

## **Highlights from the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops**

Excerpts from some of the Synodal Fathers' speeches and presentations

**Source: Vatican Information Service**

October 24, 2010

### **POPE BENEDICT'S HOMILY --We Must Never Resign Ourselves to the Absence of Peace**

The Pope presided at the celebration of the Eucharist to mark the closure of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops and concelebrated Mass with 177 Synod Fathers and sixty-nine collaborators.

In his homily, the Holy Father noted how today's first reading and responsorial psalm "stress the theme of prayer, emphasising that it is much more powerful in God's heart when those who pray suffer want and affliction. ... Our thoughts go to our many brothers and sisters who live in the region of the Middle East and who find themselves in trying situations, at times very burdensome, both because of material poverty and because of discouragement, tension and, sometimes, fear.

"Today", Benedict XVI added, "the Word of God also offers us a light of consoling hope where it presents prayer, personified, that 'will not desist until the Most High responds and does justice for the righteous, and executes judgement'. This link between prayer and justice makes us think of many situations in the world, particularly in the Middle East. The cry of the poor and the oppressed finds an immediate echo in God, Who desires to intervene to create a way out, to restore a future of freedom, a horizon of hope".

"The synodal assembly which concludes today always kept in mind the icon of the first Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles: 'The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul'. This is a reality we experienced over these days, in which we shared the joys and pains, the concerns and hopes of Christians in the Middle East. We experienced the unity of the Church in the variety of Churches present in that region. ... Thus have we enhanced the liturgical, spiritual and theological wealth of the Eastern Catholic Churches, as well as of the Latin Church. ... We hope that this positive experience may be repeated in the various communities of the Middle East, encouraging the participation of the faithful in liturgical celebrations of other Catholic rites, thus opening themselves to the dimensions of the universal Church".

"Joint prayer also helped us to face the challenges of the Catholic Church in the Middle East. One of these challenges is communion within each 'sui iuris' Church, as well as the relationships between the various Catholic Churches of different traditions. As today's Gospel reminded us, we need humility in order to recognise our limitations, our errors and omissions, in order to be able to be truly 'united, heart and soul'. Fuller communion within the Catholic Church also favours ecumenical dialogue with other Churches and ecclesial communities. During this synodal assembly the Catholic Church has reiterated its profound desire to pursue such dialogue".

"The words of the Lord Jesus may be applied to Christians in the Middle East: 'There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom'. Indeed, even if they are few, they are bearers of the Good News of the love of God for man, love which revealed itself in the Holy Land in the person of Jesus Christ. ... It is the only Word able to break the vicious circle of vengeance, hate, and violence. From a purified heart, at peace with God and neighbour, arise intentions and initiatives for peace at the local, national, and international level. In these actions, to whose accomplishment the whole international community is called, Christians as full-fledged citizens can and must do their part in the spirit of the Beatitudes, becoming builders of peace and apostles of reconciliation for the benefit of all society".

The Pope continued: "Conflicts, wars, violence and terrorism have gone on for too long in the Middle East. Peace, which is a gift of God, is also the result of the efforts of men of goodwill, of national and international institutions, in particular of the States most involved in the search for a solution to conflicts. We must never resign ourselves to the absence of peace. Peace is possible. Peace is urgent. Peace is the indispensable condition for a life of dignity for individuals and society. Peace is also the best remedy to avoid emigration from the Middle East".

Another contribution Christians can make to society is to promote "authentic freedom of religion and conscience, one of the fundamental human rights that each State should always respect. In numerous countries of the Middle East there exists freedom of belief, while the space given to the freedom of religious practice is often quite limited. Increasing this space of freedom is essential in order to guarantee that all members of the various religious communities may enjoy the true freedom to live and profess their faith. This topic could become the subject of dialogue between Christians and Muslims, a dialogue whose urgency and usefulness was reiterated by the Synod Fathers".

At the end of his homily, the Holy Father recalled how the synodal assembly "often underlined the need to present the Gospel anew to people who do not know it well or who have even moved away from the Church. Frequent mention was made of the need for a new evangelisation in the Middle East. ... For this reason, ... I have decided to dedicate the next Ordinary General Assembly, in 2012, to the following theme: 'Nova evangelizatio ad christianam fidem tradendam - The new evangelisation for the transmission of the Christian faith'".

And the Pope concluded: "Dear brothers and sisters of the Middle East! May the experience of these days assure you that you are never alone, that you are always accompanied by the Holy See and the whole Church, which, having been born in Jerusalem, spread through the Middle East and then the rest of the world".

October 23, 2010

#### **FOURTEENTH GENERAL CONGREGATION SPECIAL COUNCIL FOR THE MIDDLE EAST**

The final list of propositions was presented and voted upon and the names of the members of the Special Council for the Middle East of the Secretariat General of the Synod of Bishops were announced. They are:

- Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue.

- Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.
- His Beatitude Antonios Naguib, Patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts, Egypt.
- His Beatitude Ignace Youssif III Younan, Patriarch of Antioch of the Syrians, Lebanon.
- His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, patriarch emeritus of Jerusalem of the Latins.
- Archbishop Cyrille Salim Bustros M.S.S.P. of Newton of the Greek-Melkites, U.S.A.
- Archbishop Boutros Marayati of Aleppo of the Armenians, Syria.
- Archbishop Joseph Soueif of Cyprus of the Maronites, Cyprus.
- Bishop Bechara Rai O.M.M. of Jbeil, Byblos of the Maronites, Lebanon.
- Bishop Antoine Audo S.J. of Aleppo of the Chaldeans, Syria.
- Bishop Shlemon Warduni, auxiliary of Babylonia of the Chaldeans, Iraq.

October 23, 2010

### **SYNOD PRESENTS FORTY-FOUR PROPOSITIONS TO THE HOLY FATHER**

The working sessions of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops concluded this morning with the approval of forty-four propositions which the Synod Fathers have presented to Benedict XVI. The propositions are given to the Holy Father for him to consider while preparing the Apostolic Exhortation, the official closing document of a Synod.

