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Catholic Islam experts like Obama initiatives

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Middle East Catholic leaders are meeting in Venice for a conference on tradition in Christianity and Islam.

Of course, the topic of U.S. initiatives in the Islamic world were bound to surface. And what a Catholic News Service reporter found was that Catholics who live among Muslims are giving President Obama high marks for his Cairo speech and his outreach to the Muslim world.

"I think it had a very positive effect. It opened new horizons for cooperation between Christians and Muslims, between political authorities, between East and West," said Father Rif'at Bader, who serves as a spokesman for the Catholic Church in Jordan.

"Bridges are being built between civilizations and between religions, and as Christians we pray that everything the politicians are saying will be realized very quickly."

Brother Michel Cuypers, a member of the Little Brothers of Jesus and a scholar at the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo, said the reaction among Muslims has been "very, very favorable." They were impressed with the president's respect for Islam, and the fact that he quoted from Islam's sacred book, the Quran -- "and they were very good quotations," he said.

Melkite Archbishop Jean-Clement Jeanbart of Aleppo, Syria, said it was very important to people that Obama spoke in strong terms about settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"It's a good start. If the Palestinian problem is resolved, I think it will also remove the motive for much of the fundamentalism," he said.

Jesuit Father Samir Khalil Samir, who directs a Christian research center in Lebanon, said Obama's speech was generally a good one, aimed at making friends in the region and opening up possibilities of dialogue.

"Certainly it was very positive, and the image of the United States was improved in the eyes of Muslims," he said.

You can read the full story here.

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