

Aide: Interreligious Dialogue Enters New Era

Father Atuire Says Pope Brought "Renaissance"

By Mercedes de la Torre

JERUSALEM, MAY 15, 2009 (Zenit.org).- Benedict XVI's visit to the Holy Land brought with it a "renaissance" in relations between Jews, Muslims and Christians, says Father Caesar Atuire.

Father Caesar Atuire, the delegate administrator of Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi, the Vatican institution whose mission is to evangelize through pastoral tourism and the ministry of pilgrimage, said this in comments to ZENIT after the Pope visited the Holy Sepulcher today, a few hours before returning to Rome.

"The Holy Sepulcher is the place of the resurrection of Jesus Christ," noted Father Atuire. "This place marks the renaissance in the history of humanity. I believe that the visit of Benedict XVI here to the Holy Land has been a moment for the renaissance of the relations between Christians, Muslims and Jews."

The priest cited as an example the comments of Israel's President Shimon Peres when he told the Pontiff that never in the history of 2,000 years have the relations between Jews and Christians been better.

"The Pope has washed away the fears and worries that were there before the visit, and he has cleared away the environment to establish a new era in the relations between Christians and Jews," said Father Atuire.

"And the same has happened with the Muslims," he continued. "It is enough to listen to the address from Thursday in Nazareth, of the Muslim representative, to see that a new era is opening."

"In the four years of the pontificate of Benedict XVI there have been tensions with Jews and Muslims, and the media has made it look that interreligious relations have gotten worse under this Pope," added the pilgrimage director. "But this trip shows that these accusations don't have any basis."

Father Atuire noted that the trip will also have an important impact among the Christians in the Holy Land, "who feel isolated from the rest of the world. The Pope's visit made them feel the closeness of the universal Church and confirmed them in their vocation to be the leaven of peace for the earth.

"Even though they are few, they can make a difference so that peace comes to this land. They have a vocation at the service of the Church and of the world."

The priest said that as another fruit of the trip, "it can be hoped that the peace process, that goes forward on square wheels, begins to gain speed. There are many convergent elements that are seeking peace in this land and the Pope's visit has given a lot of encouragement to those who seek peace.

"The Pope confirmed to Mahmud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian National Authority, the need to create two states that live in security and collaboration, guaranteeing the right to free movement, in which its citizens can live in dignity with their families. In this sense, it is not just a political peace, but one that comes from the heart of each person."

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