

# Radical Islam Targets West, Pope Urges Peace

Pope Benedict started a visit to Lebanon in the Middle East on Friday, as angry demonstrations and attacks on Western interests continued to spread across the region and into Asia. They came in the wake of the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya's second city, which killed American Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three of his U.S. colleagues.

The Libyan U.S. consulate attack was allegedly triggered by the discovery of an anti-Islamic film produced in the United States by someone linked to Morris Sadek, an Egyptian Copt resident in the United States. It was the film's translation into Arabic and broadcast on Arab TV stations and talk shows that sparked the violence—although investigations are now under way in Washington to establish whether the worst of the violence was not spontaneous.

In Egypt, the religious TV channel al-Nas showed clips from the offending video, dubbed into Arabic, and scenes posted online have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times.

Egypt Independent, the English version of one of Egypt's leading newspapers Al Masry al Youm, has reported that Sadek was banned from entering Egypt and had his citizenship revoked in May 2011 because he called for war against the country.

Egyptian Coptic organizations moved quickly to distance themselves. Egyptian intellectual and researcher Adel Guindy, president of Coptic Solidarity, said the much-hyped film was "stupid and sickening ... We don't know for sure if Maurice Sadek has anything to do with the film" but if he has, "I think Sadek took the opportunity to provoke Muslims in Egypt,

as usual.”

Other Egyptian Christian leaders also condemned the film. The Coptic Orthodox Church issued a statement condemning the film as “abusive” to the Prophet Muhammad, “carried out by some Copts living abroad,” and “rejecting such acts that offend religious beliefs and all religions.”

The Coptic Orthodox Church expressed its indignation at the link with Egyptian Copts, stressing that the film’s as-yet unconfirmed producers were “expressing their personal views only and do not represent the Egyptian Church or Christians who are in Egypt.” The statement added that “the Church and its Holy Synod reject any abuse of all religious beliefs.”

For the present, many Christians in the region are keeping a low profile while the furor boils on the streets.

“We were told at church today that demonstrations were planned for 1 p.m. at mosques after prayer, so it would be best to stay put. We did,” a Cairo Christian told Open Doors News. “All is quiet in the neighborhood. I think it is mainly downtown where the problems are taking place.”

“The imam’s message was particularly enraged in tone,” said the Christian, whose identity is being withheld for safety’s sake. “Most Christians were staying at home today. Who knows what will happen?”

Meanwhile, Roman Catholic Pope Benedict is using his trip to Lebanon to meet both the region’s Christian and Muslim leaders. During his three days there, he’s to meet politicians and leaders from Lebanon’s 18 religious groups.

His trip comes as Lebanon—including the Christian community—is deeply divided over the conflict in neighboring Syria. On his plane to Lebanon, the Pope told reporters that Syrian arms

imports are a "grave sin." He also called for an end to the conflict there, saying fundamentalism was "always a falsification of religion ... Religious fundamentalism seeks to take power for political ends, at times using violence, over the individual conscience and over religion."

"All religious leaders in the Middle East [should] endeavour, by their example and their teaching, to do everything possible to uproot this threat, which indiscriminately and fatally affects believers," the pope said.

The pontiff's exhortations were made public as he signed recommendations on how to improve the lives of the Christian minority, making up 40 percent of Lebanon's population, and its relations with Judaism and Islam.

The pontiff described the Arab Spring as "a desire for more democracy, for more freedom, for more cooperation and for a renewed Arab identity". The pope told Lebanese President Suleiman he was visiting the country as a "pilgrim of peace".

"Let me assure you that I pray especially for the many people who suffer in this region," he said. "The successful way the Lebanese all live together surely demonstrates to the whole Middle East and to the rest of the world that, within a nation, there can exist cooperation between the various churches and at the same time coexistence and respectful dialogue between Christians and their brethren of other religions."

The pope also will express his concern about the dwindling Christian presence in the Middle East. In Iraq for example, tens of thousands of Christians have been driven from their homes by sectarian violence.

Coinciding with their pontiff's visit to the region, and referring to the **anti-Islam film**, in Egypt the Board of

Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops “denounced all forms of abuse of religious symbols, from whichever source they come. This completely contradicts the teachings of the Bible, which calls for love and respect for everyone.”

The Egyptian Catholic leaders have released a document on “the relationship of the Church with non-Christian religions,” to mark the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in October 1962. Pope Benedict was a key Council member of Vatican II, which addressed relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the contemporary world.

This new document, which apparently singles out Islam as having a ‘privileged’ position, says: “The Church ‘appreciates’ Muslims who worship the one true living God, and the Almighty Creator of the heavens and the earth ...”

The document also is reported to “invite everyone to forget the tragedies of the past and strive for understanding, cohesion and co-operation to safeguard common values. It is by this point of view that we strongly condemn any attempt to abuse, or hatred, and invite everyone to have full respect for all religious symbols: people, books or signs.”

Meanwhile, Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaki, Vice President of the Evangelical denomination in Egypt, said that “the film insulting Islam is a criminal act, and should not be tolerated. It must be prosecuted, and they who produced and published it are criminals.”

Zaki stressed that the Egyptian Evangelical Church “did not only condemn the film, but is communicating with several American institutions to stop such films depicting the sacred, because they represent a crime against human rights.”

According to the U.S. State Department and the Pew Research Center, Egypt’s 7 million Copts—about 10 percent of the

population—face frequent personal and group discrimination. They have been barred from building churches and applying for government jobs, among other restrictions. Egyptian Christians' fears have intensified since the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood won power there in June 2012.