The propositions are divided into three sections: The Christian Presence in the Middle East, Ecclesial Communion, and Christian Witnesses of the Resurrection and Love.

The Synod Fathers recall how "in a world marked by division and extreme positions, we are called to live communion in the Church, remaining open to everyone and avoiding the trap of confessionalism". They also note that "the attention of the whole world should be focused on the tragic situation of certain Christian communities in the Middle East which suffer all manner of trials sometimes even to the point of martyrdom".

On the subject of migration, they suggest creating "an office or commission entrusted with the study of the phenomenon ... and the factors behind it, so as to find ways of stopping it", and doing everything possible "to boost the presence of Christians in their own countries of origin".

"To better welcome and guide immigrants to the Middle East", reads another proposition, "their Churches of origin are asked to maintain regular contact with the host Churches, assisting them to set up the structures the immigrants need".

The section dedicated to the subject of ecclesial communion speaks of communion in the bosom of the Church and calls for greater pastoral care of vocations. It is also suggested that greater use be made "of the Arabic language in the major institutions of the Holy See and official meetings, so that Christians of Arab culture have access to information from the Holy See in their mother tongue".

"With a view to the pastoral service of our faithful, wherever they are to be found, and to respect the traditions of the Eastern Churches", reads another proposition "it would be desirable to study the possibility of having married priests outside the patriarchal territory".

The proposition dedicated to the question of ecumenism suggests "working for a common date for the celebrations of Christmas and Easter", and expresses the desire "to inaugurate an annual feast in common for all the martyrs of the Churches of the Middle East".

In the section dedicated to Christian Witness, the Synod Fathers suggest "the creation of catechetical centres where they are lacking" and highlight the vital importance of "ongoing formation and collaboration between the different Churches at the level of the laity, seminaries and universities".

Reiterating the importance of the communications media "for Christian formation in the Middle East, as well as for the proclamation of the faith", the Synod Fathers advocate "the aid and maintenance of the existing structures in this area".

On the question of the family, they stress the need "to make better provisions in centres for marriage preparation, counselling and guidance centres, and in the spiritual and human guidance of young families. ... Child bearing and the good education of children should be encouraged. The practice of home visiting by pastors should be revived", they write.

The Synod Fathers "commit themselves to ensure young people have the spiritual and theological formation they need" and "to build with them bridges of dialogue so as to bring down the walls of division and separation in societies".

Inter-religious dialogue must be strengthened so as "to strive for the purification of memory through forgiveness for the events of the past, and to seek a better future together". "Initiatives of dialogue and co-operation with Jews are to be encouraged so as to foster human and religious values, freedom, justice, peace and fraternity. Reading the Old Testament and getting to know Jewish traditions lead to a better understanding of the Jewish religion. We reject anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, while distinguishing between religion and politics", the Synod Fathers say.

On the subject of relations with Muslims, the Synod Fathers highlight the importance of promoting "the notion of citizenship, the dignity of the human person, equal rights and duties and religious freedom, including both freedom of worship and freedom of conscience". They note how "Christians in the Middle East are called to pursue a fruitful dialogue of life with Muslims, ... leaving every negative prejudice aside, ... and together combating every sort of fundamentalism and violence in the name of religion".

October 23, 2010

### **THIRTEENTH GENERAL CONGREGATION FINAL MESSAGE OF SYNOD FOR MIDDLE EAST**

The Synod Father's approved their Final Message. Extracts from the English-language version are given below:

## I. THE CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE EAST: COMMUNION AND WITNESS THROUGHOUT HISTORY. THE JOURNEY OF FAITH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

"The first Christian community was born in the Middle East. From there, the Apostles after Pentecost went out to evangelise the whole world. ... We are now at a turning point in our history: The God Who gave us the faith in our Eastern lands 2000 years ago, calls us today to persevere with courage, strength and steadfastness in bearing the message of Christ and witnessing to His Gospel, the Gospel of love and peace".

"Today we face many challenges. ... What Christ asks from our Churches is to strengthen communion within every 'sui iuris' Church, and between the Catholic Churches of different traditions, and to exert every effort in prayer and charitable acts in order to attain the full unity of all Christians".

"We have evaluated the social situation and the public security in all our countries in the Middle East. We have taken account of the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the whole region, especially on the Palestinians who are suffering the consequences of the Israeli occupation: the lack of freedom of movement, the wall of separation and the military checkpoints, the political prisoners, the demolition of homes, the disturbance of socio-economic life and the thousands of refugees. We have reflected on the suffering and insecurity in which Israelis live. We have meditated on the situation of the holy city of Jerusalem. We are anxious about the unilateral initiatives that threaten its composition and risk changing its demographic balance. With all this in mind, we see that a just and lasting peace is the only salvation for everyone and for the good of the region and its peoples.

"In our meetings and our prayers we reflected on the keen sufferings of the Iraqi people. We recalled the Christians killed in Iraq, the continued suffering of the Church in Iraq, and her children who have been displaced and dispersed throughout the world, taking their concerns for their country and their homeland with them.

"The Synod Fathers expressed their solidarity with the people and the Churches in Iraq expressing the hope that the emigrants, forced to leave their own country, might find in their host countries the support necessary to be able to return to their homeland and live in security".

"Our mission, based on our faith and our duty towards our homeland, obliges us to contribute to the construction of our countries together with all citizens, Muslims, Jews and Christians alike".

## II. COMMUNION AND WITNESS WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCHES OF THE MIDDLE EAST. TO THE FAITHFUL OF OUR CHURCHES

"We wish to greet you, Christians of the Middle East, and thank you for all you have achieved in your families and societies, in your Churches and nations. We commend you for your perseverance in times of adversity, suffering and anguish".

"Those of you who suffer in body, in soul and spirit, the oppressed, those forced from your homes, the persecuted, prisoners and detainees, we carry you all in our prayers. Unite your sufferings to those of Christ the Redeemer and seek patience and strength in His cross. By the merit of your sufferings, you gain God's merciful love".

