



SEIA NEWSLETTER

On the Eastern Churches and Ecumenism

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The Feast of Saint Andrew at The Ecumenical Patriarchate

AS IS TRADITIONAL FOR THE FEAST OF ST. ANDREW, A HOLY SEE DELEGATION, LED BY CARDINAL KURT KOCH, PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, HAS TRAVELLED TO ISTANBUL TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CELEBRATIONS for the saint, patron of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Every year the Patriarchate sends a delegation to Rome for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul Apostles, on 29 June.

This morning the Holy See delegation attended a divine liturgy presided by His Holiness Bartholomew I, at the Church of St. George at Fanar. At the end of the ceremony Cardinal Koch delivered a special Message to the Patriarch from Benedict XVI. This is the full text of the Message:

To His Holiness Bartholomew I Archbishop of Constantinople Ecumenical Patriarch

It is with great joy that I write this letter to you, to be delivered by my Venerable Brother Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, on the occasion of the Feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle, brother of Saint Peter and Patron of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in order to wish Your Holiness and the Members of the Holy Synod, the clergy, the monks and all the faithful an abundance of heavenly gifts and divine blessings.

On this joyful feast-day, in union with all my Catholic brothers and sisters, I join you in giving thanks to God for the wonders he has worked, in his infinite mercy, through the mission and martyrdom of Saint Andrew. By generously offering their lives in sacrifice for the Lord and for their brethren, the Apostles proved the credibility of the Good News that they proclaimed to the ends of the known world. The Feast of the Apostle, which falls on this day in the liturgical calendars of both East and West, is-

sues a strong summons to all those who by God's grace and through the gift of Baptism have accepted that message of salvation to renew their fidelity to the Apostolic teaching and to become tireless heralds of faith in Christ through their words and the witness of their lives.

In modern times, this summons is as urgent as ever and it applies to all Christians. In a world marked by growing interdependence and solidarity, we are called to proclaim with renewed conviction the truth of the Gospel and to present the Risen Lord as the answer to the deepest questions and spiritual aspirations of the men and women of our day.

If we are to succeed in this great task, we need to continue our progress along the path towards full communion, demonstrating that we have already united our efforts for a common witness to the Gospel before the people of our day. For this reason I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Your Holiness and to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the generous hospitality offered last October on the island of Rhodes to the delegates of the Catholic Episcopal Conferences of Europe who came together with representatives of the Orthodox Churches in Europe for the Second Catholic-Orthodox Forum on the theme "Church-State Relations: Theological and Historical Perspectives."

Your Holiness, I am following attentively your wise efforts for the good of Orthodoxy and for the promotion of Christian values in many international contexts. Assuring you of a remembrance in my prayers on this Feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle, I renew my good wishes for peace, well-being and abundant spiritual blessings to you and to all the faithful.

With sentiments of esteem and spiritual closeness, I gladly extend to you a fraternal embrace in the name of our one Lord Jesus Christ.

From the Vatican, 30 November 2010
BENEDICTUS PP XVI – Vatican website.

THIS IS THE ADDRESS GIVEN BY ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE LITURGY COMMEMORATING SAINT ANDREW ON NOVEMBER 30:

Your Eminence, Cardinal Kurt Koch, with your honorable entourage, representing His Holiness the Bishop of senior Rome and our beloved brother in the Lord, Pope Benedict, and the Church that he leads,

It is with great joy that we greet your presence at the Thronal Feast of our Most Holy Church of Constantinople and express gratitude to our brother in the Lord, Pope Benedict XVI, who sent you here, for his gracious fraternal gesture through you to participate in this festive celebration of the sacred commemoration of the founder of the Church in Byzantium, St. Andrew the First-Called of the Apostles. It is many years now since the establishment of an exchange of formal delegations at the respective patronal feasts of our two Churches as an indication of the brotherly bonds of love and honor among us, and we rejoice that this wonderful tradition is preserved once again this year.

We especially salute the presence of Your Eminence among us for the first time as representative of His Holiness, congratulating you on assuming the high post of the presidency in the Pontifical Council for the promotion of Christian unity, as well as on your recent elevation to the position and honor of Cardinal. We deeply appreciate the broad theological knowledge and nobility of Your Eminence's character, together with your attention to the sacred cause of the promotion of Christian unity. And we look forward to your cooperation with our Ecumenical Patriarchate for the further enhancement of the fraternal relations between our Churches to the benefit of the promotion of unity, for which our Lord prayed to His Father immediately prior to His passion.

We note with particular joy that this year marked the completion of fifty years of life and activity for the Pontifical Council for Christian unity, over which Your Emi-

nence now presides. Our thought turns to the late Pope John XXIII, who founded this Council in 1960 originally in the form of a Secretariat, together with the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, whose bold historical decisions paved the way for the participation of the Roman Catholic Church in the effort toward the reconciliation of Christian unity. Among the fruits of this historical initiative on the part of the late Pope, the development of fraternal relations between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches retains a prominent place. These relations were forged by the great ecclesiastical leaders, the late Pope Paul VI and our own predecessor Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, while they were further sustained and strengthened by their successors, Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios. Thanks to the tireless endeavors of your Council for Christian unity, and in particular of its deceased pioneer presidents, Cardinals Augustino Bea and Johannes Willebrands, assisted by such specialists in the history and life of the Orthodox Churches as the late Bishop Pierre Duprey and Mgr Eleuterio Fortino, relations among our Churches were cultivated still further through mutual respect and brotherly love. The same relations were enriched with due care by the predecessors of Your Eminence in the presidency of the Council, Cardinals Edward Cassidy and Walter Kasper, supported by their capable coworkers. To all of these, we express our fervent thanks for everything that they achieved in toil for the restoration of full communion among our Churches.

The context of these fraternal relations saw the creation and continuation over the last thirty years of the official theological dialogue between our Churches. This is because unity in love is of no benefit unless it is simultaneously a unity in faith and truth. Therefore, "speaking the truth in love," according to the exhortation of the Apostle (Eph. 4.15), we maintain this theological dialogue by the unanimous decision of all Autocephalous Orthodox Churches in order to examine, in love and sincerity, the theological matters that both unite and still divide, "until we all arrive at the unity of faith," according to the exhortation of the same Apostle. (Eph. 4.13)

In following with increased interest the development of this theological dialogue from our Ecumenical Patriarchate, we pray for its success, especially during its present phase when controversial subjects, which in the past have caused acute conflict among our Churches, are being discussed.

The recent plenary meeting of the dialogue Commission in Vienna, under the

joint presidency of Your Eminence and our most venerable brother and coworker, His Eminence Metropolitan John of Pergamon, revealed the existing difficulties but also the disposition and decision of all members of the Commission to overcome these difficulties with love as well as with faithfulness to the doctrine and life of the Church transmitted to us from the first millennium in order to advance to their resolution.

In today celebrating the sacred memory of St. Andrew the First-Called of the Apostles, we also turn our attention to his brother, St. Peter, chief of the Apostles. These two brothers were not just related by blood but especially by the infinitely more significant bond with Christ and communion in Christ. And they preserved this bond of communion in Christ unimpaired for an entire millennium, while the Churches that derived from the preaching and martyrdom of these Apostles, namely the Churches of Rome and Constantinople, are obliged once more to regain this bond of communion in order to prove ourselves worthy successors of their deposit.

In the gospel reading proclaimed during today's Divine Liturgy, we heard that Andrew personally encountered Christ and hastened to introduce Him to Peter as well. Philip does the same with Nathaniel, broadening in this way the circle of those in communion with Christ, until the apostolic message reaches all people. Thus, the Church of Christ is demonstrated "apostolic," conveying Christ from generation to generation and from place to place "that the world may believe" (John 17.21) in Him as redeemer and savior.

Even today, facing manifold impasses, the world seeks redemption and salvation. However, those who preach Christ in separation from one another cannot persuade the world that "we have found the Messiah, which is interpreted as the Christ." (John 1.42) Faithful to the authentic and authoritative message of the Apostles, we are called "with one mouth and one heart" to transmit this message to the contemporary world, discerning the concerns and embracing the problems of the world.

With these thoughts, we welcome you as representatives of senior Rome with love and esteem, and once more thank His Holiness, our brother, who sent you, for "the labor of love" (1 Thess. 1.3) that guided your steps here.

"To our God and Father be the glory to the ages of ages. Amen." – Website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches

ON OCTOBER 28, 2010, SEVENTY-EIGHT CHRISTIAN GRAVES WERE BRUTALLY DESECRATED IN THE GRAVEYARD OF PANAGIA (MERKEZ OR IMROZ), THE CAPITAL OF THE ISLAND OF IMVROS (GOKCEADA), IN TURKEY. Imvros is home to approximately 200 Greek Orthodox Christians and the birthplace of both His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the late Archbishop Iakovos of America.

The Greek Orthodox populations of Imvros and nearby Tenedos were largely forced to abandon the islands in the 1960's and 1970's due to a policy of systematic ethnic cleansing by the Turkish State. Despite recent improvement in the situation for the few indigenous inhabitants remaining, acts such as this one serve as a stark reminder of the intolerance and intimidation by certain individuals and groups that persist on the islands.

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs quickly condemned the desecration in a statement issued on October 31st, stating "we regret that many grave-stones in a cemetery belonging to our Greek Orthodox citizens in Imvros were damaged on the night of October 28, 2010. We strongly condemn it." The Ministry statement further noted the following, "Upon notification of the incident by the Imvros Metropolitan to the Public Prosecutor's Office, an immediate investigation was launched in order to catch the perpetrators and bring them before justice. Necessary measures to prevent any recurrence of such an event are being taken by the relevant authorities." – Archon News, Nov. 2.

WE MET HIM AT HIS OFFICE IN THE PHANAR AREA OF ISTANBUL ON A CLOUDY SATURDAY MORNING. THIS WAS THE FIRST COMMON INTERVIEW FOR CAFEBABEL GREECE AND CAFEBABEL ISTANBUL. WE WERE A BIT ANXIOUS; WE KEPT LOOKING AT THE QUESTIONS TOGETHER WITH OZCAN AND ANGELINA. We didn't know what to expect. We were stunned that the Ecumenical Patriarch was about to give an interview to Cafebabel. Interviewing the "Eastern Pope", the spiritual leader of more than 350 million Orthodox didn't seem very easy. All this agony passed when he welcomed us. He was smiling, and offered us traditional sweets and coffee. "It's like interviewing your grandfather." He spoke about everything: from Halki and the environment to European youth, science and Chris Spyrou..

Question: The head of the Roman

Catholic Church, the Pope, recently visited the United Kingdom, and much earlier the Phanar. Given that the Ecumenical Patriarchate was the first to lead the dialogue between Christian Churches being one of the founding members of the World Council of Churches, do you regard a Union of the Churches feasible?

Answer: From the time of my predecessors Athenagoras and Dimitrios, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been leading the dialogue between Christian denominations. Indeed, we take the lead in what is called “ecumenical movement.” During the Pope’s visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, we signed a joint declaration and he recited the “Pater noster” during the Orthodox service. Furthermore, the Ecumenical Patriarchate participates in the Conference of the European Churches. We support the dialogue, although the gap of division is large, since we have been separated for ten centuries. Now we are discussing the issue of the primacy of the Pope, examining what it looked like in the first millennium of our common fate and why this has changed. Along with the *filioque*, this is the most difficult issue that divides us. The road toward union is long, but we are not discouraged. On the contrary, we do all that we can to bridge the gap.

Q: In August you made the historic Liturgy at Soumela Monastery close to Trabzon, and a few weeks ago, liturgy was held in the Armenian Church of the Holy Cross in Lake Van in Turkey. Do you believe that such actions help mutual understanding and respect for religious freedoms in the country? The next step may be reopening the Theological School of Halki (Heybeliada)?

A: We are very pleased with these developments, both for the Soumela Monastery (Trebizond) and for the Armenians. It reveals a change in the attitude of Turkey. What happened at Panagia Soumela proved that the place (which officially is a museum) can also once a year serve as a place of worship, as is indicated by the official permission we received. This is something beneficial for all. The Turkish state understands that we are not a threat but, on the contrary, that we love and work for the good of our country. Beyond the material benefits for the country resulting from the pilgrims, such actions are evidence that respect of religious freedom is growing in Turkey. This is a matter of principles and values in relation to basic human rights.

In terms of the Theological School of Halki, we are very optimistic. We believe that the issue will be resolved in the year 2011, with the completion of 40 years since

the closing of the School. We are ready to operate immediately in order to accommodate students from Turkey and abroad, just like in the past. We will be able to train our clergy at all levels necessary for the functioning of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which, as you know, has dioceses in many parts of the world, such as the United States, Western and Eastern Europe, Australia, Korea, Hong Kong, Central and South America, and so on.

Q: Turkey seems to gradually realize that the Ecumenical Patriarchate is not just the local diocese of the Greeks of Constantinople, but a universal institution, and that by not restricting, but rather by supporting its activities Turkey has much to gain. Do you share this view and you have evidence that the Turkish state is changing its policy?

A: Look, we can summarize the position to date of the Turkish government in a single word: counter-productive.

It is counter-productive not only for us but first and foremost for the national interests of Turkey itself. However, the current developments are positive. It is understood that we do not have and never had, either now or in the future, any political aspirations or interests. At times, some not very serious arguments have been expressed, namely that we are trying to create a second Vatican in Phanar. Let anyone come and show us what these attempts have been. These arguments are not serious.

The fact is that we see a change in attitude, and the new Law for Minority Foundations also underlines this direction. It does not solve all of our problems, but it certainly gives more freedom of movement to minorities. Recently, a Rum Orthodox (i.e. a Turkish citizen of Greek origin) was elected as a member in the State Commission for the Administration of all Vakif (Foundations) in Ankara, which meets every fortnight. These are unprecedented developments for us here, and we are very pleased about them. In addition, our Prime Minister Erdogan visited the Greek Orphanage in Büyükada before the ECHR announced its decision, which justified our rights to the property. This was a brave political move by the Prime Minister, full of potent symbolism.

