



SEIA NEWSLETTER

On the Eastern Churches and Ecumenism

Number 184: January 31, 2011

Washington, DC

The Eighth Meeting of the International Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches

THE EIGHTH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES TOOK PLACE IN ROME FROM JANUARY 25 TO 28, 2011. The meeting was hosted by His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, the new President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. It was chaired jointly by Cardinal Koch and by His Eminence Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Joining delegates from the Catholic Church were representatives of the following Oriental Orthodox Churches: the Antiochian Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians), the Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia), the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. No representative of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church was able to attend.

The two delegations met separately on January 25, and held plenary sessions each day from January 26 to January 28. Each day of the plenary sessions began with a common celebration of Morning Prayer. In his remarks at the beginning of the first session, Cardinal Koch welcomed the group to Rome, and said that "I have had an enduring ecumenical interest in the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and in your history, your life of faith, your liturgy and theology. I have always felt very at home in your presence. Despite our longstanding separation, we share a solid basis of faith and ecclesial order." With great sadness the Cardinal also informed the group of the death of one of the Ethiopian Orthodox representatives, Father Megabe Biluy Seife Selassie. He has been replaced by Archdea-

con Daniel Seife Michael, an instructor at Holy Trinity Theological University College in Addis Ababa. The cardinal also offered congratulations to Father John Matthews who, since the last meeting, was ordained a bishop and given the name Metropolitan Dr. Youhanan Mar Demetrios, Assistant Metropolitan of Delhi, and to His Eminence Nareg Alemezian who has been elevated to the rank of Archbishop. Metropolitan Bishop took the occasion to congratulate Cardinal Koch on his appointment as President of the Pontifical Council, and to express his gratitude to Cardinal Walter Kasper for his co-chairmanship of the commission until his retirement last year. He also stressed that the official name of his family of churches should always be "Oriental Orthodox Churches."

At this meeting, the members continued their study – in a very friendly atmosphere -- of the ways in which the churches expressed their communion with one another until the middle of the fifth century and the role played by monasticism in this. The papers presented included "The Communion and Communication that Existed Between Our Churches Until the Mid-Fifth Century of Christian History As Well As the Role Played by Monasticism: The Tradition of Antioch," by Archbishop Theophilus George Saliba; "The Petrine Office and the Question, Who Established the Church of Rome?: Coptic Orthodox Perspective," by Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette, "Communion and Communication Among the Churches in the Tradition of Alexandria," by Father Mark Sheridan, OSB; "The Role of Monasticism in the Development and Communion of the Churches," by Father Columba Stewart, OSB; "Communion and Communication that Existed Between Our Churches Until the Mid-Fifth Century of Christian History and the Role Played by Monasticism: The Ethiopian Experience," by Archdeacon Daniel Seife Michael Felleke; "The Reception of the Ecumenical Councils in the Armenian Tradition (VIII-XV cc.)," and "Communion and Communication," by Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian; "Communion and Communication Between

the St. Thomas Christians of India and Other Churches till Mid-Fifth Century A.D. – Indian Orthodox Perspective," by Metropolitan Dr. Gabriel Mar Gregorios; "Communion and Communication Between the St. Thomas Christians of India and Other Churches till Mid-Fifth Century A.D. – A Syrian Orthodox Perspective," by Metropolitan Dr. Kuriakose Theophilose; "Communion and Communication Among the Churches: Rome in the Pre-Constantinian Era," by Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler.

In these various studies, the members of the commission focused more precisely on the concrete expressions of communion and communication among the churches before the separation. Indeed, communion was expressed primarily through various forms of communication. It was noted that in the pre-Constantinian period, there was an intense communication among the churches, especially in times of crisis. There was a common sense of responsibility towards the other churches that was found most clearly in the exchange of letters and synodal decisions. These provided a means of conveying encouragement and challenge to one another, as well as theological clarifications. This exchange was mutual among the various churches. It exemplified a remarkable degree of communion among local communities in a process that lacked central direction after 250 years of expansion throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, including Armenia, Persia, Ethiopia and India. The universal phenomenon of Christian asceticism, present from the earliest times, found expression in the monastic movements, emerging from the late third century in all parts of the Christian world. There was a fruitful exchange of monastic spiritual writings emanating from the Christian Orient, even across doctrinal divisions.

In the evening of January 25, the members attended a Vespers service in the Basilica of Saint Paul's Outside the Walls presided over by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In his homily the Holy Father made reference to the pres-

ence of the members of the dialogue, and said, "We entrust the success of your meeting to the Lord, that it may be another step forward towards our longed-for unity." On Thursday evening January 27, Cardinal Koch hosted a dinner for the dialogue members and staff of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity at the *Domus Sanctae Marthae* in the Vatican.

Pope Benedict XVI received the members of the commission in private audience on Friday morning January 28. Cardinal Koch and Metropolitan Bishoy thanked the Pope for receiving the commission, and Metropolitan Bishoy presented a Coptic icon of Saint Mary the Mother of God to him on behalf of the members of the commission. The Pope then greeted the members, saying "It is with great joy that I welcome you, the members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Through you I gladly extend fraternal greetings to my venerable Brothers, the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. I am grateful for the work of the Commission which began in January 2003 as a shared initiative of the ecclesial authorities of the family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. As you know, the first phase of the dialogue, from 2003 to 2009, resulted in the common text entitled Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church. The document outlined aspects of fundamental ecclesiological principles that we share and identified issues requiring deeper reflection in successive phases of the dialogue. We can only be grateful that after almost fifteen hundred years of separation we still find agreement about the sacramental nature of the Church, about apostolic succession in priestly service and about the impelling need to bear witness to the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the world. In the second phase the Commission has reflected from an historical perspective on the ways in which the Churches expressed their communion down the ages. During the meeting this week you are deepening your study of the communion and communication that existed between the Churches until the mid-fifth century of Christian history, as well as the role played by monasticism in the life of the early Church. We must be confident that your theological reflection will lead our Churches not only to understand each other more deeply, but resolutely to continue our journey decisively towards the full communion to which we are called by the will of Christ. For this intention we have lifted up our common prayer during

the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which has just ended. Many of you come from regions where Christian individuals and communities face trials and difficulties that are a cause of deep concern for us all. All Christians need to work together in mutual acceptance and trust in order to serve the cause of peace and justice. May the intercession and example of the many martyrs and saints, who have given courageous witness to Christ in all our Churches, sustain and strengthen you and your Christian communities. With sentiments of fraternal affection I invoke upon all of you the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The ninth meeting of the International Joint Commission will take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at the invitation of His Holiness Abune Paulos I, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Tewahido Orthodox Church. The members will plan to arrive on Monday January 16, 2012, and depart on Monday January 23. The two delegations will meet separately on Tuesday January 17, and in plenary session on Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, January 18, 19, and 21. They will participate in the celebration of Epiphany (Timkat) on January 20, and in Sunday liturgies on January 22.

The members concluded with joyful thanks to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for what has been accomplished at this meeting.

The members of the Commission are: Representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Churches (in alphabetical order):

Antiochian Syrian Orthodox Church: H.E. Mor Theophilus George Saliba, Archbishop of Mount Lebanon, Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Beirut, Lebanon; H.E. Kuriakose Theophilo, Metropolitan of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary and President of the Ecumenical Secretariat of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in India, Ernakulam, India;

Armenian Apostolic Church: Catholicosate of all Armenians: H.E. Khajag Barsamian, Archbishop of the Eastern Diocese of the USA, New York; H.E. Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian, General Secretary of Bible Society of Armenia, Etchmiadzin, Armenia;

Armenian Apostolic Church: Holy See of Cilicia: H.E. Archbishop Oshagan Cholyan, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy in the USA, New York; H.G. Archbishop Nareg Alemezian, Ecumenical Officer of the Holy See of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon;

Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Anba Bishoy (co-chair), Metropolitan of Damiette, Egypt, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox

Church; Rev. Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak, West Henrietta, New York, USA; H.G. Bishop Daniel of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sydney, Australia (observer);

Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie Gebru, Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Patriarchate, Asmara, Eritrea (unable to attend);

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church: Archdeacon Daniel Seife Michael Feleke of Holy Trinity Theological University College in Addis Ababa; Mr. Lique Hiruyan Getachew Guadie (unable to attend);

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: H.E. Metropolitan Dr. Gabriel Mar Gregorios, President of the Department of Ecumenical Relations, Diocese of Trivandrum, India; H. G. Metropolitan Dr. Youhanon Mar Demetrios, Assistant Bishop of Delhi (co-secretary), Delhi, India.

Representatives of the Catholic Church: His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch (co-chair), President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity;

Most Reverend Paul-Werner Scheele, Bishop Emeritus of Würzburg, Germany;

Most Reverend Youhanna Golta, Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop of the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate, Cairo, Egypt;

Most Reverend Jules Mikhael Al-Jamil, Procurator of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate to the Holy See and Apostolic Visitor in Europe, Rome;

Most Reverend Peter Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria;

Most Reverend Woldetensae Ghebregiorghis, Apostolic Vicar of Harar, Ethiopia, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea;

Rev. Fr. Frans Bouwen M.Afr., Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Jerusalem;

Rev. Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, Executive Director, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, St. John's Abbey and University, Colledgeville, Minnesota, USA;

Rev. Fr. Ronald G. Roberson, CSP, Associate Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, USA;

Rev. Fr. Paul Rouhana, OLM, Université Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, Jounieh, Lebanon (unable to attend);

Rev. Fr. Mark Sheridan, OSB, Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, Rome;

Rev. Fr. Mathew Vellanickal, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry, India;

Rev. Fr. Boghos Levon Zekiyan, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome;

Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler, Consultant

to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Salzburg, Austria.

Rev. Fr. Gabriel Quicke, Official of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome (co-secretary).

-- Rome, January 28, 2011

The Eastern Orthodox Churches

TURKISH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER BULENT ARINC VISITED THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE IN ISTANBUL ON JANUARY 3 AS ANKARA STEPPED UP ITS CAMPAIGN TO ADDRESS ISSUES RELATING TO THE TREATMENT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES.

According to The Associated Press, Arinc was the highest-ranking member of the Turkish government to visit the Christian Orthodox Patriarchate in more than 50 years. "Today is a very happy day for us," said Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians. "It has strengthened our hopes."

Ankara has promised to consider reopening the Patriarchate's Halki Seminary on the island of Heybeliada and recently returned control of the 19th-century orphanage on Buyukada, another island in the Sea of Marmara off Istanbul. "It is our duty to meet the just demands of our citizens who have lived in this country for centuries," said Arinc. "We will try to meet them from a legal point of view." — *KED*, Jan. 4.

THESE ARE EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III BY VALIA NIKOLAIDOU for the newspaper *Eleftheros Typos* in December 2010:

Q: Your Beatitude, almost five years have passed since your election to the Patriarchal throne. Which do you consider is your most important work [deed]?

A: Normality in the functioning of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has returned. Subsequently, the authority and prestige of the Patriarchate has been restored and now the Patriarchate plays a most important role not only in religious practices but also, mainly, in political processes because it is inseparably connected to the status of Jerusalem.

The Patriarchate plays an important role in the abatement of religious fanaticism, contributing the most through its active involvement in various inter-religious dialogues.

Proof of that is the participation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land which was created with the initiative of the

State Department and is composed of Rabbis, the Jewish religious leadership of Israel, who represent the government, the religious leadership of the Palestinian Authority and the Leaders of the various Churches.

Q: Did you encounter any difficulties during that time period and, if yes, what were those?

A: We definitely encountered difficulties which resulted from past mistakes, but, with God's help, we managed to overcome them and to correct them.

Q: In the past, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem faced financial problems. Have those problems been surmounted?

A: For many and various reasons, the Patriarchate had not fulfilled its obligations regarding many abeyances and large debts. Since then, with God's help, many gaps have been filled.

Financial matters are problems that have always required our attention and still continue to engage us, but I want to believe that we are on an upturn track. Today, everything operates with full transparency and with accountability. Also, another problem is that the Patriarchate owns land and properties which are situated at strategic locations vis-à-vis the political aspect. You realize that the Patriarchate finds itself between two 'Symblegades' [clashing rocks].

Q: How are the Patriarchate's relations with the governments of Israel and Jordan and with the Palestinian Authority?

