

TOWARDS A SPECIAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

From the announcement of the Synod to the
promulgation of its *Instrumentum laboris*

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On 6 June 2010, in the context of a Eucharistic celebration in Nicosia (Cyprus),¹ Pope Benedict XVI presented the *Instrumentum laboris* of the 'Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East'. This paper will provide information about the synodical process and the work of preparation. It will include an introduction to the *Lineamenta* and relate them to the work of the PRO ORIENTE Foundation, before finally giving a brief introduction to the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the document which provides the basis for the discussions of the Synod.

THE SYNODICAL PROCESS AND PREPARATORY WORK

Whilst in Rome in January 2009 for the official dialogue between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church,² I met the Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk, Iraq, Mar Louis Sako, who was there for the *ad limina* visit of the Chaldean Synod. Sitting together in the evening, he said to me: 'Tomorrow I will meet the Pope, and I will suggest to him that he should convoke a Synod for the Middle East.' The suggestion was obviously taken seriously by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

- 1 Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for the Middle East: The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness. 'Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul' (Acts 4:32), Vatican City 2010, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20100606_instrumentum-mo_en.pdf.
- 2 Cf. Sixth Meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, Rome, Italy, 26-30 January 2009, in *The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*, Information Service No. 131 (2009/I-II), pp. 28-29.

Announcement of the Synod

During his visit to the Holy Land in May 2009 Pope Benedict was able to form his own impressions of the Middle East. Four months later, in a meeting with the patriarchs and major archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches in Castel Gandolfo on 19 September 2009, he announced the 'Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East', and revealed the topic of the Synod as 'The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness', to which was added a phrase taken from Acts 4:32: 'Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul.'

In his address, Pope Benedict XVI said to the patriarchs and major archbishops who were present:

For my part, I feel it is my main duty to encourage the synodality so dear to Eastern ecclesiology and acknowledged with appreciation by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. I fully share in the esteem that the Council showed your Churches in the Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* which my venerable Predecessor John Paul II reaffirmed in particular in his Apostolic Exhortation *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. I also share in the hope that the Eastern Catholic Churches will 'flourish' in order 'to fulfill with new apostolic strength the task entrusted to them', so as to foster 'the unity of all Christians, in particular of Eastern Christians, according to the principles laid down in the decree of this holy Council, 'On Ecumenism' (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum* nn. 1, 24).' The ecumenical horizon is often connected with the interreligious outlook. In these two areas the whole Church needs the experience of coexistence, which your Churches have developed since the first Christian millennium.³

The topic of the Synod, combined with the motto taken from Acts, clearly expresses the intention of the Synod. Communion and witness go together, because only through common witness can the gospel be effectively proclaimed. Therefore 'one heart and soul' is needed, firstly among the various Eastern Catholic Churches themselves, and secondly in unity with all the Christian Churches of the region.

3 Benedict XVI, 'Address to the Eastern Catholic Patriarchs and Major Archbishops', Castel Gandolfo, 19 September 2009. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090919_patr-arciv-orient_en.html.

For regional Synods of Bishops, the 'Special Synods', the Catholic Church has an established organizational process. The 'Synod of Bishops' is a permanent institution, with its own *dicastarium* in the Vatican, established by Pope Paul VI in 1965, in response to the desire of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) to keep alive the spirit of collegiality engendered by the conciliar experience.⁴

The preparation for a synod is itself supposed to be part of the synodical process.⁵ Before the announcement, several consultations take place in a climate of collegial communion. The first official step would in fact be a process of consulting the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, Episcopal Conferences, departmental heads of the Roman Curia, and the Union of Superiors General for suggestions on possible topics for a synod. Among other things, the bishops are asked to bear in mind the following criteria: (a) the topic should have a contemporary character and urgency, in the sense that it has the capacity to excite energies and movement in the Church towards growth; (b) it should have a pastoral focus, as well as a firm doctrinal basis; (c) it should have feasibility, which means that the topic must actually have the potential to be accomplished.

Such a procedure has certainly been the case regarding the Middle East Synod, with the suggested topic being submitted by the Council of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father, who officially made the final decision on the theme and announced the synod.

The 'Pre-Synodal Council'

The next step was the formation of a 'Pre-Synodal Council for the Middle East', composed of six Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, two presidents from episcopal conferences and four heads of dicasteries of the Roman Curia:⁶

His Beatitude Cardinal Nasrallah Pierre Sfeir, Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites

His Beatitude Cardinal Emmanuel III Delly, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans

4 Cf. Paul VI, 'Motu Proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo*', 15 September 1965.

5 Cf. *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum, Code of Canon Law* c. 242-248, *Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches* c. 46, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/.

6 Cf. First Meeting of the Presynodal Council for the Middle East, Rome, 21 and 22 September 2009, <http://www.melkite.org/Patriarch/PA24.htm>.

His Beatitude Antonios Naguib, Patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts
His Beatitude Ignace Youssif III Younan, Patriarch of Antioch of the
Syrians
His Beatitude Gregory III Laham, Patriarch of Antioch of the Greek-
Melkites
His Beatitude Nerses Bedros XIX Tarmouni, Patriarch of Cilicia of the
Armenians
His Beatitude Fouad Twal, Patriarch of Jerusalem of the Latins

Archbishop Ramzi Garmou of Tehran of the Chaldeans, President of
the Iranian Episcopal Conference
Bishop Luigi Padovese OFM. Cap., Apostolic Vicar of Anatolia, Turkey⁷

Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental
Churches
Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting
Christian Unity
Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-
religious Dialogue
Cardinal Ivan Dias, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation
of Peoples

The first meeting of the Pre-Synodal Council took place in Rome on
21-22 September 2009, only two days after the announcement of the Synod.
Those present included Professor Fr Samir Khalil Samir SJ as expert.⁸ The

⁷ Bishop Luigi Padovese was murdered in Turkey on 3 June 2010, only a few days before the visit of the Pope to Cyprus. Benedict XVI remembered him especially, when he presented the *Instrumentum laboris*: 'Before I begin, it is only fitting that I recall the late Bishop Luigi Padovese who, as President of the Turkish Catholic Bishops, contributed to the preparation of the *Instrumentum laboris* that I am consigning to you today. News of his unforeseen and tragic death on Thursday surprised and shocked all of us. I entrust his soul to the mercy of almighty God, mindful of how committed he was, especially as a bishop, to interreligious and cultural understanding, and to dialogue between the Churches. His death is a sobering reminder of the vocation that all Christians share, to be courageous witnesses in every circumstance to what is good, noble and just.' Cf. Benedict XVI, 'Address—Consignment of the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops', Nicosia/Cyprus, 6 June 2010, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100606_inst-laboris_en.html.

