



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE COLLOQUIUM ON
"WOMEN IN SOCIETY ACCORDING
TO ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY"**

Hall of Popes

Friday, 26 June 1992 Dear Friends,¹ It is a pleasure for me to greet you, participants in the Colloquium "Women in Society according to Islam and Christianity", organized jointly by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and by the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research (Al Albait Foundation) of Amman, Jordan. The third in your series of colloquia on themes of common concern to Christians and Muslims, this seminar treats of a topic of great concern in our day, and one of fundamental importance for building more just relationships between individuals and between the peoples of the world. Believers ought to feel the urgency of the call to defend the equal human dignity of all persons, created by God male and female. The differences between women and men must never be used to oppress or discriminate against the one, or to claim a superior position for the other. Yet we are sadly aware that, in *practice*, women experience widespread forms of discrimination. There is ample room therefore for believers to work together in order to defend and promote the proper and dignified place of women in society as intended by God.² As Christians, our approach to this question is formed by the teaching of the Bible – the active social roles played by the valiant female figures of the Old Testament like Deborah, Naomi, Judith and Esther, and by the faithful women of the Gospels who accompanied Jesus, who "listened to the word of God and kept it" and who, with Mary Magdalen, were the first proclaimers of the Resurrection (Cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 16) . Most of all, our Christian understanding of the role of women is formed by the attitude of respect and esteem which Jesus always showed towards women, and by our meditation on the exalted figure of Mary, who is for Christians the model of both virginity and motherhood, of faith and active social concern. We recall the words of Mary in the hymn we call the "Magnificat": The Mighty One has done great things for me,
Holy is His name!...
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and lifted up the downtrodden.
He has filled the hungry with good things,

but has sent the rich away empty (Lk. 1:46-53). Similarly, you Muslim participants in the Colloquium are explaining to your Christian colleagues what the Koran and your traditions teach you about the role of women in society. In this way your Colloquium offers *an excellent example of the interreligious dialogue and cooperation* necessary in order to enable believers to foster justice, harmony and peace.³ I therefore encourage you in your deliberations, as I support and encourage all serious efforts of Christians and Muslims to study together the important issues of our day. As believers in God who seek to surrender our lives to his will, we have an essential contribution to make to our world. We can do this most effectively when we inform ourselves through careful examination of the issues and when we reflect on these issues in the light of our respective religions. The problems and challenges facing women in modern societies stand out as one of the issues which need to be urgently addressed in such joint endeavours. I hope that your discussions will inspire great interest *in promoting respect for women's rightful role and freedom*. May God abundantly bless your work in this Colloquium!

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