"We now wish to address the women of our Churches. To you we express our appreciation for what you are in the various states of your life: girls, mothers, educators, consecrated women and those engaged in public life. We honour you because you harbour human life within you from its very beginnings. ... God has given you particular sensibility for everything pertaining to education, humanitarian work and apostolic life. We give thanks to God for your activities and we hope that you will be able to exercise greater responsibility in public life".

"Young women and men, ... plan your life under the loving gaze of Christ. Be responsible citizens and sincere believers. The Church joins you in your desire to find work commensurate with your talents. ... Overcome the temptation of materialism and consumerism. Be strong in your Christian values".

"We appreciate the role of the communications media, both printed and audio-visual. ... With regard to the Middle East, 'Tele Lumiere-Noursat' merits a special mention. We hope it will be able to continue its service of providing information and education in the faith, working for Christian unity, consolidating the Christian presence in the Middle East, strengthening inter-religious dialogue and the communion of all peoples of Middle Eastern origin all over the world".

"To our faithful in the diaspora, ... you the children of our Churches and our countries who have been forced to emigrate, we accompany you with our prayers. ... Look to the future with confidence and joy. Hold fast to your spiritual values, to your cultural traditions and to your national heritage, in order to give your host countries the best of yourselves and the best of what you have. We thank the Churches of the countries of the diaspora which have received our faithful and unceasingly collaborate with us to ensure they receive the necessary pastoral care".

"We send our greetings to all immigrants of various nationalities, who have come to our countries seeking employment. ... We ask our Churches to pay special attention to these brothers and sisters and their difficulties, whatever their religion, especially when their rights and dignity are subject to abuse. ... This is why we call upon the governments of host countries to respect and defend their rights".

### III. COMMUNION AND WITNESS TOGETHER WITH THE ORTHODOX AND PROTESTANT COMMUNITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

"We share the same journey. Our challenges are the same and our future is the same. We wish to bear witness together as disciples of Christ. Only through our unity can we accomplish the mission that God has entrusted to us, despite the differences among our Churches. ... We acknowledge and encourage all initiatives for ecumenical dialogue in each of our countries".

### IV. CO-OPERATION AND DIALOGUE WITH OUR JEWISH FELLOW-CITIZENS

"The same Sacred Scriptures unite us: the Old Testament, which is the Word of God for both you and us. ... Vatican Council II published the document 'Nostra aetate' which concerns inter-religious dialogue with Judaism, Islam and the other religions. ... Ongoing dialogue is taking place between the Church and representatives of Judaism. We hope that this dialogue can bring us to work together to press those in authority to put an end to the political conflict which continues to divide us and to disrupt daily life in our countries".

## V. CO-OPERATION AND DIALOGUE WITH OUR MUSLIM FELLOW-CITIZENS

"We are united by faith in the one God and by the commandment that says: do good and avoid evil. ... Together we will construct our civil societies on the basis of citizenship, religious freedom and freedom of conscience. Together we will work for the promotion of justice, peace, the rights of persons and the values of life and of the family. The construction of our countries is our shared responsibility. ... Our duty, then, is to educate believers in inter-religious dialogue, in the acceptance of pluralism and mutual esteem".

## VI. OUR PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE: AN APPEAL TO THE GOVERNMENTS AND TO THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN OUR COUNTRIES

"We address you concerning the importance of equality among all citizens. Christians are original and authentic citizens, loyal to their homeland and to their national duties and obligations. It is natural that they should enjoy all the rights of citizenship, freedom of conscience, freedom of worship, freedom of education and teaching, and access to the communications media. We appeal to you to redouble your efforts to establish a just and lasting peace throughout the region and to stop the arms race. This will lead to security and economic prosperity and stop the haemorrhage of emigration which empties our countries of its living resources".

## VII. APPEAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

"The citizens of the countries of the Middle East call upon the international community, particularly the United Nations, to work conscientiously to find a peaceful, just and definitive solution in the region, by applying Security Council resolutions and taking the necessary legal steps to put an end to the occupation of various Arab territories.

The Palestinian people will thus have an independent and sovereign homeland where they can live with dignity and security. The State of Israel will be able to enjoy peace and security within internationally recognized borders. The Holy City of Jerusalem will be able to acquire its proper status, which respects its particular character, its holiness and the religious heritage of the three religions: Jewish, Christian and Muslim. We hope that the two-State-solution will become a reality and not just a dream.

Iraq will be able to put an end to the consequences of a deadly war and re-establish security, something which will protect all its citizens with all their social, religious and national structures.

"Lebanon will be able to enjoy sovereignty over its entire territory, strengthen its national unity and continue its vocation as a model of coexistence between Christians and Muslims, through dialogue between different cultures and religions, and the promotion of basic public freedoms.

"We condemn violence and terrorism from wherever it may proceed as well as all religious extremism. We condemn all forms of racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Christianism and Islamophobia and we call upon religions to assume their responsibility to promote dialogue between cultures and civilizations in our region and in the entire world".

## **CONCLUSION: CONTINUE TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE DIVINE LIFE THAT WAS SHOWN TO US IN THE PERSON OF JESUS**

"Brothers and sisters, in closing, we say with St. John the Apostle: ... 'This life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us'. ... This Divine Life ... will always remain the life of our Churches in the Middle East and the object of our witness, sustained by the promise of the Lord: 'Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'. Together we proceed on our journey with hope".

"We confess that thus far we have not done everything in our power to experience better communion in our communities. We have not done everything possible to confirm you in your faith and to give you the spiritual nourishment you need in your difficulties. The Lord invites us to conversion as individuals and communities. Today we return to you full of hope, strength and resolution, bringing the message of the Synod and its recommendations, that we might study them together and put them into practice in our Churches, each according to its state. We hope also that this new effort may be an ecumenical effort".