A: With all the governments, especially with Israel and Jordan, our relations are excellent and I mean that.

Also, with the Palestinian Authority our relations are very good and continuously improving, even though sometimes misunderstandings arise between people who are known to have personal, financial or ideological interests.

Q: Your relations with the Ecumenical Patriarch?

A: We are not talking about relations with The Ecumenical Patriarch; there exists full agreement of views in all matters.

Q: The Patriarchate went through a bad period due to the events that took place with the deposed Patriarch Irenaios. What is going on with his case?

A: We no longer concern ourselves with the case of Irenaios.

Q: To what degree can the different religions contribute to the prevalence of peace in world societies?

A: The religions play a determinative role. The problem of international diplomacy and of the politicians as well, is that, they do not possess a thorough and deep knowledge of the subject of religion and

consequently they have not taken into account the role that religion plays on an international scale. However, very cautiously, they have started to acknowledge that, wherever confrontations of a political (or other) nature take place, the reason is clearly religious.

They again try to emphasize the political aspect or the ethnic one; however, the root cause is religious.

I am speaking from experience. Here, in our region, it has been shown that the root of the political problem and the confrontation is clearly religious, and for this reason, all the governments today, European and otherwise, contribute financially any kind of initiative that pertains to the inter-religious dialogue.

I receive daily delegations from Europe and America in the political, diplomatic, religious and ecclesiastical fields. The purpose for which they come is to hear our points of view on the subject of the Middle East / Palestinian problem as well as our point of view regarding Jerusalem.

They have finally realized that diplomatic and political efforts do not bear fruit without the contribution of the religious leadership or, if you prefer, of the religion itself.

Q: As the Head of the Zion Church, The Church of Nativity of Christ is under your spiritual jurisdiction. What message would You like to convey to Christians from this holy place?

A: That people should open their hearts and accept the message of peace and hopefulness which is Christ.

Q: What do you consider is the role of the Church today?

A: The role of the Church is irreplaceable and this is proven by the fact that in countries where the Church (editor's note: I refer to the Western Churches) has lost its spiritual mission and disposition, people find themselves in a state of confusion and disillusion and, as a result, they turn to religions which, instead of renewing them spiritually and supporting them, complicate their lives even more.

Regarding the Orthodox Church, it is proven that in countries where it predominates, people acknowledge its contribution and turn to it irrespective of the flaws, if any, of its leaders and its clerics.

Q: Is the world crisis a crisis of values?

A: It is a moral crisis because the economic issue is the beginning of everything. The beginning of everything is the transcendence from the person of His self...

Q: Because of the economic crisis most people feel disappointed, angry. The

feelings of young people who declare that they fear for their future are comparable. What sort of message would you send to these people?

A: I also see that people feel disappointed as I receive thousands of pilgrims from all over the world on a daily basis. This feeling is intensely apparent in their faces. Their fear and their despair are justifiable since they feel that they are betrayed by everyone.

The message of hope is exactly the message of intervention of God in history, which is Christmas. It is the face of Christ, Who is never disillusioned and never lets believers become disillusioned. Christ is the Light of knowledge; the sun of justice. But it all depends on how much someone, young or old, is ready to make the transcendence of his/her self. -- Website of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, Jan. 18.

ON JANUARY 10TH, 2011, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, HEAD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, ARRIVED IN VILNIUS WITH THE BLESSING OF HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA AND AT THE INVITATION OF THE CATHOLIC EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF LITHUANIA.

Meeting the DECR chairman at the airport were Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius of Kaunas and Bishop Gintaras Grušas, secretary general of the Episcopal Conference and military ordinary for Lithuania, as well as archpriest Vladimir Seliavko, secretary of the Vilnius-Lithuania diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Accompanying the DECR chairman are hieromonk Ioann (Guaita), a staff member of DECR secretariat for Inter-Christian relations, and hierodeacon Ioann (Kopeikin), assistant to the DECR chairman.— Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 10.

ON JANUARY 11TH, 2011, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK TOOK PART IN AN INTERCONFSSIONAL CONFERENCE ON FAMILY PROBLEMS. The Conference, sponsored by the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Lithuania and the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, took place at the conference hall of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kaunas.

Over 300 participants attended the Conference, while over 50,000 heard it broadcast live on Radio Maria.

Metropolitan Hilarion, Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius of Kaunas (Roman

Catholic Church), Bishop Mindaugas Sabutis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania, and Rev. Adolphas Grušas, chancellor of the Kaunas Archdiocese were members of the Presidium.

Taking part in the Conference also were Archbishop-Metropolitan of Vilnius Cardinal Juozas Audrys Bačkis; Apostolic Nuncio to Lithuania Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi; Bishop Gintaras Grušas, secretary general of the Episcopal Conference and military ordinary for Lithuania; Auxiliary Bishop of Kaunas Jonas Ivanauskas; Bishop Jonas Kauneckas of Panevėžys; Kaunas Mayor Andrius Kupčinskas; rector of the Kaunas State University Dr. Zigmas Lideka; deputies of the Seim, Lithuanian intellectuals, students, and clerics of the Diocese of Vilnius and Lithuania of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Greetings from Cardinal Ennio Anronelli, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, and from Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, were read out at the beginning of the Conference.

In his report "To Be or to Have?" Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk paid special attention to the fact that market laws in modern liberal society impudently trample on moral and family values.

The DECR chairman's report was followed by prolonged applause.

Mayor of Kaunas Andrius Kupčinskas reminded the participants of the appearance of a young hieromonk Hilarion, rector of the Annunciation Cathedral, on Kaunas TV in 1991, when he called soldiers not to shoot at unarmed people. The Mayor added that the residents remember this act of courage and highly appreciate the now Metropolitan Hilarion's present efforts aimed at maintaining Interconfessional peace and accord in Lithuania and presented the DECR chairman with the Burgomaster Jonas Vileišis Order as an expression of gratitude.

Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius, Bishop Mindaugas Sabutis, and Rev. Prof. Andrius Narbekovas presented reports on family problems in Lithuania at present. — Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 11.

ON JANUARY 10TH, 2011, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK VISITED THE CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOPRIC OF VILNIUS AND MET WITH ARCHBISHOP-METROPOLITAN CARDINAL AUDRYS JUOZAS BAČKIS after visiting the Cathedral Basilica of St. Stanislaus.

Taking part in the meeting were Aux-

iliary Bishop of Vilnius and rector of the Cathedral Arūnas Poniškaitis, chancellor of the Vilnius Archdiocese Rev. Robertas Šalašavicus, Rev. Saulus Rumšas; archpriest Vladimir Seliavko, secretary of the Vilnius-Lithuania diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, hieromonk Ioann (Guaita), a staff member of DECR secretariat for Inter-Christian relations, and hierodeacon Ioann (Kopeikin), assistant to the DECR chairman.

They discussed a wide range of questions of cooperation between the Orthodox and the Catholics in Lithuania. — Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 12.

ON JANUARY 17TH, 2011, HIS BEATITUDE JONAH, ARCHBISHOP OF WASHINGTON AND METROPOLITAN OF ALL AMERICA AND CANADA, CURRENTLY ON A VISIT TO THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, visited the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR).

The DECR chairman, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, told him about the work of the oldest Synodal institution of the Russian Orthodox Church and of his predecessors.

Discussed were Interconfessional dialogue and common Orthodox problems.

Attending the meeting were Bishop Melchizedek of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania (Orthodox Church in America); Bishop Aleksandr of Dmitrov; archimandrite Zaccaeus (Wood), representative of the OCA to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia; archpriest Nikolai Balashov, DECR deputy chairman; and Rev. Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox Relations. — Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 17.

ON JANUARY 19TH, 2011, AFTER THE DIVINE SERVICE AT THE CATHEDRAL OF THE EPIPHANY AND FRATERNAL REPAST, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA HAD A TALK WITH HIS BEATITUDE METROPOLITAN JONAH OF ALL AMERICA AND CANADA.

In a warm atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust, they discussed the relationship between the two Churches and the situation of Orthodoxy on the American continent.

The Primates were joined in the meeting by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); archpriest Nikolai Balashov, DECR deputy chairman; Rev. Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-

Orthodox Relations; Bishop Melchizedek of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania (OCA); and archimandrite Zaccaria (Wood), representative of the OCA to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 19.

ON 22 JANUARY, 2011, THE COMMEMORATION DAY OF ST. PHILIP, METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA AND HIS BEATITUDE ARCHBISHOP CHRYSOSTOMOS II OF NEW JUSTINIANA AND ALL CYPRUS celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Assumption in the Moscow Kremlin.

After the divine service His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos, and the concelebrating hierarchs venerated the relics of St. Philip.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill delivered a sermon in which he told the worshippers about St. Philip's life and heroic deeds and greeted Archbishop Chrysostomos, saying:

“Your Beatitude, I am happy to have celebrated with you at the main church of Holy Russia on this day. By God's will you are the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus and spiritual leader of your nation at a difficult time. Your homeland is divided. We know that Orthodox churches have been destroyed in the northern part of the island, and Orthodox priests cannot celebrate even in these half-ruined churches. We know that you really care for your people and love the residents of Cyprus, be they Orthodox or Muslims, that you seek the unity of your country so that all people could live in peace and love.

“The upholding of this seemingly simple truth needs courage. May the example of St. Philip help you in your difficult ministry to the Church and people of Cyprus.

“St. Sergius of Radonezh, a great zealot and spiritual authority of our people, founded the monastery and dedicated it to the Life-Giving Trinity at a time when feudal Russia was divided from within and therefore seized by enemies. St. Sergius served the unity of our country as no one else. It is not fortuitous that he called his first monastery the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, as the Holy Trinity is an image of unity and love.

“Your also seek to unite your nation. May the Holy Life-Giving Trinity, the image of Divine love and Divine unity help you in your labors. As a sign of my respect for your ministry and my love for you as to a brother, I would like to present you with an icon of the Holy Life-Giving Trinity.

May the Lord bless your ministry of the Primate of the Church of Cyprus and spiritual leader of the Cypriots.

“Also, I would like you to have this holy panagia as a keepsake of our concelebration. As you wear it, recall today's divine service and our fraternal contacts and remember that you have true friends, brothers and sisters in Holy Russia who share your sorrows and are willing to pray for reconciliation on the blessed land of Cyprus.”

His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for brotherly concelebration and noted the importance of fraternal relations between the people of Russia and Cyprus. He presented Patriarch Kirill with an icon of St. Barnabas, the founder of the Church of Cyprus, and a silver tray with a picture of Cyprus.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church congratulated the IFUOCN prize-winners, greeted members of the Moscow Diocesan Council, and blessed banners, ensigns and standards of the Cossack societies registered in the Russian Federation. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 22.

ON 20 JANUARY 2011, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TOOK AN UNPRECEDENTED STEP BY ADOPTING A RESOLUTION ON THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE CONTEXT OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION. This is the first time that a major political body of the European Union recognized that Christians are persecuted.

The chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations made the following comments:

On 19 and 20 January 2011, the European Parliament discussed many cases of violence against Christians in different parts of the world. In the evening of January 19, the EP members lit candles to commemorate Christian victims of the recent terrorist attacks. On January 20, resolution on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion was adopted. It condemns killing or discrimination of Christians in various countries, particularly in Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and the Philippines. The EP deputies made public the information showing atrocious persecution of Christians in these countries. The resolution addressed to their governments and leaders was adopted by the majority. Representatives of all political parties present in the EP voted in the affirmative.

The deputies expressed their wish to set up a permanent body at the Union for Foreign Affairs to monitor the situation of

religious freedom in the world and annually inform the EU bodies and general public on the cases of infringing freedom of conscience by authorities or public forces in various countries.

A direct occasion for the resolution was a terrorist attack against worshipers in a Coptic church in Alexandria on 1 January 2011, killing 21 and leaving 97 wounded. A week later, Ministers of Foreign Affairs of France, Italy, Hungary, and Poland sent a letter to Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and demanded a reaction of the European community.

The EP resolution is a revolutionary one due to several things. It is the first time that the European parliamentarians stated in full voice their opinion on the problem they have preferred to keep silent about so far. Thus, a major political body of the European Union has recognized the persecution of Christians in the world. Earlier only certain politicians have confined themselves to talks about certain violations of the rights of Christians in a particular country. Now they are talking openly of the strategy of some terrorist organizations and fundamentalist movements aimed at the destruction or ousting of Christians living in the Moslem countries as “the fifth column” of the West.