You know, the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Orthodox church worldwide is immense, something that is beneficial for Turkey. Our efforts to build peace and promote respect among peoples of every faith is well known, and this is confirmed by the fact that every politician who comes to Turkey always visits the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We are optimistic, then, and we insist upon these

rights.

Q: What does the Orthodox faith and testimony offer to the youth of Europe? Is it easy for a Western European with a Catholic / Protestant background to embrace Orthodox concepts and values?

A: As I said earlier, all issues are intertwined with each other – socially, economically, and ideologically. Young people feel unsafe. The Orthodox Church has to offer the original faith as it existed during the first ten centuries of our common road with the West. That is to say, the faith and the Church as the true body of Christ. Before the Great Schism of 1054, all of Europe was Orthodox. Therefore, what the Church is called to offer is the simplicity and authenticity of the Christian faith. We teach authenticity, ascetic morality and spirituality. All these are missing from the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.

The West was cut off from these values, and this is precisely what justifies the nostalgia that is manifested today. In recent years, more and more liturgical books of the Orthodox Church have been translated and published in foreign countries. Apart from the theological books, one may find spiritual guides in such books as the *Philokalia*, which is of great interest also to non-Orthodox people. Furthermore, in the Orthodox faith, there is much attention to devotion and worship; and there is greater emphasis on the heart than on the intellect. This is why Orthodoxy may be said to comprise tradition, experience, and condensed wisdom. – Cafebabel, Nov. 22.

THE ORTHODOX ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE CELEBRATED ITS FOREMOST FEAST DAY TODAY, THE DAY OF SAINT ANDREW, THE APOSTLE OF CONSTANTINOPLE, BUT IT ALSO MARKED THE SUCCESSFUL END OF A LEGAL BATTLE WITH THE TURKISH STATE OVER THE BUYUKADA ORPHANAGE. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, after meeting with a delegation from the Holy See led by newly appointed Cardinal Kurt Koch, the new president of the Council for Christian Unity, expressed his emotions in an interview with AsiaNews.

“Today is a great day for our Great Mother Church. The orphanage on Princes Island (Buyukada) has been given back to us. What we inherited from our ancestors has also been returned to us. We could not tolerate the injustice done to us. We first turned to Turkey’s courts. Since we lost all of our cases, we turned to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which gave us justice,” the Patriarch said.

The implications of the return to the

Patriarchate of the 'Tapu' (title deed) are of great significance. "The Turkish government did not appeal against the court's ruling, starting instead the procedures to return us the orphanage," Bartholomew said. "I want to stress the tapu by Turkish authorities is issued in the name of our Patriarchate, as Rum Patrikanesi. This means not only the return of the orphanage but also the official recognition of our Patriarchate as a legal person. This is a positive step."

"Our struggle must teach us never to put down our spiritual tools and always trust Divine Providence, which knows when and how to overcome human obstacles and weaknesses," the Ecumenical Patriarch said.

Ioannis Ktistakis, one of the lawyers that represented the Phanar (the Patriarchate) in the case, spoke to AsiaNews about the case after the Ecumenical Patriarch received the tapu.

"We fought to re-establish civil rights in Turkey. Our struggle was first about rights, and only secondarily about a title deed. It was about re-establishing rights in this country as in any other country since the rights of a centuries-old institution like the Ecumenical Patriarchate had been violated." -- *AsiaNews*, Nov. 30.

ARCHBISHOP DEMETRIOS OF AMERICA, ON NOVEMBER 1, JOINED WITH LEADERS OF THE MAJOR CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST (NCCC) FOR A SUBSTANTIVE FORTY-FIVE MINUTE MEETING WITH PRESIDENT OBAMA in the Roosevelt Room of the White House.

As the senior church leader, Archbishop Demetrios opened the meeting after the introductions by NCCC President Peg Chamberlain and NCCC General Secretary Michael Kinnamon. Speaking on behalf of the Church leaders, the Archbishop told the President "... it is not only an honor to be with you here today, Mr. President; it is a joy." His Eminence cited the Scriptural passage from Acts 10:38 in the original Greek and then in translation, in which Saint Peter declares that Jesus Christ passed his earthly life doing good and healing.

The Archbishop went on to share with the President that the purposes of the religious bodies of the NCCC were precisely "to do good and to bring healing," and he thanked the President for his own efforts to do the same. Throughout the meeting, issues of social concern, justice, education, religious liberty and care for "the least

among us" were exchanged. The meeting was arranged through the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, with which the Archdiocese of America maintains an ongoing relationship, and the National Council of Churches of Christ USA, of which the Archdiocese has been a member since it founding in 1950. -- Press Release, Greek Archdiocese, Nov. 3.

THE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH IS THRIVING EVERYWHERE IN NORTH AMERICA EXCEPT THE MIDWEST, ACCORDING TO THE ARCHDIOCESE'S LONGTIME LEADER, METROPOLITAN PHILIP SALIBA.

And that was the sole reason for a controversial decision, announced last month, to transfer Bishop Mark Maymon, bishop of Toledo and the Midwest, to the Pacific Northwest.

Bishop Mark refused the move and instead is joining the Orthodox Church in America.

"I told our local synod when we met Oct. 22 in Jacksonville, Fla., that perhaps we put the wrong man in the wrong place," Metropolitan Philip said Monday in an interview from his Englewood, N.J., headquarters. "And I wanted to transfer His Grace, Bishop Mark, to the Northwest, where he can do a much, much better job."

Unlike many religious groups, transferring bishops is virtually unheard of in the Antiochian Orthodox Church. Some clergy and longtime members said they believe the announced transfer of Bishop Mark was unprecedented. It also is exceedingly rare for an Orthodox bishop to leave one jurisdiction for another.

But months before Bishop Mark's transfer, the global church's ruling body - the Holy Synod of Antioch - announced that all North American bishops were not bishops, but auxiliary bishops - "subordinate to their spiritual point of reference, the metropolitan."

The combination of a demotion followed by a cross-country transfer led to the abrupt departure of Bishop Mark, who was not available for comment.

Metropolitan Philip said the Holy Synod initiated its review of the status of bishops because there was "confusion" over the issue - "and I don't like confusion."

He added that "there have always been" auxiliary bishops in the church, and some biblical scholars view Timothy and Titus in the Bible as auxiliary bishops to St. Paul.

The metropolitan said he was sorry to see Bishop Mark go.

"I am very sad because Bishop Mark is a very good bishop. He was educated at St. Vladimir's Seminary and I remember him as a seminarian. I remember him as a deacon and as a priest, and he's very good, very good. I have nothing against him."

But he said he felt compelled to act because of the "deteriorating situation" in the Midwest, evident by declining attendance at annual Parish Life Conferences.

"We have 50 parishes in the Midwest and I lived in the Midwest. I lived in Detroit, I went to school in Detroit, and then I was a pastor of St. George, Cleveland. And I remember when we used to have our convention, we used to have a minimum of 1,000 people at the Parish Life Conference. And in Livonia, [Mich.], one time we had 1,500 people. And last year in Cincinnati we had about 250 people, and this year in Toledo we had less than 400 people. And Toledo is in the heart of the Midwest."

The struggling economy could not be blamed, he said, because Toledo is within driving distance from anywhere in the diocese, which cuts convention expenses. Rather, he said, the poor attendance shows "a lack of participation, a lack of interest, a lack of inspiration."

Metropolitan Philip personally will preside at the next Parish Life Conference in the diocese, set for June 15-19, 2011, in Cleveland. "You will see a tremendous crowd there, contrary to last year and this year," he vowed.

He said the diocese's "deteriorating situation" had nothing to do with recent church thefts. In Toledo, a police report filed in March alleged that the treasurer of St. George Cathedral embezzled \$145,000, and another theft was reported last year at a Troy, Mich., parish.

"No, no. Those parishes are handling the situation and they have been in touch with me. I have been advising them, you know, to solve everything peacefully, not to go to courts," the metropolitan said.

He did fault, at least in part, Bishop Mark and St. George's priest, the Rev. Basil Koory, for not keeping a close enough watch on church funds.

Metropolitan Philip said he overruled Bishop Mark's plan for external audits at all parishes in the Midwest because it would have been too expensive, and that he is confident church-appointed committees can do a good job with internal audits.

"Being the archbishop of this archdiocese for 44 years, I never felt that there was anything wrong with our finances. ... I am very, very convinced that everything in this archdiocese is like an open book," he said.

A native of Abou Mizan, Lebanon, Metropolitan Philip studied in Lebanon, Syria, and London before coming to the United States in 1956.

The Antiochian Orthodox Church has grown exponentially during his tenure, both through Arab church members immigrating to the United States as well as American Christians converting to the church.

Bishop Mark is one such convert. A native of Indiana, he grew up in a Roman Catholic family, became an evangelical Protestant, and taught Bible classes at Oral Roberts University before converting to the Orthodox faith.

Metropolitan Philip said he sees no evidence of reports surfacing within the church of tension between immigrants and converts, or that such tensions were partly to blame for Bishop Mark's downfall.

"I am the only Orthodox bishop in America that has welcomed converts with open arms. You know that," he said. "And converts have contributed so much spirituality to our church in this country, and so much discipline. I love converts because they are so pious. And they never gave me any problems."

Noting that he will turn 80 in June, the metropolitan said he wants to retire but the Holy Synod of Antioch rejected the request.

"The Patriarch [Ignatius IV] said to me, 'Look at me, I am 90 years old and I am still working.'

"Another bishop said, 'I am 88 years old and I am still working.' Another bishop said, 'I am 86 years old and I am still working.' And another bishop said, 'I am 84 years old and I am still working.' They embarrassed me! And they said, 'We're not going to accept your retirement at all.'"

– David Yonke for *The Toledo Blade*, Nov. 6.

ON NOVEMBER 22, DR. CHRISTOS NICOLAOU, GENERAL MANAGER OF THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE OF THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM, DELIVERED THIS ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PATRIARCH'S ENTHRONEMENT:

Your Beatitude,

Five years have passed since the assumption of Your duties on the Throne of the Mother of Churches. During the time of Your Patriarchy our Directorate of the Patriarchate's Website was created which now includes more than 20 associates who, though they are dispersed in 6 different cities, collaborate harmoniously having as their goal the respectable presentation of the work done by our Patriarchate on the World Wide Web via the Internet.

The central website of our Patriarchate www.jerusalem-Patriarchate.info, according to the posted welcoming message, aims at «the presentation of those Holy Places where the immaculate feet of the Lord paced and of the people who are set as guardians of them». The website was created with the decision of the 6th Holy Synod on October 10, 2006 becoming operational on June 1st 2007 initially in Greek and later in English and Arabic, and is continuously being enriched since then with new material. It contains, amongst others, descriptions and historical notes regarding the Most Holy Venerable Sites as well as their full contact information, the administrative organization of the Patriarchate and a multitude of pictures.

Subsequently the website of the Non Governmental Organization "Romiosini" www.romiosini.org.gr was constructed. This website, which acts synergistically with the central website of the Patriarchate, aims at the presentation of the Holy Venerable Sites worldwide.

Finally, on November 21 of last year, the News Portal of the Patriarchate www.jp-newsgate.net was activated through which the current state of events and the communiqués and press releases of the Patriarchate are made public, not only in Greek but also in Arabic and English.

It is true that the aforementioned three World Wide Web ventures owe their existence to Your benediction and personal care, and rightly for all of the above we hereby express and offer You the acknowledgment, appreciation and credit for this.

It is also true that with Your personal benediction and support we have further enhanced the presence of our Patriarchate on the Internet with three further Internet ventures, the "Romiosini Radio," the "Romiosini TV" and the web [electronic] presentation of the journal of the Patriarchate "New Zion." Through these new Internet ventures which, with God's help, will come into operation in the coming year, the liturgical life of our Patriarchate and the rest of its activities will be more readily visible both to its flock as well as to its friends around the world.

Due to all of the above, on behalf of the more than 20 associates that engage themselves for the dignified and respectable presence of our Patriarchate around the world via the Internet, I wish You good health and a long life for the glory of our Trinitarian God. – Press Release, Jerusalem Patriarchate, Nov. 22.

ON NOVEMBER 1, 2010, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, HEAD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, READ A LECTURE ON RELATIONS BETWEEN ORTHODOXY AND CATHOLICISM AT MOSCOW THEOLOGICAL ACADEMY AND SEMINARY as part of the course on External Church Relations taught by DECR staff beginning from this academic year.

His Eminence pointed to the priorities in relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church at the time of Vatican II.

'As you know, East and West made up one Church for the first ten centuries of Christianity in spite of the fact that there were certain differences in theology and liturgical practice. The Church in East and West was united. The developments which took place in the mid-11th century led to a sad division between Christian East and Christian West. Those were events of ecclesio-political nature, but there were also a number of other factors including disagreements on various points in the doctrine and church practice. In the subsequent almost ten centuries of our separate existence, these differences grew considerably and today they are quite substantial in various areas of theology and church life', he said.

During the second millennium up to the mid-20th century, the key point in relations between Orthodoxy and Catholicism was the notion of heresy, the DECR chairman said and explained, 'The Orthodox looked at the Catholics as heretics, and the Catholics looked at the Orthodox as heretics. Therefore, any talk on cooperation and the rule of co-existence in a particular territory was out of the question'.

A stable improvement in the relations between the two Churches has become visible in recent years with the election of Pope Benedict XVI in 2005. According to the DECR chairman, there is a need today for dialogue between the Russian and the Roman Catholic Churches for defending Christian values in the secular world. Both the Orthodox and the Catholics seek to defend traditional views on the family, bearing and raising children and to protect the integrity of marriage. They believe abortion to be a sin and euthanasia unacceptable. 'We should develop this cooperation regardless of successes and failures of the theological dialogue', Metropolitan Hilarion believes. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Nov. 2.