October 21, 2010

### **TWELFTH GENERAL CONGREGATION**

The unified list of propositions was presented. ... Subsequently the Synod Fathers, meeting in language groups, prepared their amendments to the propositions. ... At the end of the day they delivered the collectively amended propositions to the secretary general of the Synod.

October 20, 2010

### **UNIFICATION OF THE PROPOSITIONS**

The relator general, the secretary general and the relators of the language groups continue work on the unification of the propositions. Once complete, these propositions will be presented to the Pope to use as he sees fit in preparing the Apostolic Exhortation, the document which officially closes the Synod.

October 19, 2010

### **SYNOD FATHERS MEET IN LANGUAGE GROUPS**

The Synod Fathers who are currently participating in the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops met in language groups ... to prepare and approve the propositions on the theme of the synodal assembly.

October 18, 2010

### **ELEVENTH GENERAL CONGREGATION**

The "Relatio post disceptationem" (report after the discussion) was presented. Extracts from the document follow:



## THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

"The proclamation of the Gospel and the proclamation of Christ to all peoples is the supreme duty of our Churches and all Churches. Our Churches need to reawaken our missionary zeal and to renew in us the meaning, significance, ardour, enthusiasm and dynamism of our being missionary. ... Missionary formation is necessary for our faithful, especially those in leadership positions in the life of the Church".

"Religion must not be politicised nor the State take precedence over religion. ... Modern media (texts, website, internet, television, radio) have an important place in this field. They provide a powerful and valuable means for spreading the Christian message, for meeting the challenges it faces, and for communicating with the faithful of the diaspora. People in key positions need formation to achieve these ends. Eastern Christians must commit themselves to working for the common good, in all its aspects, as they have always done".

"The socio-political situations in our countries have a direct impact on Christians, who feel their negative consequences more strongly. While condemning the violence whatever its origin and calling for a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we express our solidarity with the Palestinian people, whose current situation encourages fundamentalism. We also call upon the political world to pay sufficient attention to the tragic situation of Christians in Iraq who are the main victims of the war and its effects".

"Religious freedom is an essential component of human rights. The lack of religious freedom is most often associated with deprivation of fundamental rights. Freedom of worship is an aspect of religious freedom. In most of our countries freedom of worship is guaranteed by the constitution. But even then, in some countries, certain acts or practices limit its application. ... Religious freedom is not a relativism that treats all faiths equally. Rather it is the result of the duty of every person to adhere to the truth by a firm choice of conscience, while respecting the dignity of each person ... Religious freedom also includes the right to confess one's faith, which is a right and duty for every religion".

"One of the major challenges threatening the presence of Christians in some countries in the Middle East is emigration. ... The main causes of this troubling phenomenon are economic and political situations, the rise of fundamentalism, and the restriction of freedoms and equality, strongly exacerbated by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Iraq. ... Emigration is a natural right which falls to the free choice of individuals and families, especially those living in harsh conditions. But the Church has the duty to encourage her faithful to remain as witnesses, apostles and builders of peace and wellbeing in their countries".

"The danger threatening Christians in the Middle East comes not only from their minority status, or external threats, but above all from their being distanced from the truth of the Gospel, from their faith and their mission. This divided life is more dangerous to Christianity than any other threat. The true tragedy of man is not when he suffers because of his mission, but when he no longer has a mission and thereby loses the meaning and purpose of his life".

## ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

"We need a better appreciation, understanding and experience of the unity of the Church. It is essential that we teach the Church as a 'communion' in catechesis, homilies, and in the formation

of clergy, religious and laity. Communion must first be affective before becoming effective. It is important for us to cultivate a deep sense of spiritual communion, of belonging to one and the same Church".

"'Communion' among Churches is the first goal and first task of this Synod. ... Pastors must help the faithful to know, appreciate, love and live the beautiful variety of the Church in unity. ... Inter-ecclesial relations must be encouraged, not only among the 'sui iuris' Churches in the Middle East, but also with the Eastern Churches and with the Latin Church in the diaspora, in close unity with the Holy Father, the Holy See and pontifical representatives".

"It is of vital importance to appreciate the role of lay men and women and their participation in the life and mission of the Church. In order for this Synod to become, for them and for the entire Church, a true spiritual, pastoral and social springtime, we need to reinforce the commitment of the laity to the joint pastoral work of the Church. Women, both consecrated and lay, need to find their proper place and mission in this field".

"Mission and ecumenism are closely linked. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches have much in common. ... A sincere effort is necessary to overcome prejudices, to better understand one another, and to aim for the fullness of communion in the faith, the Sacraments and hierarchical service. This Synod should help towards further communion and unity with our sister Orthodox Churches and the ecclesial communities".

"It has been pointed out that ecumenism is going through a crisis today. ... It is vital to make ecumenism a primary goal in episcopal meetings and conferences. The creation of an ecumenical commission in the Council of Eastern Catholic Patriarchs has been proposed. The media should be used to reinforce and vivify ecumenism".

#### CHRISTIAN WITNESS. WITNESSES OF RESURRECTION AND LOVE

"We must encourage all the faithful, but especially priests, religious, consecrated persons and those responsible for pastoral activity and the apostolate to follow the Church's teachings and to study the documents of the Magisterium".

"Special attention must be given to the family, which risks being torn apart and undermined by Western relativism and the predominantly non-Christian outlook in our region. Families of mixed religions must be the subject of special pastoral care. The catechetical manuals must make up for shortcomings and correct errors which are to be found elsewhere".

"It was suggested that a commission be formed for the vitalisation and co-ordination of the communications media in the Middle East. ... The media and communication are a powerful means to consolidate communion".

"In our Eastern Churches, the divine liturgy is the centre of religious life. It has an important role in safeguarding Christian identity, in strengthening membership of the Church and in animating the life of faith. We must preserve and cultivate the sense of the sacred, of symbols and of popular religiosity, which needs to be purified and deepened".

