

Words at the End of the Meeting

by Ignacio Fernandez de Mendoza, C.M.
Vicar General

Some missionaries of the C.M. proposed to Father General the desirability to convene a meeting with the purpose of studying the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Already at the General Assembly of 1986 some references to this topic had appeared.

Father General adopted this initiative and brought it to the consideration of the General Council, after concluding that the present circumstances were ripe to organize something.

At the beginning it was thought to convene only the Vincentian missionaries. Later it seemed suitable to invite also the Daughters of Charity. Sister Juana Elizondo was pleased with the proposal and decided that the Daughters of Charity would also participate.

A commission formed by five missionaries in charge of organizing the meeting was appointed. It was thought that it would be appropriate to host this meeting in a place like Lebanon where Christians and Muslims coexist.

All of this belongs to the past. What can we say about the present? We have already had this meeting in Lebanon and in this house of Our Lady of the Mount. A large number of C.M. missionaries and Daughters of Charity have participated in it. Also a representation of the Vincentian laity have participated. We have also been honored with the presence of a Patriarch, His Holiness Stephanos Ghattas, three C.M. Provincials and one Visitatrix. Father General wanted that, in spite of his absence from Rome, Father Victor Bieler and myself should participate in this meeting.

During these past days:

- We have visited with expert professors, both Catholic and Muslims, that have opened the way for us to know Islam better and in particular to understand our pastoral relationship as Vincentians with Muslims.
- The Commission has succeeded in organizing with skill and not a lack of sacrifice a way to go forward.
- We have exchanged our own experiences in our relationship with one of the religions that numbers more followers today.

- We have prayed and have lived together as the meeting unfolded.
- We have visited several places in this country of Lebanon, and thus it has been possible for us to draw near to its reality.
- In several places we have listened to Christian and Muslim leaders, who have given us with simplicity their own opinions on the relationship between Christians and Muslims.
- We have visited some of the houses of the C.M. missionaries and of the Daughters of Charity. They have received us “ex toto corde,” as brothers and sisters. They can count on our gratitude.
- The meeting has taken place in this house of Our Lady of the Mount. It is a building with optimal conditions for this type of meeting.
- I believe the results of the meeting are very positive. We have discovered a somewhat surprising fact: the C.M. missionaries and the Daughters of Charity that live in missions in contact with the Muslim world are very numerous. We have received first hand information on the relationship between Christians and Muslims. But above all, our personal and group sensibility about this problem, after what we have heard and seen, is very different from what it was before the Encounter.

To conclude I want to briefly add the following:

Father Victor Bieler and I will inform Father General as to how the meeting unfolded.

I want to thank all of you for your attendance and active participation throughout the meeting. Thanks to all the professors that have assisted us. Thanks to the Commission made up of Fathers Roberto Lovera, Victor Bieler, George Bou Jaoude, Franz Krangler and Jean Landousies. Our gratitude also for the translators that day after day have repeated the Pentecostal miracle. A very special thanks to Father George Bou Jaoude, Visitor from the Middle East Province, for everything he has done in favor of this meeting. For him a round of applause . We thank the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family and the supporting personnel, that is to say, the workers of this house.

I conclude with a suggestion. At the crossroads of the ending and the beginning of a millennium Christians and Muslims coexist in many places in the world. Vatican Council II opened the doors for an inter- religious dialogue. With this meeting that is about to end, the Vincentian family has taken a step forward. Let’s not forget that St. Vincent had a great interest for everything related to Islam. Given the geography of the Vincentians and of the Daughters of Charity and even

that of the diverse Vincentian groups, I believe that in a near future we should convene again the Vincentian family for another gathering in order to continue the reflection on Christianity and Islam and in particular on our apostolate in the midst of a Muslim world.

In the name of Father Maloney thank you for coming and participating in this meeting. I wish you a happy return to your homes. Thank you for having listened to me.

(JAMES G. WARD, C.M., translator)