THIS INTERVIEW OF HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN OF VOLOKOLAMSK HILARION WAS GIVEN TO THE GREEK JOURNALIST PEGGY DOKOU FOR THE LOCAL OMEGA TV CHANNEL ON RHODES:

· Your Eminence, I should first welcome you to Greece. It is very big honor for all of us that you are on Rhodes although it is not an official visit. What brings you here?

Here, in Rhodes currently there is an Orthodox – Catholic Forum which brings together participants from all European Orthodox Churches as well as from various Churches and Organizations in Europe. The idea of the creation of this Forum initially belongs to Cardinal Erdö of Budapest and to me. The idea is that we should informally discuss various questions of common interest. The first Forum, which took place in Trento (Italy) two years ago, discussed family issues such as marriage, procreation, abortion, the value of human life and so on. This meeting is dedicated to the relations between the church and the state in various European countries.

· In Greece there are still problems in these relations. Certainly, things are different in your country. Do you think that a constructive relation is necessary for both sides to coexist?

In Russia over the last 20 years we have developed very good and constructive relations between the church and the state. They are based on two principles. One is the mutual non-interference of either the church in state affairs or the state in internal church affairs. And another principle is collaboration in all fields in which such collaboration is necessary and welcome. And we believe that the harmonious application of these two principles will secure good relations between the church and the state and will help to solve many problems that exist currently.

· Let's talk about the relations between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate. We see that they have improved considerably in recent years. Do you find it essential not only for the relations between the Patriarchates but also for the Orthodox people –especially in the Balkans?

The relations between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate have improved quite considerably in recent years and even months. This was due to the efforts of both Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. They simply decided that we should move from a situation of competition and confrontation to a situation of trust and mu-

tual collaboration. This does not mean that all the problems have been solved. We for example have not yet come to an agreement on the situation in Estonia which provoked a deep crisis between the two Patriarchates in 1996. But we are commonly working towards solving this problem. And I think in any event the collaboration between the first Orthodox Patriarchate and the largest Orthodox Patriarchate is essential for the benefit of the entire Orthodox Church.

Therefore we are glad to note that there has been this considerable improvement in the situation and we are also glad to work together for the preparation of the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church which, following what Patriarch Bartholomew has said, will take place within two or three years.

· Your Eminence, what do you think about the problem of the succession of the Ecumenical Patriarch? What is the position of the Moscow Patriarchate about this? We still do not know what will be done “the day after” regarding the succession of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

I think that this is a problem which has to be discussed between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Turkish authorities. I understand that in recent years a number of hierarchs living outside of Turkey have been given Turkish passports. And I think this will allow them to participate fully in the work of the Holy Synod. Of course with regards to the succession it is a very delicate issue and I don't think we can discuss it publicly but I can assure you that if the Russian Orthodox Church is asked to help in one way or another it will do so.

· Your Eminence I would like to thank you for giving me this interview. What would you like to say to the Greek people who will watch your interview on TV and read it on the internet?

I would like to say that Greeks should keep, protect and cherish the Orthodox faith. If the Greeks go in the same direction as some other European countries by expelling Christianity from the public sphere and by being afraid to express their Orthodox faith because of so-called tolerance or political correctness, they will lose their country; it will no longer be Greece. Greece is unimaginable without Christianity. And I think every Greek person, whether a strong believer or less strong believer, should do everything to protect Orthodox Christianity and to make sure that it is transmitted from the present generation to future generations. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Nov. 3.

ON 13 NOVEMBER 2010, RUSSIAN PRIME MINISTER VLADIMIR PUTIN, WHO WAS ON A VISIT TO BULGARIA, VISITED THE CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY AND RIGHT-BELIEVING PRINCE ALEXANDER NEVSKY IN SOFIA, Prime Minister's press service reports.

Mr. Putin came to the cathedral together with the Bulgarian Prime Minister B. Borisov. The head of the Russian government lit a candle and venerated shrine with the relics of St. John, Prophet and Baptist of the Lord.

The shrine was found last summer in archaeological excavation of an ancient church on St. John Island near Sozopol located on the southern Black Sea coast of Bulgaria. On November 12, the shrine was brought to the cathedral by the decision of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of Bulgaria.

Prime Minister Putin met with His Holiness Patriarch Maxim of Bulgaria at the sanctuary. The Primate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church wished Mr. Putin good health, many years and God's help in his work for the good of people.

His Holiness asked Mr. Putin to convey his best wishes to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

Vladimir Putin said it was a great honor to meet with you and visit the cathedral, which is a bright symbol of the spiritual and historical closeness of our nations, and we thank the Bulgarian authorities for good maintenance of the cathedral. The Prime Minister assured His Holiness Patriarch Maxim that he would convey his good wishes to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church and presented and made a gift of a replica of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God to Patriarch Maxim. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Nov. 14.

ON 15 NOVEMBER 2010, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA MET WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF LEBANON, SAAD HARIRI, AT THE PATRIARCHAL RESIDENT IN CHISTRY SIDE STREET.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill cordially greeted the Prime Minister of Lebanon and said that the Russian Orthodox Church has maintained good relations with the Lebanese for many years, and that these relations were developing.

“I recall my predecessor, Patriarch Aleksy's meeting with the Lebanese parliamentarians, with your father and with you. I also recall my visits to Lebanon before the civil war and after it. I remember the blossoming Beirut and Beirut in ruins

that could be compared with Stalingrad. We know how great was the damage that the civil war caused to Lebanon and highly appreciate the Lebanese leadership's efforts to solve the problems that provoked the murderous conflict."

Having acknowledged the important part played by Rafik al-Hariri, a renowned political leader and father of the incumbent Prime Minister, in ordering peaceful life in Lebanon, His Holiness Kirill said: "Our Church was full of indignation against the terrorist killing of your father in 2005, and we welcome the United Nations Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating this crime."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church is convinced that both Lebanon and Syria are multireligious and multiethnic countries. Therefore, achievements in the field of interreligious and interethnic relations in both countries are of great importance for the entire world that has entered an epoch of globalization.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill underscored that interreligious cooperation is important on both regional and local levels as well as on international level, including that of international organizations. UNESCO, being a special UN organization, could be an important base for dialogue. "Some well-known religious leaders launched an initiative to have a consultative body at UNESCO to help solve issues related to interreligious relations both in hot spots of the planet and in the entire world."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church dwelt on the Middle East conflict, saying, "Lebanon is located in the place with a vivid Biblical tradition. This is a Biblical land, and we call it the Holy Land. Therefore Christian believers feel particularly sad, as peace and justice have not yet prevailed on this land. Efforts of both religious communities and the state are very important for the solution of problems that feed the Middle East conflict."

Speaking about Russian-Lebanese relations. His Holiness said that the pilgrims from Russia heading for the Holy Land have laid the foundation of these relations. It is well known that the Imperial Palestine Society, which supported the pilgrims, actively worked in Lebanon and rendered assistance to the local population in education and health care.

His Holiness continued to say, "There are some five thousand people in Lebanon who belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. Some of them are descendants of Russian families that were famous in Russia even before the Revolution. Some Orthodox Christians married the local inhabi-

itants, and mixed marriages are a very important factor in our relations."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church noted that the Patriarchate of Antioch that cares for the Orthodox Christians in Lebanon also cares for the Russian-speaking people living in the country. Besides, there is an Orthodox parish in Beirut. "We believe that good relations with the Orthodox Church of Antioch and the presence of the Russian Orthodox in Lebanon are factors that contribute to the development of relations between our countries and nations," His Holiness Patriarch Kirill emphasized and expressed his hope for the visit of the Prime Minister of Lebanon to serve this noble goal.

The Prime Minister of Lebanon helped the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for warm reception. Saad Hariri told him that the Muslim and Christian communities take part in ordering life in Lebanon. "We believe that co-existence of Muslims and Christians is absolutely necessary for Lebanon, as it is the only means thanks to which our country would not collapse and bury the entire nation beneath the ruins."

Saad Hariri underscored the importance of dialogue among religions and civilizations, saying that current problems are political ones rather than interreligious... Unfortunately, there are many people who do not understand religion and consider political problems as religious ones. We think that extremism is permitted only in the matter of forgiveness.

The Prime Minister of Lebanon called the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the process of settlement of the Middle East conflict very important.

He thanked His Holiness for his support of justice in the investigation of his father's murder. Rafik al-Hariri personified aspirations for truth in most of the Arab world.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia mentioned his plan to visit Lebanon during his visit to the Orthodox Church of Antioch. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Nov. 15.

ON NOVEMBER 23, 2010, THE 75TH BIRTHDAY OF HIS BEATITUDE METROPOLITAN VLADIMIR OF KIEV AND ALL UKRAINE, THE DIVINE LITURGY WAS CELEBRATED AT THE STS ANTHONY AND THEODOSIUS REFECTIONARY CHURCH IN THE KIEV LAURA OF THE CAVES.

The celebrant, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, was assisted by a great assembly of bishops and clergy representing Local Orthodox

Churches. Present at the service was Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich and other officials as well as numerous representatives of public organizations and non-Orthodox Christian Churches.

In spite of the heavy rain, a multitude of people came to participate in a common prayer for Metropolitan Vladimir.

After the liturgy, Patriarch Kirill addressed Metropolitan Vladimir, presenting him with a pectoral icon and a cross made by Ural craftsmen. President Yanukovich extended congratulations to the metropolitan and handed him the Order of Freedom in acknowledgement of his 'great personal services for the establishment of peace and social accord and long-standing zealous work to revive the spirituality and national and cultural identity of the Ukrainian people'.

His Beatitude Vladimir spoke in response and then accepted congratulations from participants in the celebrations, the Patriarchal Press Service has reported. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Nov. 23.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH HAS REJECTED PROTESTS BY THE COUNTRY'S ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP AFTER GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES IN THE KALININGRAD ENCLAVE GAVE THE LOCAL ORTHODOX DIOCESE OWNERSHIP OF A SOVIET-CONFISCATED CATHOLIC CHURCH.

"The way the Catholic Church is dealing with this challenge today reveals its many inherent contradictions," said Dmitri Sizonenko, the Moscow Patriarchate's acting secretary for inter-Christian relations. "Catholics are divided internally, and behaving in an unjustified way as an injured religious minority, and are issuing declarations in the name of a church which counts more than a billion believers worldwide."

The Orthodox church official was reacting to a 4 November statement by Archbishop Paolo Pezzi, the Italian head of Russia's Moscow-based Catholic Mother of God archdiocese. Pezzi had condemned the ruling by Kaliningrad's district дума, or council, that 15 non-Orthodox places of worship in the Baltic port city should be handed over to the Orthodox church.

In a 16 November interview with the Russian Interfax news agency, Sizonenko cited in particular the Holy Family church saying the local Catholic community had neglected it for many years, and that it had required renovation by the council in the early 1970s. He noted that the church had later been turned into a concert hall by the "joint effort of all citizens" in Kaliningrad,

and should now be regarded as their "common heritage."

"The Russian Orthodox Church has always sought to decide such delicate matters in a way suitable for all," Sizonenko told Interfax.

The enclave of Kaliningrad, formerly the German Königsberg, was ceded to the Soviet Union in 1945, and serves as the military base, between Poland and Lithuania, for Russia's Baltic fleet.

In July 2009, Archbishop Pezzi closed down the Catholic Church's Kaliningrad vicariate, which included 23 parishes, as a goodwill gesture to the Orthodox church, despite complaints from Catholics.

In its ruling, the district дума said it had now decided to place 15 "buildings of religious purpose" at the disposition of the Orthodox diocese of Kaliningrad and Smolensk, which was headed until January 2009 by the current Russian Patriarch, Kirill I.

Still, Archbishop Pezzi protested against the move, and said the Duma ruling had been issued, "in line with lobbying techniques and in secret." He added that the inclusion of the Holy Family church would cause, "incomprehension and pain" after Roman Catholics had attempted to secure its repossession for two decades.

"This is the poisoned fruit of the fraud, distrust, xenophobia and pseudo-patriotic mythology copiously spread by secular and church media in the 1990s," said the archbishop, who had faced criticism from some Russian Catholics after taking office in 2007, being accused of having an over-accommodating attitude to Russian Orthodox leaders. "Local Catholics will nevertheless defend their rightful interests and civic dignity with all the means provided for them by international legal norms, and by the constitution and existing legislation of the Russian Federation."

Orthodox-Roman Catholic relations have faced periodic tensions in Russia due to Orthodox accusations of proselytizing by Catholics, something they deny. Things worsened after the February 2002 creation of four Catholic dioceses in Russia. Still, both churches have repeatedly pledged to work together on social and moral issues, and established a joint working group in 2004 to settle outstanding points of dispute. – Jonathan Luxmoore for *ENI*, Nov. 24.

METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, THE DECR CHAIRMAN, ANSWERED QUESTIONS OF THE JOURNALISTS DURING PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AT THE DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS ON

NOVEMBER 25. As to the relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, he said:

"The achieved level of mutual understanding is rather high. Both sides are trying to enhance this level in order to move from competition and mistrust to mutual trust and the system of regular consultations. We believe that the present problems and differences should be resolved in peaceful fraternal dialogue between the two Churches. This dialogue is being maintained."

Also discussed was the ecclesiastical problem in Estonia. Metropolitan Hilarion said that no substantial progress has been made in this sphere, though the agreements with the Estonian government reached in 2002 are a considerable step towards normalization of the situation.