⁸ Also present were Revd Mgr Alberto Ortega Martín (Counsellor of Nunciature, Second Class, Second Section, Secretary of State, Vatican) and His Exc. Mgr Jules

members gave a brief and comprehensive review of the socio-political and religious situation in the Middle East, in order to decide the main topics to be dealt with in the forthcoming synod, and this meeting and its discussions led to the drafting of the *Lineamenta*.

The Work on the Lineamenta and the Instrumentum Laboris

Though the drafting of the *Lineamenta* would represent the combined work of the Pre-Synodal Council members, expert theologians, and the staff of the General Secretariat which co-ordinates the various efforts, it was in fact Fr Samir Khalil Samir SJ (Beirut), who was the main drafter of the *Lineamenta*, in close co-operation with Archbishop Nikola Eterović, the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops. After studying the draft text and making the necessary revisions, the Pre-Synodal Council created a final version of the *Lineamenta* which was submitted to the Holy Father for his approval. The document was then translated into Arabic, English, French and Italian.

In January 2010, the *Lineamenta* were sent to the Churches.⁹ It was intended that the Patriarchs and the episcopate would generate study and discussion at the local level regarding the topic of the synod. Thus, each chapter of the *Lineamenta* is followed by a set of questions designed to initiate such a discussion. The *Lineamenta* are by their nature very broad in scope and are meant to elicit a broad range of observations and responses. Though the first and authoritative recipients of the *Lineamenta* are obviously the bishops and the bishops' conferences, they have full liberty to broaden the basis of their consultation—whether they choose to do so or not.

The responses to these questions were to be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops by Easter, i.e. 4 April 2010.¹⁰ The Pre-Synodal

Mikhael Al-Jamil (Archbishop of Takrit of the Syrians, Procurator and Apostolic Visitor for Western Europe). The latter replaced his Patriarch for the first meeting, but was designated by Ignatius Youssif III Younan to be his substitute.

⁹ Cf. *Lineamenta*, Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for the Middle East, The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness. 'Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul' (Acts 4:32), Vatican City 2009, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091208_lineamenta-mo_en.html.

¹⁰ On 14 May 2010, PRO ORIENTE organized a panel on the Middle East Synod at the 'Ökumenische Kirchentag' in Munich Germany, where I moderated a discussion on the *Lineamenta* with Fr Samir Khalil Samir, Prof Elias Kattan (Münster; Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch) and Bishop Armash Nalbandian (Damascus, Armenian

Council then met again on 23 to 24 April in Rome, during which time¹¹ it worked on an outline of the *Instrumentum laboris*—in a plenary session and in three groups—seeking to integrate into an organic scheme the vast number of contributions comprising responses from eparchies, institutions and religious to the questions of the *Lineamenta*.

In the days following, the main drafter of the *Instrumentum laboris* was again Fr Samir Khalil Samir, aiming to include and synthesize the responses on the basis of the guidelines of the Pre-Synodal Council in order to create a more substantial document. Having finished his work, he consulted further, asking some five additional experts for any additions, contributions and suggestions thought necessary. At this point the draft, then a mixture of Italian, French and English was submitted on 5 May to Archbishop Nikola Eterović of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. There the last work of revision took place, and it was again sent to the members of the Pre-Synodal Council for a final examination. The members were asked to reply with comments to the Synodal Office as soon as possible.

In the second half of May 2010, the Synodal Office produced the final version of the *Instrumentum laboris*, and, after approval by Pope Benedict, the document was translated into the official languages of the Synod. All the members of the Pre-Synodal Council were invited to participate in the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Benedict XVI in Nicosia for the presentation of the document.¹²

The *Instrumentum laboris*, although made public, is only a provisional text, a study document, which forms the basis and reference-point for the synodal discussion. The document is not a draft of the final conclusions, but only a text which aims at helping to focus discussion on the synod's topic. Since 1983 the *Instrumentum laboris* of a given synodal assembly has been made public in order to receive wide circulation. The bishop-delegates and members are supposed to read the document in order to familiarize themselves with the contents,

Apostolic Church). On that occasion, Fr Samir provided the information that about 300 pages of responses had been returned by the bishops. This demonstrates the lively interest and robust discussion on the topics of the Synod.

11 Cf. Third Reunion of the Presynodal Council for the Middle East, Rome, 23-24 April 2010. Report by Patriarch Gregorios III of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, <http://www.melkite.org/Patriarch/PA35-SynodMiddleEast.htm>.

12 Cf. Benedict XVI, 'Homily—Holy Mass on the occasion of the publication of the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops', Nicosia, Cyprus, 6 June 2010, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100606_instr-laboris_en.html.

which will then be discussed at the synodal assembly. It is envisaged that, as a result of preparatory work in the local Churches based on the *Lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum laboris*, the bishops will then be able to present the experiences and aspirations of each community as well as the fruits of the preliminary discussions of the episcopal conferences.

THE *LINEAMENTA*

We will look first at the *Lineamenta*, since it has largely the same structure as the *Instrumentum laboris*. The document has an introduction, three main chapters and a conclusion.

The *Introduction* outlines the aim of the synod. The ecumenical and inter-religious context of the region is mentioned there:

Our Catholic Churches are not alone in the Middle East. There are also the Orthodox Churches and the Protestant communities. This ecumenical aspect is basic, if Christian witness is to be genuine and credible. 'That they may all be one, so that the world may believe' (Jn 17:21). Thus, communion has to be deepened at all levels: within the Catholic Churches in the Middle East themselves, among all Catholic Churches in the region and in relations with other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities. At the same time, we have to strengthen the witness we give to Jews, Muslims, believers and non-believers.¹³

The first main chapter (*I: The Catholic Church in the Middle East*) focuses on the situation of Christians in the Middle East (A), the challenges facing Christians in the region (B), the Christian response in daily life (C). The brief historical sketch outlining unity in diversity in section A is followed by the very fact of the apostolicity and important witness of the Church, especially in this region where revelation took place. The role of Christians in society, despite their small number, is mentioned, as well as problems of political conflict, freedom of conscience and religion, developments in contemporary Islam, and emigration as well as the immigration of Christians from throughout the world.

The second main chapter (*II: Ecclesial Communion*) has the Catholic Churches at its centre. It addresses the problem of ecclesial communion

13 *Lineamenta*, §§ 2 and 3.

among bishops, clergy and laypeople within the various Catholic (eastern and Latin) Churches of the Middle East.