Besides, close attention was paid for the first time to the work of people gathering objective information about persecution of Christians in the world. For instance, it was for the first time that information contained in the annual report prepared by a non-governmental organization, “Kirche-in-Not,” was made public officially. According to it, there were seventy-five Christians out of each one hundred killed as a result of religious intolerance in recent years. This statistic is stunning.

The European Parliament addressed the EU bodies and proposed concrete methods of influencing the situation. The principle is simple: money and business in exchange for the observance of human rights. Economic agreements between the EU countries and the states with the recorded violation of religious freedom of Christians and other religious minorities should be concluded only when the situation of minority religious groups has improved.

It is necessary today, as never before, for the European countries to stand up for the rights of Christians persecuted for their faith in various corners of the globe. Representatives of the authorities and public movements should resolutely condemn violence against Christians and insist on the necessity of putting pressure upon those countries where the rights of religious mi-

norities are violated.

We are witnessing cases of not only gross violence against Christians, but also of their physical destruction. The blood of Christians is again being poured on the land of Biblical history, the site of glorious heroic deeds of the martyrs and confessors of the Church. The 2nd-century Christian writer Tertullian wrote that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity.” The nature of Christian faith is such that any violence against conscience or religious feeling of a Christian does not harm the faith, but makes it even stronger. However, this does not mean that we could look calmly at lawlessness perpetrated against Christians. Any case should be thoroughly investigated, publicly discussed, and leaders of traditional religions should pay attention to it.

Christian communities around the world, and also Muslims, Jews, and representatives of other traditional religions do not remain indifferent to the recent acts of violence. It is a paradox that news of the oppression of Christians come sometimes from those regions of the world where representatives of different religions have peacefully coexisted for centuries, and any manifestation of Christianophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have always been implicitly denounced by the leaders of traditional religious communities.

Much attention is paid in the EP Resolution to the necessity of observing religious freedom enshrined in fundamental international and European documents. Also, monitoring instruments are proposed. However, these important and timely appeals would bring the sought-for results only in case they are followed by setting up an effective and regular mechanism of dialogue between religious communities and the national and international structures. The European Parliament urged all EU institutions to maintain dialogue in compliance with Art. 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Yet one should remember that monitoring of religious freedom in Europe and in the world should be supplemented by and connected with a dialogue between international structures and religious communities.

In recent decades, the Russian Church has focused its attention on the setting up of such a mechanism. To promote this idea, representations of the Moscow Patriarchate have been established at the major international organizations in New York, Geneva, Brussels, and Strasbourg. The protection of the Christian heritage and the rights of Christians are priority issues in the work of our church structures. The same subjects

are the main ones for cooperation between the Russian Church and inter-Christian organizations. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 24.

ON 25 JANUARY 2011, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, HEAD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE’S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS (DECR), MET WITH THE NEWLY APPOINTED AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, H.E. Antonio Landi. They were joined in the meeting that took place at the DECR premises by Rev. Sergiy Zvonarev, secretary for far abroad countries, deacon Aleksiy Dikarev, a DECR staff member for Inter-Christian relations; and M. Palacio, a staff member of the DECR secretariat for far abroad countries.

The Italian Ambassador thanked Metropolitan Hilarion for receiving him and recalled their meeting in Rome last year during the DECR chairman’s visit to Italy.

Metropolitan Hilarion and Ambassador Landi discussed problems of upholding traditional Christian values in Europe. The Italian Ambassador expressed his concern over the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights against the use of crucifixes in classrooms in Italy. Metropolitan Hilarion reminded him that Russia intervened as a third party when the case was referred to the Grand Chamber.

Also discussed were prospects of cooperation between the DECR and the Italian diplomatic mission in Moscow, for instance, in arranging cultural events.

At the end of the meeting, Metropolitan Hilarion and Ambassador Landi exchanged presents. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 25.

ON 25 JANUARY 2011, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, CHAIRMAN OF THE DECR, MET WITH THE APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, ARCHBISHOP ANTONIO MENNINI.

The Apostolic Nuncio thanked Metropolitan Hilarion for good cooperation between the DECR and the Representation of the Holy See. Thanks to that, relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the structures of the Roman Catholic Church in Russia have improved. Archbishop Mennini also said that during his time in Moscow he has come to like the Russian Church, its people and traditions. He also noted a special part the Church is playing in the life of Russia at present.

Metropolitan Hilarion thanked Archbi-

shop Mennini for his sincere love for the Orthodox Church and fruitful cooperation crowned with the opening of diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the Holy See. The DECR chairman wished the Nuncio no less impressive success in his new ministry as Apostolic Nuncio in Great Britain and expressed hope for further cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in upholding traditional Christian values on the European continent.

Metropolitan Hilarion presented the guest with a pectoral cross.

Taking part in the meeting were Rev. Dimitry Sizonenko, acting DECR secretary for Inter-Christian relations; and deacon Aleksiy Dikarev, a staff member of the same secretariat. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 25.

ON 26 JANUARY 2011, THE PRIMATE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH MET WITH THE APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, ARCHBISHOP ANTONIO MENNINI, who completes his ministry in Russia.

Taking part in the meeting that was held at the Patriarch’s working residence in Chisty side street were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, and Archbishop Mark of Yegorievsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Management for Institutions Abroad. The Apostolic Nuncio was accompanied by the first secretary of the Holy See Representation in the Russian Federation, Mgr Visvaldas Kulbokas.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill greeted the guests, saying: “I would like to thank you for your work as representative of the Holy See in Moscow and acknowledge your personal contribution to the solution of difficult problems in the relations between our Churches. These problems, by God’s mercy, are finding positive solutions, thus changing the climate of bilateral relations for the better. To a large extent, this is your service as a plenipotentiary representative of the Holy See.”

His Holiness mentioned that prior to the meeting he celebrated a litiya for the victims of the terrorist act committed on January 23. Requiem services were held in all churches of the capital city with the Patriarch’s blessing.

Archbishop Mennini expressed his condolences over innocent people’s death at the hand of terrorists.

Addressing His Holiness the Patriarch, he said: “I am very grateful to you, Your Holiness. I have been happy to work for the

good of our Churches. This work would have been much more difficult without your support, friendly relations, and Christian love. I will never forget you and the Russian Church, but shall cherish my love for it." Archbishop Mennini emphasized his willingness to contribute to common witness about Christian values before the world. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 26.

TODAY, JANUARY 23, OUR HOLY CHURCH PRAYERFULLY MARKS FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE ELECTION AND THE ENTHRONEMENT OF HIS HOLINESS IRINEJ, SERBIAN PATRIARCH.

In the Cathedral church of St. Michael the Archangel in Belgrade Serbian Patriarch Irinej served the Divine Liturgy with the concelebration of Vicar Bishop Atanasije of Hvosno and protopresbyter-staurophor Petar Lukic, the head of the Cathedral Church, Dr Dragana Protica, dean of the Seminary in Belgrade, Stojadin Pavlovic, director of OHB SOC, hierarchal deputies Branko Mitrovic, Dragomir Ubiparovic and Branko Topalovic, protopresbyter Vitaly Tarasjev, the head of the Podvorye of the Russian Church in Belgrade, presbyter Panayotis Karatasios, priest of the Greek Orthodox Church, presbyters Slavisa Popovic and Nebojsa Topolic, secretary of the Office of Serbian Patriarch, as well as protodeacon Radomir Percevic, Stevan Rapajic and deacon Aleksandar Sekulic.

After the Divine Liturgy there was a reception in the Serbian Patriarchate for all priests that served, invitees and guests among which there were also members of the family of the Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic and basketball player Dejan Tomasevic. – Press Release, Serbian Patriarchate, Jan. 23.

ON THE INITIATIVE OF HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH DANIEL, THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH APPROVED IN THE WORKING SESSION OF 6 JULY 2010 THAT THE YEAR 2011 BE DECLARED HOMAGE YEAR OF HOLY BAPTISM AND OF HOLY MATRIMONY IN THE ROMANIAN PATRIARCHATE.

In 2011, the Romanian Patriarchate and the eparchies in the country and abroad will organize pastoral-missionary conferences, theological colloquies, debates and spiritual evenings on the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Matrimony (historical presentation, theological existential significance, preparation for their reception, pastoral activity for the Christian family,

non-Orthodox uncanonical and illegal practice concerning the celebration of the two Holy Sacraments, the issue of the mixed families from inter-confessional or inter-religious point of view etc.). The professors of the institutions of Orthodox theological education will draft studies, comments, bibliographies with Scriptural, historical, dogmatic, liturgical, homiletic-catechetical, pastoral-social content on the two Holy Sacraments, on the role of the Christian family from a religious, spiritual, cultural and social point of view and on the defense of the sacred family institution when faced with the challenges of the secularized contemporary context. Special attention will be paid to the two Holy Sacraments in Orthodox catechesis, in the Religion class and catechetical program entitled "Christ Shared with the Children" of the Romanian Patriarchate.

The theme 2011 – Homage Year of Holy Baptism and Holy Matrimony in the Romanian Patriarchate will be treated within the church national program at the semester pastoral-missionary Conference in the spring of 2011, which will be detailed at the semester pastoral-missionary Conference in the autumn of 2011 or at one of the monthly administrative priestly conferences that every eparchy will establish.

In the autumn of 2011, a solemn meeting of the Holy Synod will be held at the Patriarchal Palace with the theme 2011 – Homage Year of Holy Baptism and Holy Matrimony in the Romanian Patriarchate. On this occasion, a thematic exhibition will be organized displaying the most beautiful and representative frescoes, icons, miniatures, embroideries and fabrics, mosaics and stained glass reflecting Baptism and the Christian family in Orthodox church art.

The manifestations organized during the Homage Year of Holy Baptism and Holy Matrimony in the Romanian Patriarchate will be sustained and publicized at large by the Basilica Press Centre of the Romanian Patriarchate (Trinitas Radio, Trinitas Television, Lumina publications, Basilica News Agency, Press Office), church eparchial mass-media as well as by the secular press.

In 2011, the site of the Romanian Patriarchate (www.patriarhia.ro) will have a special section which will present the calendar of the events, information, news, documentaries and activity unfolded during the Homage Year of Holy Baptism and Holy Matrimony in the Romanian Patriarchate. – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Jan. 6.

THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY BEGAN TONIGHT AT THE PATRIARCHAL CATHEDRAL OF BUCHAREST. Vespers were celebrated by His Grace Ciprian Câmpineanul, Assistant Bishop to the Patriarch. His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church and the representatives of the Christian Churches in Bucharest attended the religious service – informs Trinitas Radio station.

His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel said in his sermon that fidelity and perseverance can overcome any disappointment and neglect that may affect the unity efforts of Christians. "We meet again with this desire of faithfulness towards the ideal that becomes for us a duty to work for Christian unity too. When God sends us His Spirit and we are prepared to receive Him, He gives us unexpected inspiration to work together, in order to recognize each other and to show fraternity among us. Sometimes God urges us to come together through joys, through unexpected undeserved gifts, and some other times through difficult situations, which we do not expect. For example, there are lots of Christians in the world now who suffer just because they are Christians, who are persecuted and sacrifice their lives just because they confess they are Christians. Greater Christian sensitivity and manifestation of fraternity and solidarity with them are also part of prayer for unity, unity in suffering, not only unity in joy, in achievements and success."

According to the program established, the homily of this evening was preached by the representative of the Greek Catholic Church, His Grace Mihai Frățilă, Greek Catholic Bishop of Bucharest, auxiliary of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș, who said that firmness in faith is a pre-condition for achieving Christian unity. "We do not know when Christian unity will be established once again. We may catch a glimpse of it, but nobody knows how it can become a reality. If this scenario belongs exclusively to Heaven, God asks us, while waiting for His gift, that every one of us be firm in the simple duty to do good, act justly and pray continually." – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Jan. 18.

TODAY, 19 JANUARY 2011, HIS BEATITUDE DANIEL, PATRIARCH OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH RECEIVED, AT THE PATRIARCHAL RESIDENCE, THE VISIT OF HIS EXCELLENCY MR. BAHADOR AMINIAN JAZI, AMBASSADOR OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN IN BUCHAREST.

