

Author of Book Pope Cited Speaks

Prof. Adel-Theodore Khoury, the Lebanese Catholic theologian who was cited by Pope Benedict XVI in the speech he made in Regensburg, Germany, said that the pope "most likely" did not read the book he made reference to.

Speaking to Zaman, Khoury said, "The quotation might be unfortunate; but what matters now is the ability to look at the future." He replied to questions on the recent controversy caused by the pope's remarks that Muslims found offensive.

Zaman: The pope received the representatives of Islamic countries in his residence for the first time in the Vatican's history. Could the remarks that angered Muslims be transformed into a new dialogue move?

Khoury: It should! We can arrive nowhere by fighting and insulting each other. The world already has a lot of problems. Particularly, Muslims and Christians should come together and seek to resolve these problems. Both the individual and institutional dialog projects that have been developed so far should be further improved. As for academics, this is the project I have been dreaming of: The history of our friendship should be written and narrated. Let the future generations not grow up by reading the history of wars alone.

He should not have said those words

Zaman: Aside from its consequences, how did you find the academic content of the speech?

Khoury: Above all, the speech was not about Islam. The pope is not an expert on Islam. The subject matter of the lecture was the reasonableness of faith, and the limits of the Divine Will. It is a tough subject, and the speech was inherently elusive and hard to grasp, requiring subsequent clarifications and deliberations. The remarks on Islam were meant to serve a connection between one part of the speech to another; an unfortunate connection. He should have emphasized that the views he cited were not his own. It would have been the best if he had not made the remarks indicating that Islam was violent and irreconcilable with reason in the first place.

Zaman: So, you think that the pope did not mean to interpret Islam in his speech?

Khoury: No, and he cannot because he is not an expert on Islam. For instance, if he had made a speech on the role that Muslim intellectuals had played in conveying the Ancient Greek heritage to the Christian Europe, he would have made a quite different one.

Zaman: You stated in your dissertation at the University of Lyon in 1966 that inter-faith dialog could not be carried on in a way that the Byzantine Emperor had done before. Do you think the pope read the book he quoted from?

Khoury: Most likely he did not. He might just have wanted to make a reference to the work of an author known for his appreciation of inter-faith dialogue.

Zaman: Do you believe that pope's remarks have negatively affected your reputation and recognition?

Khoury: No. Muslims know very well what I think and believe. I have been emphasizing three things for years: It is imperative for us to show respect for each other, respect creates trust and that depending on the mutual trust we should try to get objective information from each other.

27.09.2006
Timofey Nesitov
Frankfurt

<http://www.zaman.com/?bl=international&alt=&hn=36854>