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## The Challenging Conversation between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam: An Analysis of The Dialogue with the Vatican From the Viewpoint of Al-Azhar University: Challenges, Setbacks & Promises (1998-Present)

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### ABSTRACT

Catholicism and Sunni Islam have been at enmity for centuries, although both have tried to communicate in recent decades. Over the last two decades, Al-Azhar University, the preeminent Sunni intellectual institution, has engaged with the Vatican to foster religious concord and mutual respect. Al Azhar University's Grand Imam, Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb, has met with various popes and promoted religious tolerance. Pope Francis has promoted interfaith dialogue with Al Azhar. It assesses Al-Azhar University's role in the Catholic-Sunni dialogue and its triumphs, shortcomings, and prospects. This page uses various sources to explain the argument, its social and cultural setting, and the religious and political issues that shaped the discussion. It highlights the importance and challenges of interfaith cooperation. The overall research focuses on Al-Azhar University's viewpoint to illuminate Sunni Muslims' motivations for interfaith engagement with the Catholic Church. It describes the reconciliation between Al-Azhar University and the Vatican and offers ideas for religious tolerance and understanding. This study illuminates the intricacy and flexibility of Catholic-Sunni dialogue. It emphasises the necessity for open Conversation, mutual respect, and shared values across the world's three largest religions to promote peace.

### INTRODUCTION

With a history dating back over a thousand years and 70 different faculties located throughout Egypt, Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, is the largest and most significant Muslim -university in the world. Since 1998, the Permanent Committee for Dialogue with Monotheistic Religions at al-Azhar University and the Vatican have met yearly, alternating between Rome and Cairo. Disagreements between Al-Azhar and Pope Benedict XVI led to the suspension of this dialogue in 2011. The private conversations between Pope Francis and other world leaders have resumed. When Grand Imam Dr. Ahmad Al Tayyeb visited the Vatican in 2016, he had the opportunity to meet with Pope Francis (Abdellatif, 2020). On April 28 and 29, 2017, Pope Francis visited Egypt as part of his ongoing apostolic journey. He shared his views at a peace conference Al-Azhar and Cairo's Grand Imam co-hosted. His experiences there led him to conclude that all people of all colors, creeds, and nationalities should be reached by the teachings of peace, justice, equality, and human rights preached by the world's religions.

They joined together to sign a proclamation pledging to work toward improved international relations. Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb met and spoke on February 4 in Abu Dhabi, which led to the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity. Dialogue is a human, religious, and communicative need because it promotes mutual comprehension, esteem, and regard. Aulad Abdallah, a member of the worldwide association for Al-Azhar alumni and a professor of Islamic studies and researcher at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, thinks that misconceptions about religion may have detrimental

and subversive implications. Someone's religious beliefs might be used to nmisunderstanding is only one of many cultural, economic, and ethnic factors that contribute to the persistence of violent conflict. To rephrase, when religion is misinterpreted, it may fuel conflict. A religious studies professor once argued that honest discussion between believers of various religions was essential to peaceful cohabitation (Aulad Abdallah, 2018).

The Catholic Church and Sunni Islam have a long history of doctrinal and geopolitical disagreements, sometimes resulting in antagonistic relations between the two groups. However, since the late 1990s, there has been an ongoing effort to make intentional progress toward opening communication between the two religions. These efforts have fostered togetherness and spread compassion toward one another. This argument revolves around the Vatican, the supreme governing body of the Catholic Church, and Al-Azhar University, a well-known Sunni educational establishment (Spadaro, 2018). To provide an answer to the following research question, this investigation is carried out a critical examination of previous reports that have covered the interfaith conversations that took place between the Vatican and the Al-Azhar Foundation. This study also seeks to evaluate the scholarly production that Arab Sunnis have produced on the issue (Dorsey, 2019). The efforts of Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb and Pope Francis to strengthen ties between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam are also explored in this article in connection to their respective roles (Dorsey, 2019). In this essay, we have examined the approaches taken up to this point in the Conversation, emphasising the most serious theological, ethical, and political concerns raised and discussed. A

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novel perspective on the possible advantages of dialogue and collaboration between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam is offered at the end of the discussion.

The overall discussion is a comprehensive look at a dialogue between the Catholic Church and Al-Azhar University. In this article, we look back at the last two decades and analyse the challenges encountered along with the possibilities that lie ahead in their wider social, political, and cultural environments. This article argues via an analysis of primary and secondary sources that interfaith friendships are more important than ever, despite their challenges.

### Research Question

What was the perception of the official dialogue between the Vatican and Al Azhar University from the viewpoint of Al-Azhar University, and how has it evolved from its official start in 1998 until the signing of the Declaration on Human Fraternity in 2019?

### METHODOLOGY

While studying primary and secondary sources, the methodologies of history, textual analysis, and comparative research played a role in some way.

### In-Depth Interviews

In a later stage of this research project, in-depth interviews will be conducted with the key actors involved in the dialogue between the Vatican and Al-Azhar. The purpose of these interviews will be to explore the perception of the official dialogue between the Vatican and Al-Azhar University, specifically from the viewpoint of Al-Azhar University. The objective is to understand how this perception has evolved from the dialogue's official start in 1998 until the signing of the Declaration on Human Fraternity in 2019.

A combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions will be used for the questionnaire. The questions will cover various aspects, including the impact of the dialogue on world peace and its implications for business and economic development.