The Ambassador thanked the Patriarch

for receiving him and gave a short presentation of social life in Iran, underlining the importance of the inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue between various communities of cultures and religions. In this context, Mr. Bahador Aminian Jazi considered that any extremist manifestation religiously motivated seriously affects the peace and good understanding among peoples and nations.

His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel congratulated the new ambassador of Iran in Bucharest at the beginning of his diplomatic mission and mentioned the permanent concern of the Romanian Patriarchate for sustaining interreligious and intercultural dialogue at the national and international levels. In this sense, the Patriarch of Romania said that the religions of the world must cooperate in order to promote authentic spiritual values in the contemporary world for defending the dignity of the person and life, as gift of God. His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel emphasized the important role of the Trinitas Radio and Television stations, as well as of Lumina publication, as missionary and media means of the Romanian Patriarchate for informing, promoting and educating people in accordance with the religious traditional values. His Beatitude mentioned that the Romanian Patriarchate proclaimed the year 2011 as the year of the theological, pastoral and social reflection on the sacred institution of family, of deepening and studying the dangers of today's secularized world.

During the meeting, also appreciated was the importance of the intensification of the inter-cultural and inter-religious relations between the two peoples for better knowledge of one another. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Jan. 19.

AT 7:25 THIS EVENING, HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN BARTOLOMEU ANANIA PASSED AWAY. A press release of the Press Office of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj informs us:

'It is with much regret and sorrow in our souls, as well as with the hope in the mercy and comfort coming from God, that the Eparchial Council of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj announces that on 31 January 2011, 19.25 hours, our father, Archbishop and Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania began his journey to the Kingdom of Heaven. The death took place at the Intensive Therapy Section of the Surgery Clinic I of Cluj-Napoca. Surrounded by physicians, friends, disciples and close collaborators, the body of His Eminence Bartolomeu could no longer fight against the

many afflictions that marked the last period of his life. The body of the one who was Archbishop of Vad, Feleac and Cluj and Metropolitan of Cluj, Alba, Crisana and Maramures for 18 years will lie in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Cluj-Napoca, where all those who wish can do homage to him one last time.

The day of burial, in the hierarchs' crypt under the altar of the Metropolitan Cathedral will be announced later on.

In these days of mourning, the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of our Church will lift up prayers for divine mercy and the joy of the noble soul of our Father and Metropolitan Archbishop Bartholomew and for his eternal rest in the kingdom of God with His elect.

May God rest him in peace and may the Holy Spirit comfort all those who mourn him! – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Jan. 31.

TONIGHT, HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH DANIEL ADDRESSED THE INHABITANTS OF CLUJ CITY THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE THROUGH RENASTEREA RADIO MESSAGE:

"Tonight I learned, with great sadness, of the passing away of His Eminence Metropolitan Bartolomeu of Cluj, Alba, Crisana and Maramures. We think this is a great loss for our Church and for Romanian spirituality, because His Eminence Metropolitan Bartolomeu was a defender of the Orthodox faith and a promoter of Romanian spirituality. He joined together faith and culture in fruitful harmony. He showed the experience of the life in the country and abroad. He had a very pronounced missionary spirit and a special dynamism. He has always found, in spite of his advanced age, new methods of pastoral service and could adapt himself to the evolution of society so that the Church should be recognized and respected through her decisions, but especially through her activity. I refer here especially to the modern means of mass communication used to spread the word of God. Certainly, we think he will be in the Kingdom of Heaven in the company of the saints, the authors of Holy Scripture and of the Holy Apostles because he worked with much effort on the translation and explanation of Holy Scripture. We express our condolences to the entire Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj and to all the Metropolitan See of Cluj, Alba, Crisana and Maramures. May God rest him with the righteous!" – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Jan. 31.

SOFIA'S COURT OF APPEAL DECIDED ON TUESDAY NOT TO HAND OVER THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX PRIEST JOVAN VRANISOVSKI TO MACEDONIA.

Vranisovski was arrested in Bulgaria on November 17, 2010, on the basis of an international police order.

The detainee's 40-day term of arrest expired on December 28, 2010. He has an active 2.5-year sentence in Macedonia, for embezzlement of church funds estimated at EUR 250 000, which is why he left the country. The abuse allegedly took place in the period 1998-2002.

According to Vranisovski's defenders, the above mentioned sum was the Macedonian Orthodox Church's whole budget for this period, which, they state, makes the claim impossible.

Vranisovski himself has claimed that the sentence against him has political grounds.

Formerly, Jovan Vranisovski acted as a priest in Macedonia, but presented himself as the Exarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church in that country.

The problem is that the Macedonian Orthodox Church split from the Serbian in 1967 and is not recognized by it as a separate ecclesiastical entity.

The Serbian Orthodox Church regards the self-proclaimed Macedonian Church as schismatic and sees its territory as falling under its Ohrid Archbishopric.

This is why Jovan Vranisovski's activities were seen as encroaching on Macedonia, especially since the Ohrid Archbishopric is not a registered religious entity in the country. – *Sofia News Agency*, Jan. 4.

THE GEORGIAN PATRIARCHATE ISSUED THIS STATEMENT ON JANUARY 18:

As it has been reported, there is continued negotiation on rehabilitation of Georgian churches in Turkey and mosques in Georgia between government authorities of Georgia and Turkey. There is being discussed the restoration of four Georgian churches in Turkey and four Turkish mosques and a bath in Georgia.

According to the Georgian legislation (the Constitutional Agreement), the church is a legal person subject to the public law. The church owns Georgian Orthodox churches and monasteries. The state takes responsibility to conduct negotiations on preservation of Georgian churches abroad.

Therefore, the list of churches and negotiation terms submitted to Turkey should have been agreed to by the churches' owner, the Georgian Patriarchate. But there was no such agreement,

which is totally incomprehensible to us.

Let us initially note that such valuable monuments as Oshki, Khandzta, Otkhta, Ishkhani and others could have been restored and preserved by UNESCO, and proper actions could have been taken before. It would have been better to have negotiated for other churches in Turkey.

We do not know why the abovementioned way was not utilized. Regarding the current situation, let us specify two issues out of other problematic ones:

a) We have declared before and declare it again that we consider Turkey as a partner state of Georgia with which we have good neighborly relations. Thus, an obvious question arises: considering the fact that nowadays dozens of new mosques and jamis are open in Georgia, why is it not possible to open two or three Georgian monasteries in our friendly neighbor? And why does Turkey treat this like a barter exchange?

b) Let us note that like some mosques that are a priority for Turkey, we consider it vital to restore what remains of the Ardasheni Church in the district mostly inhabited by the Lazians in the Black Sea shore town Ardasheni; we also consider it essential to move the mosque out of the ancient Khakhuli Church and open it for visitors.

Therefore, the Georgian Patriarchate considers it a priority to restore Ardasheni and Khakhuli churches. As for the rest of the churches, the list can be agreed upon by proper government authorities and the Patriarchate.

And finally, the ownership of the restored mosques in Georgia and restored churches in Turkey should be immediately clarified. We hereby express our hope that the abovementioned notes will be acceptable to all the parties and that they will put our relations on a constructive path. – Press Release, Georgian Patriarchate, Jan. 18.

THE 18TH CENTURY IMAGE OF JESUS, PURCHASED BY POP STAR BOY GEORGE IN THE 1980S, IS SAFELY IN THE HANDS OF THE CHURCH OF CYPRUS and will soon make the journey back home.

The icon was spotted by the Church's representative in Brussels, Bishop Porfyrios of Neapolis, while watching an interview on Dutch television with the former singer.

Having decided to investigate further, Porfyrios subsequently verified the icon was one of several stolen and sold in the north after the 1974 invasion. The cleric next contacted Boy George and told him about the icon's provenance, and the singer returned it to its original owners without

payment.

The relic comes from the church of St Charalambos in the occupied village of Neo Chorio Kithrea.

Boy George bought it from a London art dealer in 1985, unaware it came from occupied Cyprus.

The icon was returned during a ceremony held at the St. Anargyre Greek Orthodox Church in London. Boy George was not left empty-handed, however; as a token of its appreciation, the Church of Cyprus presented him with a modern-day religious painting of Jesus.

The 300-year-old icon is currently being stored at the Church's offices in Brussels.

Asked to comment yesterday, Archbishop Chrysostomos expressed satisfaction for Boy George's gesture.

"Although I do not know him personally, his act has moved us...from the moment he found out that the icon was stolen, I think he did well to return it.

"We thank him, and if at any time he wishes to visit Cyprus we would be glad to host him," added Chrysostomos. – *Cyprus Mail*, Jan. 21.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CYPRUS YESTERDAY LIKENED THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS (ECHR) TO A POLITICAL COURT AFTER THE STRASBOURG-BASED INSTITUTION REJECTED HIS APPLICATION AGAINST TURKEY, on behalf of the Church and its parishioners, over violations of their right to enjoy property, and holding religious services.

The ECHR ruled that in accordance with a previous ruling, Chrysostomos should apply first to the property commission set up by Turkey in the breakaway north -- considered by the ECHR as Ankara's subordinate administration.

The prelate rejected the suggestion. "We do not recognize such commissions and we will not appeal," he told reporters. "Certainly we will not go."

Chrysostomos said the ruling on the 2009 application had been expected.

"Unfortunately the Court looks more like a political court than a court that dispenses justice," Chrysostomos said.

He said the case was clear-cut but the "Earth's powerful do not want to do justice. While in other instances they go to war over human rights, for us, it is like we are second class citizens in this world."

He added: "We do not have human rights, we do not have human freedoms, we do not have religious freedoms."

The Archbishop said he would not yield and "in spite of all of this we will fight

for our country and I believe the love of God will grant us a beautiful and free country."

In the application the Church leader complained that because of the Turkish invasion of 1974, the Church and its parishioners had to leave behind property and flee places of worship which they could not subsequently access.

On top of that, since 1974, many properties had been destroyed, vandalized, looted or stripped of their religious function and are now used as Muslim religious sites, museums, bars, clubs and barns. Religious artifacts have been destroyed or sold, the application said.

The ECHR ruled the application inadmissible, pointing out that the Church should apply to the compensation commission in the north as per a March 2010 decision on a similar case.

The court also said it had no jurisdiction to consider the complaints regarding vandalism and theft as these acts occurred before 1987, when Turkey ratified the Convention. – *Cyprus Mail*, Jan. 28.

THE RELIGIOUS FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY -- THE TWELFTH DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS -- WAS CELEBRATED THROUGHOUT GREECE ON THURSDAY WITH THE TRADITIONAL "BLESSING OF THE WATERS" Orthodox Church rite in ports, rivers, lakes, reservoirs and fountains in front of cathedrals. The ritual commemorates Christ's baptism in the River Jordan, termed the Epiphany by St. John Chrysostom (from the Greek word for 'manifestation', 'epifania').

In Athens, the ceremony was held at the Kolonaki reservoir, attended by new Athens mayor George Kaminis and MPs from various parties, and government vice-president representing the government. The ceremony in Thessaloniki, officiated by Metropolitan Anthimos, was attended by the new mayor Yiannis Boutaris and political party representatives, with the government represented by national defence minister Evangelos Venizelos.

In Piraeus, Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece officiated at the ceremony in the country's largest port. The government was represented by Maritime Affairs, Islands and Fishing minister Yiannis Diamantidis, and was also attended by main opposition New Democracy (ND) leader Antonis Samaras, Popular Orthodox Rally (LA.OS) party leader George Karatzaferis, numerous officials, and political party MPs.

Epiphany, the coming of the light, means that the darkness leaves and optim-

ism comes, Samaras said, adding that this was his wish for the Greek people in these difficult hours, and chiefly for the country.

Karatzafelis wished that the blessing of the waters of the Aegean will reach all the way to Erzurum (in Turkey, where Prime Minister George Papandreou will attend a conference of Turkish ambassadors by special invitation on Friday), and that the Greeks will not find themselves presented with *faits accomplis* in the Aegean.

Diamantidis, in turn said that the baptism of Christ and manifestation of the Holy Trinity was being celebrated, and the world was brought into the light, and sent the message that "with a plan, with enlightenment, vision and optimism, we are moving forward strongly." – *ANA*, Jan. 7.

