

ZE10101910 - 2010-10-19

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-30706?l=english>

## SYNOD ADDRESSES DIALOGUE, PEACE, MIGRATION

### Urges Resolution to Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 19, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- A resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a common date for Christmas and Easter with Orthodox Churches, and interreligious dialogue with Jews and Muslims were just a few of the topics touched upon during the first week of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops.

Coptic Patriarch Antonios Naguib of Alexandria, Egypt, the synod's general relator, presented on Monday the "report after the discussion" of the synod, which ended with a set of 23 questions intended for discussion in small groups. The answers to the questions, which were discussed today in small groups, will be used to draft a concluding document of the gathering.

The patriarch reported that the synod had lived out in a concrete way the theme of the assembly -- "Communion and Witness" -- as it had gathered "cardinals, patriarchs, bishops, consecrated men and women, lay persons, invited brothers and sisters, united around the Holy Father and guided by the Holy Spirit in a 'Communion' for all to see, not in theory but in fact."

He added that the meeting had a "fraternal, warm and optimistic atmosphere, leading us to hope for many beneficial fruits for the future of our Churches and their mission. [...] We would like this synod to be of value for all Churches, in both the East and West, leading them all to a living, practical communion."

The synod, which ends Sunday, is dedicated to the Churches of the Middle East, but some closely related Churches of the North Eastern Africa, the Gulf, Turkey and Iran were also included.

The patriarch reaffirmed the two-fold aim of the synod: to strengthen the Christian identity of and foster communion among the Middle Eastern Churches, which he noted are linked to the first Christians, and the Church of Jerusalem. "Christianity is rooted in the East," he explained. "It grew there and spread from there to the West, and to the ends of the earth."

Patriarch Naguib lamented, nonetheless, current divisions, and urged more study of the events leading to the divisions.

Regarding the current situation of Christians in the Middle East, the patriarch reported that the synod fathers underlined the importance of religious freedom, freedom of worship and freedom of conscience.

"Religious freedom is an essential component of human rights," the patriarch said. "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 there, in some countries, certain acts or practices limit their application."

#### Catechesis

But more importantly, the patriarch continued, Christians must know their faith if they are to "have a real and effective impact on society." He said that the Churches "must awaken a courageous commitment of the faithful to a visible and incisive presence in public life, administration, public works and multi-confessional democratic parties, making them 'indispensable' through their quality, effectiveness and capability in honestly serving the common good."

"The number of persons in the Church is not as important as their living their faith and effectively transmitting the message," he added.

Regarding Christian's contribution to society, he affirmed that the Church's social doctrine provides "a sound contribution in the construction of society," citing the importance placed on the promotion of the family and the defense of life, as well as universal access to education.

Regarding the socio-political situations of Middle Eastern countries, Patriarch Naguib called for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while expressing the bishops' solidarity with the Palestinian people.

"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," he said. "We also call upon the political world to pay sufficient attention to the tragic situation of Christians in Iraq who are the main victim of the war and its effects.

"According to the possibilities in each country, Christians must promote democracy, justice and peace, and positive secularism, with the distinction between religion and state, and respect for every religion. An attitude of positive engagement in society is a constructive response for society as well as for the Church."

"The Churches in the West are asked not take the side of one party, forgetting the point of view and the conditions of the other," he added.

Another challenge noted by the synod fathers includes the evolution of contemporary Islam, which Patriarch Naguib said had begun to arise since the 1970s, and which affects Christians in particular. "It wants to impose an Islamic way of life on all citizens, sometimes by violence," he reported. "Therefore, it constitutes a real threat to all, and we must face these extremist currents together."

## Exodus

The exodus of Christians out of the Middle East, however, is a more concerning challenge, the patriarch noted. "The main causes of this troubling phenomenon are economic and political situations, the rise of fundamentalism, and the restriction of freedoms and equality, exacerbated strongly by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Iraq."

"Youth, the educated and affluent people are more likely to leave, depriving the Church and the country of its most valuable resources," he continued. "Emigration has become a

general phenomenon that affects Christians and Muslims. It deprives our Churches and our countries of valuable and moderate elements. The motives that cause people, especially Christians, to leave the region would constitute a good subject of sincere and frank dialogue with Muslims."

"Their absence would negatively affect the future. It is with deep faith that Christians find the motivation to live courageously and joyfully their Christianity in their country. It is important to avoid defeatist talk, or encourage emigration as a preferred option."

Patriarch Naguib, however, acknowledged that in order to encourage Christians to stay in the region, "we must foster the conditions that encourage the decision to stay."

"It is up to politicians to consolidate peace, democracy and development, to foster a climate of stability and confidence," he said. "Christians, along with all people of good will, are called to engage positively in achieving this goal. Greater awareness on the part of international bodies of the duty to contribute to the development of our countries would help a great deal in this regard."

## Dialogue

The synod fathers also spoke this week of the need to "reinforce the initiatives and structures that express and support unity," such as the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

A further initiative offered was to unify the dates for Christmas and Easter between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. "This is a pastoral necessity," Patriarch Naguib said, "given the pluralistic context of the region, and the many mixed marriages between Christians of different ecclesial denominations."

With regard to relations with Muslims, the patriarch noted that Christians and Muslims have lived side-by-side in the region for 14 centuries, through "enduring difficult moments as well as many positive ones."

"Whether we are Muslims or Christians," the patriarch noted, "we must pursue a common

path together. Although we differ in our understanding of man, of his rights and freedoms, we can together find a clear, definite foundation for joint action, for the good of our societies and our countries."

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