Please note that the specific questions for the questionnaire will be developed at a later stage in the research process, taking into consideration the research objectives and the input from key actors.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### DISCUSSION

#### An In-Depth Look at the Talks Between the Catholic Church and Sunni Muslims

Al-Azhar University has played a significant part in the dialogue that has taken place between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam ever since the formal beginning of the Conversation in the year 1998 (Hellyer, 2017). This dialogue lasted right up to the signing of the Declaration on Human Fraternity in the year 2019, making it one of the most significant institutions in the history of the dialogue. This goal was accomplished via conversations

with the Vatican and cooperation in various other interfaith initiatives. 1998 was significant because it initiated an official dialogue between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam (Kuruvachira, 2018). Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, is one of the influential people who has emphasised tolerance of people of different religions and nationalities as a fundamental goal. Several renowned personalities have made similar comments. We concentrate on the most significant hurdles, problems, and possibilities that the Conversation between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam has offered. Our analysis is based on a review of the materials that are now accessible. These are the points that have been brought up during the discussion.

Numerous tiers to the intricate web connect religious thought and deeds to armed warfare. Not all conflicts have to escalate into violence, but how people interpret and use religious ideas may make a big difference. Certain theological ideas might affect how wars play out on the battlefield. First, conflicts may arise when religious leaders interpret the Bible, theology, and other holy texts differently. These differences might lead to violent conflicts if fueled by political, social, or economic tensions. Second, those with political or ideological agendas may twist religious doctrine and practice to justify their use of violence. It's a common manipulation tactic to appeal to religious beliefs to justify or promote violent behaviour. But it's also feasible that religious reflection and action might help bring about peace. Kindness, fairness, forgiveness, and peace are highly valued in many faiths, including Catholicism and Sunni Islam. These concepts may serve as the cornerstone upon which peaceful communities may be built, and issues may be solved.

Al-Azhar's position on the relationship between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam has brought various theological, ethical, and political difficulties to the forefront of the present interfaith debate. In light of the reality that both groups have difficulty coming to grips with the stresses of current politics, globalisation, and social change, this discussion has sought to investigate the notions of peace, justice, solidarity, and social responsibility (Dorsey, 2019). It has been argued that religious law and teachings may be used to solve contemporary ethical problems, that religion plays a part in public life, and that it is important for adherents of different religions to respect and comprehend the beliefs and practises of one another. The signing of the declaration "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" 2019 by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb was a significant event throughout history (Andrea T., 2019).

The need for cultural interchange as well as mutual tolerance for the varied religious and spiritual practices practised by others, is another crucial topic that has emerged during dialogues between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam, notably from the standpoint of Al-Azhar. This issue has been brought up throughout

these discussions (Alexander, 2007). Several times, the leadership of Al-Azhar has expressed its support for more interfaith concord as well as tolerance (Brignone, July 2017). The goal of the discussion up to this point has been to increase our awareness of and respect for the shared values that may be found among people from various backgrounds.

In the last twenty years, the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam have made significant efforts to work, yet, they have been *met along* the road with various barriers and prohibitions. The ongoing sectarian and geopolitical tensions in the Middle East have made the conflicts that have broken out amongst the many religious communities that live in that area even more severe (Aulad Abdellah, 2018). The progress made in the interfaith Conversation has also been jeopardised due to these conflicts, which have threatened it. The Catholic Church and Sunni Islam comprise a complex web of different theological and cultural traditions; consequently, the discourse inside each organisation is filled with internal disputes and agendas that directly oppose one another. Al-Azhar University's efforts to encourage communication between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam have shown evidence of yielding favourable consequences, despite the challenges that they have faced. The issue of discussion has brought to light the need for interfaith partnerships in the promotion of cultural understanding, mutual respect, and collaboration in order to establish a global society that is more peaceful and harmonious.

### A Scientific Approach to Interreligious Dialogue

The concept that individuals of various faiths have more common beliefs, values, and practises than they do, in contrast, serves as the foundation for conversations between those of different faiths. Conversations between people of different faiths are often centred on the idea that they may have something to teach one another and might become better at working together if they do so (Aulad Abdellah, 2018). People of various religions may be able to put their differences aside and work together to make the world a better place if they have meaningful conversations about their experiences, values, and beliefs that they have in common with one another.

It is essential to remember that those participating in an interfaith discussion may have different understandings of the term "discourse." Individuals and groups may bring a diverse range of experiences to the table, both in terms of their cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs. This diversity contributes fresh thoughts and interpretations, which helps the conversation advance, and it also enables members of different religions to realise the advantages of working together with one another. A social constructivist point of view is often adopted during Conversations among individuals of various religious traditions (Hellyer, 2017). Truth and meaning, as seen from this vantage point, are not givens but rather arise via discourse and agreement. Consequently, it is of the utmost importance for individuals of different religions

to engage in open dialogue with one another about their values and views. When members of different faiths engage in Conversation with one another, they provide an opening for mutual learning from the viewpoints and experiences of one another, which may lead to the development of novel interpretations.

The contributions of many bright minds significantly aided our appreciation of the ethical relevance of our dialogues. When I think of some of the most influential philosophers in the history of ethical discussion, four names immediately emerge: Martin Buber, Hans Georg Gadamer, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jurgen Habermas. Their work is predicated on the principles of ethical Conversation, which include considering other individuals' perspectives and promoting mutual comprehension (Alexander, 2007). These writers have helped shed light on the nuances of speech by showing how it may enhance understanding and dialogue among members of other religions (Francis, 2013). It is vital to study some basic issues concerning the nature of interfaith interaction and how it takes place to have a hold on the intricacy of this topic. This will allow one to have a better understanding of the complexities involved. Discover solutions to issues that need to be addressed about the character and extent of interfaith discussion, its historical beginnings and development, its underlying causes and foundations, and the repercussions of diverse actions in this area. It is required to discover answers to questions that need to be addressed about the nature of interfaith dialogue and its scope. Look at the official stances of organisations like the Al-Azhar foundation and the Vatican. You may be able to gain a clearer picture of how individuals of different faiths all around the globe approach communication (Melloni *et al.*, 2016). Likely, some insights into the nature of interfaith discussion and its purpose in promoting mutual understanding and respect among followers of different faiths might be extracted from the responses to these questions.