It is interesting to note that several statements of the *Lineamenta* were not included in the *Instrumentum laboris*. Here we quote only one paragraph, which, since it mirrors a reality of daily life, deserved to remain:

Furthermore, the attitude of the two apostles, James and John, who asked Jesus to grant them the first places at his right and his left (Mk 10:35-37), can still be detected, posing difficulties among the brethren. Instead of coming together to face difficulties in common, we sometimes argue among ourselves, counting the number of faithful in our Churches to ascertain who is the greatest. This spirit of rivalry destroys us. Instead, emulating each others' good practices in spiritual and pastoral service can stir our creativity in serving others. Consequently, emulation of what is best in our services must be encouraged. At the same time, our Churches, like all Churches in the world, are in need of continuous purification. This Synod can provide the occasion for a sincere examination of conscience to ascertain, on the one hand, the strong points for promotion and development, and, on the other, the weaknesses to be courageously faced and corrected.¹⁴

The third main chapter (*III: Christian Witness*) focuses on collaboration in catechesis and works (A), on common witness with and of all the Christian Churches (B),¹⁵ on the particular relationship to Judaism (C) and relations with Islam (D) as well as to the contributions of Christians to society (E), including Church-State relations. This chapter ends with a conclusion on the specific and irreplaceable contributions of Christians in the Middle East (F).

The *Conclusion* seeks to see what lies ahead for Middle Eastern Christians and what they should hope for:

We must make a firm decision for the future, which will be shaped by how we manage to treat others and forge alliances with people of good will in our society. We need a faith which becomes involved in the life of society, a faith which serves to

¹⁴ *Lineamenta*, § 43.

¹⁵ It is a source of pride that the ecumenical work and endeavors of the PRO ORIENTE foundation are specifically mentioned in the *Lineamenta*: 'From time to time, the *Pro Oriente* Foundation of Vienna gathers together the Catholic and Orthodox Churches of the region for theological and ecumenical reflection.' (*Lineamenta*, § 56)

remind the Christians of the Middle East of the inspirational words: 'Do not be afraid, little flock!' (Lk 12:32). You have a mission, you are to fulfill it and assist your Church and your country to grow and develop in peace, justice and equality for all citizens.¹⁶

SOME CONTRIBUTIONS OF PRO ORIENTE:
THE SECOND COLLOQUIUM SYRIACUM IN VIENNA/AUSTRIA
AND THE STUDY SEMINAR IN SULAYMANIAH/IRAQ

It became clear from various announcements, from the time of the preparatory work, that Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish observers were supposed to be present. Nevertheless, since PRO ORIENTE had been informed by the (Oriental) Orthodox and Assyrian Churches that the invitations to 'non-Catholic' observers had not yet been sent in May 2010, the foundation took the initiative and sent a letter, signed by its President Johann Marte to Archbishop Nikola Eterović, which stated that, from 'the perspective of PRO ORIENTE, from the experience of our work and in the ecumenical spirit of the II Vatican Council, we would like strongly to suggest that observers of the Christian Churches of the Middle East—Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian) and Assyrian as well as representatives of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC)—get invited to the Special Assembly for the Middle East in October 2010'.¹⁷ Attached to the letter was the Final Report of the *Second PRO ORIENTE Colloquium Syriacum*, which took place in Vienna, November 2009.¹⁸

From its beginnings in 1964, PRO ORIENTE—as a foundation of the Archdiocese of Vienna (Austria) and therefore in the context of the Latin Catholic tradition—has focused not only on the (Byzantine) Orthodox Church but has also included the Christian traditions of the Orient. Since the early 1970s the Foundation has maintained close contact with Oriental (Orthodox) Christianity.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Lineamenta*, § 88.

¹⁷ Cf. Johann Marte, 'Letter to Archbishop Nicola Eterović', 20 May 2010 (Archive Pro Oriente Vienna).

¹⁸ See Appendix I.

¹⁹ Cf. especially the non-official Consultations between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, published in *Wort und*

For more than a decade, PRO ORIENTE has also been facilitating mutual exchange between the Syriac Churches through its former 'Syriac Dialogue' (with six non-official Consultations, 1994-2005) and has therefore contributed to a better understanding of the spiritual, liturgical, patristic and theological treasures that derive from their sacred tradition. These non-official consultations focused mainly on Christology and its historical contexts, and on the *raze/roze*, i.e. the Sacraments of the Syriac Churches.²⁰

In the context of a changing ecumenical landscape and several ecumenical problems concerning the family of Oriental Orthodox Churches of the Middle East and the Assyrian Church of the East, PRO ORIENTE decided to start a new endeavour called *PRO ORIENTE Studies of the Syriac Tradition*. For these studies PRO ORIENTE has formed a *Forum Syriacum*, a team of representatives and expert scholars in Syriac studies and from Syriac Churches, who commit themselves to the promotion of the Syriac heritage, mutual enrichment, and better understanding within their Churches. This *PRO ORIENTE Forum Syriacum* advises and consults the Foundation in order to develop appropriate studies and helps to coordinate research projects. Within the *PRO ORIENTE Forum Syriacum* there is also an exchange of current developments of the Syriac Churches to learn about their sufferings and successes, and to strengthen the solidarity of those who belong to the Syriac tradition.

Since this new approach, two *PRO ORIENTE Colloquia Syriaca* have taken place: the first on the topic 'Syriac Churches encountering Islam: Past Experiences and Future Perspectives' in Salzburg (14-16 November 2007)²¹

Wahrheit. Revue for Religion and Culture Supplementary Issue 1-5 (1971, 1973, 1976, 1978, 1988). For a comprehensive analysis cf. Dietmar W Winkler, *Koptische Kirche und Reichskirche. Altes Schisma und neuer Dialog*. Mit einem Vorwort von Franz Kardinal König (*Innsbrucker theologische Studien* 48). Innsbruck, Tyrol, 1997, esp. Part C. *Idem*, 'Die altorientalischen Kirchen im ökumenischen Dialog der Gegenwart', in Christian Lange/Karl Pinggéra, eds., *Die altorientalischen Kirchen. Glaube und Geschichte*, WBG, Darmstadt, 2010, pp. 89-122.

20 Cf. Sebastian P Brock's contribution in this volume. For a comprehensive analyses cf. Dietmar W Winkler, *Ostsyrisches Christentum. Studien zu Christologie, Ekklesiologie und zu den ökumenischen Dialogen der Assyrischen Kirche des Ostens* (*Studien zur orientalischen Kirchengeschichte* 26), Lit, Münster, 2003; *idem*, 'Dogmatic and Historical Results of the first three Pro Oriente Syriac Consultations', in PRO ORIENTE, ed., *Syriac Dialogue 4*, Vienna, 2001, pp. 121-137; *idem*, 'Between Progress and Setback: The Ecumenical Dialogues of the Assyrian Church of the East', in PRO ORIENTE, ed., *Syriac Dialogue 4*, Vienna, 2001, pp. 138-151.