"We hope the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Estonian State will make further steps. First of all, we consider it necessary to resolve, once and for all, the problem of property used by the Estonian Church of the Moscow Patriarchate on a long-term rent basis. The Church is not a full owner of many objects, for instance, the Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky in Tallinn, or the Pühtica Convent, whereas the ecclesiastical structure in the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople is the full owner of the objects it uses. This situation is unacceptable from our point of view. We shall carry on a dialogue with the Estonian state authorities and with local authorities in the cities where the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has parishes and try to have the real estate transferred to church ownership."

Metropolitan Hilarion elaborated on the two forms of ownership. There are churches, which the Estonian state owns, and there are churches on the asset register of local authorities. The transfer of the latter into ownership of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate depends on local authorities of the cities. As to the former, it depends on the state authorities. "Estonian state authorities are prepared to consider this problem provided that the church structure of the Patriarchate of Constantinople would not raise objections as it has done up to now. So, we shall carry on a dialogue."

Metropolitan Hilarion told the journalists of his recent visit to Estonia, his meetings with Metropolitan Korniliy of Tallinn and Estonia and representatives of state authorities, including the Tallinn mayor and leaders of some other cities, and expressed his opinion, saying: "A readiness seems to be there to make steps to normalize the situation." – Press Release, Moscow Pa-

triarchate, Nov. 28.

ON 30 NOVEMBER 2010, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA MET WITH H.E. RICARDO ALARCON DE QUESADA, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PEOPLE'S POWER (PARLIAMENT) OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA. The meeting took place at the Patriarch's working residence, Chisty side street.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church addressed the President of the National Assembly of People's Power of Cuba, saying: "Your Excellency, I am happy to welcome you in Moscow where you met twice with my predecessor, His Holiness Patriarch Aleksy II. I know that you have visited the Laura of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius, the spiritual centre of our Church and our country. Not so long ago, when I was a metropolitan, I visited Cuba and consecrated the Church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Havana. I retain a good memory of this event." His Holiness added that the church was built with active participation of the Cuban leadership, saying: "We are grateful for this important act as an important gesture to the Orthodox Christians."

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill described the level of relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and Cuba as a high one and underscored that these relations are a priority of the Russian Orthodox Church in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. He noted a substantial contribution to the development of relations made by the Embassy of Cuba in Moscow and by H.E. Juan Valdez Figueroa.

His Holiness said further that the people of Russia and Cuba have been good friends for a long time. Diplomatic relations between Russia and Cuba were established in the early 20th century, almost at the same time as the independent Cuba came into being. Cuban public of the 20th century was well acquainted with Russian culture thanks to the tours of theatres and musicians. "However, special relations have been established between Cuba and the USSR after the Revolution of 1959. After a cool down of the 1990s, they were re-established on a new level. The Orthodox church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Havana is a symbol of friendship between the Russians and the Cubans."

His Holiness mentioned two major common features that create an affinity between them, such as the Christian foundation of their national cultures and an enhanced sense of social justice.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox

Church told his guests of the Annual Address to the Federal Assembly delivered by the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and expressed his profound satisfaction with his main emphasis on a human person, mainly children and the youth. "This notion is very close to that of the Church. I believe that our common commitment to the idea of social justice give us a platform for close cooperation." His Holiness is confident that cooperation serves to common good.

The Russian-speaking diaspora is an important driving force of the Russian-Cuban relations. "Several thousands of our compatriots live in Cuba, having come from Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus... They are our parishioners, and I am happy to see that the Orthodox church built in Havana is not only a place for worship, but also unites all these people. "Russian House" was set up at the church for contacts among the Russian-speaking people," His Holiness said.

He mentioned difficulties that the Cuban people encounter because of the economic blockade. "We have stated several times that blockade was an unjust action against Cuba and does not conform to political and economic realities of the 21st century. This is a vestige of the cold war, and it is very important to remove it from relations between the states as soon as possible. Cuba has proved to the entire world that it could survive in spite of the blockade. Yet, it has the right to live as other states, having an opportunity to trade with them and develop contacts with the world."

H.E. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, President of the National Assembly of People's Power of the Republic of Cuba, thanked the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for the meeting and kind words.

His Holiness asked H.E. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada to convey his heartfelt regards and good wishes to Fidel Castro and Raul Castro. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Nov. 30.

THE SECOND REGULAR MEETING OF THE HOLY ASSEMBLY OF SERBIAN ORTHODOX BISHOPS WAS HELD BETWEEN NOVEMBER 17-20, 2010 AT THE PATRIARCHATE IN BELGRADE UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH IRINEJ. All diocesan bishops took part in the work of the Assembly, with the exception of the head of the autonomous Archbishopric of Ohrid, His Beatitude Jovan and Bishop Konstantin of Central Europe.

The work of the Holy Assembly of Bishops began with the conciliar serving of the Holy Hierarchical Liturgy at the Monas-

tery of the Holy Archangels in Rakovica near Belgrade, at which Patriarch Irinej officiated. A parastos was served afterward for the repose of the soul of Patriarch Pavle of blessed memory on the occasion of the one year anniversary since his falling asleep, the cross was blessed at his grave site and the invocation of the Holy Spirit for a blessed and God-pleasing Assembly session took place. Afterward, in his introductory comments His Holiness, as the president of the Assembly, evoked memories once again of the person and spiritual merits of his predecessor Patriarch Pavle of blessed memory as well as the newly departed Metropolitan Christopher of Libertyville-Chicago, and indicated the need of a dignified and responsible approach to the issues on the agenda of the Assembly through brotherly dialogue in the spirit of the spiritual maxims of Patriarch Pavle that our words be mild and our proofs strong.

Before beginning with its work, the Assembly reacted to the news of the capture of the Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skoplje Jovan at the border in Kalotin between Bulgaria and Serbia by Bulgarian border police, and his detention on the basis of a warrant for his arrest issued by Macedonian police. The Assembly reacted first through their prayer to God for their brother in distress, then with a public protest for the unjust persecution of Archbishop Jovan following the legal farce against him in the Republic of Macedonia, and finally an Assembly appeal for his release to both the head of Serbia as well as the president of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Georgi Parvanov.

On the agenda at this Assembly were two major issues and a few smaller ones. The two major issues were regarding the restructuring and filling of vacancies in some of the dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and solving the situation in the Diocese of Ras and Prizren which is burdened with many troubles. Added to these are the uncanonical actions of the former Bishop of Ras and Prizren Artemije and of his sect made up of his followers and supporters, which culminated during the meeting of the Assembly when he arbitrarily left Monastery Sisatovac in Srem, resolutely refusing obedience to the Assembly, explicitly not accepting the decisions of the Assembly and attempting to forcefully take over monasteries and other property of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and Metohija, as well as the usurpation of hierarchical authority in the Diocese of Ras and Prizren.

The vacant diocese of Ras and Prizren was filled with the election of the current

Vicar Bishop Teodosije of Lipljana as the new Bishop of Ras and Prizren.

The plan for restructuring the dioceses was completed as much as was possible during this session: parts of the Diocese of Nis, Zica, Sumadija and Branicevo will form a new diocese, of Krusevac headquartered in Krusevac, and it was accepted that the largest diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Archdiocese of Belgrade-Karlovci, be broken up into two more dioceses. Also, the bishops active in America were entrusted with the task of examining the possibilities of restructuring the dioceses there, and the issue was raised of forming a separate diocese for Austria, with headquarters in Vienna, taking into consideration the realistic needs and the magnitude and large number of faithful of the current Diocese of Central Europe.

The Assembly received with joy the news of the unanimous decision of the Diocesan council of the Diocese of Australia and New Zealand and the Church-laity assembly of the New Gracanica Metropolitanate of Australia and New Zealand at their recent extraordinary meeting regarding the establishing of full church-administrative unity.

After learning all the relevant facts and exhaustive discussions, the Holy Hierarchical Assembly, with much sadness, but decisively standing in defense of the holy and salvific unity of the Church, in light of evidence of the most serious canonical transgressions which he himself has confirmed - serving while under suspension, refusing obedience to the Assembly, creating a schism and forcefully occupying some monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Diocese of Ras and Prizren, even with the participation of armed individuals and physically endangering the monastics in those monasteries - the Assembly has stripped the retired Bishop Artemije of Ras and Prizren of the episcopal dignity and returned him to the status of monk.

The Assembly, among other things, made decisions with regards to the upcoming commemoration of the 1700 Anniversary of the Edict of Milan (313-2013), by which Emperor Constantine the Great granted freedom to the Christians of the Roman Empire and established the foundations of Christian Europe, as well as decisions regarding the establishment of military chaplains in the Serbian Army.

The Assembly appeals to all faithful of the Serbian Orthodox Church that, in spite of the difficult economic crisis which is affecting us, we continue to help the renovation of the monastic dwelling of Monastery Hilandar on Mount Athos, destroyed in

a fire a few years ago, as well as the renovation of homes and other buildings in Kraljevo and the surrounding areas, destroyed or damaged during the recent earthquake. – Press Release, Serbian Patriarchate, Nov. 20.

ASERBIAN ORTHODOX BISHOP ACCUSED OF FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT HAS REFUSED TO ACCEPT A DEFROCKING ORDER BY HIS CHURCH'S GOVERNING SYNOD AND HAS SAID HE WILL REMAIN IN CHARGE OF HIS DIOCESE.

"The decision to defrock me is unconstitutional - it is uncanonical and has no bearing on me, and I'm still what I was before," said Artemije Radosavljevic, a 75-year-old bishop who previously headed the church's Raska-Prizren diocese in Kosovo.

"I've respected the ban on performing religious rituals so as not to give them cause for further actions, and I expected the Holy Assembly of Bishops to resolve this issue," said the bishop. "However, their non-canonical decisions and sanctions have continued."

He was speaking after the 19 November Belgrade church synod declared he had been deposed and defrocked.

In an interview with Serbia's Vecernje Novosti daily newspaper on 22 November, Artemije said he had accepted previous synod decisions for the sake of church unity, but added that he had not been invited to attend the latest session. He said he had notified the synod he would not comply with its ruling until his case is heard by a church court.

Bishop Artemije was strongly critical of NATO's 1999 intervention in Kosovo, as well as the province's February 2008 independence declaration.

He was stripped of his post and barred from officiating at services in May when he was accused of financial mismanagement, and ordered to remain in an Orthodox monastery at Sisatovac.

In a letter to the synod, supporters denied wrongdoing by the bishop and claimed the charges were politically motivated. However, on 19 November, the synod said it had now appointed Bishop Artemije's former auxiliary, Teodosije Sibalic, as head of the Raska-Prizren diocese.

A diocese statement on 21 November said the bishop had "attempted to carry out a coup" by occupying other monasteries as well, including those of Devine Vode and Crna Reka. It added that the sites were now "freed and under the control of the diocese," and said Artemije's "schismatic group" was "not supported by the Serbian people."

In its ruling, the synod said it had re-

ceived news of the bishop's "attempted forcible appropriation of church power" with "great regret and concern," and called on Artemije and his "straying accomplices and supporters" to "show penance and return to church unity."

"The whole activity of Bishop Artemije is invalid from a canonical point of view and deprived of God's grace," the synod said. "We call on the faithful not to accept lies and sectarian manipulation by the bishop's supporters."

However, in his newspaper interview, Artemije said there had been no evidence of his wrongdoing presented. He said synod members deserved to be defrocked for uncanonically naming his successor.

Muslims make up most of the 2.2 million inhabitants of Kosovo, whose mostly ethnic Albanian inhabitants were placed under UN and NATO supervision after a 1998-9 war with Serbia. Its independence has been recognized by 69 countries, including the United States and Britain, but not by Serbia and its ally, Russia. -- Jonathan Luxmoore for *ENI*, Nov. 26.

TODAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2010, HIS BEATITUDE DANIEL, PATRIARCH OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH RECEIVED, AT THE PATRIARCHAL RESIDENCE, THE VISIT OF HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN GHENADIOS OF SASSIMA, CO-MODERATOR OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC), accompanied by Mr. Georges Lemopoulos, deputy Secretary General, and by Rev. Dr. Daniel Buda, Executive Secretary of the respective institution, as the Press Office of the Romanian Patriarchate informs. The visit took place in the context of the conference that WCC organized, from 10 – 12 November 2010, in Sibiu, in co-operation with the "Andrei Şaguna" Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Sibiu, with the theme The Ecumenical Movement in the Theological Education and in the Life of the Orthodox Churches.

On this occasion, His Eminence Metropolitan Ghennadios of Sassima conveyed a message of salute on behalf of His Holiness Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, who appreciated the dynamics of the church life in the Romanian Patriarchate after his recent visit to Bucharest (26 – 29 October 2010).

The discussions tackled themes concerning the challenges present in the contemporary society and the pastoral-missionary efforts of the Orthodox Churches in order to solve the issues the local churches are faced with. The need to explain the purpose of the inter-church

relations was also emphasized in order to avoid the distorted and tendentious interpretations when dealing with the relations between the Orthodox and some other Christian confessions.

His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel underscored the fact that the dialogue and co-operation between various Churches should not be a dogmatic or ethical compromise, but the manifestation of the Christians' co-responsibility in solving some urgent social issues as secularization, poverty, states of conflict, etc. – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Nov. 9.

ON MONDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 2010, HIS BEATITUDE DANIEL, PATRIARCH OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, RECEIVED HIS EXCELLENCY MR. HAMLET GASPARIAN, AMBASSADOR OF THE ARMENIAN REPUBLIC IN BUCHAREST, at the beginning of his diplomatic mission in Romania. Rev. Archimandrite Zareh Baronian was also present on behalf of the Armenian Church in Romania.

Ambassador Hamlet Gasparian underlined the very good relations between the two peoples and mentioned the fact that the Romanians are appreciated in Armenia for the friendship and hospitality they have always shown to the Armenian community in Romania during over eight centuries of peaceful cohabitation. The Armenian Ambassador in Bucharest made a short presentation of the history of the Armenian people and of the traditional relations of political, economical and cultural cooperation between Romania and Armenia. His Excellency emphasized especially the important contribution of the Catholics of all Armenians of pious remembrance Vasken I, born in Bucharest, for having kept alive the faith of the Armenian people during the period of the communist regime.