"The Israeli-Palestinian conflict affects relations between Christians and Jews. The Holy See has clearly and repeatedly expressed its position, appealing for both peoples to be able to live in peace, each in its own homeland, with secure and internationally recognised borders. ... Our Churches reject anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism".

"For a fruitful dialogue, Christians and Muslims must know one another better. ... Numerous initiatives prove that it is possible to come together and work on the basis of shared values (peace, solidarity, non-violence). ... The Eastern Churches are the most qualified to promote inter-religious dialogue with Islam. This duty is theirs because of their history, their presence and their mission. ... It is necessary to avoid any provocative, offensive, humiliating action and any anti-Islamic attitude. To be authentic, dialogue must take place in truth".

"The West tends to be identified with Christianity and the choices of States are often attributed to the Church. In reality, however, the governments of the West are secular and increasingly opposed to the Christian faith. It is important to explain this reality as well as the positive significance of the secular State, which distinguishes politics from religion. Within this context Christians have an obligation and a mission to live out Gospel values. ... It is by our lives that we must testify constantly, without syncretism or relativism, but with humility, respect, sincerity, and love".

## CONCLUSION

"What does the future hold for Christians in the Middle East? 'Do not be afraid, O little flock!'".

"Together we must work to prepare a new dawn for the Middle East. We are strengthened by the prayers, understanding and love of our brothers and sisters around the world. We are not alone. This Synod has made that very clear".

October 16, 2010

## TENTH GENERAL CONGREGATION

During the session, the draft of the final message was presented and discussed, and a first round of voting took place for members of the Special Council for the Middle East of the General Secretariat of the Synod.

October 15, 2010

## NINTH GENERAL CONGREGATION

CARDINAL WILLIAM JOSEPH LEVADA, PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH. "I would envision a useful study and exchange of views about how the ministry of the Successor of Peter, with its essential doctrinal characteristics, could be exercised in different ways, according to the diverse needs of times and places. This remains a chapter of ecclesiology to be further explored and completed. Such theological reflection, however, does not supplant the vital testimony of the Catholics of the Middle East to their Orthodox and Muslim brethren about how Church doctrine develops in the living Apostolic Tradition, guided by Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church's Magisterium in every age.

This Magisterium necessarily includes the role of the Pope as head of the Apostolic College of Bishops, together with Christ's commission to confirm His brethren in the unity of faith so that 'all may be one'".

**ARCHBISHOP CYRIL VASIL S.J., SECRETARY OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES.** "Synodality has a special bond with the mechanism for choosing candidates to the episcopacy. Checks on the suitability of the candidates should be carried out by the bishops and the Synod in a more appropriate manner than sometimes happens at present, in order to facilitate and speed up the process of pontifical assent. ... First and foremost, formative and academic institutions must be constantly evaluated as regards the level of cultural and spiritual formation they offer. The difficulties students encounter in their higher studies outside the Eastern context, for example in Rome, cannot be ignored and there is no point in hiding them. We have to ask ourselves if the time has finally come to open a first cycle of Eastern theological studies here in Rome, in an Eastern Theological Faculty".

October 15, 2010

### **EIGHTH GENERAL CONGREGATION**

**BISHOP SHAHAN SARKISSIAN OF ALEPPO, SYRIA, ARMENIAN PRIMATE OF SYRIA.** "We must give clearer and more concrete witness of the unity of the Churches, which today is more imperative than ever for the Middle East. ... Mutual respect and reciprocal understanding are the foundation for Islamic-Christian dialogue and coexistence. We must dedicate more profound attention to coexistence with Islam, while remaining faithful to Christian mission and identity. ... Priorities include relaunching and promoting Christian education, spiritual renovation and diaconate, internal evangelisation and the transmission of Christian values to young people, active participation of lay people in the life and vocation of the Church. We must underline the importance of ecumenical co-operation and bilateral dialogue. The reform and reorganisation of the Council of Middle Eastern Churches constitutes a major priority to which member Churches are dedicating their efforts".

**CARDINAL JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN, PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE.** "The Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops represents an opportunity and a challenge. An opportunity, because it could lead to better understanding: (1) that the unresolved conflicts in the region are not caused by religious reasons, as evinced by the presence among us of representatives of Judaism and of Islam; (2) of the urgency for a three-way reflection (Jews, Christians and Muslims) on the place of religions in Middle Eastern societies. It is also a challenge, to give Middle Eastern Christians concrete guidelines. Let us not be shy in reclaiming not only freedom of worship, but also religious freedom. Society and State should neither force a person to act against his conscience, nor hinder him from acting according to his conscience. Let us invest more in schools and universities, which are attended by both Christians and Muslims. They are indispensable places of co-existence. Let us ask ourselves if we are doing enough, at the level of the local Churches, to encourage our Christians to stay: housing, tuition, healthcare. We cannot expect everything from others".

BISHOP GIACINTO-BOULOS MARCUZZO, AUXILIARY OF JERUSALEM OF THE LATINS. "Formation is absolutely the greatest need of the Church in the Middle East; it is the pastoral priority that the Special Synod for the Middle East should adopt. ... The best approach to times of novelty and change is the cultural mediation of faith, and this is also the best approach to our situation in Israel where there are two great historical novelties for the Church: (a) an Arab-Palestinian minority living in a Jewish majority; (b) the birth of a Hebrew-speaking Catholic community".

AGOSTINO BORROMEO, GOVERNOR GENERAL OF THE EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM. "(N)ew strategies could also be sought with the aim of creating better living conditions in favour of Christians...: (1) Building social housing. (2) Creating medical clinics in places far distant from hospitals. (3) Granting microcredit, especially to finance activities that create new sources of income, or augment those that already exist. (4) Creating a system of microinsurance, with particular reference to the field of healthcare. ... Naturally, these initiatives will have to be put into effect in close collaboration with the local ecclesiastical authorities, and under the control of each of the individual Churches. Although the results may be modest, they would represent a concrete witness of the closeness of Christians all over the world to the problems and sufferings of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East".

