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ASIA/LEBANON - The Lebanese religious mosaic

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - Lebanon is the most religiously heterogeneous and diversified society in the Middle East, with 18 officially recognized religious groups. Among Christians, the Maronite Catholic Church - which traces its origin to the monastic congregation founded by the ascetic Syriac St. Maron in the early fifth century – it is the predominant community. In addition to the Maronite, Lebanese Catholicism also includes Melkits, Syrian Catholics, Chaldeans, Roman Catholics, Armenian Catholics. Other Christian denominations include the greek Orthodox, Protestants and pre-Chalcedonian Eastern Orthodox Churches (which at the time had rejected some definitions of the Council of Chalcedon): Armenian Apostolic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Assyrian Church, Coptic Church.
Islam in Lebanon knows the division between Shiite and Sunni, to which must be added the groups - Shiite ancestry, but heterodox - the Alawites and Ismailis, and the followers of the Druze religion, a sect of Muslim origin that absorbed Gnostic esoteric elements . There remains a small Jewish community with thousands of members concentrated in Beirut.
The numerical relations between the different religious communities cannot be precisely defined. The Lebanese residents at home are about 4 million 200 thousand. But since 1932 no official census has drawn a detailed map of Lebanon from a religious point of view, so as not to fuel tensions and threaten the political balance based on the distribution of institutional positions on a sectarian basis. The official estimates are estimated by taking note of the fact that many communities tend to overestimate the number of its members, and that the official demographic statistics do not take into account the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees.
According to projections, that also refer to the statistics provided by U.S. Intelligence, currently the Muslims together with the Druze, account for about sixty percent of the Lebanese population, with a prevalence of Shiites on Sunnis and on minority groups (Alawites, Ismailis) estimated around 1 per cent. Christians as a whole reach 40 per cent of the population, with the Maronites estimated at some 23 per cent of the total.
According to the figures of the Statistical Yearbook of the Church, to December 31, 2011, Catholics in Lebanon were 2,148,000, the ecclesiastical districts 24, 53 Bishops (to 31/07/2012), 840 diocesan priests, 703 religious priests, 33 permanent deacons, 147 religious who are not priests, 2,650 women religious, 483 catechists, 62 minor seminarians, 390 major seminarians. The Church runs 647 kindergartens and primary schools, 229 middle schools, 31 high schools and universities, 358 health care, welfare and charitable centers. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 11/09/2012)

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