His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel emphasized the relations of friendship between the Churches of the two peoples, with a long rich Christian tradition, who share common values in today's multicultural context of Europe. In this sense, the Patriarch of Romania expressed his hope to intensify the traditional bilateral relations through the mutual exchange of scholarships, pilgrims and organization of manifestations for better knowing the history, cultural and church life of the two peoples. – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Nov. 29.

ARCHBISHOP CHRYSOSTOMOS II OF CYPRUS WOULD RATHER SEE APOSTOLOS ANDREAS COLLAPSE THAN LET RESTORATION OF THE HUGELY IMPORTANT MONASTERY LEFT IN THE

HANDS OF THE MUSLIM RELIGIOUS ENDOWMENT EVKAF.

Speaking to the state broadcaster CyBC yesterday, the Archbishop said the US Ambassador had personally taken on board the issue of the dilapidated monastery's restoration in the occupied area of Rizokarpazo.

"The whole matter is in the hands of the UNDP (United Nations Development Program). We had a meeting the other day and are ready to invite tenders," he said.

"One issue was raised which we rejected immediately, that Evkaf apply to the UNDP to take on and coordinate the restoration of Apostolos Andreas. We said that the owner of Apostolos Andreas is the Church, not Evkaf and to leave all that behind. In fact, I was very categorical that I would rather see Apostolos Andreas collapse, and will never accept that this monument belongs to Evkaf," he added.

Evkaf represents Turkish religious foundations on the island.

The primate said EU ambassadors had also got involved in the matter of urgent restoration work needed for the deteriorating monastery.

"I consider the matter closed. They won't insist on this because they realized our categorical refusal. It has also been arranged that the Bishop of Karpassia will go and conduct services there for the first time. That problem has been overcome. All will run smoothly," said Chrysostomos.

The archbishop will meet with President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Mevlut Cavusoglu today, in a round table meeting along with Turkish Cypriot religious leader Mehmet Emin Yeltekin at the Ledra Palace hotel in the buffer zone.

Chrysostomos said he would discuss the issue of preserving religious monuments in the north.

"There are many issues to discuss (with Cavusoglu), and given that he hails from Turkey and is Turkish, a further reason is (for him) to learn the real facts about Cyprus.

"I'm considering raising the issue of the restoration of Apostolos Andreas as well as the return of the abbot of Apostolos Varnavas with his escort to resume services and for us to be allowed to fix all our Christian monuments because one after another are collapsing."

He added: "We don't want them to fix them but just to allow us to get inside and fix them up ourselves."

Last March, the archbishop crossed the island's divide for the first time since 1974 to visit Apostolos Andreas after Turkish

Prime Minister Recep Tayip Erdogan gave the go-ahead to conserve and restore the monastery following nearly four decades of neglect. The structure threatens to collapse in on itself if the restoration plans fail to come to fruition.

Apostolos Andreas, on the island's northeastern tip, is one of the most important religious monuments for Greek Cypriot pilgrims. -- Stefanos Evripidou for *The Cyprus Mail*, Nov. 2.

THREE HIGH-RANKING CLERICS IN CYPRUS AND GREECE ARE BEING SUED FOR DECEIVING AND MANIPULATING YOUNG MEN INTO BECOMING MONKS.

The lawsuits, filed by parents of sons who became monks, have been filed against abbot Epifanios of Maheras Monastery, Limassol bishop Athanasios and chief monk Efraim of the Vatopedi Monastery in Greece.

They stand accused of running an operation aimed at brainwashing young men, isolating them from their families and secular way of life and finally recruiting them at monasteries.

The first hearing in one of the lawsuits takes place next month, and more court cases are in the pipeline.

Meanwhile, five families have jointly filed a group recourse with the European Court of Human Rights in which they make similar allegations against the priests but also accuse the Republic for failing to take action to stop this "brazen recruitment."

Earlier this week, a group of concerned parents spoke to MPs during a behind-closed-doors session in parliament. The parents demanded the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry to investigate their claims of "illegal recruitment," intellectual terror and "enslavement" of their children.

The parents accuse the three clerics in question of running a recruitment operation, where young men – usually students in Cyprus and Greek universities – are approached. The "targets" are preferably young men studying for a degree in economics.

According to the parents, men with degrees in economics are a prime target, because upon being converted they will be more than capable of running the monasteries' financial affairs – and for free.

Moreover, the recruiters prefer men who are financially well-off, in the hopes that the prospective monks will bequeath all their possessions to the monasteries, which then get to increase their holdings. In one case, the parents said, a monastery

went to court to contest the will of a monk who had bequeathed all his possessions to his siblings.

The parents went on to recount the monasteries' manipulation techniques. More often than not, the recruiters target young students when they are vulnerable, for example right after they have failed an exam or are experiencing some problem in their personal life.

After the initial contact, the young men are introduced to an "elder," who is presented as a "mentor" or "prophet" who then proceeds to extol the virtues of monastic life. The "mentor's" job is also to introduce the young men to Church writings.

Gradually, the prospective monks are invited to spend a few days at a monastery. The candidates are encouraged to fast and to keep vigils – although the parents prefer the term "sleep deprivation." Through these methods, the parents say, the young men are weakened both physically and emotionally. In time, the candidates' indoctrination is complete.

The prospective monks sever all family and social ties, often on the advice of their elders.

The parents have procured the personal diaries of young men, in which the latter describe such-and-such priest as telling them to resist contact with the outside world because it is a "distraction" and a "temptation."

The young men are also encouraged to lie if necessary. In one diary, a young man described how a priest told him to lie to his parents if necessary so as to conceal his monastic activities.

"Just tell them that you are going to study with a friend. It is not a sin, because it is not acted upon."

In another diary, as quoted by Politis, an elder monk advises a candidate: "You should spend more time studying the books of the Fathers. So what if your [school] grades drop a little? Afterward God will help you, my son, do not worry..."

And elsewhere: "Parents usually react. But this does not last long and can be handled. Don't tell them everything. This is not a sin."

To prove the extent of the recruitment operation, the parents cite especially the case of Vatopedi Monastery, which started out as a small outfit with just a handful of elders but today numbers around 80 monks.

The monasteries in question are said to espouse the more fundamentalist tendencies of the Christian faith, with a heavy emphasis on mysticism.

Asked to comment on the allegations, Archbishop Chrysostomos told Politis he

did not see how a 25-year-old could be "misled" in this way, arguing that adults are free and capable to choose their way of life.

The parents say that although in private the Archbishop acknowledges a problem does exist with the recruitment methods of certain monasteries, he does not repeat these views in public. -- Elias Hazou for *The Cyprus Mail*, Nov. 27.

THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF GREECE HAS ORDERED AN INSPECTION OF 145 CHURCHES TO DETERMINE HOW THEIR FINANCES ARE BEING MANAGED and is also considering bringing in auditors if the statistics produced by individual church councils prove less than convincing, Kathimerini has learned.

The initiative – the first of its kind by the Church of Greece – aims to inform the country's Orthodox faithful about how their donations to their local church's collection boxes are being utilized. "The goal is to draft a comprehensive overview of the management of Church finances and record the problems and challenges being faced by parishes following the onset of the financial crisis," a spokesperson for Archbishop Ieronymos told Kathimerini.

According to sources, the country's churches owe around 500,000 euros to the Archbishopric. – *KED*, Nov. 22.

THE CONVICTION THAT ANY ISSUES THAT MAY EXIST BETWEEN THE AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH OF GREECE AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND WILL BE SETTLED WAS EXPRESSED BY GREEK PRESIDENT KAROLOS PAPOULIAS, who received visiting Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, on Thursday at the presidential mansion.

Dr Williams was later received by Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou for a 40-minute meeting.

During his talks with Papoulias, the latter said he is closely following the work performed by the Church of England in a period with many social problems "and with people who suffer, particularly those seeking a better future."

"I am pleased that relations with the Church of Greece are very good. We have certain issues that need to be solved and I am certain that our representatives will solve them," Papoulias said.

On his part, the head of the Church of England stressed that the timing of his first visit to Greece is very important, considering the problems with which both countries are faced. "The Church of Greece is facing poverty and other social problems using

new methods. We would like to cooperate and ... exchange notes," he pointed out.

The Archbishop of Canterbury also met with Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece at the latter's office at the Archdiocese.

The two religious leaders had a brief discussion in the presence of bishops and priests of both Christian Churches.

Archbishop Ieronymos expressed his joy over the visit of the head of the Church of England, adding that in him "we see an excellent professor of patristic theology, a sincere friend of Orthodoxy and a scholar of the Orthodox doctrine."

The Archbishop of Canterbury underlined the common points shared by the two Churches, stressing that "the Church has played an important role in the history of both countries." – *Athens News*, Nov. 25.

DURING THE OPENING SESSION OF THE FALL MEETING OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA, WHICH OPENED AT THE CHANCERY IN SYOSSET, NEW YORK, on Tuesday morning, November 16, 2010, Priestmonk Matthias [Moriak] was canonically elected to the vacant See of Chicago and the Midwest.

Following a lengthy search process, Father Matthias was nominated from a slate of three candidates by delegates at a special Assembly of the Midwest Diocese convened at Saint Mary Cathedral, Minneapolis, MN on Wednesday, October 6, 2010. His name was then submitted to the Holy Synod for canonical election. He is currently under the omophorion of His Grace, Bishop Michael of New York, and serves Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery, Otego, NY.

In addition to the address of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah, and reports by the Church's officers -- Archpriest Alexander Garklavs, Chancellor; Archpriest Eric G. Tosi, Secretary; and Melanie Ringa, Treasurer -- the Holy Synod's agenda includes a variety of items concerning external affairs, financial and legal matters, OCA departmental ministries, 2011 priorities, the Strategic Plan, the All-American Council, and related issues. – OCA Press Release, Nov. 16.

The Assyrian Church of the East

THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE HOLY APOSTOLIC CATHOLIC ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST ISSUED THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF CLARIFICATION ON NOVEMBER 11, UNDER THE SIGNATURE OF MAR AWA ROYEL, SECRETARY:

In response to certain canonical and ecumenical issues that are arising in the public recently, the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East wishes to address a matter of grave importance. Recent statements by certain clergy, particularly in the United States, have distorted the facts regarding the synodical decrees of the Church of the East. It has been claimed by some Chaldean Catholic clergy in California that the deposed bishop Ashur Soro has *only* been suspended by the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East.

The fact remains that the ex-bishop Soro was suspended by the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East on November 11, 2005; this synod was convened and presided by His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch, in Chicago, Illinois (USA). Further, the Holy Synod which was convened in Dohuk, Iraq, in October of 2008 formally and permanently excommunicated Ashur Soro in its decree of October 31, 2008. This means, canonically, that Ashur Andrious Soro has been utterly deposed from the episcopal rank and laicized from all sacerdotal faculties. The text of the Synodical Decree reads: "*The suspended bishop Ashur Andrious Soro is hereby pronounced entirely excommunicated and stripped of the episcopal office and of all priestly dignity which he had received in the Assyrian Church of the East. From henceforth, he is utterly laicized and retains absolutely no canonical or spiritual right or privilege of any other sort in the Assyrian Church of the East.*"

This matter has been brought to the fore recently due to the fact that the Synod of the Chaldean Catholic Church attempted to convene in Rome on October 25, 2010, under the presidency of His Beatitude Mar Emmanuel III Delly, Chaldean Patriarch. It was expected that the Chaldean Synod would discuss the matter of receiving and fully recognizing Ashur Soro as a bishop in the Chaldean Catholic Church. According to the canons of the Assyrian Church of the East, once a cleric (whether in the episcopal or sacerdotal ranks) has been deposed, excommunicated and/or laicized, he may never validly administer the sacraments, and he remains a simple layman. We urge the Chaldean faithful, therefore, to beware of attempting to receive the sacraments from the deposed cleric Ashur Soro, or any of his equally deposed priests. Out of Christian charity, we further urge our brother bishops of the Chaldean Synod to be cautious of receiving an excommunicated and deposed bishop among their ranks, as this will naturally have both canonical and ecumenical implications. –

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II, SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS, ISSUED PONTIFICAL DIRECTIVES APPOINTING NEW CLERGY ASSIGNMENTS to the Monasteries and the Seminaries of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

His Grace Bishop Sahak Mashalian has been relieved as Dean of the Gevorkian Theological Seminary of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, as he will be returning to the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople for permanent service.

Very Rev. Fr. Gevorg Saroyan has been appointed as Dean of the Gevorkian Theological Seminary beginning December 10. Father Gevorg previously served as the Dean of the Vaskenian Academy at Lake Sevan.

Rev. Fr. Shnork Sargsian has been relieved as Abbot of the Geghard Monastery and was assigned to serve as Dean of the Vaskenian Academy at Lake Sevan beginning November 15.

Rev. Fr. Kiuregh Davtian was appointed to serve as the Abbot of the Shoghakat Monastery. – Press Release, Holy Etchmiadzin, Nov. 15.

THE NINETEENTH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ST. JAMES BROTHERHOOD OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM, CONVENED ON NOVEMBER 15-18, 2010 UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF HIS BEATITUDE ARCHBISHOP TORKOM MANOOGIAN, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, with the participation of 28 members of the Brotherhood.

His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America was elected as the co-Chairman of the Assembly, and conducted it with efficiency.

During the meeting various issues and proposals of interest to the Brotherhood concerning real estate, finances, and bylaws were discussed, and an election was held to replace members of the Executive Council whose terms had expired.

