

Religions Bring Peace, Not War, Says Pontiff

Urges Egypt to Foster Co-existence

VATICAN CITY, NOV. 6, 2008 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Religions can and should be a factor of peace, Benedict XVI is affirming.

The Pope said this today when he received the letters of credence from the new Egyptian ambassador to the Holy See, Lamia Aly Hamada Mekhemar.

"Unfortunately, religion can be misunderstood and used to provoke violence and death," the Holy Father noted. To avoid this, it is necessary to promote "respect of the sensitivity and history of each country and every human and religious community" through "multilateral consultations and meetings."

But before all, he added, there is a need for "a genuine desire to seek the peace that will promote the reconciliation of peoples and peaceful co-existence among everyone."

"This is what the Holy See asks, and knows that this is also the desire of Egypt," affirmed the Bishop of Rome. He praised "the efforts carried out by Egypt and its government officials to gradually reach this noble objective."

He added: "Egypt is in the vanguard in the search for bridges between peoples and religions. Such relationships are certainly based on a profound mutual respect of our proper identities, but also and above all, on a genuine desire to promote unity and peace, both within national borders and within international spaces."

Benedict XVI affirmed that Egypt "has always been known as a land of welcome for innumerable refugees, Muslims and Christians, who have sought security and peace in your land. May this noble tradition continue for the well-being of everyone."

Dialogue

The Pope mentioned the regular meetings between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Al-Azhar Al Sharif University in Cairo. He said these meetings have contributed to "a reciprocal understanding and respect between Islam and Christianity."

This dialogue, he insisted, implies an "opportunity for the world, an opportunity offered by God that must be protected and lived in the best way possible."

"A long path has been traveled, and there is still a long way to go," the Pontiff suggested. "It is necessary to promote a deep mutual knowledge, which cannot be limited to the small circle of the dialogue forum, but rather should gradually be extended to all peoples, so that day after day, in cities and towns an attitude of mutual respect is developed."

The Holy Father took advantage of the occasion to greet Catholics in Egypt, who "though reduced in number, manifest the great diversity that exists in the bosom of our Church and the possibility of a harmonious coexistence among the great Eastern and Western Christian traditions."

He concluded with a word on behalf of tourists who visit Egypt and want to be able to practice their religion.

"I am convinced that soon there will be the opportunity to pray to God with adequate dignity in places of worship in the new attractions that have been developed in recent years," he said. "It would be a good sign that Egypt could give to the world, through the promotion of friendship and fraternal relations among religions and peoples, totally in accord with its ancient and noble tradition."