

# Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Talks: Blah, Blah, Blah

Like most Israelis, I am an eternal optimist. Living day to day in our neighborhood and faced with continued threats to our legitimacy and even our existence, what choice do we have?

That being said, I am extremely pessimistic about the latest round of peace talks that have been initiated in Washington, D.C. There is no shortage of reasons why I should be skeptical, but what worries me most are the personalities involved in these talks and the faulty premises they represent.

Almost 20 years after the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin attempted to conjure arch-terrorist Yasser Arafat into a worthy partner for peace, it seems that we have not learned the lessons from the past. As the peace process continued to hit bumps along the way, Israel and our American allies attempted many different variations, which all led to the same failed result.

We initiated staged withdrawals and implemented unilateral disengagements. At times we included the Europeans and our Arab neighbors in the process, while at key points we negotiated secretly without any third party involvement. The European Union was used to monitor border crossings, and donor countries were asked to invest in an "economic peace."

Let us be brutally frank: None of this worked in changing the dynamics of the conflict or convincing the Palestinians to completely abandon hatred and violence and recognize that the Jewish state is here to stay.

Perhaps the problem with Israeli-Palestinian conflict negotiations lies not with the process but with the people involved in representing the parties at the table. In most

professions, when one fails at his job and leaves the project in question in chaos and complete disarray, he is most definitely not asked to keep working on the task at hand—again and again and again. In fact, he is usually fired. Not so when it comes to the “peace process industry.”

Saeb Erekat is the main representative for the Palestinian delegation. He has held this position in one form or another since 1991. Despite the hours logged with his Israeli counterparts and the countless interviews he has granted to Western media sources where he extols peace and reconciliation, Erekat has not brought the Palestinians even one inch closer to peaceful existence with Israel.

More troubling, it is clear that he never really revised his radical views about the Jewish state. During the second intifada, Erekat appeared on live international television to accuse Israel of massacring 500 Palestinians in Jenin while completely ignoring the facts showing that one-tenth of that number had been killed, and most of those were armed terrorists. Further, as recently as 2007, Erekat is belligerently on record as denying the possibility of the Palestinians ever recognizing Israel’s existence as a Jewish state.

Representing the United States at the latest round of talks is former ambassador Martin Indyk. Like Erekat, Indyk has also been a major player in the peace industry since the early 1990s, and he also can point to zero achievements in bringing peace and prosperity to our region.

On the contrary, when Indyk served as the American ambassador to Israel during Prime Minister Netanyahu’s first term, he was known for his disparaging attitude toward the democratically elected government of Israel. Since leaving public office, Indyk has publicly revealed his true political leanings. Until his recent appointment by Secretary of State John Kerry, Indyk chaired the International Council of the New Israel Fund

(NIF).

Over the past few years, NIF has become notorious for refusing to stop funding groups that call for a boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel and for actively aiding organizations that provided false details to the Goldstone Commission.

Finally, we are left with the chief negotiator on behalf of the state of Israel. Compared to Erekat and Indyk, Justice Minister Tzipi Livni is a relative newcomer to peace negotiations. Nevertheless, she too has endured countless hours of negotiating with the Palestinians.

Most troubling, her views do not represent a majority of the current government and are most definitely at odds with the average Likud voter, not to mention the Israeli public, which sharply spurned her in the recent elections. While serving under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Livni offered the Palestinians more than 95 percent of the historic Jewish heartland of Judea and Samaria and the unprecedented division of Jerusalem—an offer that was ultimately rejected by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Erekat. It is a fair assumption that she will try to up her offer in the latest round of talks to succeed where she abjectly failed to surrender in the past.

As a father of three small children, there is nothing I want more than to believe that the latest round of talks will lead to true and lasting peace in Israel. On the other hand, we all know that the definition of insanity is the endless repetition of the same experiment in the hope of obtaining a different result.

If this is the case, I call on all sides to end the insanity and appoint negotiators who have not failed us all in the past and who truly represent the best interests of the people they aspire to represent in this area.

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*For the original article, visit .*

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## **Glimpsing God's Breathtaking Majesty in Worship**

"You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased" (Rev. 4:11, NLT).

The sight of our exalted God and resurrected, glorified Christ must be so overwhelming that the only logical response is extravagant praise and worship. A glimpse into the throne room pulls from the heart unrestrained worship and adoration.

The biggest, most flamboyant words language can produce—*glory, honor, power, worthy*—don't quite give full expression. Those standing before the throne throw their crowns at the feet of the Lord God Almighty, as if nothing they could have accomplished or that might honor them belongs to them. Every position or success has no worth other than to be offered as gift to the King.

This song of worship states that the King created all things and that those things are in existence still because it pleases Him for them to exist. Translate that into your heart this way: *You exist because you are a pleasure to God.* He created what He pleased, and He pleased to create you.

Even in the midst of this breathtaking vision of the majesty of heaven's throne room and the glory of heaven's King, there is His love for you. It is part and parcel with His glory, honor and power that He loves you beyond comprehension.

Isn't it beautiful—this scene that only our hearts can see? Does it sweep you away in its pageantry and splendor? Yet the glorious, all-powerful, eternal God at His most exquisite is mindful of you. He's not aloof from the adoration poured out on Him but returns it in equal measure. Not in worship, certainly. But in boundless love.

Let your heart see this scene. In the inner sanctuary of your own soul, worship with abandon. Let the wonder that you are precious to Him, known by Him, created because you please Him just by being—let it all wash over you and capture you in the great undertow of love flowing from Him and drawing you in.

*King of kings, Lord of lords, Creator, Sustainer, only God, I worship you with my whole life. I pour out my life at Your feet. May it be a sweet-smelling aroma of worship. May it please You and give You some small echo of the joy You give me.*

“Ordinary human motives will appeal in vain to the ears which have heard the tones of the heavenly music; and all the pomp of life will show poor and tawdry to the sight that has gazed on the vision of the great white throne and the crystal sea.”  
—Alexander MacLaren (1826-1910)

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## Should You Tithe When Things

# Get Tough?

Recently a man who attends The Man in the Mirror Bible Study every Friday online asked a question about tithing that I suspect a lot of men wonder about. So with his permission, here's our exchange.

Abe: I have a question about tithing. I have not treated God's money very well over my life. I am 52, married five years and have three very young children.

Unfortunately, I am embarrassed to say we have no savings and about \$38,000 in debt outside our condo mortgage. About \$12,000 of that is credit cards, \$10,000 is student loans, and \$15,000 is from a friend who loaned me money for the condo. We had been giving 5-7 percent of our net income until this year when we upped it to 10 percent. If we did not tithe, we could put that money to our credit cards and pay them off much sooner.

Do you think that would be biblically wrong or does God want us to suffer and pay the price for my immature and irresponsible attitude towards money? Our financial situation is a large source of tension in our marriage. I feel I have let our family down. My wife asked me to shoot you a message to see what you think.

Response: Abe, no one else can tell you what God's will is for anything unless it is specifically commanded or prohibited by scripture. In my opinion, tithing falls into the category that it is commanded in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus in the New Testament at Matthew 23:23.

My own story is that, even though I faced bankruptcy every day for seven years, my wife and I tithed every penny we ever earned—actually more. And God has wonderfully provided for us. We have never lacked for anything. And I was spared from bankruptcy.

My advice would be to keep tithing. I know it's counterintuitive, but God honors those who honor Him. You're going to get through this. Make God bless your decision.

Men, I hope you already tithe. But if not, I would like to encourage you to test and see if it's true that, by tithing, God will watch over you as He has watched over me.

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## **Harassment, Persecution Pattern Worsens Against Indian Christians**

In vast and diverse India, Christians often live freely. Yet India ranks among the 50 countries where life as a Christian is most difficult, according to Open Doors International, a global ministry that serves Christians who are pressured because of their faith. The country is No. 31 on Open Doors' 2013 World Watch List, largely because of a streak of Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, that envisions India as a purely Hindu state.

Each month, numerous reports surface of provincial Hindutva militants breaking up prayer meetings, intimidating pastors, assaulting worshippers, and chasing Christian families from

their homes and villages. The dates, locations and names change, but many of the elements remain: Christians are accused of forcing Hindus to convert; church buildings are damaged; area church leaders intervene; police often provide little protection. The incidents reported here, for May and June, contain more of the same.

Hindutva has a political base in India's rightwing, nationalist Bharatiya Janta Party, or BJP. It is the No. 2 party in the national assembly and holds or shares power in seven of India's 28 states, comprising about 15 per cent of India's population. "This ideology ... has firm root and strong support in many government structures as in the police," the World Watch List says.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an advisory body to the U.S. Congress, notes the Indian government has created programs intended to prevent religious intimidation. But it also says the country's overburdened courts, rife with "political corruption, and religious bias, particularly at the state and local levels," rarely punish Hindutva aggression.

The result, the commission says, is a "climate of impunity," especially in states with anti-conversion laws. Five Indian states, three of them BJP-controlled, have passed laws placing restrictions on religious conversions.

"While intended to reduce forced conversions and decrease communal violence, states with these laws have higher incidents of intimidation, harassment, and violence against religious minorities, particularly Christians, than states that do not," the commission's 2013 annual report claims.

Incidents in May and June, listed by state:

### **Karnataka**

**May 15:** Hindu nationalists rally in Pakshirajapura, accusing

Pastor Steven Suresh of forcefully converting members of the nomadic Hikki Pikki Adivasi tribe to Christianity and insulting Hindu gods. Police arrest Suresh and 11 other Christians. Pastor Shiibu of Indian Evangelical Church tells World Watch Monitor the new converts were forbidden to draw water from the town well, and denied government-subsidised staples such as rice and sugar.

**June 26:** In Narasipura, a crowd burns Zion Church, beats the pastor and five church members, following repeated calls to stop holding worship services, according to the pastor, named Annaiah. Three days later, the temporary shed built to replace the church is also burned. Police tell Hindus to stop disturbing the church, and tell Christians to stop holding meetings and to pray at home.

## **Odisha**

**May 21:** Hindutva extremists attack Kati Singh in Bhalukasai village after he refuses to contribute to the local Hindu festivals. Singh is injured and admitted to Nilgiri Government Hospital. According to the All India Christian Council, Singh files a complaint with police, who turn aside his petition and ask Singh to make a festival donation.

**June 12:** The third day of a three-day meeting of pastors and church leaders conducted by Independent Pentecostal Church in Canalpada is disrupted when a crowd barges in, accusing organisers of forceful conversion, according to one of the guest speakers, Rev. Suratmahat Samal. Some of the intruders use motorcycles to chase several meeting participants as they leave the session in an auto-rickshaw. The rickshaw overturns, injuring eight.

## **Uttar Pradesh**

**June 10:** Returning home from a visit to a church member in Sonari, Pastor Ram Prakash from the Prakash Healing Society's Church is stopped by a group, which threatens to kill him if

he doesn't stop holding worship meetings in the area, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India. Prakash tells World Watch Monitor that the church member, named Raghu, "has been visiting our church for the past two years and I went to his house as he invited me to pray for him and his family." The militants threaten to burn Raghu's house. Prakash files a complaint with police, with no response.

## **Manipur**

**June 10:** Some residents of Kongpal assault Pastor A. Shyam and damage the newly built Victory Church of India, according to the Evangelical Fellowship of India. They complain the church, completed in May, is an insult because it is built adjacent to an historic site.

## **Tamil Nadu**

**June 9:** Pastor Ram Chandra is beaten by Hindu attackers after he prays for a sick man, according to Pastor C.V Chacko of the Indian Pentecostal Church. Chacko tells World Watch Monitor that the man's wife and children asked Chandra to pray with them, and that protesters massed at the family's home, setting upon Chandra as he left the house.

## **Maharashtra**

**May 5:** A mob of about 20 enters Maranatha Worship Centre in Pimpri village during services, menaces the 50 assembled parishioners assembled for evening prayer, and orders the priest to leave town and close the church, according to the Catholic Christian Secular Forum. The priest, Fr. Wilson Patole, suffers a swollen eye and other bruises.

**May 23:** Intruders barge into the Sarfabad house of Gyaneshwar Kurwade as they are gathered for an evening family prayer. The intruders assault Kurwade and his son, Shrikrishana, saying they don't want Christian activity in the area. The victims report the assault to police, but no action is taken.

**June 6:** State police in Pandherwani file a First Information Report against local Christians after Hindus accuse them of forceful conversion. Sudharkar Mavli, field coordinator for Indian Evangelical Mission, tells World Watch Monitor that some of Hindus in the town have assaulted Christians, destroyed a house, seized farmland, and have ordered Christians to leave the village.

## **Andhra Pradesh**

**June 4:** In Thukkuguda, Hindu extremists attack a Telegu pastors meeting, hurl verbal abuse at their faith and caste, and beat them with sticks, according to Pastor Bhagati Timothy. Four pastors suffer significant injuries and are taken to the hospital. Police register a First Information Report against the attackers. No arrests have yet been made.

**June 10:** A Hindu mob, assisted by Dhanjiy Reddy, a local government official, demolishes Christ Church in Gutta Begumpet, making good on a year of insistence that Pastor Paul Viswas stop church services. At the intervention of area church elders, Reddy is transferred to a different area.

## **Tripura**

**April 28:** Angry Hindus in Twirisa interrupt worship meetings on April 14, 21 and 28, threatening "dire consequence" if the meetings don't stop, Nabin Zamatia tells World Watch Monitor. On April 28, the meetings stop. "There are about 40 church members and some are very fearful of the extremists' threats now," Zamatia says. "My family and a few other families went to another village to worship Christ."

**May 23:** Tapas Bin, 35, is murdered in Twirisa village. Area church leader T. Honathan tells World Watch Monitor that after Bin had married a local woman, his Hindu father had been pressuring him to abandon Christianity. Church officials claim the killing was religiously motivated. Police disagree, though at times have provided conflicting assessments.

## **Kerala**

**June 5:** Eight Hindutva extremists attack Church of God Full Gospel India Pastor Vijayan M. and his wife in Edathar, as they return home from a visit to a believer who had fallen sick, according to the All India Christian Council. Attackers knocked the couple off their scooter, and in the ensuing assault suffer injuries that require care at Palakkad District Hospital. Local Christian leaders file a police complaint.

## **Gujarat**

**May 14:** Rajubhai R. Bhuriyaand and his family, assembled in their Bilwani village home for the evening family devotion, are assaulted by a group of about 20 drunken villagers who accuse the family of forceful conversion. Five injured members of the family are admitted in Dahod Government Hospital.

## **Chhattisgarh**

**May 3:** Police arrest four pastors in Bhelwa Baddhara after they are accused of forceful conversion. The Evangelical Fellowship of India reports that pastors Mani Munda, Vishnu Kerketta, Ashok Idaigo, and Rajgopal Munda, from the Power of Saviour Ministry in Sundargarh, Odisha, were visiting the house of a believer when police arrived and took them to the police station for questioning. Ten local Christians tell police they became believers of their own free will. Police charge the pastors with continuing an assembly that has been ordered to disperse, and release the men on bail.

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# What to Do When You Feel Like Giving Up

*Open your ears, God, to my prayer; don't pretend you don't hear me knocking. Come close and whisper your answer. I really need you. I shudder at the mean voice, quail before the evil eye, as they pile on the guilt, stockpile angry slander.*

*My insides are turned inside out; specters of death have me down. I shake with fear, I shudder from head to foot. "Who will give me wings," I ask—"wings like a dove?" Get me out of here on dove wings. I want some peace and quiet. I want a walk in the country. I want a cabin in the woods. I'm desperate for a change from rage and stormy weather.*

Those aren't my words. They are the words of King David in Psalm 55:1-8 (MSG). But I can certainly relate to those words, and you probably can too.

If you're like me (and David), there are times when you feel like God just isn't listening. Mean voices are rising with guilt and condemnation or angry slander. You feel like you've prayed your guts out. You're battling fear. You just want to fly away, to escape the trial. You want to run off to a cabin in the woods. You need a break from the stormy weather—and you need it now. You've tried everything and nothing changes.

You are on the verge of giving up.

## **Flesh Wars Against Spirit**

So, what do you do when you feel like giving up? Do you go on a sleep marathon, hoping to escape the harsh reality? Do you veg out in front of the television with a bag of potato chips and a pint of ice cream (and put on a few pounds), watching anything that will keep your mind off the pain? Do you call your friends to rehearse and rehash the drama, hoping they

will have a **prophetic word**? Do you wallow in self-pity? Do you drown your pillow with tears (Ps. 6:6)? I've done all those things, but none of it helps.

So, what *should* you do when you feel like giving up? You do what David did a few verses later in the same psalm:

"I call to God; God will help me. At dusk, dawn, and noon I sigh deep sighs—he hears, he rescues. My life is well and whole, secure in the middle of danger even while thousands are lined up against me. God hears it all, and from his judge's bench puts them in their place. But, set in their ways, they won't change; they pay him no mind. ... Pile your troubles on God's shoulders—he'll carry your load, he'll help you out. He'll never let good people topple into ruin. ... And I trust in you" (Ps. 55:16-19, 22-23).

### **Quitting Is Not an Option**

I know all too well what it feels like to want to give up. I know all too well the temptations to revert to the world's comfort in the midst of a trial. I know all too well the emotions that come with a raging storm against your family. But quitting is simply not an option. If we lay our weapons down, the devil won't just forfeit his position and pursue someone else. If we lay our weapons down, we just become an easier target for the enemy. The devil will keep attacking until he's robbed us of our faith to believe in the goodness of God.

When we feel like giving up, we can take our complaints to God. He can certainly handle it. Like David, we can take our deep sighs to God dusk, dawn and noon. But ultimately, we have to come to the conclusion that God does hear us (Ps. 116:1), that He is working on the situation (Rom. 8:28) and that His grace is sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:9). Ultimately, we have to conclude God is trustworthy (Ps. 9:10). Ultimately, we have to keep on our whole armor of God so we are able to withstand

the attacks of the enemy against our mind and, having done all, stand (Eph. 6:13).

Pile your troubles on God's shoulders. If He carried David's load and helped David out—and He did—then He won't fail you. As trite as it sounds, set your heart to trust in God, and you will not be disappointed (Rom. 10:11). Don't give up.

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## **9 Reasons Church Leaders Struggle With Prayer**

John, a leader in a church I assisted as a consultant, admitted to me what I'd heard before from seminary students and church leaders alike: "Dr. Lawless, I don't always pray like I should. I know better, but prayer isn't easy."

I've heard something similar so many times that I've begun asking for more details. These findings are anecdotal, but here are my general conclusions about why church leaders struggle with prayer.

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# Why the Debate About the Right Weight?

A person's weight is a highly individual issue, but here are some guidelines.

By definition, *obese* means being 20 percent or more above one's ideal weight. A person with an ideal weight of 120 pounds would be obese at 144 pounds or more. *Overweight*, on the other hand, means being 10–19 percent above one's ideal weight. Our hypothetical person with an ideal weight of 120 pounds would be overweight at 132–143 pounds.

An ideal weight can be set in several different ways. One way is to look at the records of large life insurance companies that are interested in finding predictors of longevity. They have discovered that certain ideal weight-to-height relationships correlate well with optimum life expectancy. The massive actuarial data of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company formed the basis of its gender-specific Table of Desirable Weight, based on height and bone size.

Although most people have a pretty good idea of their frame size, their wrist—and sometimes ankle—measurements provide a more reliable method. In general, a wrist measurement for women of 5 1/4 inches or less is considered small-boned, between 5 1/4 to 6 inches is medium, and over 6 inches is large. For men, anything under 6 inches is small, and anything over 7 inches is large.

Here is a time-honored rule of thumb:

For men: Allow 100 pounds for 5 feet of height. For each additional inch, add 6 pounds. The ideal weight for a man 5 feet 10 inches tall would therefore be 160 pounds.

For women: Allow 106 pounds for 5 feet of height, but add 5

pounds for each additional inch. For a woman who is 5 feet 5 inches tall, that comes to 131 pounds. Large-boned men and women should add 5 percent to these figures.

A simpler, more practical test is the pinch test. Trained health professionals use calipers to measure the thickness of skin folds at different places on the body. With the proper tables, they can then calculate body fat percentages with fair accuracy.

You can do a simplified pinch test yourself. Reach over to your left side, just below the last rib, and pull the skin and fat away from the underlying muscle. Hold it between your thumb and index finger and squeeze. If the space between your thumb and finger is more than three-fourths of an inch, you're in trouble!

Knowing your ideal weight is important. Studies show that people who remain near their target live longer, healthier lives. Find out how close (or far) you are from your ideal weight.

*The preceding is an excerpt from 201 Secrets to Healthy Living (Siloam). The book can be purchased at , or .*

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## **Petra Celebrates 40 Years with 'Biggest, Most-Loved Songs'**

Celebrating the band's 40-year career, Petra released a new CD on July 30 featuring the pioneering Christian rock group's "biggest and most loved songs."

The standard edition of *40th Anniversary* (Star Song Records/Universal Music Group Distribution) will include 27 of Petra's hits, while the deluxe version (digital copy only) will feature 37 songs. Both editions include a new recording titled "Holy Is Your Name."

"'Holy Is Your Name' is a thank-you to all our fans, but mostly a thanks to God for all the wonderful years," said Bob Hartman, founding member of Petra. "We are happy to include it on the 40th Anniversary compilation."

Compiled by Hartman, the two-disc album features hits such as "This Means War," "Beyond Belief" and "Creed." Longtime vocalist John Schlitt joined Hartman on a seven-city reunion tour this summer.

Petra formed in 1972, endured numerous lineup changes and was regarded as the most popular Christian rock band in the 1980s and early 1990s. The group has released 24 albums, sold more than 7 million copies and garnered four GRAMMY Awards, 10 Dove Awards and several No. 1 radio hits.

For more information, visit [.](#)

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## **Christian Leaders: Is it Time to Cool the Hype?**

At different times in history, and for various reasons, Christian leaders have fallen victims to hype.

The dictionary defines "hype" as "extravagant promotion." In other words—it's usually a lie, even if our purpose is noble.

Today, we're in another massive "hype cycle." How many times

have you heard about some Christian book, teaching series, conference, or media program that it would “impact this generation,” “change the world,” or “shake nations?” I believe one of the single biggest reasons the secular culture marginalizes Christianity is the hype factor.

Remember that this generation is the most marketed to, pitched, branded, and advertised generation in history. They can smell a con a mile away. Do you really believe they’re buying into the fact that your latest sermon is going to “change a generation” or “shake the nations?”

Doubtful.

How about this idea: What if we start re-building our credibility with a little realism? What if the world starts to realize that what we say is true? That how we describe our lives, ministries, churches, and impact is honest?

Who knows? *They might even start believing what we’re teaching.*

**Phil Cooke** is a media consultant focused mainly on the Christian market, as well as a vocal critic of contemporary American and American-influenced Christian culture. For the original article, visit .

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## **Pope Pens Personal Message to Muslims at Ramadan’s End**

In message published on Friday, Pope Francis took the rare step of personally expressing his “esteem and friendship” to the world’s Muslims as they prepare to celebrate the end of

the Ramadan fast.

While it is a long-established Vatican practice to send messages to the world's religious leaders on their major holy days, those greetings are usually signed by the Vatican's department for interfaith dialogue.

In his message, Francis explains that in the first year of his papacy he wanted to personally greet Muslims, "especially those who are religious leaders."

Francis' predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, had fraught relations with Muslims. In a 2006 speech he quoted a Byzantine emperor who said Muhammad had only brought "evil and inhuman" things to the world, sparking a worldwide crisis in Christian-Muslim relations.

In subsequent years, he worked hard to mend ties with Muslims and visited three mosques. But he never fully succeeded in dispelling mistrust among Muslim religious leaders.

Since the beginning of his pontificate, Francis has stressed that he places a high value on dialogue with other religions.

In one of his first public speeches, on March 22, he announced he wanted to "intensify dialogue among the various religions," adding: "And I am thinking particularly of dialogue with Islam."

In his Friday Ramadan message, Francis highlighted the importance of educating Muslim and Christian youth to respect each other's religion.

"We have to bring up our young people to think and speak respectfully of other religions and their followers, and to avoid ridiculing or denigrating their convictions and practices," he wrote.

The pope also said that "particular respect" must be given "to religious leaders and to places of worship." "How painful are

attacks on one or other of these!" he added.

Francis' move, while rare, is not unprecedented. Pope John Paul II in 1991 chose to pen the Ramadan message himself as a sign of solidarity with Muslims in the wake of the Gulf War.