October 14, 2010

## **SEVENTH GENERAL CONGREGATION**

CARDINAL PETER KODWO APPIAH TURKSON, PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE. "Churches and minority religions in the Middle East must not be subject to discrimination, violence, defamatory propaganda (anti-Christian), or the denial of permits for building places of worship or for organising public functions. In fact, the promotion of the Resolutions against the Defamation of Religions in the framework of the United Nations should not limit itself to Islam (Islamophobia) in the Western world. It should include Christianity ... in the Islamic world. We could also promote the adoption, again within the UN framework, of a resolution on religious freedom as an alternative to the resolution on the defamation of religions".

RAYMOND MOUSSALLI, VICAR GENERAL OF THE PATRIARCHATE OF BABYLON OF THE CHALDEANS, JORDAN. "We are a part of the history and culture of this Middle Eastern region, and if we were forced to abandon it we would lose our identity within a generation. For this reason I hope that one of the things to emerge from this Synod will be the need for much closer collaboration between the heads of the various Churches, in mutual dialogue with our moderate Muslim brothers. ... We want to make the international community aware that it cannot remain silent in the face of the massacre of Christians in Iraq, and to encourage countries of Catholic tradition to do something for Iraqi Christians, beginning with placing pressure on their own governments. We are experiencing a catastrophic moment, with the emigration of families and the loss of our people who still speak the Aramaic language spoken by Our Lord Jesus Christ".

## **SIXTH GENERAL CONGREGATION**

HIS BEATITUDE IGNACE YOUSSEF III YOUNAN, PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH OF THE SYRIANS, LEBANON. "For the past 2000 years, and especially during the last fourteen centuries, Christians have become a minority in their own lands and have been harshly tested in their witness of faith, even to the point of martyrdom. Our beloved Saviour, before His last sacrifice, defended the Truth, synonym of the unalienable right of a person to freedom, while proclaiming His salvation to all, even to those who opposed His message of ineffable and universal love."

BISHOP CAMILLO BALLIN M.C.C.J., APOSTOLIC VICAR OF KUWAIT. "In Muslim tradition, the Gulf is the land sacred to the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed, and no other religion should exist there. How can we reconcile this affirmation with the reality of our Churches in the Gulf where there are approximately three million Catholics? They come from Asia and other regions. The reality of their presence, which cannot be overlooked, questions the Muslim assertion. We cannot limit our assistance to these faithful only to celebration of Sunday or even daily Mass, and to our homilies. We must recover the missionary aspect of the Church. Indeed, a Church which does not have a missionary spirit and which turns in on itself, on its own devotions and traditions, is destined to live a life that is not the life 'in abundance' the Lord wished. . . . We ask our Muslim brothers to give us the space to be able to pray properly".

ARCHBISHOP PAUL NABIL EL-SAYAH, PATRIARCHAL EXARCH OF ANTIOCH OF THE MARONITES, ARCHBISHOP OF HAIFA, PATRIARCHAL EXARCH IN JERUSALEM, PALESTINE AND JORDAN. "The ecumenical question, in the Middle East in general and in the Holy Land in particular, has become one of the most important challenges facing the Church at all levels. We have thirteen major Churches in Jerusalem, with well-defined traditions and heritage, ... and clearly marked physical and psychological frontiers. The scandal of our division is sometimes transmitted live, especially when it occurs in the Holy Sepulchre on Good Friday or in the Church of the Nativity on Christmas morning, while the communications media looks on. ... There can be no true witness unless our Churches are united and work together. Meeting the ecumenical challenge is not an option, but an urgent necessity".

October 13, 2010

## **FIFTH GENERAL CONGREGATION**

HIS BEATITUDE NERSES BEDROS XIX TARMOUNI, PATRIARCH OF CILICIA OF THE ARMENIANS, LEBANON. "Looking back to the first Christian community we see that the first Christians did not have an easy life, nor were they exempt from difficulties and adversities; quite the contrary, they endured outrage and persecutions. But this did not prevent them from proclaiming the teachings of Jesus integrally, or from practicing forgiveness. We find similar situations in our own times. Christians not enlightened by the Holy Spirit think they should be spared difficulties. It is important to point this out, and in this sense to re-evangelise our faithful by presenting them the faith as it was lived during the first centuries of Christianity. This does not mean that we should not fight to re-establish justice and peace in the Middle East. But it would be wrong to consider that, without justice and peace, Christians cannot fully live their

faith, or that they must emigrate. ... On the contrary, following the example of ... their ancestors in the Middle East, they must work together with their Christian brethren to bear witness through life and through example, to make Jesus' message of love more convincing".

**BISHOP PAUL HINDER O.F.M. CAP., APOSTOLIC VICAR OF ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES.** "The two vicariates of the Arabian peninsula, comprising Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, U.A.E., Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, have no native Christians. The three million Catholics in a population of sixty-five million inhabitants are all labour migrants from a hundred nations, the majority from the Philippines and India. ... There are strict immigration laws (restricting the number of priests). ... There is no freedom of religion (no Muslim can convert but Christians are welcome into Islam), and only limited freedom of worship in designated places, granted by benevolent rulers (except in Saudi Arabia)".

**ARCHBISHOP BERHANEYESUS DEMEREW SOURAPHIEL C.M. OF ADDIS ABEBA, ETHIOPIA, PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE ETHIOPIAN CHURCH, AND PRESIDENT OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA.**

"Ethiopia has about eighty million inhabitants, half of whom are below the age of twenty-five. The great challenge which the country faces is poverty and its consequences, such as unemployment. Many young people, aspiring to escape poverty, attempt to emigrate, by any means. Those who emigrate to the Middle East are mostly young women who go legally or illegally to seek employment as domestic workers because most of them lack professional training. In order, to facilitate their journey, the Christians change their Christian names to Muslim names, and dress as Muslims so that their visas can be processed easily. In this way, Christians are indirectly forced to deny their Christian roots and heritage. ... Even if there are exceptions where workers are treated well and with kindness, the great majority suffer exploitation and abuse. ... Modern migration is looked upon as 'modern slavery'".