THE CHURCH OF GREECE HAS WARNED ITS BISHOPS TO AVOID USING DIVISIVE LANGUAGE ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS AND TO BACK UP THEIR CLAIMS WITH FACTS FOLLOWING COMMENTS by Bishop Seraphim of Piraeus that drew criticism from Jewish and Muslim groups as well as the government. The Holy Synod discussed Seraphim's comments, which included labeling Islam as a "false religion" and claiming that Adolf Hitler was "an instrument of world Zionism," on Wednesday before issuing its statement. "The Holy Synod condemns any form of racial or religious discrimination," it said. "In the Church of Greece, every bishop has the right to express his views but must also bear the burden of proving them." – *KED*, Jan. 14.

THREE FORMER MINISTERS IN PREVIOUS NEW DEMOCRACY GOVERNMENTS LOOK SET TO AVOID PROSECUTION OVER THEIR ALLEGED ROLE IN THE VATOPEDI MONASTERY LAND-SWAP SCANDAL according to a recommendation to the Supreme Court that looks set to bring an end to the long-running speculation over the affair.

Sources told *Kathimerini* yesterday that Supreme Court deputy prosecutor Miltiadis Andreiotelis is to recommend to a special council of judges ruling on whether the ministers should face action that the politicians cannot be tried because of the statute of limitations that applies to any offenses they have committed.

The Greek Constitution stipulates that current or ex-ministers cannot be prosecuted if more than two parliaments have sat since the alleged crime was committed.

That is why Andreiotelis appears to be recommending to judges that former Deputy Economy and Finance Minister Petros

Doukas, former Agriculture Minister Evangelos Basiakos and his deputy Alexandros Kontos should not be brought to trial. All three have been accused of breach of faith while holding a public post, although they deny the charges. The ex-ministers argue that they were simply following the recommendations of various public servants and state bodies that gave the green light to the exchange of public property for land belonging to the Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos. It is alleged that the state lost tens of millions of euros in the deal because the real estate it traded had a higher value. However, several evaluations by property experts have yet to confirm this.

According to sources, Andreiotelis is set to recommend to judges that the statute of limitations does not mean other civil servants implicated in the case are immune from prosecution.

The judicial council, convened after Parliament voted to refer the case following a probe by MPs, is due to issue its verdict in less than a month. If it follows the prosecutor's recommendation, as is likely, then it would bring to an end almost three years of speculation about whether any PASOK or New Democracy politicians would be found guilty of wrongdoing.

However, ND sources said that such a verdict would lead to the conservatives attacking PASOK for forcing the judiciary to make the final ruling when the constitution makes it clear that three ministers could not face prosecution. The conservatives believe that Parliament, therefore, should not have referred the case to the judges. – *KED*, Jan. 15.

THE CHURCH OF GREECE SAID YESTERDAY THAT IT HAD DECIDED TO TEMPER ITS REQUEST FOR THE HIRING OF NEW PRIESTS TO REMAIN WITHIN THE SPIRIT OF THE CUTBACKS THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND THE GREEK PEOPLE HAVE TO MAKE as a result of the economic crisis. Following a meeting of the Holy Synod, it was decided that the Church would only seek to hire 300 priests. According to its spokesman, Bishop Dorotheos of Syros, the church has some 800 spaces to fill. – *KED*, Jan. 18.

The Assyrian Church of the East

THE ASSYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL IN ILLINOIS, USA HAS HELD A DINNER IN HONOR OF HIS HOLINESS MAR DINKHA IV, CATHOLICOS PATRIARCH OF THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST TO MARK THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ASSYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL.

The dinner, held on 22 January, celebrated the founding of the Assyrian National Council, which was established according to the recommendations of His Holiness in 1985.

His Holiness, accompanied by a number of priests and deacons, arrived at the Council's headquarters where he was greeted with applause and received by members.

Also among the guests was His Grace Mar Nursai Thomas, Archbishop of Kirkuk for the Ancient Church of the East, and a number of priests.

Following His Holiness' entrance, both the Assyrian national anthem and the national anthem of the USA were played. Assyrian poet and master of ceremonies, Ninos Nirari, gave a welcome speech for distinguished guests including:

His Grace Mar Nursai Thomas, Archdeacon Shlemon Hasqiel, Archdeacon Aoiqam Bithyo, Chor-Bishop Othanas Joseph, Chor-Bishop Kewarkis Thomas, Reverend Antoine Agen, Reverend Alfred (Evangelical Church), Reverend Khoshaba Bouza, Reverend William Thomas, Reverend Paul Benjamin, and Reverend Charbel (Church Syriac Orthodox).

More than 57 national institutions, political and civil organizations were acknowledged for their participation.

His Holiness inaugurated the dinner with a prayer, while His Beatitude Mar Nursai Thomas led a prayer after dinner.

The Chairman of the Assyrian National Council, Mr Sheba Mando, thanked His Holiness for his paternal care and values, without which the Council would not be established.

Mr Mando highlighted the efforts by His Holiness to unite all ranks of the Assyrian people by picking the fruit that is shared by all parties, organizations and churches united under the banner of the one Assyrian nation.

His Holiness addressed attendees, recounting the establishment of the Assyrian National Council:

"In one of our visits to this country in 1981, we met one of the state officials who had accompanied Mr Jean-Greece, where he told us that government assistance is available for every new arrival in this country. Since we honestly do not know of any Assyrian institution involved in this work, we had the idea of founding the Assyrian National Council in the state of Illinois, which includes in its membership all Assyrians regardless of their canonical or political affiliation. And after four years of numerous meetings, which were held mostly in the St George Church hall in Chicago, it

was on 18 May in 1985 that the opening of the establishment session of this Council took place. We prayed asking the Lord to provide those assembled with wisdom and to look over them with love for progress and success of what is good for all the Assyrians in this state," said His Holiness.

Giving thanks for all the efforts made to establish the Council, His Holiness asked the members to work hard to establish a home for the elderly and hospital for the needy and elementary and secondary schools of our Assyrian people in the state.

His Holiness also added that "although we as Christians belong to the Chaldean Church, Syrian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church, we are one people and one nation, and as Christians also we are all brothers in Christ because we are born to a mother and recognize one spiritual baptism."

"For this are not three but one bishop and nationally we should be recognized in the legislative acts of the Government of Iraq as one nation. All archaeological excavations in Mesopotamia testify and confirm we are today's Assyrian people of Nineveh and Babylon, from Assyria. We are not strangers, but children, indigenous and true to our country, Iraq. No one who lives in Iraq today is entitled to consider us strangers, or try in various ways and means to expel and displace the sons of our nation, to keep them away from their home and the country of their ancestors.

"Therefore, we renew our prayers for the unity of our political parties and our nation in order to increase our strength in order to better claim our national rights through a self-governing province for the children, our people, because we do not want to immigrate, but to live and stay safely in our country, Iraq." – *Assyrian Church News*, Jan. 28.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

A DEVASTATING NEW YEAR'S DAY TERRORIST BOMBING AT A COPTIC CHURCH IN EGYPT THAT KILLED 21 PEOPLE WAS THE LATEST IN A SPATE OF VIOLENT ASSAULTS AGAINST THE MIDDLE EAST'S VULNERABLE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES.

The car bomb explosion also injured 79 people just after midnight Saturday as worshippers were leaving a New Year's Mass at the Saints Church in east Alexandria, Egyptian officials said. The bombing sparked street clashes between police and angry Copts, who hurled stones, stormed a nearby mosque and threw some of its books into the street.

Security forces cordoned off the area and used tear gas to disperse the crowd. A witness told the state-run newspaper *Al Ahram* that a priest calmed the Copts and urged them to stay inside the church.

The attack was among the deadliest on Egyptian Christians in recent memory and the worst terrorist incident in the country since 2006, and followed similar assaults this week in Iraq.

All but eight of the injured and all of the fatalities in Alexandria were Christians, according to Egypt's Ministry of Health. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, which was being described as a suicide bombing. The explosion, which appeared designed to inflict maximum civilian casualties, bore the hallmark of Al Qaeda militants.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak accused unnamed foreign elements of being behind the attack.

"This act of terrorism shook the country's conscience, shocked our feelings and hurt the hearts of Muslim and Coptic Egyptians," he said in an emergency address to the nation. "The blood of their martyrs in the land of Alexandria mixed to tell us all that all Egypt is the target and that blind terrorism does not differentiate between a Copt and a Muslim."

The attack in the ancient Mediterranean coastal city was the latest in a wave of violence against once-resilient Christian communities in the Muslim world. -- Borzou Daragahi and Amro Hassan for the *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 1.

AT MIDDAY ON JANUARY 2 THE POPE APPEARED AT THE WINDOW OF HIS STUDY IN THE APOSTOLIC PALACE TO PRAY THE ANGELUS WITH THOUSANDS OF FAITHFUL AND PILGRIMS GATHERED IN ST. PETER'S SQUARE.

After the Angelus prayer the Holy Father referred to "news of the serious attack against the Coptic Christian community in Alexandria, Egypt. This vile and murderous gesture, like that of placing bombs near the houses of Christians in Iraq to force them to leave, offends God and all humankind, which only yesterday prayed for peace and began a new year with hope. In the face of these strategies of violence, which aim against Christians but have consequences for the entire population, I pray for the victims and their relatives, and encourage ecclesial communities to persevere in the faith and in the witness of non-violence which comes to us from the Gospel. I think also of the many pastoral workers killed in various parts of the world in the course of 2010. For them too we equally express our affec-

tionate remembrance before the Lord. Let us remain united in Christ, our hope and our peace!" – *VIS*, Jan. 2.

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW SENT THIS MESSAGE OF CONDOLENCE TO POPE SHENOUDA III ON JANUARY 3:

Your Beatitude Shenouda III, Pope and Patriarch of the Coptic Church of Alexandria, our beloved brother in the Lord: Grace be to you and peace from God.

We hasten to express to Your Beatitude our sincerest and whole-hearted condolences for the recent terrorist attack outside of All Saints Coptic Church. Words cannot adequately express our shock and sorrow at the magnitude of this tragedy; the ruthlessness and cold-bloodedness of the assailants have shaken Christians and people of good will all over the world. This unjust and unjustifiable incident has revealed to us and to the entire world the great price that Christians continue to pay for their faith in Christ Jesus.

During this most difficult time of pain, therefore, we would like to assure you and your faithful of our complete solidarity and support. Please know that we always stand prayerfully beside you as we continue to journey on the difficult paths of our respective Churches. May all those who have recently lost their lives find peace and comfort in the embrace of Abraham.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the 3rd of January 2011. Your Beatitude's beloved brother in Christ,

+ BARTHOLOMEW

Archbishop of Constantinople
New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch –
Website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,
Jan. 3.

IN SEPARATE LETTERS TO THE HEAD OF EGYPT'S COPTIC CHRISTIANS AND U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON, THE U.S. BISHOPS CONDEMNED THE RECENT ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS, INCLUDING THE NEW YEAR'S DAY ATTACK ON THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH IN ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT, and expressed their solidarity with the victims of religious violence. They also affirmed the ongoing work of the U.S. Church and government to work for the religious freedom of all people, especially vulnerable minorities.

In his January 4 letter to Shenouda III, Patriarch of the See of St. Mark in Alexandria, Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, called the attack in Egypt a "shocking assault on human life and religious freedom."

"I was horrified to learn that over 20 people died and more than 100 were injured. So many innocent lives lost to such senseless violence calls for the strongest condemnation by all religious leaders and by persons of conscience everywhere," wrote Archbishop Dolan. "Please be assured that the Catholic bishops of the United States stand in solidarity with you and your Church in this time of trial and suffering. We continue to work with others to defend the life, dignity and human rights, especially religious freedom, of vulnerable minorities, especially Christians, in the Middle East."

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard expressed grave concern in a January 6 letter to Secretary of State Clinton following the attacks against Christians in Egypt, Iraq and Nigeria as well as other countries over Christmas and the New Year. Speaking as chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, Bishop Hubbard said that "egregious violations of human rights as well as indifference and inaction by foreign governments to the protection of their own citizens must be weighed seriously" in economic and political decisions taken by the Administration.