### The Preceding Two Decades have Brought New Difficulties but Also New Opportunities

Over the last twenty years, various challenges, disappointments, and broken promises have significantly altered the landscape of religious relationships. These shifts are the result of a confluence of several influences coming together. The "Decree on Ecumenism" (Unitatis Redintegratio) is one of three key statements issued by Vatican II that address religious plurality. The other two declarations are "The Dogma of the Church" and "The Constitution on Religious Liberty." It is one of the three important statements that address religious plurality and discusses the ties between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian faiths (Church, 2019). Both are immediately relevant to the problem at hand; however, the first relates to the freedom of religion, while the second discusses the relationship between the Christian Church and other religions. Both are immediately relevant to the problem at hand. Both are directly pertinent to the



problem that we are now dealing with.

The first declaration, titled “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (also known as “Nostra Aetate,” which translates to “In Our Time”), constituted a profound paradigm shift in the Catholic Church’s perception of and attitude to non-Christian religions. The text brought about this transformation. It recognised the need to have conversations with people of other faiths as part of mending fences between the Catholic Church and Muslims (Abdellatif, 2020). It is feasible for Catholics and Muslims to work together since their communities share many of the same core values and principles. Interfaith dialogue, on the other hand, requires a deeper and more extensive level of involvement in addition to articulating its objectives. Muslims have been the ones to initiate discussions about what Islam is not throughout history. This is particularly true when differentiating religion from acts of violence or terrorism (Alexander, 2007). Even though they played a crucial part in developing a sense of trust among the other participants, Muslims often claimed that they felt frightened and powerless in their efforts to advance the discourse.

The inability of the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam to achieve reconciliation over the last two decades has had far-reaching ramifications for preserving religious peace in the Middle East and beyond. These repercussions may be seen in places as far-flung as other parts of the world. The advent of violent extremist organisations like ISIS, which explicitly target religious minorities, has further strained the fragile peace between the region’s many religious groups (Al-Tayyeb, 2019). ISIS specifically targets religious minorities. Due to concerns over politics and security, building bridges has been put on hold for the time being. As a direct consequence of globalisation’s ascent to prominence, the prospects for religious harmony worldwide and existing cultural and ideological norms gaps have become much broader. In controversial debates about topics like human rights, gender equality, and the preservation of the environment, religion has often served as a factor that contributes to the division of viewpoints. These are just some topics that have sparked heated disputes, but there are many more.

Despite the challenges that have been presented, there has been some forward movement in the dialogue that is going place between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam. Those individuals who go above and above to promote religious tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding have been acknowledged and rewarded for their contributions in this area (Al-Tayyeb, 2019). Peace and the freedom to practise one’s religion are two advantages that come to mind when I think about the importance of interfaith cooperation, even if they aren’t the first things that come to me when I hear about it (Yucel & Tahir, 2021). Several declarations of cooperation and activities encouraging interfaith collaboration have brought to light the need to respect one another and work together. This need has been brought to light by a variety

of efforts. As a direct consequence of this discussion, unique points of view about the connection between religion and modernity and ethics, in general, have emerged. As our understanding of how religious and cultural traditions are intertwined grows, new strategies have emerged to address issues relating to social justice, environmental sustainability, and interfaith collaboration. These innovative new techniques are the product of a rising awareness that has led to their development.

The dialogue between Catholicism and Sunni Islam is positive, but it must be assessed within the framework of today’s culture to get an accurate comprehension of the phenomenon. Migration patterns, pandemics, and the challenges provided by expanding nationalism and populism are a few examples of social, economic, and geopolitical crises that all shape the global debate (Spadaro, 2018). These issues are all interconnected and interdependent on one another. The factors described in this article will continue influencing the discussion even after changing it. Keeping a successful and relevant discourse amid change requires ongoing effort (Brignone, July 2017). Over the last two decades, the interactions that have taken place between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam have been characterised by a great number of challenges, letdowns, and optimistic indicators. These characteristics have been present throughout the whole of these relationships. It remains a crucial gathering place for anybody interested in investigating the connections between religion and the modern world, and they will continue to discover that there. We may be better able to grasp the many contributions that the discourse has made and the effort necessary to maintain its current with the constantly evolving world around us if we place these events within the context of their particular social, political, and cultural situations.

### **Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb’s Contributions to Catholic-Sunni Dialogue**

It has been noticed that both Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar University, have been essential in building communication and mutual understanding between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam over the last two decades. Pope Francis is now the leader of the Catholic Church. Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb is the Grand Imam of Al Azhar University. Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb is the current Grand Imam of Al Azhar University. The current Pope is Francis, and Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb is the current leader of Al Azhar. Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb now serves as Al Azhar University’s Grand Imam. Francis is the current leader of the Catholic Church, while Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb is the head of the Al Azhar organisation. Primus inter pares, often known as the head of the Catholic Church, is a status that was just recently bestowed onto Pope Francis (Al-Tayyeb, 2019). Both have put in a substantial amount of effort to help people who subscribe to a wide variety of religious traditions acquire the capacity to accept and work together with one another.

Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb has made major contributions to the debate that is taking place between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam. In particular, he has emphasised the importance of cultural appreciation, mutual tolerance, and participation in activities that unite people of various faiths. These are all aspects that Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb has brought to the forefront of the discussion. His persistent focus has been on bringing people together, as opposed to throwing a wedge between them, to create progress in the area of development (Francis, 2013). This contrasts with the common practise of pushing a wedge between people.

In contrast to the emphasis he once placed on generating discord between them, he is now focusing more on actively driving a wedge between them. In addition, he has emphasised how crucial it is for religious leaders to speak out against extremism and violence and instead develop a culture that places a high premium on peace and tolerance. He has said this several times. Throughout his speech, he has brought attention to this point often. The historic “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” proclamation was signed in 2019 by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb. Both men are from the Muslim faith. Arabic was the language used to write the announcement. Both of these guys follow the precepts that are established in Islam. When it was first sent, the notification was spelled out in Arabic.

Specifically, Pope Francis has revitalised and deepened the commitment of the Catholic Church to its relations with Sunni Islam. This was one of the key goals of Pope Francis’ papacy, and he made significant progress towards this goal. Issues of global concern, such as poverty, climate change, and migration, which had previously gotten little attention, are now gaining greater attention and are actively being addressed as a direct and immediate consequence of the communication channels he has opened up. This is the case because of the direct and immediate effect of the communication channels that he has opened up. As a result of his extensive travels and contacts with religious leaders from around the globe, Pope Francis has established the framework for new forms of cooperation and brought together religious leaders from all over the world. This has allowed Pope Francis to bring together religious leaders from all over the world. In addition to this, he has coordinated the gathering of religious authorities from all over the globe (Hellyer, 2017). In addition, he has made steps to reduce tensions between people of various religions by highlighting the need for similar objectives and working together to attain them. He has done this in several different ways. This was carried out to lessen the probability of violent confrontation occurring. He was successful in accomplishing this goal by putting a significant focus on the need to develop common goals. Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb and Pope Francis have encountered enormous theological and political barriers in their endeavours to heal divisions between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam. Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb has more successfully overcome these challenges than Pope

Francis. Both sides have brought up these stumbling blocks in their discussions. Because of this, a significant amount of development and growth has occurred in this sector over the last several years. For example, to settle their disagreements on religious law and theology, they have emphasised how important it is to accept and embrace one another’s one-of-a-kind religious customs fully and practises. This is done in the hopes of bringing about a resolution to their disagreements (Al-Tayyeb, 2019). This is done in the hope that their problems will be resolved in a way that is satisfying to them. This is done with the hope of bringing about peace and reconciliation between the two groups. They have also done a lot to call attention to the importance of social justice and human rights and the role that religion should play in public life and public dialogue. This is something that they have been quite active in doing. This goal has been reached using a variety of strategies and procedures. Throughout their existence, they have engaged in this activity in many instances.

The contributions that Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb have made to the ongoing Conversation between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam have been significant, and they will continue to have an effect for a significant amount of time into the foreseeable future. This discussion occurs between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam (Alexander, 2007). They have shown the need for communication and collaboration to make the world a better and more peaceful place, and they have promoted religious tolerance and mutual respect by encouraging positive relationships between individuals who practise a variety of faiths.

### Factors of A Religious, Moral, and Political Nature The Teachings of the Quran Serve as the Basis for Discourse, According to Al-Azhar

The Quran’s revelations as a whole call on Muslims to engage in dialogue with people of other faiths, notably Christians and Jews. It is possible that dialogues between people of various religions might benefit from the fact that the Quran sets forth the foundational notions of meta-religion. The passages that follow further corroborate this:

مُكِنِّيَبَو اَنْنِيَبَءَاوَسَ قَمَلَك اِيْلَا اَوَّلَا عَتَبَاتِكَلَا لَهَا اِي لُقْ  
اَنْضَغَبْ ذَخْتِي الْوَايْشَ بَلْعَرُشْنِ الْوَقَلَا اَلَا دُبْعَنْ اَلَا  
اَنْ اَبْ اَوْدُقْشَا اَوَّلَوْقَفْ اَوَّلَوْتْ نَاْفَ قَلَلَا نَوْدْ نَمْ اَبَابَرَا اَضْغَبْ  
نَوْمَلْسُومْ

Say, “O People of the Book, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah.” But if they turn away, say, “Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him].” (Quran 3:64).

مُهَلْدَا جَو. قَنَسَحَلَا قَطْرُغُوْمَلَا اَوْ قَمَلِكَلَا اَبَلْ قَبَرْ لِيَبَسْ اِيْلَا غُذَا  
وَقَو. لِيَبَسْ نَعْلَضْ نَمَبْ مَلْعَا وَهْ قَبَرْ نَاْنَسَحَا يَهْ يَتَلَا اَب  
نَيْدَتْمَلَا اَبَلْ مَلْعَا

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best.

Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.” (Quran 16:125).

“Invite (all) to the way of the Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching. And argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious”.

As these verses demonstrate, the Holy Quran actively promotes dialogue and proclamation among people of all faiths and cultures.

Muslims are urged to talk to people of all faiths throughout the Quran, but the Abrahamic religions are singled out for special attention.

“And dispute not with the people of the Book except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury). But say, ‘We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our Allah and your Allah is one, and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)’”.

These verses underscore the Quran’s recognition of the value of Conversation with those of the Abrahamic religions by emphasising the commonality of faith in a single Allah.

Encourage (everyone) to follow the Lord’s way by sharing your knowledge and wisdom in a beautiful and wise way. It is argued that the Quran’s call for believers and unbelievers alike to “argue with one another in the best and most gracious ways” exemplifies the Book’s dedication to free speech.