October 13, 2010

#### **FOURTH GENERAL CONGREGATION**

**HIS BEATITUDE GREGOIRE III LAHAM B.S., PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH OF THE GREEK-MELKITES, SYRIA.** "The Christian presence in the Arab world is threatened by the cycles of war afflicting the region, the cradle of Christianity. The main reason is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the fundamentalist movements, Hamas and Hezbollah are consequences of this conflict as well of internal dissension, slowness in development, the rise of hatred, the loss of hope in the young who constitute sixty percent of the population in Arab countries. The emigration of Christians is among the most dangerous effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: emigration which will make Arab society a society of only one colour, Muslim, faced with a European society identified as Christian. Should this happen, should the East be emptied of its Christians, this would mean that any occasion would be propitious for a new clash of cultures, of civilisations and even of religions, a destructive clash between the Muslim Arab East and the Christian West".

**CARDINAL JOHN PATRICK FOLEY, GRAND MASTER OF THE EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM.** "... (T)he more time

passes, the more difficult such a (two-State) solution becomes, as the building of Israeli settlements and Israeli-controlled infrastructure in East Jerusalem and in other parts of the West Bank make increasingly difficult the development of a viable and integral Palestinian State. During the Holy Father's historic pilgrimage to the Holy Land last year, I had the opportunity for brief conversations with political leaders at the highest level in Jordan, Israel and Palestine. All of them spoke of the great contribution to mutual understanding made by Catholic schools in those three areas. Since Catholic schools are open to all ..., many Muslim and even some Jewish children are enrolled. The effects are apparent and inspiring. Mutual respect is engendered, which we hope will lead to reconciliation and even mutual love".

**HIS BEATITUDE FOUAD TWAL, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM OF THE LATIN.** "The Mother Church of Jerusalem ... watches over the Holy Places of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the Apostles. ... (and) must therefore be the object of love, prayer and attention from all the Church, from all bishops, priests and faithful of the People of God. To be united with the Church of Jerusalem, to live in the communion and witness which this Synod speaks about, reveals our duties as shepherds and our episcopal collegiality. To love the Holy Land implies visiting the Holy Places and meeting with the local community. To love the Holy Land is also to serve it: do not leave your Mother Church alone and isolated. Help her with your prayers, your love and your solidarity, prevent her becoming a great open-air museum. To be silent because of fear before the dramatic situation you all know about would be a sin of omission. ... The Christian community of the Holy Land (barely two percent of the population) is suffering violence and instability. It is a Church of Calvary. She has the weighty responsibility of perpetuating the message of peace and reconciliation".

**ARCHBISHOP BASILE GEORGES CASMOUSSA OF MOSUL OF THE SYRIANS, IRAQ.** "In our Middle Eastern countries, we are small minorities, much ravaged by the following factors: (1) Unbridled emigration. Christians are losing more and more trust in their own historical countries. (2) Waves of terrorism inspired by religious ideologies, Islamic or totalitarian, which deny even the principle of equality to the advantage of a fundamentalist revisionism which crushes minorities, including Christians who are the most vulnerable. (3) The alarming decrease of births among Christians, faced with an ever growing natality among Muslims. (4) The unjust accusation against Christians of being troops loaned or led by and for the so-called Christian West, and thus considered as a parasite in the nation".

October 12, 2010

### **THIRD GENERAL CONGREGATION**

**ARCHBISHOP LOUIS SAKO OF KERKUK OF THE CHALDEANS, IRAQ.** "The fatal exodus afflicting our Churches cannot be avoided, emigration is the biggest challenge which threatens our presence. The data is worrying. The Eastern Churches, and even the universal Church, must take on their responsibilities and, with the international community and local authorities, find common choices which respect the dignity of the human person. Choices which are based on equality and full citizenship, with efforts towards partnership and protection. The strength of a State must be based upon its credibility in the application of its laws at the service of its citizens,



without discrimination between the majority and the minority. We want to live in peace and freedom rather than merely surviving".

**ARCHBISHOP VINCENT LANDEL S.C.I. OF BETH, OF RABAT, MOROCCO AND PRESIDENT OF REGIONAL EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF NORTH AFRICA (CERNA).**

"Our responsibility as a Church is to help Christians to accept the differences that separate them from their Muslim friends, ... to help them cultivate an attitude of humble trust towards people different from ourselves. ... Our responsibility as a Church is to help Christians who live temporarily in our lands to understand that they can live their Christian faith with joy and passion in a totally Muslim society. This will help them to return to their own countries with different ideas about Muslims, and so eliminate the prejudices that run the risk of ruining the world".

**ARCHBISHOP PAUL YOUSSEF MATAR OF BEIRUT OF THE MARONITES, LEBANON.**

"The responsibility of the Western powers: They have committed injustices and historical errors in their encounter with the Middle East. They too should make amends by removing injustices, which whole peoples suffer especially the Palestinian people. The Christians of this region, who were unjustly identified with those powers, would benefit from these reparations thanks to their cohesion with their brothers. ... The responsibility of Christians in the West and in the rest of the world: They should show solidarity with their brothers and sisters of the Middle East, ... show more solidarity to their causes. They should also exercise pressure on public opinion at home as well as on their governments to re-establish justice in their relationships with the Middle East and Islam, and help liberate the world from fundamentalism".

## **SECOND GENERAL CONGREGATION**

**CARDINAL ROGER MICHAEL MAHONY, ARCHBISHOP OF LOS ANGELES, U.S.A.**

"While acknowledging their union with Rome, inter-ecclesial relations should be encouraged, not only among the 'sui iuris' Churches in the Middle East but especially in the diaspora. Recognising the haemorrhaging of Christians from the Middle East to Europe, Australia, and the Americas, we have sought various ways to transform emigration into a new opportunity for support for these Christians as they become established throughout the diaspora. ... The biggest challenge we face with our immigrant peoples - whether they be Middle Eastern Catholics or Vietnamese Catholics who have fled their country for Southern California, or Cubans who have fled Cuba for the Miami shores - is not one of assisting them in living the mystery of 'communio' between and among various Christians and Christian Churches. The biggest challenge is to help them respond to the grace of giving witness to the Gospel by forgiving those enemies who quite often are the principal reason for their leaving their homeland to find peace and justice on our shores".