During the meeting, His Beatitude the Patriarch presented a written Memorandum to the officers of the Assembly, and in accordance with the wishes of His Beatitude, the Chairman of the Assembly read the Memorandum. In summary, the Memorandum stated that taking into consideration the state of his health and the future of the Church, His Beatitude suggested that the

Assembly consider electing a Patriarch Coadjutor, and prepare articles addressing canonical issues. He directed His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, as Chairman of the meeting, to chair a committee that will address this section of the by-laws. It is the wish of His Beatitude, that the articles of the by-laws be ratified by March of 2011.

The General Assembly of the Brotherhood concluded with a positive and encouraging spirit. The General Assembly of the Brotherhood concluded its 19th session with singing of the hymn of the Holy See and the prayer read by the Patriarch. – Press Release, Holy Etchmiadzin, Nov. 18.

ON SUNDAY 31 OCTOBER 2010, AFTER THE HOLY LITURGY, THROUGH A PONTIFICAL ENCYCLICAL, HIS HOLINESS ARAM I raised Bishop Dirayr Panossian, Director of the Library of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, and Bishop Nareg Alemezian, Director of Ecumenical Relations, to the rank of Archbishop.

In his remarks, Catholicos Aram I said: “On the occasion of the beginning of the month of ‘Armenian Culture and Literature’ established by the our Catholicosate, I decided to honor Bishops Dirayr and Nareg because of their service to the Church and their commitment to promote Armenian culture and literature I also wanted to reaffirm the vocation of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia as guardian of the written Armenian word. – Press Release, Catholicosate of Cilicia, Nov. 2.

FIFTEEN JOURNALISTS FROM CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES, REPRESENTING DIFFERENT TYPES OF MEDIA, MET WITH HIS HOLINESS ARAM I IN ANTELIAS. In his welcome speech, Catholicos Aram I talked of how the ancient local churches of the Middle East, which have been deeply rooted in the region for over 17 centuries, have contributed to its economic, intellectual, and cultural development.” He went to note that “the roots of Christianity are in the Middle East, and that from the beginning, the Church Fathers have contributed to the theological discourse on Christian faith and on ways to witness their faith in the context of the other monotheistic religions.”

His Holiness then responded to questions raised by the visitors.

Question 1. What are the challenges that Christians in the Middle East are facing today?

Answer: “Christians in the Middle East have always lived with challenges. The history of Christians in the Middle East has

been a history of ‘living martyrdom’. They have witnessed their faith through their participation in their societies living the message and values born in Bethlehem. What is happening today is a continuation of the same journey, continuation of Christian witness in the Middle East.”

Question 2: How do you explain what is happening to Christians in some countries of the Middle East?

Answer: “It is important to approach this question from the right perspective. Fundamentalism in Islam is not only a threat to Christians, but also to Islam itself. It is a serious threat to security in the region. I am sure that many Muslims will share this understanding with me. We, therefore, need a common strategy. Christian-Muslim dialogue and cooperation is the best strategy. I would like to remind you that Muslim political and religious leaders were the first to condemn the attack and massacres in the Church in Baghdad.”

Question 3: How do you assess the current status of Christian-Muslim dialogue?

Answer: “Christian-Muslim dialogue is not new, but in the past ten years it was given a new emphasis and a new orientation. While I welcome these new initiatives, I would like to see the following happen: First, political leaders should be actively engaged in these dialogues, for in the end political and social structures should change as a result of the dialogue. Second, the agenda of dialogue meetings should include issues that affect the daily lives of the people. Third, dialogue meetings should be regular and not be held merely to respond to specific situations. Finally, dialogues should lead to cooperation on common projects.” He then added, “as a result of globalization, people of different faiths are living together as neighbors. People are involved in existential dialogue. Our task is to help people discover their neighbors, learn to respect them and build mutual trust. Only through such a process will we build sustainable relations.”

Question 4: In another question His Holiness Aram I was asked to assess the Special Synod for the Middle East held at the Vatican last October.

Answer: “The Synod was a ‘wake-up’ call to the churches in the Middle East, as well as to Muslims and Christians all over the world. As I mentioned in my response to the Vatican invitation, such a call is addressed to all churches of the region, for we are facing the same concerns. Christian unity is an important challenge not only to all Christians, but specifically to the churches in the Middle East. I strongly be-

lieve that churches in the Middle East, while safeguarding their specificity, should work together on the basis of their common Christian values and convictions.”

He then added, “Christians and Muslims have lived and worked together for many centuries and the current challenges require that they continue working together. I welcomed the final statement of the meeting because the Synod invited Muslims to face common challenges together with Christians.” He then continued, “Although we have different perceptions of the ‘truth’ of our faiths, different sources of identity, we must learn to respect our differences and face the same problems. On the other hand, since we share common moral and ethical values, we should make an effort to build common strategies. Christians in the Middle East can help build bridges in Christian-Muslim relations in other parts of the world.” And finally, he said, “I appreciated very much that the Muslim representative at the Synod in the Vatican acknowledged the constructive role of Christians in building Middle East societies.”

In his conclusion, Catholicos Aram I reminded his audience that “the Church is ‘God’s mission’ and not an institution, and this is what unites the churches even if they express their mission in different forms. For example, the advocacy work of the churches in the west regarding Christians in the Middle East, and their humanitarian assistance to the churches in the Middle East are expressions of God’s mission through the Church. The ‘wake up’ call of the Vatican was an invitation to all churches in the world and specifically to churches in the Middle East to re-envision their presence and witness in the Middle East and all over the world in accordance with ‘God’s mission,’ with which they have been entrusted.” – Press Release, Catholicosate of Cilicia, Nov. 16.

ON NOVEMBER 26, 2010, HIS GRACE BISHOP DAVID OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH WENT TO THE EGYPTIAN CONSULATE IN NEW YORK accompanied by nineteen priests from the USA’s east coast, to present an official statement to the Consul General Mr. Youssef Zada, expressing the feelings of resentment towards the current events. The meeting was characterized by complete honesty, where all attendees expressed their feelings clearly towards these events, and the suffering of the Copts in Egypt. His Excellency, the Consul General, understood all these feelings and promised to transmit a complete picture to the Egyptian authorities. The statement is as follows:

Statement by Bishop David and the Priests of the USA’s North East

We have come today, Friday, November 26, 2010 to the Egyptian Consulate in New York, in consideration that all loyal Egyptians worldwide are partners in the moral responsibility for the image and reputation of Egypt before the world community. In our efforts to ensure the peace and safety of our dear homeland Egypt, which we now see has had its global image shaken in recent times as a result of successive events, we therefore wish to declare the following:-

-- We deplore and condemn the angry demonstrations that took place in various areas on Fridays over the past weeks, where insults were hurled at the church with curses and emotional provocation, enticing Muslim enmity towards the Christians. Boundaries were crossed when hurtful comments were made against our Father, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III - Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark in Egypt, Africa and the rest of the Diaspora - that are not befitting of, what is acclaimed by all, this great and wise character. Everybody acknowledges that His Holiness the Pope is an Egyptian icon whose positions on the national issues are well known and esteemed by both Muslims and Christians alike. Furthermore, we are amazed by the disengaged attitude portrayed by state officials who have not acted or expressed any outrage in response to those reckless outlaws who care neither for the security and peace of Egypt, nor its reputation in the world community. We are astonished at the absence of any official condemnation or denouncement of these despicable and degrading statements and their escalation. These statements have lately led to the loss of dozens of lives during the recent terrorist attack on The Church of Salvation in Baghdad, Iraq, and threats to the Coptic Church of similar actions!! These deliberate lies about the Coptic Church and His Holiness the Pope could have been prevented from spreading if government officials were intent on denying and refuting them by revealing the truth, calming the enraged souls, preventing the newspapers and the media from the provocative handling of the news, and the punishment of those who stir up violent emotions.

-- We express our astonishment at the security policies currently used, which we hope will be wiser, impartial and swift in the treatment of matters before they escalate, so that we do not reap deaths, injuries, fires and destruction, as has happened recently in the events of Abu Tisht and Tal-

bia. The country could have avoided this frustrating violence if there was a clear, fair and uniform policy for the construction of houses of worship for those in need of a place to pray. We also demand that Copts who had their homes and businesses burned be compensated accordingly.

-- We reject the policy of coerced meetings and forced reconciliation that rid people of their rights, and we request the avoidance of biased balances that are against truth and justice and that this will be achieved and take its course through the power and supremacy of the law. We await with great concern a just ruling in the case of Naga Hammadi on December 18, 2010, without any further adjournment, since we have waited long for its final verdict.

-- The current events in the areas of Talbia and Omranieh in Giza explicitly show, for the first time in Egyptian history, the confrontation with live ammunition and tear gas of unarmed youth seeking to pray and worship, despite the fact that these security forces are trained to face worse crises with wiser methods. This heavy-handed approach ended in the death of two Coptic youth, tens of injuries and the arrest of 156 Coptic youth. To make matters worse, the official media coverage inverted the truth and turned the victim into the culprit, which contributed in creating deliberate falsehood about the church and its clergy. We demand a swift calming of the turmoil and a clarification of the facts with truthfulness. Thereby preserving the future of these Egyptian youth, who are not criminals, but are simply asking for a place to worship.

-- Our thanks to the moderate and wise Muslim brothers whose voices rose to condemn these events. Thank God they are not few.

Our presence today at the Egyptian home in New York is an expression of our continued confidence in the possibility of internally containing these situations when serious, fast and effective steps are taken. This is in tune with what President Hosni Mubarak has always confirmed, that there is no distinction between citizens of one country because of creed or religion.

In spite of living abroad, we feel that our love for Egypt is still within us, and as His Holiness Pope Shenouda III says, “Egypt is not a country we live in, but a country that lives in us.”

Finally, we pray that God blesses Egypt, America and the entire world, and that safety and peace prevail in every place, in order for everyone to live in peace and tranquility. – Nov. 26.

THE INSTALLATION OF BASELIOS MARTHOMA PAULOSE II, THE EIGHTH CATHOLICOS OF THE EAST FROM MALANKARA, TOOK PLACE AT PARUMALA.

Newly installed Catholicos, Baselios Marthoma Paulose II is the eighth Catholicos since the Catholicate of the East was relocated to India and 91st Catholicos in the lineage of Catholicos of the East in the apostolic throne of St. Thomas. He is also the 21st Malankara Metropolitan of the church.

At 6.30 am all the Metropolitans ceremoniously accompanied the Catholicos into the Church and the day's event began. Metropolitan of Chengannur Diocese Thomas Mar Athanasius celebrated the Holy Qurbana. Catholicos Baselios Marthoma Didymus I was the chief celebrant for the consecration ceremony.

"At the inception of Catholicate in Malankara the first Catholicos was named as Paulose I. Now at the centenary of the Catholicate the Catholicos is again being called Paulose, precisely Paulose II. This is not a coincidence, but a great plan of God," said the Principal of Orthodox Theological Seminary, Fr. Dr. K.M. George.

The new Catholicos readout and put his signature on his confession of faith (Amalugia), which the new Pontiff himself piously submitted to the Catholicos Baselios Marthoma Paulose II.

Thereafter the reigning Catholicos declared that the new Pontiff is worthy to be elevated to the Catholicate and to the throne of St. Thomas. This led to reading of the Gospel, with Metropolitans carrying the throne, on which the new Catholicos was sitting. This was to symbolize the authority of the new Catholicos over the Church of God. Staff for the new Catholicos was also handed over in a similar fashion, where nine Metropolitans held their hands below the hand of the New Catholicos, which was guided to the top by the reigning Catholicos.

Concluding the ceremony, litanies were read out, which were prayers for and divine felicitations to the new Pontiff.

Newly installed Catholicos Baselios Marthoma Paulose II completed the Holy Qurbana to mark the end of ceremony.

Around 25 Metropolitans attended the event. A number of priests and thousands of faithful witnessed the historical ceremony. -- *Orthodox Herald*, Nov. 1.

The Catholic Churches

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES GENERAL SECRETARY, THE REV. OLAV FYKSE TVEIT, HAS JOINED POPE BENEDICT XVI AND OTHER

RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN CONDEMNING THE "CRIMINAL ACT OF TERROR" IN BAGHDAD when gunmen took hostages in a city church, resulting in the deaths of nearly 60 people.

"The World Council of Churches strongly condemns the criminal act of terror that took place on Sunday in the Sayyidat al-Najat Church in Baghdad and expresses its deep sympathy and solidarity with those who lost their loved ones and prays for a speedy recovery for the injured," said Tveit in a 1 November statement.

Earlier in an address to mark All Saints Day, the Pope told pilgrims in St Peter's Square, "I pray for the victims of this absurd violence, all the more ferocious in that it struck defenseless people united in the house of God, which is a place of love and reconciliation."

Iraqi television stations said assailants wearing suicide vests from the Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaida-linked group, stormed the church in Baghdad's Karrada district during an evening service. Hostages and police officers were killed when security forces raided the Baghdad church to free the more than 100 Iraqi Catholics who had been captured.

In East Jerusalem the group known as Islamic and Christian Religious leadership released a statement to ENInews which said, "All of us are responsible when people, children of the one God are killed in a house of God." It noted in its statement, "No religion or religious person can hide behind the word of God and justify what is happening in Iraq. We from Jerusalem consider those who stand behind this murderous act as outside of any religion of God."

In his statement Tveit said that the WCC's 349 churches representing more than 500 million Christians have been deeply troubled "by the continuous suffering of Christians in Iraq and continue to stand in solidarity with all churches as they pass through turbulent and challenging times amidst hatred and aggression."

The WCC leader stated, "This is not the first time that such attacks have targeted Christian communities in Iraq. All those responsible need to be brought to justice, and governmental authorities should take their responsibility to bring safety and security to all citizens and particularly to those in vulnerable situations."

Tveit made his comments shortly be-

fore delivering the opening address at a Christian-Muslim meeting at the WCC headquarters in Geneva, taking place from 1-4 November. -- Peter Kenny for *ENI*, Nov. 1.