Bishop Hubbard also cited Pope Benedict XVI's recent World Day of Peace Message, in which the Pope urged greater religious freedom, saying that religious freedom is the "path to peace."

"We ask everyone to pray for the religious freedom of Christians and other people of faith in countries where they are under attack," said Archbishop Dolan in a separate statement. "The recent violence in the Middle East and the ongoing threats to religious freedom in countries like Pakistan, Nigeria, China and North Korea remind us of what Pope Benedict has recently said, that religious freedom is essential not only as a human right, but in ensuring world peace." – USCCB Press Release, Jan. 6.

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY ROWAN WILLIAMS AND WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES GENERAL SECRETARY THE REV. OLAV FYKSE TVEIT ARE AMONG INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH LEADERS WHO HAVE CONDEMNED THE JAN. 1 SUICIDE BOMB ATTACK that killed at least 21 people and injured more than 80 at a Coptic church in Alexandria, Egypt.

Williams said the attack on Christians in Alexandria is "yet another dreadful reminder" of the pressure Christian minorities are under in the Middle East.

"The Coptic community and other Christian groups in Egypt can be sure of

our deep sorrow at this terrible event and our continuing prayers and support for them," he said. "We know the long and honorable history of co-existence of Christians and Muslims in Egypt and are confident that the overwhelming majority of Egyptian people will join in condemning this and similar acts."

Tveit expressed "profound sorrow" on hearing of the attack and offered condolences and prayers for the families of the victims, for the wounded and for all the people of Egypt.

Tveit said the Jan. 1 bombing was a reminder of other tragedies in the region, including an attack on Coptic worshippers in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, on Jan. 7, 2010, and the assault on the Church of Our Lady of Salvation (Sayidat al-Nejat) in Baghdad, Iraq, on Oct. 31, 2010.

He appealed to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, to religious leaders and to governments across the region "to act swiftly and boldly to safeguard the fundamental religious rights of worshippers of all faiths, to ensure security in the face of violence and to guarantee justice for all people." – *Episcopal News Service*, Jan. 3.

THE ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA (ISNA) SENDS HEARTFELT PRAYERS AND CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AFFECTED BY THE SENSELESS JANUARY 1ST ATTACKS IN ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT AND ABUJA, NIGERIA. It also condemns these barbaric acts that go against the very essence of every Godly teaching across religions.

On Saturday, more than 20 people were killed and more than a hundred injured as they gathered outside of a church after prayer service in Alexandria. In Abuja, more than 20 Christians and Muslims were killed and dozens more injured as they gathered to celebrate the New Year.

"It is a sad day for all people when a simple act of worship or community celebration is marked by violence and innocent deaths. ISNA asks Muslim community members and organizations in Egypt and Nigeria to lend support to the families who lost loved ones during these attacks and urges Muslim Americans to join them in prayer for God to ease the suffering of all those affected by this terrible tragedy," said ISNA President Imam Mohamed Magid.

ISNA and the American Muslim community recognize that these acts of violence require us to double our efforts in promoting religious harmony and the right of people to worship free from fear and violence everywhere in the world. "The

small faction of fanatics that wish to ignite religious violence and strife across the world must not be allowed to succeed" said ISNA Secretary General Safaa Zarzour.

"These bombings are absolutely reprehensible. ISNA condemns any and all acts of violence against innocent civilians. The attacks in Egypt and Nigeria are unacceptable and ISNA urges the Egyptian and Nigerian governments to take all measures to prosecute the individuals responsible for these heinous crimes swiftly and to the fullest measure. We applaud President Obama's commitment to lend support from the United States to prosecute these individuals and bring peace to innocent civilians," said ISNA President Imam Mohamed Magid. – ISNA Press Release, Jan. 3.

POPE SHENOUDA III, THE LEADER OF EGYPT'S COPTIC CHURCH, PLEADED FOR CALM AMONG HIS FOLLOWERS AS RIOTS RAGED FOR THE THIRD STRAIGHT DAY AFTER A BOMB ATTACK OUTSIDE A CHURCH KILLED 21 PEOPLE.

The Pope, in an interview with Egypt's state-run television late yesterday, also called on the government of the Muslim-dominated country to address the grievances of Copts, the largest religious minority in the Middle East.

Thousands of Copts have taken to the streets of Egypt in the aftermath of the Jan. 1 attack in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, demanding government protection and protesting what they describe as the state's negligence of their rights.

"I plead with our sons to calm down," Pope Shenouda said. "There are many demands, but this is not the way to ask for them."

Hundreds of Copts protested in Cairo yesterday, many clashing with riot police. Two officers and 12 policemen were injured, the state-run *Middle East News Agency* reported.

Sectarian violence and discrimination have worsened in Egypt in recent years, according to the U.S. State Department's annual International Religious Freedom report. Christians in Egypt "face personal and collective discrimination, especially in government employment and their ability to build, renovate, and repair places of worship," the report said.

Copts account for about 10 percent of Egypt's population of 80 million people. The government says it treats all citizens equally.

President Hosni Mubarak blamed the church attack, which injured 96 people, on "foreign elements" and has urged Christians and Muslims to stand united. The Inte-

rior Ministry said it has increased security around churches nationwide “in light of the escalating threats from al-Qaeda to many countries,” according to a statement on its website.

Al-Qaeda’s branch in Iraq said in November that it would attack Christian targets after it claimed that Egypt’s Coptic Church was holding two Christian women who had converted to Islam. The church has denied this allegation. -- Alaa Shahine for *Bloomberg*, Jan. 4.

AS CLASHES BETWEEN ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTERS AND EGYPTIAN POLICE INTENSIFIED ON JAN. 28, SOME COPTIC ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS DISREGARDED THEIR CHURCH’S CALL FOR PEACEFUL NON-INVOLVEMENT – in hopes that the possible abdication of President Hosni Mubarak could advance the cause of their freedom.

Professor Emad Shahin, a political scientist at the University of Notre Dame, specializes in Islamic affairs and has been monitoring the Egyptian situation closely. He told CNA that many Coptic Christians were joining with Muslims to express their frustration with three decades of authoritarian rule.

“The different statements that called for today’s demonstrations were calling on participants to come ‘from the mosques and the churches,’ to go to public squares,” Professor Shahin explained. “We have seen evidence that some Copts have been participating in the demonstrations.”

The protesters, he said “need an end to corruption. They need the rule of law. They call for freedoms, and dignity – for social justice, and of course, for democracy.”

Officially, however, “the Egyptian Church is taking a separate side – it’s not really participating, or encouraging its members to participate in the events.”

The unprecedented protests have brought hundreds of thousands of Egyptians into the streets since Jan. 25, prompting President Mubarak to deploy security forces and shut down the means of communication – including internet access, text messaging and phone service – within the country.

Professor Shahin mentioned a number of statements coming from officials of the Coptic Church – including its leader, Pope Shenouda III – asking Copts not to participate in the demonstrations. They were urged, instead, to attend church services and pray for the peace and the well-being of their country.

But for many Coptic Christians, the prospect of a future without Mubarak –

notwithstanding the uncertainty about who would replace him – held more appeal than the Coptic Pope’s call for restraint.

“If President Mubarak is removed, and these uprisings lead to the establishment of a true democratic system, then I think everyone will benefit,” Shahin stated. “It would ensure a fair representation of the Copts within the political structures and the state.”

“But we’re still really far from being there,” he acknowledged.

Egyptian Christians want their rights and legal status to be handled by what Shahin called “real governing institutions” – the judiciary and legislature – instead of the frequently brutal and corrupt state security apparatus. They want the right to build new churches, and an end to discriminatory policies that leave them socially, politically, and economically marginalized.

Shahin believes most Egyptians want to grant these rights to the Coptic Christians. President Mubarak, however, has not been inclined to do so.

“Mubarak doesn’t want to appear weak – because Pope Shenouda is a very strong and highly political figure. He doesn’t want to give any concession to him. He’s been at war with the Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, so he doesn’t want to appear – in front of a majority Muslim population – as giving concessions to Copts, while cracking down on Islamists.”

It’s not clear whether the protesters can achieve their goal of ousting Mubarak, or how they will move forward if they succeed. “It’s difficult to anticipate where this is going,” Shahin reflected. “It all depends on the public, and how steadfast they will be in continuing with the protests and demonstrations.”

The two most likely outcomes, Shahin predicted, were “someone from the military taking power – either directly or indirectly – or a transitional unity government.”

“In terms of names,” he said, “I can think of 10 or 15 people who can successfully head a transitional government – one that would prepare the groundwork for a true and meaningful change, and a democratic transition.” – Benjamin Mann for CNA, Jan. 30.

IN NEW YORK CITY ON FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2011, HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II, SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS, PRESIDED OVER THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL—the administrative body which governs the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

Diocesan Primate Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, in his role as president of the

Diocesan Council, welcomed His Holiness to the Diocesan Center, and expressed his thanks for the extraordinary opportunity to share the vision and thoughts of the leader of the worldwide Armenian Church.

Oscar Tatosian, Diocesan Council chair, expressed gratitude to His Holiness for his leadership, and pledged the Diocese’s continued support to His Holiness for his ongoing ministry to the church in its homeland of Armenia and across the globe.

Catholicos Karekin II had arrived in the United States earlier in January, to meet privately with community leaders.

During the January 21 luncheon meeting, the Diocesan Council offered its warm good wishes for His Holiness’ continuing leadership of the church. Archbishop Barsamian informed the council that the present year would mark His Holiness’ 60th birthday, and that the Supreme Spiritual Council had agreed to observe the milestone by launching a worldwide endowment fund to help benefit the education of future clergy. The council members pledged to contribute to this effort, and organize suitable events in the Eastern Diocese.

In the last decade, 300 deacons have been ordained to the holy priesthood, and there are plans to open a new seminary in Armenia this year. Each year, several newly-ordained priests are invited to intern in the Eastern Diocese, where they work closely with experienced parish pastors and become better acquainted with parish life in the United States, in preparation for future service as full-time pastors in the Eastern Diocese.

His Holiness expressed appreciation to the Primate and to leaders of the Armenian Church in America, and discussed his constructive goals for the future. These involve increasing the number of Armenian clergy, restoring historic Armenian monuments, building new churches and educational facilities, codifying the administrative practices of the church, expanding outreach through communications technology, and deepening the religious experience of the faithful.

As a result of these and other efforts, His Holiness explained, people throughout Armenia are coming closer to their faith, and the Christian religion is asserting its historic role at the center of the Armenian nation.

All of these developments would be advanced by a stronger administrative structure of the Armenian Church, Catholicos Karekin II said. He noted that the Eastern Diocese’s own by-laws were exemplary, and laid emphasis on the need for all diocesan jurisdictions to incorporate into their

respective governing documents the guidelines prepared under the auspices of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, and approved during the meeting of Diocesan representatives at the Holy See in the autumn of 2009.

His Holiness entertained questions from Diocesan Council members on a host of ecclesiastical and pastoral topics. To close the meeting, Catholicos Karekin II led the council members in a prayer.

"We were so blessed to have the opportunity of this audience with our Vehapar," said Oscar Tatosian.

"His fatherly concern for our church, and his interest in the life and growth of our own community, is deeply inspiring."

The Armenian Pontiff will return to Armenia later this month. – Press Release, Holy Etchmiadzin, Jan. 22.

ON JANUARY 18-19, HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP VICKEN AYKAZIAN, ECUMENICAL OFFICER OF THE EASTERN DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA and representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) paid a working visit to Rome, Italy.

On January 18, His Eminence met with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State of the Vatican. During the meeting, there was a reflection on the issues of bilateral importance. They also touched upon the issues of strengthening cooperation and on the rights of religious organizations of various countries including the Republic of Georgia.

Father Gabriel Quicke, Official of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome (co-secretary) accompanied His Eminence during his visit. – Press Release, Holy Etchmiadzin, Jan. 24.

THE COMMISSION THAT WAS FORMED FOR THE ILLNESS OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH, MESROB II, MET AT THE PATRIARCHATE ON WEDNESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2011, TO ASSESS ALL OF THE MEDICAL DATA.

