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## Understanding Church-Muslim Relations (Part 2)

### Egypt's Ali Al-Samman on John Paul II's Beatification

By Emil Amin

CAIRO, Egypt, APRIL 17, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- An expert on interreligious dialogue who helped arrange Pope John Paul II's February 2000 visit to Egypt is expressing joy about the Pontiff's upcoming beatification.

In 1998, Ali Al-Samman was the architect of the joint committee that brings together the Cairo-based Permanent Committee of Al-Azhar for Dialogue among the Monotheistic Religions and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He is currently Egypt's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs.

He met John Paul II on several occasions, including a 2002 visit to Assisi when he gave an address on behalf of Imam Muhammad Tantawy.

In Part 2 of a two-part interview with ZENIT, Al-Samman spoke about his reaction to the news of the Holy Father's May 1 beatification, and offered his perspective on the current situation in Egypt in regards to interreligious relations.

Part 1 of this interview appeared Friday.

ZENIT: In the last few days, the Vatican sponsored "Court of the Gentiles" discussions with nonbelievers. You are a man of dialogue -- what do you think of this invitation made by the Vatican?

Al-Samman: The essential element is dealing with the human being on the basis that he is a human being.

The human being comes before religions, and the Vatican's dialogue with nonbelievers goes back to the second Vatican ecumenical council.

Undoubtedly, I welcome such dialogues and I have participated in some of them in the time of the Blessed Pope John Paul II.

I believe it is a good step to build one humanity with common feelings and responsibilities.

ZENIT: Some people in the Arabic media considered that the words of Cardinal Kurt Koch on promoting Jewish-Christian dialogue are not in the interests of the Muslim-Christian dialogue. Do you agree?

Al-Samman: Of course not, because I do not feel bothered by the Christian-Jewish convergence, since it is part of the system I always call for, which is that we are sons of Abraham, and no one from now on can separate Abraham's sons.

We also know well that this dialogue has existed for a long time, and it is not new.

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I would like to note the growth of right-wing movements in Europe that show hostility against the Jews, and with which I do not agree.

I consider that the freedom of faith and religion and dialogue among believers are essential issues in our daily life.

ZENIT: Archbishop Louis Sako from Iraq said that Islamic states will not live in a true democracy if Christians do not become real citizens. Do you agree with him?

Al-Samman: Democracy is definitely linked to citizenship. This is certain and it is the center of the citizenship talks in Egypt, for which the national dialogue sessions are being held now.

We are endeavoring to let the citizenship be the base, and this is what rational people in the Islamic world are calling for.

ZENIT: But the reality in fact is the contrary?

Al-Samman: A part of the reality might be different. There are some who exaggerate, but on the opposite side, there are people who oppose them and refute their claims.

Personally, I have participated in many television programs, and I wrote in newspapers denouncing these attitudes that separate and do not gather.

Like me, there are many people who are fighting for the supremacy of the citizenship concept.

ZENIT: Is it possible that Egypt will become another Iraq, and the Coptic's future will become similar to the Christian Iraqi situation?

Al-Samman: Egypt's history and the language of its wise people assert that Egypt cannot become another Iraq. It is a gamble. Iraq got used to a language that is different from the Egyptian language.

Despite some extremist statements issued lately, I don't think or expect that Egypt would be a new Iraq.

Moreover, we should note that there is a real ruling authority in Egypt represented by the supreme council of the armed forces.

The latter never stops denouncing and warning against any violation of security or legitimacy that affects the citizens, and especially the Copts. This was made clear in the council's declarations on rumors aiming at terrorizing the Coptic women and girls in Egypt in the past few days. It was announced clearly that violations of legitimacy and law are not allowed.

ZENIT: As a man who made a substantial contribution in arranging Pope John Paul's visit to Egypt and who met him several times on later occasions, how will you feel in the wake of his beatification on May 1?

Al-Samman: As a believer, my reaction would be a desire to pray for him.

Then, I will say he was given what he deserves for his work, the work that I saw, in which I participated and to which I am a witness.

All this proved to me how much he opened his heart and mind and arms to everyone. This is what I personally experienced in Assisi when I went there and gave a speech in the name of Imam Tantawy.

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Undoubtedly, I will be the happiest of all God's creation on this day.

[Translation by ZENIT]

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On ZENIT's Web page:

Part 1: [www.zenit.org/article-32338?l=english](http://www.zenit.org/article-32338?l=english)

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