their important role in ongoing dialogue. At the end of his letter there is a framework for ongoing Muslim-Christian dialogue drawn largely from Vatican documents ('*the dialogue of life*, "where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit"; *the dialogue of action*, "in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people"; *the dialogue of theological exchange*, "where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages"; and *the dialogue of religious experience*, "where persons rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches"), with special attention paid to the problems and possibilities of the role that can be played by scriptures within this framework.

I was myself part of a memorable group study of the Bible and the Qur'an in Cambridge during the October 2008 conference on *A Common Word* hosted by Archbishop Rowan. The theme was forgiveness, and the members of my group included Methodist Revd Professor Frances Young, Anglican Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, Jesuit Professor Christian Troll, Palestinian Christian Revd Dr Yazeed Said, Sufi Sheikh Habib Al-Jifri of the Tabah Foundation, Iranian Ayatollah Professor Seyyed Mostafa Damad and Dr Aref Nayed. The climax was a discussion of the relevance of our texts on forgiveness to Sheikh Al-Jifri, who a few weeks earlier had been the target of a failed assassination attempt in Yemen in which two of his attackers were killed and three arrested. He had subsequently visited them in prison, having wrestled with the question of forgiveness – and he had in fact offered it.

³⁶ In addition to the responses available on www.acommonword.com, see especially Lejla Demiri (ed.), *A Common Word: Text and Reflections. A Resource for Parishes and Mosques* (Muslim Academic Trust, Cambridge 2011); Norman Solomon, Richard Harries and Tim Winter (eds.), *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation* (T&T Clark/Continuum, Edinburgh 2005); Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad and Melissa Yarrington (eds.), *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2010); as well as David F. Ford, *A Muscat Manifesto and Growing Ecologies of Peace, Compassion and Blessing. A Muslim Response to 'A Muscat Manifesto'*, a lecture by Dr Aref Ali Nayed, a signatory of *A Common Word Between Us and You*, both available on www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk.

The second reflection concerns a prominent feature of the aftermath of the publication of the letter: the close collaboration between universities and religious bodies in conferences, consultations, publications and other media. Hosts included the Universities of Yale, Cambridge, Georgetown, North Carolina and Al Azhar, and the American Academy of Religion also sponsored sessions on the letter. This raises the vital matter of the role of universities in hosting and enabling inter-faith thinking, discussion, teaching, research and projects. University education is increasingly important in our world, not only to economies but also to religions. Never before in history have there been so many university-educated people of faith, and, in addition to religious professionals, there is also an unprecedented number of lay people educated to a high level in their faith. Add to this the range of complex issues (ethical, legal, medical, educational, political and so on) arising with a religious dimension and requiring well-informed discussion and deliberation, together with widespread media attention to the religions. It is clear that the need for intelligent, thoughtful and well-resourced study and constructive engagement with questions raised by the religions, between the religions and about the religions has never been greater. Universities are one of very few places where this can happen in a long term, transgenerational way. They therefore have a great responsibility in the area of inter-faith relations.

By far the majority of the world's universities, however, seem to be secular in orientation. Therefore those that are not, such as this University of St Thomas Aquinas, need to bear an even greater share of the burden. And those universities that, like our world as a whole and most individual societies within it, are at the same time both secular and complexly multi-religious, such as my own University of Cambridge, need to make their distinctive contribution too. If these universities – both the explicitly confessional and the complexly religious and secular - could lead the way in enabling the whole of our society, including universities, to become more religiously literate then they would have made a much-needed contribution to the common good. In this regard, one of the most hopeful signs that I know of is the Government-funded Religious Literacy Leadership Project in England, in which so far sixty universities of many sorts have taken part. The aim is for those who lead universities in administration, academic life and student services to learn how their institutions might be more attentive and responsive to those of many faiths and beliefs. The project's typology of approaches to religious literacy culminates in the 'formative-collegial' university, which is described as follows:

"This university takes into account the widest experience of its students and staff, seeing their learning and work in terms of their overall human growth and development.. Faith is not seen simply in terms of 'requirements' or 'needs' which some students have and others do not. Rather, all people's worldviews, both religious and secular, are taken as essential aspects of identity and culture and as potentially enriching dimensions of learning and growth. [It] ... emphasises the personal and intellectual benefits of obtaining a university education alongside people from different traditions and none, in addition to the economic and material benefits... Good campus relations are ensured by trying actively to create an environment in which faith is 'at home' on campus, with religious events and forms of expression enjoyed alongside others, and religiously orientated questions and legacies being on the academic agenda in curricula, teaching and learning. There is outreach to

surrounding communities, including faith communities, which are seen as enriching the university experience within and beyond the campus walls.'

If that were to be the main ethos not only of universities but also of other spheres of society – educational, cultural, medical, business and so on - then the cause of interreligious understanding would be spectacularly advanced.³⁷

Conclusion: A Fourth 'Deeper', and the Third in Action

I opened by saying that the best sort of interreligious understanding seeks wisdom in three ways, by going deeper into the faiths of others; deeper into one's own faith; and deeper into understanding the common good. I want now to add a fourth: deeper into relationship with others committed to interreligious understanding and engagement. This is a delicate matter. It is not about creating syncretistic communities but about partnerships in which deep differences remain. As suggested already, I think a good way of conceiving the ideal is as long term friendship, which may be helped by a long term practice such as Scriptural Reasoning.

Friendships can, of course, take many forms and be sustained in many ways. The hope is that Jews, Christians and Muslims, who worship the Creator and Judge of all yet identify this God and practice their faith so differently, might be open to many forms of friendship with each other in the decades to come, friendships that each friend might, in his or her own way, describe as being 'for the sake of God'.

Such friendships might also be described as being for the sake of God's good purposes, which, as Catholic social teaching repeatedly affirms, are deeply concerned with the common good. This, the third 'deeper', is of special concern today as Jews, Christians and Muslims try in so many parts of the world to discern how to speak and act in the public sphere.³⁸ I conclude with an example drawn from a pressing current crisis, the conflict in Libya. In recent weeks I have been deeply moved by almost daily communications from a Libyan friend, who has been working for the interim National Council and as Secretary of the 'Network of Free Ulema - Libya'. That network is a diverse alliance of religious scholars and leaders, teachers, doctors, judges, engineers, academics, writers and others, men and women from across Libya. Besides anguished appeals for help and recognition, and descriptions of killings, bombings, brutality and innumerable kidnappings by Gaddafi forces, they have also offered a vision for a future Libyan society 'upholding the highest religious, spiritual, moral and human values... We believe in the richness of plurality, and the wisdom of dialogue and communication with all other faiths and cultures...'

³⁷ For another approach, specializing in areas of education, health and the workplace, see the New York-based Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, <https://www.tanenbaum.org/>

³⁸ For more on this see David F. Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2011) Chapter 6.

One day, like a sign of hope for such a world, came the blog of another friend: 'I am a Jewish scholar and I am aware how many of these same religious scholars condemn the policies and often the very legitimacy of the State of Israel... But today I name them friends... Like the cries of the children of Israel, the pleas of these Libyan religious scholars command our attention. I hear this as a call to call them friends and to act...'

More recently, the Libyan friend urged Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu to make a statement encouraging South Africa and other African states to be more supportive, which he did. In it Tutu says: 'The scenes of brutality being meted out with sophisticated weaponry by Libyan security forces against their own civilian population make God weep.'

The desire to live well before the face of a God of such compassion might perhaps inspire the world's Jews, Muslims, Christians and others in their twenty-first century interreligious pursuit not only of understanding but also of collaboration and even friendship. As the Psalmist says in praise of God:

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;

steadfast love and faithfulness go before your face. (Psalm 89:14)