ISRAEL'S FIRST FULLY ACCREDITED ARAB-CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, THE NAZARETH ACADEMIC INSTITUTE, OPENED ITS DOORS ON NOVEMBER 1, OFFERING A "NEW MODEL" FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN ISRAEL that offers both equal opportunity education and peace studies.

Formerly located in Ibillin, near Haifa, the Nazareth Academic Institute (NAI) served as branch campus of the University of Indianapolis. Then, in March 2009, after years of working to adapt to the Israeli academic system, both the Council of Higher Education, as well as the Israeli government, recognized and accepted the school as an Israeli private college, the institute reported in a press statement.

During his May 2009 visit to the Holy Land, Benedict XVI blessed the cornerstone of the new college after celebrating Mass for Arab Christians.

As of Nov. 1, the curriculum for both the Department of Chemistry and the Department of Social Communications has been approved. Other departments that are being considered for approval by the Council of higher education are computer science and occupational therapy; the latter is working in conjunction with the French Hospital in Nazareth. In the planning stages are programs for environmental studies, food and nutrition science, tourism and theology.

Students in each field of study will be required to take a course in the Peace Studies and Leadership Program, focusing on such issues as "how to advance and secure the peaceful coexistence and cooperation in a multiethnic and multireligious region, such as the Middle East."

"NAI believes peace is possible and that it can begin in the classroom," the institute wrote. "For that to happen, students must learn how to function in society, not just in the workplace, so NAI builds its education around a core curriculum in peace studies.

"Required of all students, this peace core encourages students to evaluate regional issues from multiple perspectives and conflicting cultural narratives. It also fosters the skills in critical thinking, negotiation and conflict resolution students need to identify solutions and build consensus in a diverse society."

"Students discover not only why coex-

istence matters but how they can create it in their personal and professional lives," the statement added.

The founder of NAI is Melkite Catholic Archbishop Elias Chacour of Akka, Haifa, Nazareth and All of Galilee. – *Zenit*, Nov. 2.

FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 31 ASSAULT ON THE SYRIAN CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL IN BAGHDAD AND SUBSEQUENT VIOLENCE, CHICAGO CARDINAL FRANCIS GEORGE, OMI, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, URGED PRESIDENT OBAMA to "take additional steps now to help Iraq protect its citizens, especially Christians and others who are victims of organized attacks." The full text of the letter follows.

Dear Mr. President:

The October 31 attack on the Syrian Catholic cathedral in Baghdad that killed 58 and wounded 75, together with the recent wave of bombings in Iraq's capital, are grim evidence of the savage violence and lack of security that has plagued the Iraqi people, especially Christians and other minorities, for over seven years. Some reports even indicate that the October 31 attack may have been more extensive and the failures of security more egregious than originally thought. Enclosed you will find a press release by the Most Reverend Yousif Habash, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Deliverance of Newark for Syrian Catholics.

In the recent Synod of Bishops on the Middle East in Rome, the bishops from Iraq spoke of the terrifying situation facing Christians and other minorities in that country. They recalled murders, kidnappings, bombings, and naked threats that have forced many Christians from their homes and businesses. Ironically, just two weeks before the October 31 attack, Archbishop Athanase Matti Shaba Matoka of the Syrian Catholic Church in Iraq, whose cathedral was the site of the October 31 attack, addressed the Synod: "The invasion of Iraq by America and its allies brought to Iraq in general, and especially to its Christians, destruction and ruin on all levels. ... Seven years have passed and Christianity is still bleeding. Where is the world conscience? All the world remains a spectator before what is happening in Iraq, especially with regards to Christians."

Archbishop Matoka's strong words remind us of the moral responsibility that the United States bears for working effectively with the Iraqi government to stem the violence. Prior to the war, our Conference of Bishops raised grave moral questions

regarding the possibility of U.S. military intervention in Iraq and warned of "unpredictable consequences." The decimation of the Christian community in Iraq and the continuing violence that threatens all Iraqis are among those tragic consequences.

Our troops have served with bravery and distinction, and we welcome the end of U.S.-led combat in Iraq; however, the United States has so far failed in helping Iraqis to develop the political will needed to deploy effective strategies to protect the lives of all citizens, especially Christians and other vulnerable minorities. More must be done to help ensure that refugees and displaced persons are able to return to their homes safely. Having invaded Iraq, our nation has a moral obligation not to abandon those Iraqis who cannot defend themselves.

The murderous attack on innocent Christians gathered for worship witnesses to the need for the United States to redouble its efforts to assist Iraq as our engagement enters a new phase. At a minimum, our country must strengthen its work with Iraqis and the international community to: enable the Iraqi government to function for the common good of all Iraqis; build the capacity of Iraq's military and police to provide security for all citizens, including minorities; improve the judicial system and rule of law; promote reconciliation and the protection of human rights, especially religious freedom; rebuild Iraq's shattered economy so that Iraqis can support their families; and assist refugees and internally displaced Iraqis.

To meet its moral obligations to the Iraqi people, it is critically important that the United States take additional steps now to help Iraq protect its citizens, especially Christians and others who are victims of organized attacks. Thank you for your kind consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely yours,

Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.

Archbishop of Chicago

President – USCCB Press Release, Nov. 10.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY HAS ISSUED A MESSAGE TO CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ, FOLLOWING RECENT KILLINGS IN BAGDAD AND THE APPEAL OF SENIOR CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN IRAQ. The full text of the message is below:

Dear Brothers and Sisters

May the peace and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

We read with deep emotion the heartfelt appeal of our brothers the Syrian and Chaldean Catholic archbishops in Iraq on

All Souls Day, which followed the dreadful events of 31 October.

We have repeatedly highlighted the plight of Christian minorities in Iraq, and the need for them to enjoy a dependable freedom of conscience, religion and worship, to flourish as minority communities, and to contribute to the common good of Iraqi society from the riches of our Christian heritage and faith.

But the killing of worshippers at Our Lady of Salvation Church in Bagdad has demonstrated a new low point of Christian vulnerability in the country. This slaughter of unarmed people gathered in church to worship God is a shocking and disgraceful act that should be utterly condemned by people of all faiths and none.

We commend those who were killed to God's grace and mercy, and our prayers are with all those who survived the attack, their families, and all others in Iraq who mourn the loss of loved ones. We pray too for all Iraqi Christian communities elsewhere in the world who rightly feel passionately for the safety of our Christian brothers and sisters there, and with all those in Iraq who will live in greater fear not only because of this appalling event but also because of the continuing threats directed against them all.

We hope and pray with all our hearts that there may be an end to this kind of sacrilegious butchery and to all intimidation and violence against Christians and other minorities in Iraq.

+ Rowan Cantuar

Press Release, Nov. 12

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF EUROPE'S EASTERN CATHOLIC BISHOPS TOOK PLACE IN SOFIA FROM 5-7 NOVEMBER 2010, ALSO MARKING THE CELEBRATIONS FOR THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNION OF BULGARIA'S EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH ROME. The event, at the invitation of the Exarch of Sofia, Mgr Christo Proykov, and sponsored for the second time by CCEE, saw the participation of Cardinals Péter Erdő, CCEE President, and Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, along with 35 bishops representing different Eastern Catholic Churches from various parts of Europe, from Russia to Cyprus, from Slovakia to Greece. Also present were some representatives from Vatican dicasteries: from the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. Liturgical celebrations were an integral part of the rhythm of the meeting, which also included visits to Sofia and Plovdiv, two symbolic cities in Bulgaria's

Christian history, as well as a series of talks on the main theme of the meeting: "The ecclesiological criteria of the Eastern Catholic Churches and the reality today." The outcome of the meeting demonstrated that the criteria of ecclesiology of the Eastern Catholic Churches is found in their full communion with the Apostolic See of Peter.

The commemoration of 150 years of this union was marked in the Exarchate of Sofia on 4 November with two presentations on the history of the Byzantine-Slavic Rite Catholic Church. This special celebratory moment, under the presidency of the Exarchate of Sofia, was attended by Cardinal Péter Erdő, CCEE President, the Apostolic Nuncio to Bulgaria, as well as representatives of the Bulgarian government and the President of the Republic.

The real work of the meeting began on the morning of 5 November. After the initial welcomes, there was a brief celebration of the Byzantine Slavic Office for the Dead, in memory of the late Monsignor Eleuterio Fortino, who died on 22 September and who would have opened the meeting with a talk on "The ecclesiological criteria of the Eastern Catholic Churches on the basis of the Vatican II documents and recent papal documents." On the basis of the outline prepared by Mgr Fortino himself, and other previous works of his, the talk was given by Archimandrite Fr Manuel Nin, Rector of the Pontifical Greek College in Rome, trying to highlight the ecclesiological criteria of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the thought of someone who was for many years Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. The talk was followed by a useful debate among the bishops present. The second morning talk was given by Mgr Antonio Maria Vegliò, President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, on the theme "Pastoral structures for Catholic migrants from the Eastern Churches, on the basis of the Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*." In his talk, Mgr Vegliò highlighted the reality of the pastoral welcome given to Eastern Catholic migrants and the problems of finding or creating pastoral structures which enable the development and continuity of their Christian life in the diaspora. In the afternoon the Exarch Christo Proykov presided over the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Assumptionist Church in Plovdiv. In the celebration the Greek Catholic martyrs of the Communist persecution were commemorated. Movingly, the Exarch recalled the previous jubilee: that of the 100th anniversary in 1960 when the Greek

Catholic Church was almost wiped out. He recalled how at the celebrations of that jubilee, as a young altar server he himself had served Mass, along with the bishop and only priest still alive and not imprisoned in that period.

Two other talks were held on Saturday 6 November, that of Mgr Cyril Vasil, Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, and that of Mgr Demetrio Salachas, Apostolic Exarch in Greece. Mgr Vasil spoke about "The relations of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches with the Eastern Churches in Europe and their future." Mgr Salachas, on the other hand, spoke about the theme "The Eastern Catholic Churches in the light of the official theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church as a whole." Both talks gave rise to a lively debate between the participants. In the afternoon there was a visit to the national museum, housing testimonies and works of art on the history of Bulgarian antiquity and Christianity, where a number of the museum's artefacts were shown and presented to the participants. Afterwards, the group went to the monastery of the Eucharistine Sisters. In a church dedicated to Blessed John XXIII, built on land he acquired during the time when he was papal representative in Bulgaria, the Exarch of Sofia gave a presentation on the history of the Exarchate, recalling the key moments from its foundation, through martyrdom up to the present-day re-birth. Subsequently, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the presence of a very large number of the faithful; in his homily, Cardinal Sandri emphasized the faithfulness to Christ and the Apostolic See of the predecessors in the Exarchate and exhorted those present to give an authentic witness of faith to young people. Before the final blessing, the Apostolic Nuncio, Mgr Bolonek, read the letter which the Cardinal Secretary of State, Tarcisio Bertone, had sent, on behalf of the Holy Father, to Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Eastern Catholic Church in Bulgaria. The celebration ended with a concert given by the Ioan Kukuzel Orthodox Choir.

On Sunday 7 November, the final session was held and the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the church of the Exarchate in Sofia. The next meeting of the Eastern bishops will take place in Oradea, in Romania, on the theme: You will be my witnesses: the evangelization in Europe's Catholic Eastern Churches. – Press Release, Nov. 16.

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY IN SYRIA MET AT ALEPPO UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF PATRIARCH GREGORIOS III OF THE MELKITE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH, to discuss matters arising from the recent Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops in Rome.

The Assembly was first concerned with the problems of Caritas trying to deal with the difficulties of Iraqi refugees in Syria.

It went on to consider the matter of the personal statute in legislation.

The Assembly also discussed the Syrian President's initiative to hold an international Christian-Muslim Congress in December 2010 to examine the impact of the Synod's recommendations on Middle Eastern countries.

The Assembly also discussed the date of Pascha, when next year (as this year) once again Eastern and Western calendars coincide. There was a desire among the participants to continue to work, in order to have in future unified Christian witness in the Middle East's predominantly Muslim countries.

On the final day, the Synod was attended by representatives of other Churches, including the Greek Orthodox, the Syriac Orthodox, and the Armenian Orthodox Churches and Protestant Churches. They also support the unification of the date for celebrating Pascha. – Press Release, Melkite Patriarchate, Nov. 18.

HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI DELIVERED THIS ADDRESS WHEN HE RECEIVED IN AUDIENCE THE PARTICIPANTS IN A PLENARY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY ON NOVEMBER 18:

Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It gives me great joy to meet you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, during which you are reflecting on the theme: "Towards a new stage in the ecumenical dialogue." In addressing my cordial greeting to each one of you, I also wish to thank in particular your President, Archbishop Kurt Koch for his warm words expressing your sentiments.

Yesterday, as Archbishop Koch mentioned, you celebrated with a solemn commemorative Act the 50th anniversary of your Dicastery. On 5 June 1960, on the eve of the Second Vatican Council which identified ecumenical commitment as central for

the Church, Bl. John XXIII created the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity which in 1988 was given the name of "Pontifical Council." This Act was a milestone on the ecumenical journey of the Catholic Church. In the course of 50 years great headway has been made.

I would like to express deep gratitude to all those who have devoted their service to the Pontifical Council, recalling first of all the successive Presidents: Cardinal Agostino Bea, Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy; and I am particularly pleased to thank Cardinal Walter Kasper, who has led the Dicastery in the past 11 years with competence and enthusiasm. I thank the members and consultants, officials and collaborators, those who have contributed to bringing about the theological dialogues and ecumenical meetings and all those who have prayed to the Lord for the gift of visible unity among Christians.

