



ZE12092602 - 2012-09-26

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-35603?l=english>

Muslims and Christians Are Committed In Spreading Pope's Fraternal Message in Lebanon

Inter-Religious Meeting Held to Gather First Fruits of Historic Visit

By Robert Cheaib

BKERKE, Lebanon, SEPT. 26, 2012 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- An inter-religious meeting was held on Monday at the patriarchal headquarters of the Maronite Church in Lebanon. The gathering gathered various religious realities of the country to discuss the effect, fruits and challenges stemming from Benedict XVI's visit, which took place earlier this month.

Attending the meeting organized by the Maronite Patriarch, Mar Bechara Boutros El-Rai, were the heads of the major religious communities, Muslim and Christian, present in Lebanon.

Participating on the Muslim side were: the Grand Mufti of the Lebanese Republic, Sheikh Muhammad Rachid Qabbani as representative of the Sunnis; the vice-president of the Supreme Shiite Islamic Council Imam Abd el-Amir Qabalan, as representative of the Shiites; Sheikh Naim Hassan, spiritual head of the Druses, and the president of the Alawita Islamic Council, Sheikh Assad Assi.

Participating on the Catholic side were The Catholicos of the Armenian Orthodox, His Beatitude Aram I Chechechyan; the Patriarch of the Syro-Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Mar Ignatius Youseff III Younan; the president of the Evangelical community in Lebanon and Syria, the pastor Dr. Salim Sahyouny, as well as other bishops representing the various Christian communities of Lebanon.

The participants focused their attention at the meeting on the "historic visit" of Pope Benedict XVI to Lebanon. Those present agreed on the opportuneness of the visit which brought immediate positive fruits to the Lebanese scene and highlighted the quality of the Lebanese nation as a country "secure and open to all cultures and religions, and as the best place to sign the Apostolic Exhortation "The Church in the Middle East."

In the final communique, the Christian and Muslim participants expressed their approval of the contents of the Exhortation, given that the Holy Father's insistence on the necessary coexistence between cultures and religions is "an expression of renewed confidence in Lebanon's mission, already confirmed by Blessed John Paul II" in his apostolic visit to the country in 1997.

According to Lebanon's various religious representatives, the principal message that the Pope wished to give was to confirm Lebanon as a land of dialogue and peaceful interaction among the different cultures that live "the richness of diversity."

The communique confirmed the willingness of the various religious heads to commit themselves to "spread the fraternal message" of the Holy Father and to "reflect further on its content in families, in schools and in society" and to transmit the message to religious heads in the other Arab countries.

In tune with the Pope's appeal to young people not to yield to the temptation to taste "the bitter honey of emigration," the prelates exhorted the Lebanese to stay in their land and not allow themselves to be drawn by the "wave of emigration that impoverishes the East and deprives it of its best children and dynamic forces and weakens the Lebanese national fabric, putting at risk the Republic's identity."

Condemnation of the "Innocence of Islam"

The participants condemned unanimously the controversial film shown on the Internet, which "offends Islam and its prophet and messenger Muhammad," and stated that "any offense to any religion is a sacrilege against all religions."

The communique also condemned the violent reactions that caused the death of innocent victims and desecrated places of Christian worship far from being responsible for the film.

A Successful Visit

Benedict XVI's visit to the Lebanon was long prepared by the country's Christians. A few days before the visit, the Maronite bishops hoped that the visit would be "a real and proper Arab Spring" marked by peace and peaceful coexistence and respectful of otherness.

Numerically, participation in the visit was powerful, involving several components of the Lebanese society, including representatives of the Muslim communities. And the subsequent echoes on the visit were highly positive both in the secular press as well as in the interventions of several Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim religious heads.

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