



Pope Benedict XVI should visit Sabra and Shatila

The Pontifex Maximus, Pope Benedict XVI, will visit Lebanon from 14 to 16 September 2012. This papal visit will coincide with the 30th anniversary of the Sabra and Shatila massacre that was perpetrated by Christian militia forces under the watch of Israeli occupation troops. To make atonement for the crimes committed by “his” Christian brothers he should commemorate this anniversary by visiting his Palestinian Muslim brothers and sisters, who can be regarded as “the Wretched of the Earth” in Lebanon because they enjoy no rights whatsoever.

Pope Benedict’s predecessor, Pope John Paul II, expressed his desire in 1982 to visit Lebanon but the civil war, which started three years earlier, prevented him from doing so. At that time, Israel had invaded Lebanon on June 6, 1982 and called its operation “Peace for Galilee” after the PLO had shelled the north of Israel with rockets. The main reason, however, was the assassination attempt against Israel’s ambassador to the United Kingdom, Shlomo Argov, by the Abu Nidal organization. Besides the political and geopolitical considerations the then Israeli government under Prime Minister Menachem Begin pretended to protect the Christians in Lebanon. At the end, they let the Christian Phalange killers go on the rampage after having sealed the refugee camps off. And the “Christians” did a “good job”: Almost 3 500 unarmed civilians were massacred. Robert Fisk’s report makes one shiver.

Pope John Paul II, besides being very conservative on religious issues, was very outspoken against the misery and the oppression of the peoples of the “Third World”. He put the Palestinian people on an equal footing with Israeli Jews. On September 15, 1982, he received Yasser Arafat, who had just been forced to leave Beirut, providing him with a political legitimacy after a military defeat. Three days before the meeting, the Israeli Foreign Ministry issued a violent accusation: “The same church that did not say a word about the massacre of Jews for six years in Europe, and did not say much about the killing of Christians in Lebanon for seven years, is willing to meet the man who perpetrated the crime in Lebanon and is bent on the destruction of Israel which is the completion of the work done by the nazis in Germany. If the pope is going to meet with Arafat, it shows something about the moral standards (of the church)”.

On the same level, we find the complaint by Israel’s interior minister Eli Yishai, member of the right-wing Shas party. He declared German Nobel laureate Guenter Grass persona non grata and banned him from visiting Israel after he published a poem in which he stated that Israel is a threat to world peace because it is planning to attack Iran on charges of a phantom nuclear bomb from which Iran is light years away. Prior to pope Benedict’s visit, Yishai did not only condemn the timing of the papal visit but also declared that a visit to the Sabra and Shatila camps would arouse hatred against the State of Israel and the Jewish people. “Yishai had earlier sent a memorandum to the US reminding the Israel lobby not to forget that following his 14th birthday in 1941, Joseph Ratzinger, the current Pope, joined the Hitler Youth. Yishai omitted the information that Hitler Youth membership was required by law for all 14-year-old German boys after December 1939”, writes Franklin Lamb on April 14, on MWC news. According to his brother Georg, the young Josef Ratzinger was an unenthusiastic member who refused to attend meetings.

During his visit to Lebanon, Pope Benedict should make a strong statement concerning the establishment of a viable Palestinian state, the return of the refugees to their homeland, and Israel's dreadful policy in the region. But he should also remind the Lebanese government to grant the Palestinian refugees a status that allows them to live with human dignity. A visit to the refugee camps would show to the world that the Catholic Pontifex Maximus does not only care about his Christian brethren but also about the Muslim ones. For the Vatican, it goes without saying, that the religious identity of Jerusalem is not only Jewish but also Christian and Muslim. This would be a strong political message from Lebanon to Israel.

Ludwig Watzal

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