These are 50 years in which a true knowledge and greater esteem has been acquired with the Churches and Ecclesial Communities, overcoming prejudices crystallized by history: we have grown in theological dialogue and in the dialogue of charity; various forms of collaboration have developed, among which, in addition to those for defending life, for safeguarding creation and for combating injustice, collaboration in the field of ecumenical translations of Sacred Scripture has been important and fruitful.

In recent years, then, the Pontifical Council has been involved, among other things in an extensive project, called the Harvest Project, in order to draw up a first estimate of the goals achieved in the theological dialogues with the principal Ecclesial Communities since the Second Vatican Council.

This is valuable work that has highlighted both the areas of convergence and those in which it is necessary to continue to deepen reflection.

As I thank God for the fruits already gathered, I encourage you to persevere in your commitment to promoting a correct assessment of the results achieved and to make known exactly the present state of the theological research at the service of the journey towards unity. Today some people think that this journey, especially in the West, has lost its impetus; therefore the urgent need to revive ecumenical interest and to give fresh purpose to the dialogues is felt.

Moreover we are presented with unheard of challenges: the new anthropological and ethical interpretations, the ecumeni-

cal formation of the new generations and the further fragmentation of the ecumenical scene. It is essential to become aware of these changes and to identify ways to proceed effectively in the light of the Lord's desire: "that they may all be one" (Jn 7:21).

Also with the Orthodox Churches and the Ancient Churches of the East, we share the "closest intimacy" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 15). The Catholic Church is eagerly continuing the dialogue, seeking seriously and rigorously to deepen the common theological, liturgical and spiritual patrimony in order to face with serenity and commitment the elements that still divide us. With the Orthodox she has reached a crucial point in comparison and reflection: the role of the Bishop of Rome in the Church's communion. And the ecclesiological issue is also the centre of the dialogue with the Ancient Churches of the East: despite many centuries of misunderstanding and distance, it is joyfully noted that a precious common patrimony has been preserved.

Dear friends, even in the presence of problematic situations or difficult points for the dialogue, the goal of the ecumenical journey remains unchanged, as does the firm commitment to pursue it. However, it is not a commitment in accordance with political categories, so to speak, in which comes into play the ability to negotiate or the greatest skill in finding compromises through which we as good mediators might expect, after a certain time, to reach agreements acceptable to all. Ecumenical action has a dual movement.

On the one hand there is the convinced, passionate and tenacious search to find full unity in truth, to conceive of models of unity, to throw light on disagreement and obscure points in order to attain unity. And this takes place in the necessary theological dialogue but especially in prayer and penance, in that spiritual ecumenism which constitutes the vibrant heart of the whole journey: the unity of Christians is and remains prayer, it dwells in prayer.

On the other hand, there is another active movement that stems from the firm awareness that we do not know the time of the fulfillment of unity between all Christ's disciples and we cannot know it, because it is not "we who can decide it," God "decides" it. It comes from on high from the unity of the Father with the Son in the dialogue of love which is the Holy Spirit; it is a participation in the divine unity. And this must not diminish our commitment; indeed it must make us ever more attentive to understanding the signs and times of the Lord, knowing and recognizing with gratitude

what already unites us and working to consolidate and increase it. In the end, also on the ecumenical journey it is a question of leaving to God what is his alone and of exploring, with seriousness, constancy and dedication, what is our duty, bearing in mind that the binomials of acting and suffering, of activity and patience, of effort and joy are part of our commitment.

Let us trustingly invoke the Holy Spirit so that he may guide us on our journey and that everyone may feel with fresh vigor the call to work for the ecumenical cause. I encourage all of you to continue in your work; it is help that you offer the Bishop of Rome in the fulfillment of his mission at the service of unity. As a sign of affection and gratitude, I warmly impart to you my Apostolic Blessing. – Vatican website.

THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY JUST MARKED ITS 50TH BIRTHDAY. THE COUNCIL'S PRESIDENT SAW THIS AS AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT to look at what progress has been made in five decades of dialogue and prayer.

Cardinal Kurt Koch presented a report last week at the council's plenary assembly called "Harvesting the Fruits."

The first fruit, he said, is within the Church itself.

Ecumenism "is no longer a foreign reality" in the life of parishes and dioceses, the cardinal affirmed. "This 'ecumenism of life' is of fundamental importance, as without it, all the theological efforts directed to reaching a lasting agreement on basic issues of faith between the different churches would be in vain."

Cardinal Koch admitted, however, that although the Catholic Church is irreversibly committed to the search for unity, in some respects the problem is still the same as it was at "the point of departure," at the Second Vatican Council.

In this regard, he spoke of the crux of the issue being ecclesiology -- the concept of the nature of the Church.

Cardinal Koch noted how ecumenism and ecclesiology are intimately connected: "Ecumenism was an important theme of the renewal of the Catholic Church herself and of her self-understanding," he said. He pointed to one of the key issues of the council: the relationship between the universal Church and the local Churches.

But in the realm of ecumenism, the prelate explained, the plural "churches" refers not to local Churches, but to the ecclesial communities not in communion with the Catholic Church.

The ecumenical problem "consists in

pointing out how the Catholic Church can and must conduct herself in face of this plural 'churches,' which exist outside of her," he said. This issue arises both in the dialogue with the Orthodox Churches as well as, though in a different way, in the dialogue with the communities of the Reformation.

In regard to the Orthodox, Cardinal Koch explained: "The definition that is most adapted to Orthodox ecclesiology is 'Eucharistic ecclesiology,' a concept developed above all by exiled Russian theologians in Paris after World War I, in clear opposition to the centralism of the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church."

This concept "stresses that the Church of Jesus Christ is present and realized in each particular Church gathered around her bishop, in which the Eucharist is celebrated," he said.

Hence, the cardinal continued, for the Orthodox, with the exception of an ecumenical council "there can be no other visible principle of unity of the universal Church, to which are attributed juridical powers, such as those the Catholic Church recognizes in the Petrine ministry."

According to Catholic ecclesiology, however, the Church is fully present in the concrete Eucharistic communities, but one Eucharistic community alone "is not the Church in her fullness," he explained. "Because of this, the unity between each Eucharistic community united in turn with her own bishop and with the Bishop of Rome is not an external ingredient to Eucharistic ecclesiology, but its essential condition."

The heart of the ecumenical problem between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church lies in the fact that "an ecclesiology linked to the national culture and a Catholic ecclesiology oriented to the concept of universality find themselves one before the other, up to now, in disagreement," Cardinal Koch stated.

Cardinal Koch noted that Pope Paul VI saw this issue as the "greatest obstacle" for reaching full communion with the Orthodox. However, the prelate said, Benedict XVI has also detected in this issue an opportunity for union.

According to the thought of the present Pope, he said, "without primacy, the Catholic Church would also have disintegrated a long time ago in national and *sui iuris* Churches, which would have confused and complicated the ecumenical landscape."

The council president affirmed that ecumenical dialogue between Catholic and Orthodox has taken "encouraging steps," even if more work remains to be done. — *Zenit*, Nov. 23.

POPE BENEDICT XVI HAS IN COMMENTS MADE IN A NEWLY-PUBLISHED BOOK SAID THAT HE HOPES FOR A MEETING "IN THE NOT TOO Distant FUTURE" WITH PATRIARCH KIRILL I OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH.

The book, "Light of the world," was presented on 23 November to international media at the Vatican. It is the text of an extended interview with the pontiff conducted in July by German journalist Peter Seewald.

Benedict's predecessor, Pope John Paul II, spoke repeatedly about his dream of visiting Russia, but met resistance from the Moscow Patriarchate, which had accused the Vatican of aggressively seeking converts among Russian Orthodox faithful.

In the book, Benedict recalls that the first visitor whom he received after his election as Pope in 2005 was Kirill, who was then chairperson of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations.

"We immediately got along. He has such a joy about him, such a simple faith - the simplicity of the Russian soul, you might say - but also its determination and warmth. So we understood each other well," the pontiff says.

Seewald asks the Pope if, due to the dialogue going on between Rome and Moscow, he thinks that a meeting with Kirill, who became Moscow Patriarch in 2009, "could take place while you are still Pope."

The Pope answers: "That depends on how much life the good Lord grants me, but I hope so. Nevertheless, Orthodox public opinion in Russia has to be prepared for a meeting of this kind. There is still a certain fear of the Catholic Church. We need to wait patiently."

"A meeting between Rome and Moscow in the not too distant future is within the realm of possibility?" asks Seewald. "I would say that, yes," the pontiff answers.

Answering questions about ecumenism, the search for church unity, Benedict speaks about the role of the Pope, one of the key issues that divide Christians.

Seeing the bishop of Rome as being "First among equals would be immediately acceptable by Orthodoxy," says Benedict, noting "It [Orthodoxy] acknowledges that the bishop of Rome is the 'protos,' the first, as is laid down already by the Council of Nicaea [in A.D. 325]."

But, he states, "the question is precisely whether the Pope has specific tasks or not."

Asked about the suggestion of the German Lutheran Bishop Johannes Friedrich of a limited recognition of the papal

office as an "ecumenically acceptable spokesman of the world's Christians," Benedict refers also to Anglicans, "who have said they could accept a primacy of honor on the part of the Pope of Rome -- That is, of course, already a significant step."

Already, he notes, it is also true "that when the Pope takes a position on major ethical issues, the world regards him as speaking with the voice of all Christians."

Still, after referring to relations with Protestants, Benedict says, "We are not going to bring about full unity in the foreseeable future."

The First Vatican Council of 1870 defined two dogmas - the universal primacy of the Pope in the Church, and on papal infallibility when the bishop of Rome speaks "from the cathedra [chair], as pastor and doctor of all Christians in matter of faith and of ethics."

Still, Benedict XVI notes, "It goes without saying that the Pope can have private opinions that are wrong."

In the book, the Pope also refers to Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, a key leader for the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians, whom he visited in Turkey 2006.

The Patriarch, says Benedict, "practices ecumenism as much more than a cold duty; there is a real friendship and sense of brotherhood between us."

Another question is about the 2000 declaration "Dominus Iesus," which states that Protestant denominations "are not churches in the proper sense."

Benedict, who was then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, signed the text as the Vatican's Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

"A Church, in the proper sense, as we understand it, exists where the episcopal office, as the sacramental expression of apostolic succession, is present - which also implies the existence of the Eucharist as a sacrament that is dispensed by the bishop and by the priest," says Benedict in response to Seewald's question.

Therefore, the Second Vatican Council in 1964 used the term "ecclesial communities" to "indicate that such communities embody a different mode of being a church," the Pope says.

"As they themselves insist it is precisely not the same mode in which the Churches of the great tradition of antiquity are Churches -- The term [ecclesial community] is an attempt to capture what is distinctive about Protestant Christianity and to give it a positive expression," the Pope states.

Asked whether a Pope can offer an

alternative definition of the Church, Benedict responds, "He has no authority over that. The Second Vatican Council is binding on him." – Luigi Sandri for *ENI*, Nov. 23.

THE HEAD OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRIA HAS DENIED BEING "ANTI-POLISH" AFTER MEMBERS OF POLISH CONGREGATIONS IN VIENNA PROTESTED AGAINST HIS DECISION TO OFFER ONE OF THE CITY'S CATHOLIC CHURCHES TO SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS.

"In recent weeks, many stormy events have taken place around a church in the Neulerchenfeld district," said Cardinal Christoph Schonborn, the chairperson of the Austrian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

"Untruths and simplifications have been spread, filling me with great sadness," said the cardinal. "It has gone so far that I have been accused of deliberately acting against Polish Catholics, and this information has even circulated in southern Poland. I must assure you the truth is quite different."

Schonborn was reacting to protests by local Polish Catholics against news that the city's Our Lady of Sorrows church would be handed over in June 2011 to members of the 160,000-strong Serbian Orthodox community.

The cardinal had said in a 19 Novem-

ber open letter he had promised to donate the church to the Orthodox after determining it could no longer be maintained by its declining congregation, and would otherwise have had to be closed and sold.

The move had faced protests by local Catholics, including a large group of Poles and their priest, the Rev. Tadeusz Cichon, who rejected Cardinal Schonborn's explanation and accused him of an "act of unfriendliness towards Poles."

In his letter, the cardinal noted that the number of Christians of other denominations had been growing rapidly. "We must help them in Christian solidarity, among other things by transferring places of worship to them," said Schonborn.

"I am aware that this is a painful decision for people connected with this place. But the churches we own were built in other times and in the expectation that there would be more Catholics," he stated. "We cannot preserve such a large number of churches forever. – Jonathan Luxmoore for *ENI*, Nov. 29.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, CARDINAL ANGELO BAGNASCO, HAS TURNED DOWN A REQUEST TO ALLOW MARRIED CATHOLIC PRIESTS OF THE ROMANIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH TO COME TO ITALY to work with the immigrant Romanian community in our country. In a letter

dated last September 13 and published by the *Adista* news agency, Bagnasco writes to Archbishop Lucian Muresan, primate of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, that the Italian Bishops' Conference, "after having carefully examined the question also in the light of statistics regarding the size of the ethnic communities coming from Eastern Europe and the situation of the clergy in the Italian dioceses, holds the position that, generally speaking at the present time, there does not exist a 'just and reasonable cause' that would justify the granting of a dispensation." According to church law, married priests from the Eastern Churches cannot exercise their ministry outside the historical territory of their Church – a limit that the bishops had also protested against last month in the Vatican during the Synod on the Middle East.

"The suitability of protecting clerical celibacy," Bagnasco also explained, "and of preventing the possible upset of the faithful because of a larger number of married priests prevails over the need, even if legitimate, to guarantee for Catholics of the Eastern rite the celebration of the liturgy by ministers who speak their language and come from their own countries." Out of about a million Romanians in Italy, the Greek Catholics number about 800 thousand. [trans. by RGR] – *ASCA News Agency*, Nov. 30.



Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew with Cardinal Kurt Koch at the Phanar, November 30, 2010

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