The Book also highlights the distinctive way in which the Quran deals with the Abrahamic religions. The verse “And dispute not with the people of the Book except with means better (than mere disputation), except with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury)” cautions against arguing with those who believe in the Book. Muslims are encouraged to communicate to members of different religions by the passage, “But say, ‘We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our Allah and your Allah is one, and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)’”.

Certainly! This revised section has heightened the focus on the Quranic Basis for Dialogue and its linkages to the given verses.

The Quran is the foundation for dialogue across faiths at Al-Azhar University, the world’s preeminent Sunni Islamic higher education institution. In their dealings with those of other faiths, Muslims are urged to do so with wisdom, eloquence in teaching, and respectful arguments, all of which are emphasised in the Quran. Al-Azhar University recognises and upholds these Quranic precepts in its approach to the challenging discourse between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam.

The Quranic verse “Invite (all) to the way of the Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching” is the foundation for Al-Azhar University’s concept of discourse. And dispute with them in the finest, most courteous manner possible.” This verse highlights the Quran’s call on Muslims to disseminate the message of Islam in the most refined and courteous manner possible.

Moreover, the Quranic command to engage in dialogue with the People of the Book (including Christians) is a central tenet of the teachings of Al-Azhar University. And settle disputes with people of the Book by means other than plain disputation, unless it is with those who do evil (and injury). Instead, say something along the lines of “Our Allah and your Allah is one, and it is to Him we bow; we believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you,” which is the attitude of Al-Azhar University. Members of the Abrahamic faiths should talk to Muslims since they believe in Allah with them.

Al-Azhar University adopts these Quranic principles as a basis for Conversation with the Catholic Church to promote mutual understanding and concord by applying knowledge, beautiful preaching, and respectful argumentation. Al-Azhar University believes that being faithful to these Quran teachings will help Christians and Muslims have a discourse that moves beyond superficial differences and into a space where they can work together productively.

Conversations on politics, ethics, and theology have occurred between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam. These topics have all risen to prominence in the contemporary religious scene. The unwillingness to recognise each other’s religious beliefs and practises is a significant theological difference that has hampered the promise of constructive ecumenical communication and collaboration. This has limited the hope of fruitful ecumenical communication and cooperation. In addition to this, the importance of religious texts and teachings for modern problems, as well as the role that religious leaders play in promoting peace and cooperation between different groups, are also investigated (Abdellatif, 2020). Conversations between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam have increasingly focused on moral issues over the last several years. There has been discussion on various subjects, including social justice, environmental sustainability, promoting peace and nonviolence, and more. The proclamation for 2019 entitled “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” was co-written by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad Al Tayyeb, who both urged more interfaith collaboration.

Throughout the previous several decades, political matters have been at the forefront of conversations between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam. The place of religion in public life and the threat posed by extremism and terrorism are two of the many contentious and urgent topics that have been discussed up to this point. The conventional wisdom on the relationship between political economy and religious authority, both secular and religious, has also been called into question. Discussions on a wide variety of theological, ethical, and political topics have taken place within the context of the contact that has taken place between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam (Spadaro, 2018). This connection has shown to be very constructive and mutually courteous. Through these talks, we want to get a deeper understanding of how

people of various faiths and cultural backgrounds may work together to address the serious issues of today while at the same time appreciating and valuing one another's contributions. This kind of Conversation has helped persons of all cultures and religions work together in a peaceful and productive way by increasing the level of trust and respect between them.

### **Challenges and Setbacks in the Dialogue Process Repairing the Strained Relationship between the Vatican and Al-Azhar University: Implications for Interreligious Peacebuilding**

In the following section, we examine the consequences of interfaith harmony and seek answers to the issue of how to mend the rift between the Vatican and al-Azhar University. Tensions stemming from theological and ideological differences have made it difficult to promote understanding and cooperation between the Vatican and al-Azhar University. This study's section proposes methods for mending the rift, emphasising the role of Conversation and mutual respect in fostering peace across faiths.

I examine Pope Benedict XVI's more hard-line policy towards Muslims and his controversial Regensburg lecture, which resulted in negative perceptions of the Pope's stance in the Muslim world. The impact of this strained relationship on efforts to protect Christian minorities in Muslim-majority countries is also highlighted.

In the past, tensions and arguments have arisen because the Vatican and al-Azhar University had different theological and ideological stances. Disagreements about religious freedom have exacerbated the rift between them, the place of women in society, and the value of interfaith engagement. Despite this, it is essential to confront these differences and strive towards reconciliation since religious organisations play an important role in promoting peace and developing understanding.

The first step in mending ties between the Vatican and al-Azhar University is to continue talking to one another civilly (Duffner, 2013). Representatives from the highest levels of both organisations should have frank conversations about their differences and seek areas of common ground and potential cooperation during this interaction. Mutual visits and cooperative projects are two examples of trust-building techniques that might increase communication and cooperation.

Peacebuilding and religious cooperation should be top priorities for the Vatican and al-Azhar University. The two organisations can show the world the strength of interfaith collaboration by solving serious global problems, including poverty, conflict resolution, and environmental sustainability.

Restoring ties between the Vatican and al-Azhar University would have far-reaching consequences for promoting religious harmony. Inspiring discourse, mutual respect, and the pursuit of common ground among religious organisations is one result of restored collaboration. It may also serve as the cornerstone for cooperative efforts

to foster mutual respect and tolerance among people of different faiths. By combining their considerable influence, the Vatican and al-Azhar University might considerably advance efforts to create a more just and peaceful global community.

