

religious communities that live there, the sacred places dear to millions of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim believers.

For our part we want to affirm that we will continue to do everything possible in our communities and in our societies so that no people and no country of the region may be excluded from the true road toward justice and peace or be injured in some way in its fundamental rights.

Moreover, solidarity in sharing spiritual and material wealth will be the sign and proof of our commitment to make sure that—as His Holiness has said—“poverty and the lack of prospects for the future” do not prevail and that, with the help of everybody, the populations of the Middle East, who have most suffered, shall be finally placed in conditions to offer their contribution to the pacification of the region and thus to the world.

We trust that there will be a more just redistribution of the natural wealth of the region and that development plans shall be promoted to support the less favored populations. All this will be made easier by a strict regulation of the arms traffic and by a controlled and substantial disarmament, binding all sides.

The exchange of ideas of these last two days confirmed to us that Christians—as well as our brothers of other religions—have a word to say and a role to play so that a world of brotherhood may not just be a dream. We, as believers, are convinced that with faith in God and confidence in man, His creature, the world can change its face.

For this hope of collegiality and of participation, this meeting between East and West is a prophetic sign of reconciliation.

In profound communion with the Holy Father we entrust these intentions of ours to the mercy of God and to the intercession of the Queen of Peace.

Interview: Patriarch Nashrallah Sfeir

Lebanon not at war, but also not at peace

Fiorella Operto interviewed Nashrallah Sfeir in Rome. He is Patriarch of the Maronite Christian Church, in Lebanon.

EIR: You took part in the Middle East conference recently here in Rome. Can you comment on it?

Sfeir: It was a good initiative, and promising for the future. The first result was to dissipate the climate of tension which had been created between Islam and Christianity, because there have been people who wanted the Muslims to think this was a new crusade by the Christians against Islam. That is

not true at all. It is not a religious war. The war has as a cause Iraq's aggression against Kuwait, but there were also other causes, and other interests [involved]. Allow me to say that if the resolutions which were decided on for Lebanon and Palestine by the United Nations Security Council had been enforced, I think Iraq would not have attacked Kuwait. But since those resolutions were not enforced, it is possible that Saddam thought no U.N. resolution would ever be enforced.

That is why this conference is important and will allow us to intensify the dialogue among believers of different religions, especially the monotheistic ones, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three believe in one God, the Creator, and if we all believe in one sole God whom we call Father, we must treat each other as brothers. This is the direction in which the world has to go.

EIR: What future initiatives are there?

Sfeir: We must encourage believers to establish a dialogue with their fellow citizens, whether they be Jews or Muslims. Some projects can be launched; or humanitarian aid organized to alleviate the sufferings of populations. There could be social projects to benefit all the citizenry. We could promote the birth of cultural institutions, intellectual institutions, so that Christians can understand Islam and vice versa, and both could understand Judaism, and vice versa. We have to come up with initiatives which bring people closer. . . .

Today in Lebanon there is no more war. But you cannot say there is calm. The political situation is not good, nor the social situation. The factories have been wrecked, unemployment is very high, and the Lebanese pound is totally devalued. The people are suffering poverty. Minimum wages are \$75 a month, and it is impossible to live on that. There are huge problems in the health sector. Just to get into a hospital you have to pay 3 or 4 million Lebanese pounds, and if it is for a complicated operation, you need 12 million pounds. In education, the situation is very, very difficult.

Politically . . . well. We have a President, a government, a parliament. But quite a few of the parliamentarians are dead and there are thoughts of appointing others. But to appoint parliamentarians is undemocratic, and it is being contested.

There are still troops of non-Lebanese armies on Lebanese territory. It is necessary, in order for Lebanon to be completely autonomous and independent, for the non-Lebanese troops to leave the country, which has not yet happened. That is why you cannot say the situation is resolved; it is not resolved. A lot of efforts will be needed to arrive at the peace which is desired and for people to be able to live a normal life.

I asked for the non-Lebanese troops to leave the country, and for the U.N. resolutions to be respected. The Palestinian cause, too, is a just cause. We cannot allow a whole people to remain for 30, 40 years with no homeland. Many Palestinians have lived most of their lives waiting. We cannot be surprised if they explode. They have to be given a homeland, and until that is done, we cannot speak of peace in the Middle East.