

November 30, 2006

Pope Recalls Genocide during Turkey Visit

Istanbul — Pope Benedict XVI brought up issue of the Armenian genocide—although he did not mention it explicitly—during a November 30 meeting with the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, Mesrob II.

In his greeting to the Patriarch, the Pope praised the Armenian people for their faithful witness to the Gospel, even under "truly tragic conditions, like those experienced in the past century." He was clearly alluding to the massive slaughter of Armenians under the Ottoman empire.

To this day the Turkish government denies to acknowledge the genocidal campaigns against the country's Christians, in which it is estimated that 3.5 million Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians were killed during massive massacres, forced marches and relocations, under the direct orders of Talaat Pasha and of Mustafa Kemal Pasha in the years marking the end of the Ottoman empire and the creation of the Turkish Republic.

Benedict XVI visited Turkey at the invitation of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, the supreme Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, in an effort to heal the schism between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches dated from 1054 AD.

During his visit, the Pontiff invited the Islamic world to renounce violence and to respect freedom of religion and belief, clearly alluding to the difficulties which the remaining Christians face in the predominantly Muslim Turkey.

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