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Dialogue of cultures and religions

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It is unfortunate that a portion of the Holy Father's talk at the University of Regensburg on Sept. 12 was taken out of context and used to misrepresent his true views.

In his talk, the Holy Father calls for a genuine dialogue of cultures and religions. Many in the world today see the prospect of a clash of civilizations of immense proportions looming in the future, specifically a clash of Moslem culture with Western culture.

The Holy Father calls for a dialogue of cultures and religions in order to avert such a worldwide conflict and potential war. Only by such respectful dialogue among cultures and religions can the world hope to live in peace.

As the Holy Father said, the views of the 14th-century emperor do not represent his own sentiments nor the teaching of the Catholic religion regarding Islam. But, by referring to the statement of the emperor, the Holy Father did effectively raise the question: What exactly is the true face of Islam?

Is violence and terrorism such as we see it perpetrated in the world today the true face of Islam? Or is the true face of Islam rather represented by the phrase from the Quran, "there is no compulsion in religion," which would respect the freedom of the human person to freely assent to religious truth and embrace it?

Such a question about the true nature of Islam must be addressed in order to pursue a meaningful dialogue of cultures and religions.

The Holy Father has noted on another occasion that evidence can be found in all the great religious traditions of the close bond between a relationship with God and the ethics of love. The message of love can be found in some way in all the great religious traditions.

Jesus, who revealed to us the truth of God, put this message front and center in his own teaching and life. He summed it up in his great commandment:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.... You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mk 12:30-31).

This is true religion.

The Holy Father's talk was primarily a challenge to the West not to exclude God from its culture. Secularism, such as we have it today, which excludes the divine from the culture, is not the best that the West has to offer in a dialogue of cultures and religions.

It is only by recognizing the great contributions that Christianity has made to Western thought and life that the West will be able to enter effectively into the dialogue of cultures and religions envisioned by the Holy Father.