**ARCHBISHOP ELIAS CHACOUR OF AKKA OF THE GREEK-MELKITES, ISRAEL. "**

During the past twenty centuries our Christians from the Holy Land were alike condemned and privileged to share oppression, persecution and suffering with Christ. ... Being the archbishop of the largest Catholic Church in the Holy Land, the Melkite Catholic Church, I insistently invite you and plead with the Holy Father to give even more attention to the living stones of the Holy Land. ... We are in Galilee since immemorial times. Now we are in Israel. We want to stay where we are, we need your friendship more than your money".

October 11, 2010

## **FIRST GENERAL CONGREGATION**

The "Relatio ante disceptationem" (report before the discussion) was discussed. Extracts from the Conclusion follow:

### **A. WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR MIDDLE EASTERN CHRISTIANS?**

Present-day situations give rise to difficulties and concerns. However, empowered by the Holy Spirit and guided by the Gospel, we can face them with hope and filial trust in Divine Providence. Today, though we are not numerically significant in the region, our actions and witness can make us a considerable presence. ... Faced with the temptation of discouragement, we need to remind ourselves that we are disciples of the Risen Christ, the Conqueror of sin and death.

### **B. HOPE**

Our Churches need believers-witnesses among the pastors as well as among the rest of the Church's members. The proclamation of the Good News can only be fruitful, if bishops, priests, consecrated men and women and the laity are aflame with the love of Christ and zealously seek to make Him known and loved. We are confident that this Synod will not simply be a passing event, but one which will truly allow the Spirit to move our Churches.

October 10, 2010

## **POPE BENEDICT XVI'S HOMILY – Middle East: Cradle of a Universal Design of Salvation**

The Holy Father Benedict XVI presided at a concelebration of the Eucharist with Synod Fathers for the solemn opening of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East, which is to be held in the Vatican's Synod Hall until 24 October. The theme of the synodal assembly is: "The Catholic Church in the Middle East. Communion and Witness. Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul".

The Pope concelebrated with 177 Synod Fathers and 69 collaborators ... (saying,) "God is love and wants all men to be part of His life. To carry out this plan He, who is One and Triune, creates in the world a mystery of a communion that is human and divine, historical and transcendent: He creates it with the 'method' - so to speak - of the covenant, tying Himself to men with faithful and inexhaustible love, forming a holy people, that becomes a blessing for all the families of the earth. Thus He reveals Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Who wants to lead His people to the 'land' of freedom and peace. This 'land' is not of this world; the whole of the divine plan goes beyond history, but the Lord wants to build it with men, for men and in men, beginning in the co-ordinates of space and time in which they live and which He Himself gave them.

In its own specific way, what we call the 'Middle East' is part of those co-ordinates", the Holy Father added. "God also sees this region of the world from a different perspective, one might say, 'from on high': it is the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the land of the Exodus and the return

from exile; the land of the Temple and of the Prophets, the land in which the Only Begotten Son of Mary was born, lived, died and rose from the dead; the cradle of the Church, established in order to carry Christ's Gospel to the ends of the earth. And we too, as believers, look to the Middle East in this way, from the perspective of the history of salvation".

"Looking at that part of the world from God's perspective means recognising therein the 'cradle' of a universal design of salvation in love, a mystery of communion which becomes true in freedom and thus requires a response from man. ... The Church was established to be a sign and an instrument of the unique and universal saving project of God among men. She fulfils this mission simply by being herself, that is, 'Communion and witness', as it says in the theme of this Synodal Assembly which opens today".

"Without communion there can be no witness: the life of communion is truly the great witness. ... In Jerusalem the first Christians were few. Nobody could have imagined what was going to take place. And the Church continues to live on that same strength which enabled it to begin and to grow. Pentecost is the original event but also a permanent dynamism, and the Synod of Bishops is a privileged moment in which the grace of Pentecost may be renewed in the Church's journey, so that the Good News may be announced openly and heard by all peoples".

The Pope continued his homily: "Therefore, the reason for this synodal assembly is mainly pastoral. While not being able to ignore the delicate and at times dramatic social and political situation of some countries, the pastors of the Middle Eastern Churches wish to concentrate on the aspects of their own mission. ... Ecclesial life, corroborated in this way, will see the development of very positive fruits in the ecumenical path with other Churches and ecclesial communities present in the Middle East.

"This occasion is also propitious for a constructive continuation of dialogue with Jews, to whom we are tied by the indissoluble bond of the long history of the Covenant, as we are with Muslims. Moreover, the workings of the synodal assembly are oriented to the witness of Christians on a personal, family and social level. This requires the reinforcing of their Christian identity through the Word of God and the Sacraments. We all hope that the faithful feel the joy in living in the Holy Land, a land blessed by the presence and by the Paschal Mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Over the centuries those places have attracted multitudes of pilgrims, as well as men and women in religious communities who have considered it a great privilege to be able to live and bear witness in the land of Jesus. Despite the difficulties, Christians in the Holy Land are called to enliven their consciousness of being the living stones of the Church in the Middle East, in the holy places of our salvation.

"However, living in a dignified manner in one's own country is above all a fundamental human right: therefore, the conditions of peace and justice, which are necessary for the harmonious development of all those living in the region, should be promoted. Thus, everyone is called to make their personal contribution: the international community, by supporting a stable and constructive path towards peace; the main religions in the region, by promoting the spiritual and cultural values that unite men and exclude any expression of violence.

"Christians", the Holy Father concluded, "will continue to contribute not only with work of social promotion, such as education and healthcare, but above all with the spirit of the evangelical Beatitudes which enliven the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation."