

REPORTAGE

Lebanon divided over DJ-priest

WORLD

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It is a confusing start to the year in Lebanon, which is grappling with the [search for Hezbollah weapons](#) and Israeli bombing in the [southern regions and the Bekaa Valley](#). The Lebanese army's actions are also causing dissatisfaction. Meanwhile, Netanyahu is raising [the prospect of American approval](#) – which has not been confirmed by Trump – for a new, massive military operation in Lebanon. This may be one of the reasons why

the population, tired of living amid threats, inept rulers, and financial crises, has become embroiled in a seemingly lighter controversy that has erupted in recent days and has, so to speak, split the country in two.

The protagonist of this controversy is Father Guilherme (born Guilherme Peixoto), a Portuguese Catholic priest who emerged from anonymity at the 2023 World Youth Day in Lisbon when he performed as a DJ during a vigil with Pope Francis. According to reports, after his exploits in Lisbon, the 'DJ priest' began performing for young and very young audiences, intending to bring them closer to God through techno-house music. Thanks to the Maronite priests at the University of the Holy Spirit in Beirut, Father Guilherme was invited to celebrate an open Holy Mass on the university campus on Saturday 10 January.

Guilherme's performance at the console was essential, so one was organised for midnight on the same day at AHM, a nightclub in the capital Beirut. It is unclear how the priest and the nightclub became connected, or who sought out whom. Nonetheless, the event was advertised, and tickets were initially priced between £35 and £45 each.

However, on 4 January, a bombshell was dropped when a group of around eighteen people, including some priests, submitted a petition to the judge requesting urgent measures to prevent the concert, as it 'violates the morals and teachings of the Church, damages Christian faith and its rites'. This sparked controversy and online sales, with prices rising to £95 on the eve of the concert.

On 9 January, the judge rejected the petition, citing various procedural irregularities. In a statement issued on the same day, the nightclub announced that 'no religious symbols will be displayed' and that 'Father Guilherme will not wear religious clothing'. Satisfied with this response, the petitioners decided not to demonstrate in front of the nightclub as initially planned.

On the evening of the concert, heavy security measures were in place outside the venue and it was clear that the press was not welcome. The managers and bouncers were no different to those in any other club in the Western world, being cynically business-oriented with no concern other than making money. Three DJs were due to perform during the evening, with Father Guilherme scheduled to play second. Boys and girls of various ages began entering, dressed as one would for a night out at the disco. "Are you here for Father Guilherme? Why?" we ask a young man waiting outside. "Yes, I'm here for him. I came because I think we need people like him who

bring the church closer to young people and build bridges. The Church isn't just about going to Mass..."

"Did you go to Father Guilherme's Mass today?" we interrupt him. 'No,' he replies. 'I came out of curiosity,' says a girl waiting with her boyfriend. "Father Guilherme is a social media phenomenon, and I want to see what he's like in real life."

Neither of the couple went to Father Guilherme's Mass, and none of the other people we interviewed that evening did either. A young man covered in tattoos tells us that he was invited to the event and came without thinking too much about it. 'Don't you think it's strange that Father Guilherme is both a priest and a DJ?' we ask him. 'Very strange. But we live in strange times, so it's OK.' 'I came because I trust Pope Leo,' says a much more modest-looking girl. 'He appeared on video during one of his concerts in Slovakia, so I know he supports him, and that makes me feel comfortable.' Another girl leaves, looking dejected: the ticket they offered her costs \$120, and she has decided not to buy it.

Finally, we go in. The young people get something to drink at the bar – after all, we are Christians and our religion does not forbid it. Just after midnight, Father Guilherme arrives. He is wearing a black T-shirt with white writing and immediately starts fiddling with his equipment; he is going to play for two and a half hours straight in front of several hundred people. He plays 1990s techno music with deep bass that is frankly repetitive and uninteresting, interspersed with very brief 'mystical' interludes of bells, hints of 'Gloria' and 'Alleluia', and fragments of symphonic music. Born in 1974, perhaps Father Guilherme's taste is affected by his age. He seems more like a selector than a DJ: his skills at the console are not brilliant, to say the least.

Vaguely peaceful images flash across the screens: a large white dove, Pope John Paul II, a rainbow. Those present follow him enthusiastically, staying with him the whole time. Towards the end, he gets the audience to sing along and plays John Lennon's *Give Peace a Chance* before the grand finale: Pope Francis delivers his infamous 'Todos, todos, todos' speech in Spanish on video. We thought we had left that behind us, but instead... 'A DJ set like any other, perhaps with a little less drugs,' comments a girl on her way out. "Amazing! Extraordinary," remarks another. Young people, some slightly euphoric and others unsteady on their feet, swarm towards the valet parking attendants who have parked their SUVs. Father Guilherme is driven away in a large black car with tinted windows, which screeches off.

The only violation we witnessed was apparently that of good taste, so the strict Lebanese censors can sleep soundly knowing that Father Guilherme will not corrupt

young people any more than other figures, priests or otherwise. However, the evening leaves a bitter taste in the mouth; yet another wasted opportunity for a Church that no longer knows which way to turn.