21 Cf. Dietmar W Winkler, ed., 'Syriac Churches Encountering Islam: Past Experiences

and the second one on 'Syriac Christianity in the Middle East and India today: Contributions and Challenges' in Vienna (4-6 November 2009). It was in the context of the latter meeting that PRO ORIENTE decided, on the invitation of Archbishop Mar Louis Sako, to hold the next meeting in Iraq and to combine this with a study seminar on the Middle East Synod. However, the Second *Colloquium Syriacum* had already picked up many of the themes and challenges which were now mentioned in the *Lineamenta* of the Special Synod,²² and it therefore seemed highly appropriate to send the joint results, which were discussed in the ecumenical context of all the Syriac Churches, i.e. Assyrian and Ancient Church of the East, the Syrian Orthodox and Malankara Orthodox Churches and the Eastern Catholic Churches of the Syriac tradition (Maronites, Chaldeans, Syrian Catholic, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches), to the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops.

The study seminar on the Middle East Synod took place on 26-27 May 2010, in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq. Along with expert scholars from PRO ORIENTE, Archbishop-Metropolitans, Bishops, and Reverend Fathers of all the above mentioned Churches participated, with the exception of the Malankara Orthodox Churches and the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, who were prevented from coming to Iraq. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity were also represented, and with a letter of 17 May 2010, signed by Archbishop Cyril Vasil SJ and Mgr Maurizio Malvestiti, the Congregation for the Eastern Churches apologized for not being able to send a participant, but expressed its lively interest in the results of the study seminar.²³ The final report²⁴ has been sent to the members of the pre-synodal Council and to the General Secretary of the Synod.

Since this study seminar was the only ecumenical preparatory meeting for the Middle East Synod, it is evident that some points were seen in a wider perspective. The first three points of the final report are therefore worth mentioning:

The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East is characteristically different from similar Synods concerning different geographical areas. In the Middle East, we are faced with the unique ecclesiastical situation that the Catholic Oriental Churches, with the exception of the Maronites, have a long common spiritual and liturgical tradition with their

and Future Perspectives', *Pro Oriente Studies in the Syriac Tradition* 1, Gorgias, Piscataway, NJ, 2010.

22 Cf. Appendix I.

23 Oriental Congregation, Letter to Dr Johann Marte, 17 May 2010 (archive PRO ORIENTE).

24 Cf. Appendix II.

Orthodox Sister-Churches. For this reason we believe that the invited persons from the Orthodox Churches should be present at the Synod not only as fraternal delegates, but should be able to fully participate in the various activities during the Synod. In general we are concerned about the constant ecumenical dimension of the whole synodal process in its different stages. For instance we would have liked that the Orthodox Churches had been invited to take part at the preparatory stage and we hope that they will also be able to participate in the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Synod. The challenges put to the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches are common, a supplementary reason for close cooperation. This is particularly true of the burning issue of massive emigration from the Middle East.²⁵

THE *INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS*

With some fifty pages the *Instrumentum laboris* is a more voluminous and much more substantial document than the *Lineamenta*, since it integrates the reactions of the bishops, bishops' conferences and religious institutions of the Catholic Middle East. The structure remained more or less the same, with minor corrections, especially in Part III, concerning Christian witness.

The first chapter better elaborates the necessity of catechesis and properly prepared members of faithful. The chapter in the *Lineamenta* called 'Witnessing together with other Churches and Communities' is now named 'Ecumenism', which is rather more precise; the chapters on relations with Judaism and Muslims become somewhat stronger. In the chapter on witnessing in society, the paragraphs on the problems dealing with 'Modernity' are more specific.

Some points should be highlighted: in the preface Archbishop Nikola Eterović underlines that for many 'the present-day situation in the Middle East is much like that of the primitive Christian community in the Holy Land', which had to face difficulties and persecution.

25 PRO ORIENTE Final Report Study Seminar, Sulaymaniah (Iraq), pp. 1-3.

Lineamenta

Instrumentum Laboris

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PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

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B. A Reflection Guided by Holy Scripture

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I. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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A. The Situation of Christians in the Middle East

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1. An Historical Sketch: Unity in Diversity

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2. Apostolicity and the Missionary Vocation

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B. The Challenges Facing Christians

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II. ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

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

A. What Lies Ahead for Middle East Christians?

B. Hope

The introduction underlines the principal aims of the Synod: These are firstly 'to confirm and strengthen the members of the Catholic Church in their Christian identity, through the Word of God and the Sacraments,' and secondly 'to foster ecclesial communion among the *sui iuris* Churches, so that they can bear witness to Christian life in an authentic, joyous and attractive way.'²⁶

The first part focuses on the *Catholic Church in the Middle East*, recalling that all the Churches in the world 'trace their roots to the Church of Jerusalem.'²⁷ It also recalls that the Churches of the Middle East are apostolic in origin and that it 'would indeed be a great loss for the universal Church if Christianity were to disappear or be diminished in the very place where it was born.'²⁸ Here lies the 'grave responsibility ... to maintain the Christian faith in these holy lands.'²⁹ According to the *Instrumentum laboris*, Christians, despite their 'low numbers', 'are entitled to be a part of the fabric of society and identify themselves with their respective homelands.'³⁰ Their disappearance would mean a loss in the pluralism of the Middle East. Catholics are called to promote the concept of 'positive laicity' of the state to 'eliminate the theocratic character of government' and allow 'greater equality among citizens of different religions, thereby fostering the promotion of a sound democracy, positively secular in nature, which fully acknowledges the role of religion, also in public life, while completely respecting the distinction between the religious and civil orders.'³¹

The document then underlines the fact that regional conflicts make the situation of Christians even more fragile. 'The Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territories is creating difficulties in everyday life, inhibiting freedom of movement, the economy and religious life (access to the Holy Places is dependent on military permission which is granted to some and denied to others

26 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 3.

27 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 4. In the English text of *Instrumentum laboris* 15 and 16 it should be 'Oriental Orthodox' rather than 'Eastern Orthodox'. In *Instrumentum laboris*, p. 17, it would be historically more correct to read 'Later, from the 11th century onwards, the Great Schism occurred ... rather than 'Later, at the beginning of the 11th century, the Great Schism occurred ...'

28 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 19.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 24.

31 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 25.

on security grounds).³² Christians are the main victims of the war in Iraq.³³ 'In Lebanon, Christians are deeply divided at the political and confessional level ... In Egypt, the rise of political Islam on the one hand, and the disengagement of Christians (forcefully at times) from civil society on the other, lead to severe difficulties ... In other countries, authoritarianism or dictatorships force the population, Christians included, to bear everything in silence so as to safeguard the essential aspects of living. In Turkey, the idea of "secularism" is currently posing more problems for full religious freedom in the country.'³⁴

Christians are exhorted to remain strong in their commitment to society, despite being tempted to discouragement. 'In the Middle East, freedom of religion customarily means freedom of worship and not freedom of conscience, that is, the freedom to believe or not believe, to practise openly one's religion, privately or publicly, or to change one's religion for another. Generally speaking, religion in the Middle East is a social and even a national choice, not an individual one. To change one's religion is perceived as a betrayal of the society, culture and nation, which are founded, for the most part, on a religious tradition.'³⁵ For this reason 'conversion to the Christian faith is perceived to be from self-interest and not authentic religious conviction. Oftentimes, the conversion of Muslims is forbidden by State law.'³⁶ In the meantime, Islamic extremism continues to grow in the entire area creating 'a threat to everyone, Christians and Muslims alike'.³⁷ In this context of conflict, economic difficulties and political and religious limitations, Christians continue to emigrate. 'International politics often times pay no attention to the existence of Christians, and the fact that they are victims, at times the first to suffer, goes unnoticed. This is also a major cause of emigration.'³⁸

Part two is again dedicated to Ecclesial Communion, but above all communion among the various Catholic Churches of the Middle East. It shows a classical Catholic ecclesiology: 'Communion within the universal Church is principally manifested in two ways: in the first place, through Baptism and the Eucharist, and, secondly, through communion with the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of St Peter, chief among the Apostles, "permanent and visible source and foundation of the unity of faith and

32 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 32.

33 Cf. *Instrumentum laboris*, § 33.

34 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 34.

35 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 37.

36 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 38.

37 Cf. *Instrumentum laboris*, § 41.

38 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 43.

communion.'³⁹ Communion among the various members of the same Church or Patriarchate is based on the model of communion with the universal Church⁴⁰ and the successor of St Peter, the Bishop of Rome. At the level of the Patriarchal Church, communion is expressed by a Synod which gathers the bishops of an entire community around the Patriarch, the Father and Head of his Church.⁴¹ Christians are called to see themselves as members of the Catholic Church in the Middle East and not simply as members of a particular Church.

Part three deals with the theme of Christian Witness, reiterating the importance of catechesis in knowing and transmitting the faith. A new chapter on the liturgy was included: 'In this regard, many responses express a desire for liturgical renewal, which, while remaining firmly grounded in tradition, takes into account modern sensibilities as well as present-day spiritual and pastoral needs.'

The urgent need for ecumenism, overcoming prejudices and mistrust through dialogue and collaboration is emphasized. The document rejects 'a proselytism' which employs means not in keeping with the Gospel. 'Ecumenism calls for a sincere effort to overcome prejudices in order to work for a better mutual understanding, so as to attain the fullness of visible communion in the faith, sacraments and the apostolic ministry. Ecumenical dialogue is marked by a common quest for truth, particularly concerning the Church.' (*Ut unum sint*) 'This dialogue takes place at various levels. On the official level, the Holy See has taken initiatives with all the Churches in the Middle East, in collaboration with the Catholic Churches. On the unofficial level, the *Pro Oriente* Foundation of Vienna has brought Eastern Catholics and Orthodox together for an ecumenical, theological reflection, which has already produced many fruits in the areas of Christology and ecclesiology.'⁴² 'An essential instrument of ecumenism is dialogue, which should take place in a positive atmosphere so as to increase mutual understanding, overcome suspicion and work in defence of religious values, collaborate on projects for the benefit of society, foster understanding among the faithful in each country and better their living conditions. Given a history of misunderstandings, a *healing of memories* is necessary to free souls from various prejudices through accepting one another and working together for things in common.'⁴³

39 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 55.

40 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 71.

41 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 57.

42 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 78.

43 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 80.

With reference to the theological basis to be found in Vatican II, relations to Judaism are also elaborated. Dialogue with the Jews is defined as essential, though at times not without its obstacles, being affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁴⁴ The Church hopes that ‘both peoples may live in peace in a homeland of their own, within secure and internationally recognised borders.’⁴⁵ The document firmly rejects anti-Semitism, underlining that ‘current animosity between Arabs and Jews seems to be political in character’ and therefore foreign to any ecclesial discussion. Christians are asked ‘to bring a spirit of reconciliation, based on justice and equality of the two parties. The Churches in the Middle East also call upon all involved to take into account the distinction between the religious reality and the political one.’⁴⁶

The Catholic Church’s relations with Muslims also have their foundation in Vatican II, and are mentioned in the *Instrumentum laboris*. ‘Oftentimes relations between Christians and Muslims are difficult, because Muslims make no distinction between religion and politics, thereby relegating Christians to the precarious position of being considered non-citizens, despite the fact that they were citizens of their countries long before the rise of Islam. The key to harmonious living between Christians and Muslims is to recognise religious freedom and human rights.’⁴⁷ Christians are called upon not to isolate ‘themselves in ghettos and a defensive and reclusive attitude which is sometimes seen in minority groups.’⁴⁸ To work together for peace, social justice and freedom the younger generation especially has to become well educated in schools and universities. ‘To do this, some responses suggest that educational texts be revised, especially materials for teaching religion, so as to eliminate all prejudices and stereotypes concerning others.’⁴⁹

The document also analyses the strong impact of ‘modernity’, which ‘to most Muslim believers is perceived to be atheistic and immoral and a cultural invasion, threatening them and upsetting their value-system.’⁵⁰ ‘At the same time, “modernity” is the struggle for justice and equality, the defence of

44 Cf. *Instrumentum laboris*, § 89.

45 *Ibid.* With reference to Benedict XVI, *Discourse at Ben Gurion Airport Tel Aviv (11 May 2009)*.

46 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 90.

47 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 96.

48 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 97.

49 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 98.

50 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 104.

rights.’⁵¹ In that sense Christians and the Churches have a special contribution to make in the area of justice and peace. It is the Christian duty, ‘which implies the double obligation of fighting the evils in our society, be they political, juridical, economic, social or moral, and contributing to the building of a more just, sound and humane society.’⁵²

The document then examines the topic of evangelisation, which in a Muslim society can only happen through witness. The charitable activities of Christian communities ‘towards all without distinction, to the poorest and those pushed to the periphery of society, represents the clearest way of spreading the Christian message.’⁵³

In its conclusion, the document points out the ‘great concern for the present difficulties Christians are facing,’ yet, at the same time express ‘a hope, founded on the Christian faith ... For decades, the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, disregard for international law, the selfishness of great powers and the lack of respect for human rights have disrupted the stability of the region and subjected entire populations to a level of violence which tempts them to despair. Many—Christians for the most part—are emigrating elsewhere. In the face of this challenge and sustained by the universal Christian community, Christians in the Middle East are called to respond to their vocation of service to society.’⁵⁴ The *Instrumentum Laboris* finally quotes Lk 12.32: “Do not be afraid, little flock.” You have a mission; the growth of your country and the vitality of your Church depend on you. This will only be achieved with peace, justice and equality for all citizens!

The Middle East Synod will hopefully raise awareness through the press and media in a wider public of the sincere challenges and profound contributions of Middle Eastern Christianity, and have an impact on the Middle Eastern states to contribute to justice and equality for the Churches in that troubled region.

51 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 103.

52 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 106.

53 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 115.

54 *Instrumentum laboris*, § 118.

APPENDIX I

PRO ORIENTE

Second Colloquium Syriacum

**'Syriac Christianity in the Middle East and India today:
Contributions and Challenges'**

Vienna, 4-6 November 2009

FINAL REPORT

1. With its *Studies in the Syriac tradition* PRO ORIENTE intends to facilitate mutual understanding and exchange as well as to promote the common heritage of the various Churches belonging to the historical Syriac tradition. In continuation of the former 'Syriac Dialogue' (1994-2005), the *PRO ORIENTE Forum Syriacum* was formed in October 2006 to face the challenge of an ecumenically changing context and to find practical ways for fruitful exchange on issues of common concern. The *Forum Syriacum* aims, in a true ecumenical spirit, to learn about the achievements and sufferings of the respective Churches and to strengthen the solidarity among, and with, those who belong to the Syriac tradition.

2. The PRO ORIENTE Forum Syriacum therefore decided in its meeting in Aleppo on July 1-2, 2008, to organize the *Second PRO ORIENTE Colloquium Syriacum* on the topic 'Syriac Christianity in the Middle East and India today: Contributions and Challenges.' The Middle Eastern countries under consideration were Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon.

3. At the inaugural session, Wednesday morning, November 4, 2009, the Archbishop of Vienna, H. E. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, presided over the opening prayer and cordially welcomed the participants. He recalled the spirit and vision of the founder of PRO ORIENTE, the late Cardinal Franz König, whose life was devoted to dialogue and a profound love for Oriental Christianity. A greeting of Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, was read. He expressed his deep hope that the studies of the PRO ORIENTE Colloquium Syriacum, highlighting the urgency of religious freedom and pluralism, will contribute to a strengthening of ecumenical dialogue. Further, he encouraged the participants to reflect together on the motives and the impact of emigration for the future of Christianity in the Middle East. PRO ORIENTE President Johann Marte welcomed the participants, who came from India, Lebanon, Syria, USA, Great Britain, France, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy,

4. For spiritual guidance, participants prayed together the Morning Prayers according to the East Syriac (Hudra) and West Syriac (Sh'imo) liturgy.

5. On the evening of November 5, a public panel was held at the Diplomatische Akademie on the topic 'Israel, Palestine and Jordan: Perspectives after the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the Holy Land'. The main speakers were: Martin Tamcke (Göttingen, Germany), Anthony O'Mahony (Heythrop College, University of London) and Fr Frans Bouwen (Jerusalem). The participants were also invited for a reception by the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Peter Zurbriggen in the Apostolic Nunciature in Vienna, and welcomed for a dinner-reception by the Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq, Mr Tariq Aqrawi. The participants want to thank the staff of the Pallottihaus for their generous hospitality.

6. The study days of the *Second PRO ORIENTE Colloquium Syriacum* were structured according to the following topics: In its first part, the *contributions* of Syriac Christians to their societies in the fields of culture, education and civil society throughout the history in the Middle East and India were taken into consideration. In its second part, the Colloquium focused on the main present *challenges* of living and professing the Christian faith in a multi-religious and diverse society, with special attention to religious freedom, education and personal status. The final session was devoted to the vital question of continuous *emigration* of Christians from India and the Middle East.

7. The following ten papers were presented:

Christianity in the Middle East: Some historical Facts and demographic Figures (Dietmar W Winkler, Salzburg, Austria)

Cultural, social and educational Contributions of Syriac Christianity in South India (Baby Varghese, Kottayam, Kerala, India)

Christians in Iran and Iraq: Which Contribution to Society? (Herman Teule, Nijmegen, The Netherlands)

Cultural, social and educational Contributions of Syriac Christianity in Syria and Lebanon (Karam Rizk, Kaslik, Lebanon)

Religious Freedom, Education, Pluralism, Personal Status of Syriac Christianity (Family Rights) in India (Philip Nelpuraparambil, Changanassery, India)

The Church-State Relations in Modern Iraq (Anthony O'Mahony, Heythrop College, University of London)

Religious Freedom, Education, Pluralism, Personal Status of Syriac Christianity (Family Rights) in Syria and Turkey (Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Aleppo, Syria)

The Contribution of the Syriac Family to the Experience of the Islamo-Christian

Co-existence in Lebanon (Mar Paul Matar, Beirut, Lebanon)

Emigration of Syriac Christians moving from India—Motives and Impact (Mar Kuriakose Theophilose, Ernakulam, India)

Emigration of Syriac Christians moving from the Middle East—Motives and Impact (Martin Tamcke, Göttingen, Germany)

8. On the basis of these studies and after extensive discussion and exchange, the following points were emphasized:

On Contributions of Syriac Christians

- (a) In India the contribution of the Syriac Christians to the cultural and social life of Kerala, in particular in relation to education, in schools for both boys and girls, in the areas of journalism, literature, political life, economic development, and industry have been significant. Although the Christian communities compose only a small percentage of the population, they have been a leaven in the society of Kerala as a whole. For instance, in the area of banking, one particularly valuable contribution has been in the development of micro-financing.
- (b) Syriac Christians in India have been especially active in the development of Malayalam as a literary and cultural language in Kerala. Early on, the *Peshitta* (the canonical Syriac version of the Bible) was translated into Malayalam. Since the 1890s there have been continuing projects to translate the *Peshitta* into Malayalam, particularly the Gospels. Furthermore, in the early years of the nineteenth century, under the influence of the British, Bible translations were made from English versions of the scriptures translated from the original languages, Hebrew and Greek.
- (c) In Iran the number of Christians is extremely small and the impossibility for them to have access to public functions makes it impossible to play a significant role in the society. Nevertheless the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Armenians are maintaining their own schools and are recognized as distinct ethnic identities.
- (d) In Turkey, especially in the region of Tur 'Abdin, Syriac Christians have suffered periods of difficulty and hardship. In recent times, one can perceive a change in the attitude towards Christians in some

academic and political circles. This development notwithstanding, a number of problems, such as integration into society and recognition of some juridical rights have not yet been resolved.

- (e) Currently in Iraq the situation of Christians is in transition and extremely complex. The present plight of the indigenous Christians of the 'Cradle of Civilization' should be of urgent concern for the international community at large. Today's five autochthonous Syriac Churches have witnessed to Christianity in its Mesopotamian homeland since ancient times and long before the rise of Islam. Since the times of early Christianity these Churches have contributed to shaping and molding the Middle Eastern societies in intercultural exchange. Their impact on cultural, literary, social and political life throughout history should not be underestimated. Furthermore, today Christians in Iraq are a reminder that a society and a culture can never be monolithic, uniform or mono-religious (which is a temptation for some Islamic societies).
- (f) Recently the situation of Iraqi and Iranian Christians has been complicated by the activity of some evangelical movements undertaken to the detriment of the autochthonous communities.
- (g) There was much discussion of the proposed autonomous region for Christians in the Nineveh Plain in Iraq. Some advocate a 'soft autonomy' that would take into account the shared history of the Christians, as well as their cultural and national concerns; and the need to feel at home in their country. It was pointed out that this last suggestion should not be easily rejected. Rather, one must consider it within the perspective of justice for ethnic and religious particularities in the country; it is not a matter of proposing a Christian ghetto. As a matter of fact, the idea of a homeland for indigenous Christian groups, such as the Assyrians, goes back to the end of the First World War. Fears were also expressed in regard to the future of religious minorities in Iraq in general and in this region in particular. The Assembly of the Catholic bishops in Iraq stated on 29 October 2009 that 'the Iraqi Christians are an indigenous component of the Iraqi nation and that their loyalty is to Iraq. They want to continue to live in collaboration with their brothers and sisters in good and in bad and to strengthen

the harmonic conviviality. They do not want to live isolated from them in any way.⁷

- (h) The beautiful monuments of Christian art and monasticism in Syria and Lebanon witness to the spiritual power of Syriac Christianity throughout history. Within their genuine homeland, these Syriac churches as well as Christians individually have engaged themselves in the educational sector, in the domain of literature, arts and administration.
- (i) In Lebanon the Christian communities, especially the Maronites, have contributed essentially to the various aspects of the socio-cultural and political life of the nation, especially in the area of education with the foundation of a number of schools and of well known universities. Their social and political contribution is shaping the country significantly in matters of freedom, human rights and dialogue of cultures.

On Challenges

- (j) Concerning challenges there is a sharp contrast between the Indian and Middle Eastern situation. The basic reason for this is the difference in the respective constitutions of the Nation-States and the embedding in different cultures.
- (k) The Indian Constitution specifically protects and safeguards the rights of religious and other minorities, this is also the case of the Lebanese Constitution. Though provisions for a protection of religious minorities are not absent from the constitutions of some Middle Eastern states, their application on the local level is often not acknowledged.
- (l) The question of identity is a complex one. Plurality of identities applies to every individual in every society, depending on different contexts: this only becomes a problem when the wider society does not accept, or does not allow for one or more of these identities. In India the axiom 'Christian in religion, Indian in culture, and Eastern in worship' expresses the situation accurately. Here an important

factor is that Indian culture is seen as a cultural mosaic where all have a place: unity lies in diversity. However, recent politicization of religion among certain sections of Hindu society, leading on occasion to open conflict and violence committed against religious minorities, as well as the emergence of certain propaganda within the Communist government of Kerala aimed at interfering with Christian educational institutions, are serious threats to the Indian culture of religious tolerance and freedom.

- (m) In the Middle East the problems of identity, and especially Christian identity, are very different. What is lacking in many places is an acceptance of cultural diversity, and of some basic human rights involving a religious and cultural freedom to partake and play a role in the wider society.
- (n) In order to promote human rights in the Middle East, there is an underlying essential need to achieve peace, justice and stability in this region as a whole.
- (o) The situation of Christians in Syria is considerably better than in other Middle Eastern countries apart from Lebanon. For example, the government provides land for building places of worship, helps the churches as well as mosques in many other ways. Over a century ago, legislation allowed for the establishment of private schools belonging to churches or to certain religious orders. However, recent legislation has made it no longer possible for Churches as institutions to own schools.
- (p) Despite the comparatively good situation for Christians in Syria, considerable numbers are leaving due to the sense of unease and the increasing marginalization which is experienced by Christians as extremist ideas increasingly make their presence felt, not only in the wider society, but also in some government circles.
- (q) An essential topic was raised concerning conversions, which are only possible in one direction, with no possibility for return allowed. In mixed marriages the woman can keep her religion, but the man has to convert to Islam, and all the children will be raised as Muslims.
- (r) The situation for Christians in Lebanon is in marked contrast to that

elsewhere in the Middle East. Only here is there a widespread feeling of mutual respect and equality, leading to the possibility of effective dialogue on practical matters. The main reason for this is the large number of Christians and of Christian educational institutions where many Muslims are educated. Likewise the freedom of press and other media allows for the possibility of informing public opinion.

- (s) The situation of Syriac Christians in the Middle East remains fragile and unstable, and will do so as long as the wider political problems, above all the Israel/Palestine question, remain unresolved. If only a real peace could be achieved, then the whole situation for Christians and other minorities in the Middle East would undoubtedly be changed for the better, and many who left might want to return.
- (t) An acknowledgement of, and respect for, human rights and religious freedom are the key to the successful co-existence of Christians and Muslims.

On Emigration

- (u) For Syriac Christians, both in India and the Middle East, migration is not an entirely new phenomenon.
- (v) Regarding the migration of Syriac Christians from Kerala, it is important to note that they left their country for other states of India or abroad not because of persecution or political problems in India, but mainly for economic reasons. The impact of migration is being felt in every aspect of life in the State of Kerala. In particular, almost all families are affected by migration abroad in one way or another. Their integration into their new cultural environment is different according to the three main destinations: Gulf Region, United States of America or Europe. The relations of the migrants with their homeland and Syriac Indian culture remains generally very strong, and liturgical worship is still a central part of their social life. In the USA they are more easily assimilated and especially the youth are more oriented to Western culture.
- (w) Although the economic reasons for the emigration of Syriac

Christians from the Middle East are also very important, religious and cultural freedom, equal rights, the possibility to participate in the political life, fair educational opportunities are even more important (quite apart from the dire situation in Iraq).

- (x) In general, Syriac Christians quickly integrate into the local communities of their host countries, taking advantage of educational opportunities. At the same time a change of consciousness in their relationship to the abandoned homeland is taking place.
- (y) As for the situation of the migrants in their new environment and their relations to their homeland and traditional religious and cultural heritage the following are important points:
 - For a harmonious integration of the migrant communities, the formation of the church leaders is of great importance, in the theological field as well as in openness to Western contemporary culture.
 - For Syriac Christians who have emigrated the question remains, how can they preserve their religious and cultural identity and what influence can and should they exercise back in their homeland?
 - It is necessary for the Western Churches to seize the opportunity of the presence of the Syriac Christian communities in their midst for a mutual enrichment. Those Churches should assist the Christians who have emigrated in every possible way to preserve their cultural and spiritual traditions (including their language) and welcome them in their guest society. This could be achieved for instance by making available church and educational facilities.
 - A difficult problem is: What kind of engagements should Churches and persons or organisations develop with political society and civil authorities to help Syriac Christians to continue to live in their homeland, on the one hand, and to integrate harmoniously in their new environment, with a mutual enrichment for both hosts and guests?
 - Lately, some countries or governments have encouraged Christians

to leave the Middle East: what should be the reaction of our Churches? Another query is how can Christians in the West encourage and help Christians to remain in the Middle East since the fewer the Syriac Christians become in their homeland the more difficulties they face.

—Migration leads to the fact that many Syriac Christians are in danger of losing their religious and cultural roots. They are often absorbed into the larger Christian Churches of the West, or they may become completely secularized. This is a great loss, not only for themselves, but also for the whole of Christendom, the diversity of whose spiritual and cultural richness is thereby impoverished.

9. On the basis of the *Second Colloquium Syriacum* participants express their gratitude and their deep desire to pursue this initiative of PRO ORIENTE in the field of the common study of the Syriac tradition. It is to be hoped for that this enriching endeavour may help the Syriac Christians to better preserve and fructify their rich heritage and offer their unique contribution to the search for Christian unity. Participants therefore urge the *Forum Syriacum* to consider and decide upon the topic for the *Third Colloquium Syriacum*.

APPENDIX II

PRO ORIENTE

Ecumenical Study Seminar

'Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East'

Sulaymaniyah (Iraq), May 26-27, 2010

In its endeavour of facilitating and supporting mutual understanding and exchange between the Oriental Churches (Catholic, Oriental Orthodox and Assyrian), PRO ORIENTE Foundation (Vienna/Austria) with its fifth *Forum Syriacum* organized a study seminar on the 'Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East'. The study Seminar took place on 26-27 May 2010, at the invitation of Archbishop Louis Sako (Chaldean Archdiocese of Kirkuk) in Sulaymaniyah/Iraq.

Participating Archbishop-Metropolitans, Bishops, and Reverend Fathers named below came from the Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the

East, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Chaldean Church, the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, and the Syro-Malabar Church. Likewise the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, along with PRO ORIENTE expert scholars, were present. With a letter of May 17, 2010, signed by Archbishop Cyril Vasil SJ and Mons. Maurizio Malvestiti, the Congregation for the Eastern Churches apologized for not being able to send a participant, but expressed its lively interest in the results of the study seminar.

In the opening session, a letter of greeting of Cardinal Emmanuel III Delly, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, was delivered, whereby he appreciates that this initiative of PRO ORIENTE could take place in Iraq.

Participants appreciated the reflections presented in the *Lineamenta*, and—after extensive discussion and exchange in plenary and workshops—would like to draw attention to the following points:

I. Relationship between Churches: Communion and Witness

1. The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East is characteristically different from similar Synods concerning different geographical areas. In the Middle East, we are faced with the unique ecclesiastical situation that the Catholic Oriental Churches, with the exception of the Maronites, have a long common spiritual and liturgical tradition with their Orthodox Sister-Churches.
2. For this reason we believe that the invited persons from the Orthodox Churches should be present at the Synod not only as fraternal delegates, but should be able to fully participate in the various activities during the Synod. In general we are concerned about the constant ecumenical dimension of the whole synodal process in its different stages. For instance we would have liked that the Orthodox Churches had been invited to take part at the preparatory stage and we hope that they will also be able to participate in the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Synod.
3. The challenges put to the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches are common, a supplementary reason for close cooperation. This is particularly true of the burning issue of massive emigration from the Middle East.
4. For this reason one has to reconsider the division made in the *Lineamenta* (Ch. III Christian Witness), where a division is suggested between witnessing to the Gospel within the Church and witnessing together with local Orthodox Churches. Catechesis should not be considered an issue only for the Catholic Church, but should be elaborated in cooperation with

the other local Orthodox Churches.

5. The concept of communion of Churches considered distinctively from jurisdictional communion launched some years ago, deserves ongoing and further study.
6. One of the results of the Synod should be that the situation of the Christians in the Middle East come to be better known in the West. Now Middle East Christians are faced with ignorance and indifference. Initiatives should be taken to encourage Western Episcopal Synods, theological faculties, church members and youth organizations, etc. to undertake visits to the region. Serious analyses are to be offered to the West. There is a need to reach out also more to the media.
7. In the field of witness: common witness is a form of communion. Possible new initiatives that can be taken (and which in some regions are already being taken) are: common schoolbooks, common school curricula, common pastoral work and diaconia, etc.

II. Witness to the Islamic World

1. Christians and Muslims have a long history of coexistence. The present situation in the Middle East has to be studied and evaluated from this perspective, especially in the context of a growing political and extremist interpretation of Islam.
2. In order to find an answer to political Islam, Christians and Muslims have to develop common strategies, e.g. in the field of study and research, by a common reading of Sacred Texts.
3. Christians should also be encouraged and prepared to actively take part in the public life in the countries they are called to life in.
4. It would be useful to develop a common program of promoting publications on different levels (academic and more popular) to present Christianity in a way that is understandable for the Muslim community. So far we have only isolated initiatives. A new apologetic endeavour in the good sense of the word is much needed.
5. Educational institutions should impart a culture of coexistence, mutual respect and understanding. Joint educational programs are needed in this respect, where common religious, spiritual and cultural values are presented.
6. Educators and religious leaders should have a good, reflective knowledge

- of religion, not only of one's own community, but also of that of the other communities. They have to respect the religious sensitivities of all students. School authorities should take the necessary steps that textbooks used in educational institutions give proper information about the religions.
7. Periodical and occasional inter-religious meetings of religious leaders should be organized, not only in official, international encounters, but also on a more regional, local and intermediate level, since these kinds of gatherings are more effective for promoting better mutual understanding.
 8. Media is a powerful instrument to promote a proper image of Christianity in the region. More coordinated efforts should be taken to ensure an objective presentation of Christian beliefs and values. It should be made clear that some evangelical movements of Western Christians give a distorted image of Christianity.
 9. Both Christians and Muslims ought to be more open to the ideas of civil society, including the distinction between the religious and the political domains and the struggle against corruption and social injustice. Meetings intended for both decision and opinion makers (including future clergy and politicians) are to be organized. They also have to be informed on the historical developments of Christianity and Islam and their mutual relations (including some mutual misconceptions and negative experiences in the past).
 10. True expertise has to be developed among Christians and Muslims concerning inter-religious dialogue (by university training, in seminaries and sharia schools, by special programs, etc.).
 11. Another form of common witness is in the field of charity. Much needed housing projects, hospitals, care for handicapped persons, marginalized etc. However, all initiatives taken should not be limited to the Christian communities only, but should be for the benefit of all.

Final remarks

It would be useful to organize a follow up 'Synod' or meeting (preferably in the Middle East, e.g. convoked by the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East or another body) in order to evaluate the implementation of the decisions taken at the Synod.

Because of the urgency of the situation in the Middle East, we express the wish that the Apostolic Exhortation communicating the results of the Synod be published soon.

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