In his 2011 article "Rashied Omar. A," the author analyses the tense relationship between the Vatican and al-Azhar University and stresses the need for communication and mutual understanding in pursuing religious harmony, especially between Muslims and Catholics. Omar condemns Pope Benedict XVI for taking a tougher stance towards Muslims, as seen by his dismissal of Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald from the presidency of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and his contentious talk at Regensburg.

Omar goes on to say that the Pope's image in the Muslim world has suffered because of his contentious stance and that attempts to safeguard Christian minorities in countries where Islam is the majority have been hampered. Omar also attacks al-Azhar University, saying they should have encouraged Christian-Muslim interaction rather than discontinuing talks with the Vatican. He thinks the Pope's focus on the fate of Christian minorities provides a chance for discourse and involvement on a major subject, notwithstanding the nature of the Pope's presentation of Islam. Omar argues that the discourse should include sensitive matters like the Vatican's stance on Kairos Palestine, religious freedom, and full citizenship for Christian minorities.

Robert R. Reilly (2013) weighs in on this discussion by emphasising the importance of Pope Benedict XVI's words and arguing that they are more than just boilerplate. Reilly contends that if Catholics and Muslims are ever going to have an honest conversation, they need to agree on what it means to be human and what rights that person should have. It is argued in the study that discussion attempts might be hampered if this basic dispute is not resolved (Reilly, 2013).

The aforementioned section underlines the necessity for respectable religious leaders to behave carefully and with great circumspection to build peace and understanding by analysing the tense relationship between al-Azhar and the Vatican (A, 2011).

Omar's research on the tense relationship between the Vatican and al-Azhar University and its implications for interfaith harmony brings to light several important facts. First, Pope Benedict XVI's contentious Regensburg talk and the subsequent expulsion of Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue show that he has taken a tougher stance towards Muslims than his predecessors. The Pope's reputation with Muslims has suffered due to this policy change. Its attempts to safeguard Christian minorities in nations where Islam is the majority have been hampered. The text argues that Al-Azhar University should have called for further engagement on Christian-Muslim ties rather than suspending interaction with the Vatican, which the university did.



This study highlights the role of religious leaders in promoting peace and calling for open and meaningful Conversations. It argues that Muslims may benefit from a time of introspection and rejuvenation if they engage in a conversation about the treatment of Christian minorities in Muslim-majority states. It also emphasises the need for the Vatican to call on Middle Eastern nations to safeguard their Christian minority and acknowledge the widespread disapproval of church bombings throughout the Muslim world. The piece finishes with the hope that the solid links Pope John Paul constructed between the two communities will enable Catholics and Muslims to get through this difficult time together.

Omar argues that Al-Azhar University should have called for greater talks between Christians and Muslims rather than stopping talks with the Vatican. Omar claims it highlights the need for open and sincere discussion amongst people and the responsibility of religious leaders in promoting peace.

Denari D. J. (2013) similarly examines the effects of the halt in discussion between al-Azhar University and the Vatican on efforts to foster religious tolerance and coexistence. Denari highlights three issues: the appropriateness of Pope Benedict XVI's approach to Islam in the post-9/11 world, the need for more delicacy in his diplomacy with Muslims, and the possibility that al-Azhar University is overreacting to Benedict's comments. Denari also touches on Pope Benedict's resolute anti-Muslim attitude from the start of his pontificate. It emphasises the criticism levelled by al-Azhar University against the Pope for his alleged lack of knowledge of Christian persecution and his perceived silence on violence against Muslims. She says that rather than halt the Conversation between Christians and Muslims, al-Azhar should have advocated for more of it. She also discusses other divisive topics, such as the Vatican's stance on Kairos Palestine, and stresses the need for introspection and regeneration among Muslims (Duffner, 2013).

On the other hand, Omar stresses the need to make amends for the damage to the strained relationship between Catholics and Muslims.

Because of this, Denari condemns the mainstream Muslim religious establishment for remaining silent in the face of human rights abuses and injustices, and he warns that Al-Azhar's response may play into the hands of extremists who want to sow discord between Muslims and Christians. Finally, she urges Christian and Muslim leaders to prioritise Conversation to foster honesty, truth, and trust.

This section offers insightful analysis of interreligious dialogue and peace-building processes in light of the ongoing tensions between the Vatican and al-Azhar University. It explains why Muslims have a bad impression of Pope Benedict XVI and his approach toward Islam. It also highlights the necessity for religious leaders to play an integral role in building peace (A, 2011; Duffner, 2013; Reilly, 2013) and the need to take a nuanced approach to interreligious dialogue.

In the end, Omar, Denari, and Reilly hope that Muslims and Catholics can work through their differences and continue to create trusting relationships via discussion. They also stress the need of talking things out and working together to mend fences between the Vatican and al-Azhar University. These powerful institutions may serve as pillars of peace and unity in an increasingly linked and varied world if they are willing to put aside their differences and embrace common ideals.

Therefore, this study may provide the groundwork for future studies on the subject and help us better understand how to implement successful tactics for interreligious peacebuilding.

### Nostra Aetate

The third article of Nostra Aetate highlights the Catholic Church's high regard for Muslims. It emphasises the shared beliefs and practices between Christians and Muslims, emphasising their worship of the same God, who is characterised as one, living, merciful, and almighty. The article also recognises the submission of Muslims to God, drawing a parallel to the faith of Abraham and their adoration of Jesus as a prophet and Mary as his Virgin Mother.

Additionally, the article mentions the shared belief in the day of judgment and the importance Muslims place on leading an upright life centred around worship, alms-giving, and fasting. It emphasises that the Church calls for forgetting past conflicts and fostering mutual understanding to improve society, peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values.