Present at the meeting were Archbishop Aram Atesyan, the General Deputy of the Patriarch; Mari Mutafyan, mother of His Beatitude the Patriarch; Surgeon Doctor Ardas Akday, Head Doctor of the Holy Savior Hospital; Neurologist Dr. Armenak Medzaduryan of the Holy Savior Hospital; and Assistant Professor Dr. Vahe Aleksanyan.

The commission assessed the treatments and examinations for the medical condition of His Beatitude the Patriarch.

The doctors also added to their documents the report of Dr. Gulustu Kaptanoglu, who is responsible for the treatment of His Beatitude the Patriarch.

We hereby show the commission's report to our community:

"We read and then assessed the 5 January 2011 report of Dr. Gulustu Kaptanoglu, who is in charge of the treatment of His Beatitude the Patriarch, Mesrob II.

"In our opinion the illness of His Beatitude the Patriarch is advancing as was expected. It is unclear how long it will last. The care and supervision of the Holy Savior Armenian Hospital will continue. The situation will again be evaluated as needed." – *Lraper*, Jan. 12.

FOR THE 550TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF OUR PATRIARCHATE, AN ORGANIZING COMMITTEE HAS BEEN FORMED FROM MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY'S ADMINISTRATORS, WITH ARCHBISHOP ARAM ATESYAN AS ITS HEAD. The committee has started to arrange the celebratory activities.

While on the one hand we feel the joy of celebration in these preparatory activities, on the other hand we recognize the illness of His Beatitude the Patriarch, Mesrob II, and have decided to limit the celebrations of the Religious Council and the Organizing Committee only to spiritual and cultural activities.

Our community will be informed as the projects reach their final shape. -- Statement by the Patriarchal Council, *Lraper*, Jan. 13.

ON THURSDAY 30 DECEMBER 2010, HIS HOLINESS ARAM I MET WITH A GROUP OF THIRTY ITALIAN JOURNALISTS, UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY. They met to discuss the problems and challenges related to the Christian presence in the Middle East. The conversation between His Holiness Aram I and the visitors covered the following issues:

1. Starting with the situation in Lebanon, he said: "Religion is not the cause of the political problem in Lebanon. Christianity and Islam have always existed together. Lebanon is a community of confessions, and this is unique in the world. Just as in any family, there is also misunderstanding within the wider Lebanese family regarding political issues. It is important to respect differences and safeguard the unity of the country and its economy. As one of the seven major confessional communities in Lebanon, the Armenian community is in good relations with all other communities

and political organizations with the purpose of safeguarding the interests of Lebanon and its independence."

2. His Holiness then addressed the role of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia in ecumenical and interreligious relations. Catholicos Aram I first described the current ecumenical situation based on his experience as former Moderator of the World Council of Churches. He said that the ecumenical movement needs to be restructured so that the member churches put aside their theological and institutional differences and focus on responding together to the wide range of challenges arising from our societies. He went on to say that world religions should emphasize and teach what is similar among all religions and face all problems from a common moral and ethical perspective.

3. Finally, addressing the issue of the Christian presence in the Middle East, he said: "It is true that there are instances of persecution of Christians in the Middle East. It is also true that sometimes there are tensions between the two religions. However, we cannot speak of an overall plan to persecute Christians in the Middle East. So far, any act of violence against Christians has been denounced by Muslim religious and political leaders. Christianity is an integral part of the Middle East. Through the centuries, Christianity and Islam have coexisted and participated in the political structures of the countries of the Middle East, contributing together to their culture and socio-economic development. Jesus' statement, "Do not be afraid; only have faith," has been the guiding principle for Christians living in the Middle East in the past; the same principle will guide them not only to remain in the region but also to participate in the life of their societies." He then added: "We need lasting peace in the Middle East. This peace cannot be imposed from outside. It should be based on justice. As long as Israel does not recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self determination, there can be no peace in the Middle East."

4. The meeting ended with a reference to the Armenian Genocide. His Holiness said that Human Rights Laws and Conventions should not remain dead words on paper. The Armenian Genocide is a historical reality. Turkey ought to recognize the crime perpetrated by its ancestors. He then asked: "Why do we have an Armenian Diaspora today, why is the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Lebanon and not on its centuries old historical land of Cilicia? When you visit Turkey, I suggest that you raise these questions with the Turkish authorities. The genocide of

Armenians in 1915 was well planned and implemented by Turkish authorities. Today, in memory of our martyrs and on behalf of our people, the Catholicosate demands justice from Turkey.”

At the end of this long interview, the group visited the memorial chapel of the martyrs and the Cilicia museum. – Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, Jan. 3.

MALANKARA METROPOLITAN AND CATHOLICOS MAR BASELIOS MARTHOMA PAULOSE II ASSUMED THE CHARGE OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH EAST AMERICA AS OF TUESDAY JANUARY 18, 2011. The decision of the Malankara Metropolitan is vide order No. MOSC/CMM/22/2011 and according to clause 95 of the constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

The Malankara Metropolitan has also decreed that on behalf of him Zacharia Mar Nicholovos, the current Assistant Metropolitan of the Diocese, will discharge the administrative responsibilities until further orders. “We exhort you all to obey the orders and directions of H. G. Zacharia Mar Nicholovos,” urged the Malankara Metropolitan to the Diocese of North East America.

Earlier in his letter OL No.5/2011 dated January 12, 2011 Mathews Mar Barnabas, Metropolitan of the Diocese of North East America, requested the Pontiff to relieve him from all administrative responsibilities of the North East American Diocese and cited his ill health as reason therefore.

The Catholicos wished all blessings from the Almighty to the senior Metropolitan of America upon his retirement. “It is with immense gratitude that we acknowledge the Charismatic leadership of H. G. Mathews Mar Barnabas to build up the diocese to its present status. We praise and adore God Almighty for empowering His Grace Mathews Mar Barnabas Metropolitan with extraordinary divine gifts of prayers, simplicity and commitment to the Divine Call and to the faith and traditions of the Holy, undefiled Church. Along with the faithful, members of the Holy Episcopal Synod and other office bearers of the Church, we beseech God Almighty to grant His Grace all heavenly blessings to continue his pilgrimage,” says the bull from the Catholicos of the East. – *Orthodox Herald*, Jan. 18.

The Catholic Churches

PRESIDENT VIKTOR YANUKOVYCH SENT HIS CHRISTMAS GREETINGS ONLY TO ORTHODOX BELIEVERS. In his congratulation disseminated by his press service, Yanukovych says, “I am happy that in these moments we, together with the rest of the Orthodox world, are glorifying God’s child and looking with hope and love toward the prospects of the new year,” *Ukrayinska Pravda* reported on Jan. 8.

Meanwhile, Yanukovych failed to congratulate the 5 million Greek Catholics who also celebrate Christmas on the same day as the Orthodox.

There was no official response from the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, *Radio Svoboda* notes. However, a UGCC priest, Father Mykhailo, believes Yanukovych’s greetings can hurt many Ukrainians.

“Our president often forgets about other categories of his subjects, and not merely believers. We can come across such forgetfulness in his declarations and actions. It is very humiliating. As regards the Greek Catholics, we’ve seen a lot of humiliations,” he says.

“Such steps do not promote peace among Ukrainians. The president should be the center of peacemaking. Possibly, he may not be aware of this duty, possibly, this is done deliberately,” Father Mykhailo says. – *RISU*, Jan. 7.

THE INSTITUTE OF EUROPE OF THE RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES IS HONORING A SECRETARY OF BLESSED POPE JOHN XXIII FOR HIS CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH ON THE PONTIFF’S LEGACY as a leader of the 20th century, and a promoter of religious dialogue and peace.

The institute conferred an honorary doctorate on Archbishop Loris Francesco Capovilla, 95, who was the Holy Father’s personal secretary.

Loris Capovilla was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Venice in 1940. When Cardinal Roncalli (the future Pope) was appointed Patriarch there, the two began to collaborate and Father Capovilla continued this work after the cardinal was elected to the See of Peter in 1958.

Four years after John XXIII’s death in 1963, Father Capovilla was appointed the bishop of Chieti and then for 17 years served as the papal delegate to the shrine of Loreto. He retired to Sotto il Monte, Italy, the birthplace of John XXIII.

The director of the think tank, Smelyev Nikolay Petrovich, a former adviser of Mikhail Gorbachev, chose to confer the

honor.

The Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IE RAS) is one of Russia’s leading think tanks. It was founded in 1987 and works on economic, political, social and security issues, established or emerging across Europe.

The Russian Orthodox Church in the person of Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department of External Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate, expressed its approval of the honor. – *Zenit*, Jan. 12.

EGYPT HAS RECALLED TO CAIRO ITS AMBASSADOR TO THE HOLY SEE IN A SHOW OF DISPLEASURE AT THE POPE’S DEFENSE OF THE COUNTRY’S COPTS. Before leaving the Vatican, she met with Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for relations with states.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi offered information about Tuesday’s meeting between the archbishop and Lamia Aly Hamada Mekhemar.

“During the meeting the ambassador, who is to return to Cairo for consultations with the Egyptian foreign ministry, described the concerns of her government at this present difficult time,” a Vatican communiqué explained. “She was also able to receive information and gather the elements necessary in order to report adequately on the Holy Father’s recent remarks concerning, in particular, religious freedom and the protection of Christians in the Middle East.”

The Holy Father’s comment came in the context of his greeting to a group of Italian Parliamentarians who had attended the midday Angelus address as a show of solidarity with the Egyptian Copts. His Monday statement noted the persecution of Christians in Iraq, after which he noted: “In Egypt too, in Alexandria, terrorism brutally struck Christians as they prayed in church. This succession of attacks is yet another sign of the urgent need for the governments of the region to adopt, in spite of difficulties and dangers, effective measures for the protection of religious minorities.”

According to the Vatican communiqué, the ambassador’s meeting with Archbishop Mamberti gave the prelate a chance to affirm “how the Holy See shares the emotions of all the people of Egypt, struck by the attack in Alexandria.”

He also “gave assurances that it also fully shares the Egyptian government’s concern ‘to avoid the escalation of religiously motivated conflict and tensions,’ and appreciates the efforts being made to that end.”

According to a statement from the

Egyptian foreign ministry, the call for the ambassador to return to Cairo is because "new statements from the Vatican [...] are considered by Egypt as unacceptable interference in its internal affairs," the AFP reported.

The ambassador told Rome Reports that "we do not share the view that Christians are persecuted in our part of the world." – *Zenit*, Jan. 12.

FORMER ARMENIAN CATHOLIC PATRIARCH OF CILICIA HOVHANNES BEDROS XVIII KASPARIAN PASSED AWAY OVER THE WEEKEND AT THE AGE OF 84, ACCORDING TO THE STATE-RUN NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY.

Bedros served as the head of the Patriarchate of Cilicia from 1983 to 1998 before passing on the role to the current Patriarch, Nerses Bedros XIX Tarmouni. Prayers will be held in honor of Bedros at 10 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 22, at the Saint Gregory the Illuminator-Saint Elie Church on Debbas street in Downtown Beirut.

The N.N.A. added the funeral would take place at Bzoummar's Armenian Catholic Patriarchate complex where Bedros will be laid to rest at 2 p.m. Saturday. According to the news agency, condolences will be held after the funeral at Bzoummar and Sunday, Jan. 23, and Monday, Jan. 24, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate of Achrafieh. – *The Daily Star*, Jan. 18.

THOUGH CHRISTIANS ARE STILL FAR FROM THE UNITY THAT JESUS PRAYED FOR AT THE LAST SUPPER, RESIGNATION AND PESSIMISM ARE A LACK OF TRUST IN THE HOLY SPIRIT'S POWER, SAYS BENEDICT XVI.

The Pope affirmed this today as he closed the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with a service at St. Paul's Outside the Walls. Today's feast of the Conversion of St. Paul brought the prayer week to a close.

The Holy Father called the faithful to gratitude, since the ecumenical movement over the last few decades has "taken significant steps forward," such that there is "encouraging convergence and consent on varied points," as well as "mutual esteem and respect" and "concrete collaboration."

"We are well aware, however, that we are still far from that unity for which Christ prayed and which we find reflected in the portrait of the first community of Jerusalem," the Pontiff acknowledged. His reference to Jerusalem alluded to the theme for this year's week of prayer, which was prepared by the Church of Jerusalem and

pointed to the community of the first Christians.