The article highlights the inclusive approach of Nostra Aetate towards Muslims. It acknowledges the common ground and shared values between Christians and Muslims, promoting a message of respect, unity, and dialogue. It reflects a commitment to overcoming past differences and working towards mutual understanding for the benefit of all people.

The document Nostra Aetate holds significant historical importance in Catholic-Muslim relations, often regarded as a pivotal turning point (Borelli, 2008; Yucel & Tahir, 2021). Pope Benedict XVI 2005 described Nostra Aetate as the Magna Carta of the Catholic Church in the context of Muslim-Christian relations. This comparison to the Magna Carta, an iconic document that symbolises foundational principles and rights, underscores the document's immense significance and impact (Borelli, 2008).

The reference to Nostra Aetate as the Magna Carta implies that it establishes a framework or guiding principles for fostering understanding and dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Muslim community. This comparison suggests that the document has played a transformative role in shaping the Catholic Church's approach to engaging with Muslims, highlighting its significance as a cornerstone document in interfaith relations (Borelli, 2008).

### An Interreligious Perspective on Cooperation between the Catholic Church and Sunni Muslims

Through fruitful Conversation, the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam, two of the most important religions in the world, have discovered areas in which they share similar ground. The discussion demonstrates how successful ecumenical collaboration can be in solving global crises like poverty, climate change, and violence by focusing on theological, ethical, and political concerns as the primary focus of the discussion (Hellyer, 2017). Communication between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam on these topics may help develop religious tolerance in today's linked world. The Catholic Church and Sunni Islam may overcome the prejudices and misconceptions that have contributed to centuries of conflict and division between their communities if they communicate with one another. New friendships and business ventures between members of different religions have surfaced as a direct result of a discussion that took place recently, during which members of the two faiths discussed their common beliefs, ideals, and practices. The potential for good that may be realised when people of different faiths unite in a peaceful and harmonious way is shown by alliances such as this one. The legitimacy of the discussion has been enhanced owing to the support of institutional entities such as the Catholic Church and Al-Azhar University, which may lead to a bigger influence outside the communities of Catholics and Sunni Muslims. To accomplish this goal, it may be necessary to solicit the participation of a greater number of the many religious communities around the globe and of more renowned institutions, such as universities, nongovernmental organisations, and nations. The combined efforts of the three groups might likely be quite successful in creating understanding and harmony if they work together (Church, 2019). The discussion that has taken place between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam is illustrative of the power that can be harnessed via interfaith dialogue and collaboration to assist in the resolving of difficulties that have persisted for a long time and in the creation of beneficial new avenues of cooperation between different religious groups (Hellyer, 2017). This in-depth discourse may have far-reaching repercussions for the larger religious and secular communities, as it may provide the groundwork for a culture of peace, respect, and understanding by creating the framework for it. In conclusion, the Conversation between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam can significantly mould and influence the path that worldwide interfaith relations are headed more positively.

### Textual Analysis

An examination of the text reveals that the viewpoint of Al-Azhar University is vital to the Conversation that is taking on right now. The terminology used places an emphasis on the necessity of comprehending the viewpoint of Al-Azhar University. This suggests a willingness to think about and improve one's perspective and values about the issue now being discussed. Words

such as "perception" and "from the viewpoint of Al-Azhar University" call attention to the significance of considering their point of view.

The wording used in the research indicates that the authors are interested in tracing the development of this perspective over time. Words like "evolved" and "changed" point to a progression in the style of thinking that has occurred over time at Al-Azhar University. This leads one to believe that the Conversation won't merely consist of an initial standpoint but will also address how things have developed since then. Understanding this shift within the ongoing Conversation context may provide insight into whether its proponents or detractors see it as a good or bad progression.

The period and time the work was written are also essential to grasp its meaning. The topic is considered using particular year references, such as "official start in 1998" and "signing of the Declaration on Human Fraternity in 2019." The progression of the dialogue may be better understood with these references. The public's conception of Al-Azhar University has likely undergone significant transformations over many centuries. One possible way to shed light on this transformation is to use various terminology to characterise different historical periods. Perspective shifts may often be linked back to certain influences and events in a person's past.

Textual analysis, in which careful consideration is given to the vision and perspective of Al-Azhar University, the development of that stance over time, and the extent to which the discussion has been carried out, may lead to a greater comprehension of the matter at hand. This examination of the text's subtleties, hidden meanings that are transmitted through language, and linguistic structure may provide insight into the opinions and advances in the formal Conversation that is taking place between the Vatican and Al-Azhar University.

### Future Implications

The official cooperation between the Vatican and Al-Azhar University cannot be overlooked while addressing the importance of interfaith engagement between Islam and Christianity. Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, is one of the most prestigious Islamic educational institutions, whereas the Vatican is the highest religious authority in the Catholic Church. They are committed to mending the gap between the two religions, as seen by their openness to dialogue.

The viewpoint presented at Al-Azhar University changed over time. The 1998 formalisation of the discussion was a significant first step since it showed a willingness on both institutions' parts to engage in interfaith dialogue and tackle common issues. However, opinions on the institution and its role in the debate may vary widely within the student body at Al-Azhar Institution.

Approving the Declaration on Human Fraternity in 2019 marks a major step forward in the Vatican and Al-Azhar University dialogue. This significant work emphasises the significance of promoting religious tolerance, mutual

respect, and peaceful coexistence. The statement also addresses contemporary concerns, including religious extremism, bigotry, and the need for collective action to establish social harmony.

### Case Studies

In an article that I authored and published in 2020 under the title “Peace and Brotherhood through Interreligious Dialogue” see (Hemmet, 2020), I investigated the role that Al-Azhar University and Ahmed El-Tayeb play in the ongoing interreligious conversation that takes place between the Vatican and Al-Azhar. The article was titled “Peace and Brotherhood through Interreligious Dialogue.”