Benedict XVI affirmed that the unity Christ desires is not only at the level of structures, but also in the confession of one faith and the common celebration of worship.

"The search for the re-establishment of unity among divided Christians cannot therefore be reduced to a recognition of the reciprocal differences and to the obtaining of a peaceful coexistence," he said. "What we long for is that unity for which Christ himself prayed and which by its nature is manifested in the communion of the faith, of the sacraments, of the ministry.

"The path toward this unity must be seen as a moral imperative, response to a precise call of the Lord."

In this light, the Pope asserted, "the temptation must be overcome to resignation and pessimism, which is lack of trust in the power of the Holy Spirit."

"Our duty," he said, "is to continue passionately on the path toward this goal with a serious and rigorous dialogue to deepen the common theological, liturgical and spiritual patrimony; with reciprocal knowledge, with the ecumenical formation of the new generations and, above all, with conversion of heart and prayer." – *Zenit*, Jan. 25.

AS THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY DRAWS TO A CLOSE TODAY, THE SECRETARY OF THE VATICAN'S ECUMENISM COUNCIL SAYS THAT BENEDICT XVI IS PUSHING THE FAITHFUL FORWARD ON THE PATH OF SEEKING UNITY.

L'Osservatore Romano interviewed Bishop Brian Farrell, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, in the context of this week of prayer. The interview was published in the Jan. 19 edition of the daily's Italian version.

Q: The pontifical council recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of its foundation. Is the spirit that inspired its birth with Pope John XXIII still alive?

Bishop Farrell: Yes, in fact, on this past Nov. 17, we held a solemn public ceremony to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, which John XXIII intensely desired and instituted along with the other commissions charged with preparing the Second Vatican Council. Convinced that the council's entire work had to be impregnated with the desire to re-establish unity, he wished, as a clear sign of that desire, to have the presence of observers from other churches and ecumenical com-

munities at the council.

It seems almost like a miracle of Providence that more than 2,000 bishops came to Rome to start the council in 1962, many of them formed in a theology of "exclusion," according to which the Orthodox and the Protestants -- schismatics and heretics, in the terminology of that time -- were simply outside of the Church, and three years later they produced the decree "Unitatis Redintegratio," which recognizes a real, although incomplete ecumenical communion among all the baptized and among the Churches and ecumenical communities. This renewed perspective, in perfect harmony with the old ecclesiology of the Fathers, had enormous consequences for the new way that Catholics related to other Christians and with their communities, and for the irrevocable adherence of the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement.

John XXIII spoke of a "step forward," a way of seeing the old tradition with new eyes, thus opening up new ways for the Church to move toward that visible unity that is her own. This transformation has largely been due to the intense work of the first president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Agustín Bea, and his coworkers -- along with the grace of the Holy Spirit, of course.

Q: How much of the pontifical council's work from those first years has remained?

Bishop Farrell: Everything has remained, insofar as it has to do with the council's teachings on the principles that govern the quest for unity. The 50 years that have passed by since then bear witness to how fruitful that teaching has been in the day-to-day life of the Church and for the Christian world as a whole.

In the commemorative ceremony mentioned before, in addition to Pope Benedict XVI's important message delivered by the Secretary of State, Cardinal Bertone, three great figures from the ecumenical world -- Cardinal Walter Kasper, retired president of our pontifical council; the archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams; and the Metropolitan Ioannes of Pergamum, distinguished theologian of the Ecumenical Patriarchate -- emphasized how fundamental and urgent it is for current historical development for Christians to be able to talk and work together, not only to defend freedom, and religious freedom first of all, but to face humanity's enormous challenges with the hope of success.

Q: But some today say they are disillusioned by the results of so much effort.

Bishop Farrell: Whoever thinks that way is not looking at the reality. In his

magnificent encyclical "Ut Unum Sint," Pope John Paul II wrote that probably the most valuable result of ecumenism is the "rediscovered brotherhood" among Christians. It is hard for the younger generations to understand how much things have changed for the better. In the past, the divided Christians avoided each other and didn't talk to each other; the Churches had attitudes of reciprocal conflict and rivalry, even of truly scandalous actions, which undermined the very mission of evangelization. There are still some signs of that here and there, but it is ever clearer that this way of acting is not acceptable; it is not from God.

If we consider the "life dialogue," meaning the vast world of contacts, collaboration, and solidarity among Christians, we cannot be disillusioned. If we think about the "truth dialogue," that is, the quest to overcome theological elements of divergence, here as well much has been achieved, including the resolution of former Christological controversies, and even the deepest aspect of divergence between Catholics and reformed Lutherans on justification, that is, on how salvation acts within us, has been substantially overcome. We have to take into account that in doctrinal matters it will always be necessary to act cautiously and slowly, since we must be sure of advancing in fidelity to the deposit of faith, of coming to an agreement on the basis of true Tradition.

Q: Nevertheless, have new difficulties appeared in theological dialogue with the Orthodox?

Bishop Farrell: We are examining the crucial point of our differences on the Church's structure and way of being and operating: the question of the role of the Bishop of Rome in the Church communion of the first millennium, when the Church in the West and East was still united. After profound studies and discussions, the members of the Theological Commission have come to realize the enormous difference between the lived, assimilated, and narrated historical experience in Western culture and the historical experience perceived in the Eastern vision of things. Every historical event is open to different interpretations. The discussion has not led to a real convergence.

But it is also true that if we want to find a consensus, what matters from the start is to clarify the doctrinal and theological principles that are at play in those events and that are decisive for remaining faithful to Christ's will for his Church. Thus it was decided to prepare a new base document in a theological key. I am convinced

that this is the correct path.

Therefore, when we speak of new difficulties, it is not a matter of insurmountable difficulties, but of a true opportunity. It is clear that the discussion will be neither easy nor quick. It seems to me, however, that there is a growing conviction that unity is possible; the circumstances of today's world are moving the Churches in this direction. In my opinion it is urgent for Catholic theology to work out a more concrete vision, a model of what awaits us at the moment of full visible communion. That way, the Orthodox brethren will be able to have trust, overcoming the enslaving fears of the presumption of superiority that is typical of the West. We must surely reaffirm what the council said about the equal dignity of all rites, the respect due to the institutions, traditions, and disciples of the Eastern Churches and so many other things.

Q: And with the Protestants?

Bishop Farrell: In 2009, Cardinal Kasper published an important study titled "Harvesting the Fruits," which examined in depth more than 40 years of ecumenical dialogue between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the principal ecclesial communions worldwide. There are still significant divergences and perhaps new ones are appearing, but it is surprising to discover how the controversies of the 16th century are perceived now in a new light that softens the insistence on the particular positions; we thus understand that we are not as far apart on many essential points. It is true, the main difficulties lie in the different conception of what the Church willed by Christ is. The question is not abstract: "What is the Church?" Rather, it is also concrete: "Where is the Church and where is it brought to fulfillment?" There is still much to do on this point.

Q: This is the work of the experts, but ecumenism should involve everyone!

Bishop Farrell: Certainly. The dialogues will continue because they are the high road of obedience to the Lord's will for the unity of his disciples in the truth. But they are meaningful and they will be fruitful only if they are sustained by the entire living body of the Church. It is the Churches, the communities of believers, that must come together in unity.

Today we must return to the origins of the ecumenical movement and discover what is called "spiritual ecumenism." Prayer, conversion of heart, fasting and penance, the purification of memory, the purification of our way of speaking about the others: this spiritual sensitivity, present at the start of the ecumenical movement, is the center of ecumenism and is the duty of

all. Spiritual ecumenism is not the monopoly of the experts; all Christians can be protagonists in this movement.

A particular aspect at the base of everything was emphasized in the bishops' synod on the Word of God, which was then gathered up in the apostolic exhortation "Verbum Domini" by Benedict XVI: listening, praying, and reflecting together on Scripture "represent a way of coming to unity in faith as a response to hearing the word of God."

We divided ourselves by Scripture; we should find each other again around Scripture. Let us make sacred Scripture the heart of ecumenism! In that document, the Holy Father also recalled the ecumenical importance of translating the Bible. Far from any impasse, the Holy Father is pushing us forward on the path of seeking unity. – *Zenit*, Jan. 25.

THE APOSTOLIC NUNCIO IN UKRAINE, ARCHBISHOP IVAN JURKOVIC, READ A CONGRATULATORY ADDRESS TO CARDINAL HUSAR FOR THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS SERVICE AS HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH. The nuncio stressed that the ministry of Cardinal Husar was conducted at a very important time for the church and the nation.

"It was the beginning of a period of great initiatives that you are developing in the UGCC. First of all, you strengthened church structures so they would correspond to the society of Ukraine. It was a difficult task but Your Beatitude was able to fulfill it with full respect for the richness of the denominational structure of Ukraine. Your steps as those of a father and pastor of the church were motivated by the specific needs of the modern people, which are completely different from the past. As we wished to be near our flock, we discovered with the synodal bishops new qualities in pastoral ministry and closeness to those who seek salvation in the UGCC. The 10 years of your ministry made the UGCC more present in the society, closer to the needs of the people and more responsible for the future of your own nation," reads the address.

The nuncio also noted that the head of the UGCC remains, probably, the most visible hierarch in the mass media. "Your thoughts, your wisdom and testimony of the radical Evangelical poverty have made you extraordinarily popular in the Ukrainian society and justly made you one of the most authoritative voices of today. Your Beatitude always spoke as the pastor of the church, as a man of faith and prayer, who

experiences daily life as it is seen in the light of human life. People are very attentive to your words, which are always full of sincere love and care for others for they carry no empty rhetoric or conceit, but the desire to serve the truth and faith," reads the address.

Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic thanked Cardinal Husar for his "service and for the lesson that we should always be constructive and attentive members of the society so that our words and actions do not offend anyone but to be constantly engaged in a dialogue for the good of everyone." – *RISU*, Jan. 25.

ON THE MORNING OF JANUARY 29 IN THE VATICAN, BENEDICT XVI RECEIVED PRIESTS AND SEMINARIANS OF THE PONTIFICAL ETHIOPIAN COLLEGE in a meeting to mark the 150th anniversary of the death of St. Justin de Jacobis (1800-1860), patron of that institution.

St. Justin "was a worthy son of St. Vincent de Paul who put the principle of 'being everything for everyone' into exemplary practice, especially in his service to the people of Abyssinia. At the age of thir-

ty-eight he was sent by Cardinal Franzoni, then prefect of the Propaganda Fide, as a missionary to Ethiopia ... where he founded a seminary called the "College of Mary Immaculate."

"He learned the local language, championed the centuries-old liturgical tradition of the rites of those communities, as well as working effectively towards ecumenism," said the Pope. "His particular passion for education, especially the formation of priests, means that he can justly be considered as the patron of your college. Indeed, this worthy institution still welcomes priests and candidates to the priesthood, supporting them in their theological, spiritual and pastoral preparations."

The Holy Father called on the priests, when returning to their communities of origin or assisting their compatriots abroad, "to arouse in everyone a love for God and the Church, following the example of St. Justin de Jacobis. He crowned his fruitful contribution to the religious and civil life of the Abyssinian peoples with the gift of his own life, silently restored to God after much suffering and persecution. He was beatified by Venerable Pius XII on 25 June 1939 and canonized by Servant of God Paul VI

on 26 October 1975.

"The way of sanctity also lies open to you, dear priests and seminarians," Pope Benedict added. "Sanctity lies at the very heart of the ecclesial mystery; it is the vocation to which we are all called. Saints are not some exterior ornamentation of the Church; rather, they are like the flowers of a tree which testify to the endless vitality of the lymph flowing through it. It is good to see the Church like this, in ascension towards the fullness of the 'Vir perfectus'; in continual, demanding, progressive maturation; dynamically driven towards complete fulfillment in Christ."

Benedict XVI concluded by encouraging the members of the Pontifical Ethiopian College "to live this important period of your formation, in the shadow of the dome of St. Peter's, with joy and dedication. Walk resolutely along the path of sanctity. You are a sign of hope, especially for the Church in your countries of origin. I am certain that the experience of communion you have experienced here in Rome will also help you to make a precious contribution to growth and peaceful coexistence in your own beloved nations." – *VIS*, Jan. 29.



His Eminence Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette and His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, Co-Chairmen of Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches

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