The purpose of this article is to present a description of a big event between different religious groups in Rome in October 2020. At this gathering, religious leaders from a broad spectrum of religions convened to explore the significance of working together with one another and engaging in candid dialogue to make the world a place that is both safer and more peaceful. Mohamed Abdelsalam Abdellatif, who is now serving as the Secretary General of Egypt’s Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, was the one who spoke at the conference in El-Tayeb’s place and gave the words. The epidemic prevented El-Tayeb from attending the conference in person as it was scheduled. In a speech that he gave against prejudice and discrimination, Al Tayyeb drew attention to the awful situations that the onset of COVID-19 has brought about. He differentiated Islam from the atrocities of terrorists while issuing a plea for peace and brotherhood. This article highlights Al-Azhar and Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb’s role in developing interfaith understanding and peace. Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb was one of his day’s most influential religious leaders. In addition to this, it highlights the continuous need for knowledge, understanding, and open communication across the many religious traditions.

## RESULTS

### Analysis of the Speech by His Excellency the Great Imam Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Sheikh of Al-Azhar

In the interest of this research, this section examines religion, human values, and interfaith dialogue from the point of view of Al-Azhar. This article analyses the speech that was delivered by Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb, concentrating on how it might contribute to strengthening connections between the Vatican and Al-Azhar to advance interfaith understanding and human dignity.

Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb, speaking from the standpoint of Al-Azhar, examines various key topics of religious tolerance, humanism, and interfaith collaboration.

The Imam acknowledges the global challenges humanity is now confronted with, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastation it has wreaked on societies worldwide. In the face of such disasters, he emphasises the importance of community and the interconnectedness of people’s lives by saying that solidarity is necessary.

This shared experience of being human is an essential foundation for religious conversations.

In his lecture, the Imam also takes the opportunity to denounce intolerance and racism, which he compares to a disease that saps the strength of the human soul. He is quite vocal in his condemnation of discriminatory conduct and his demand to end all forms of bigotry based on external circumstances. The Imam of Al-Azhar has recently expressed his opinion on the importance of human brotherhood as a solution to the problems of prejudice and racism. Accepting individuals for who they are is just one aspect of human brotherhood; the other is ensuring they are happy and secure in their lives.

In addition, the Imam evaluates the potential for more freedom, justice, and equality brought about by globalisation. The author laments that globalisation has sometimes resulted in brutal exploitation, the stifling of dissident views, and the imposition of a uniform cultural standard, all of which he highlights. He also regrets that globalisation has sometimes led to the suppression of dissenting voices. According to what was said in the lecture, Al-Azhar is advocating for a new kind of globalisation centred on the concept of brotherhood among people. The reallocation of resources, away from the military and into the sectors of education, healthcare, and research, is an essential part of this different paradigm for how globalisation should be carried out.

The speech also emphasises the significance of religious leaders and intellectuals, particularly as seen through the perspective of Al-Azhar, in guiding adherents back to the fundamental tenets of their respective religions. The Imam makes it obvious that violent extremism and terrorism have no common ground regarding the genuine teachings that the Prophet Muhammad imparted to his followers. In light of the present challenges, he emphasises the value of Christian teachings, sometimes ignored or mistakenly equated with terrorism. He says this because the world is in a tough place.

Overall, Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb’s speech illustrates Al-Azhar’s position on the importance of religious toleration, humanism, and interfaith cooperation. It critiques the weaknesses of globalisation and underlines religion’s role in creating social cohesiveness, equality, and acceptance. It argues for human brotherhood as a solution to prejudice and racism. Al-Azhar urges people of all religions to unite in solidarity by emphasising these aspects.

After the speech, the speaker thanked everyone who attended, including Pope Francis, the President of Italy, and other dignitaries. It strongly emphasises the need of intellectuals and religious leaders of all faiths to work together to cultivate interfaith dialogue and sow the seeds of human brotherhood in both the culture of today and the culture of generations to come. The speech emphasises religious leaders’ and intellectuals’ role in promoting mutual tolerance, peace, and cooperation among the many religious groups around the globe (Abdellatif, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Recent years have seen a marked improvement in the level of collaboration and mutual understanding that exists between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam as a consequence of dialogues that have taken place between the two organisations. As a result of open, honest, and polite discussion, the general public has a better perception of the level of trust and respect between individuals who adhere to various religions, philosophies, and political perspectives. Given its capacity to promote religious variety and mutual comprehension, there is reason to believe that it may be a driving element in growing interfaith discussion and cooperation in the larger religious landscape. This is because of the potential it has to develop religious diversity. The notion is supported by the fact that there is cause to expect that it will have this influence, as stated in the considerations of opinion presented earlier in this paragraph. According to Giacaman *et al.* (2016), this is because it makes it easier for all involved parties to engage in more profound levels of communication. Because of this confidence, it is possible to achieve higher levels of optimism, which is why this confidence is so important. Followers of various religious traditions need to communicate with one another and work together to find solutions to the urgent social and geopolitical problems that are afflicting the globe today. One good example of this is the discussion that is now taking place between the Catholic Church and Sunni Islam. It has been observed that these issues are afflicting the globe not only because of the urgency with which they must be dealt with but also because of the urgency with which they must be dealt with on a geopolitical and social level. It helps people work together more effectively while also repairing rifts and opening up very important communication channels. This constant discourse between members of various faiths is an important component of the attempt to build peace, understanding, and harmony among people who adhere to various religious traditions. In addition, it highlights the role of communication in developing a society that is more compassionate and equal for all of its members.

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