

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*)**

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

VATICAN CITY
2010

The *Instrumentum laboris* can be found on
the *Internet* at the Vatican website:

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PREFACE

“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). *The promise of the Lord Jesus, made before his Ascension into heaven, is fulfilled in the Church throughout the ages. From Jerusalem, where the Paschal Mystery of the Lord’s death and resurrection took place, the Gospel has spread to not only Judea and Samaria but the whole world, including the Gentiles. This is a result of the Holy Spirit, given by the Risen Lord to the Church. Indeed, after his victory over death, Jesus appeared to his disciples and greeted them in customary Jewish fashion: “Peace be with you!” (Jn 20:20), an expression which calls to mind the fullness of divine gifts. Again, St. John’s Gospel recounts that he entered, though the doors were locked, and bestowed upon them the gift of the Spirit: “He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” (Jn 20:22, 23).*

The event gladdened the disciples who “rejoiced in seeing the Lord” (Jn 20:20). This encounter, marked by the outpouring of the Spirit, radically changed their lives. Those who, “for fear of the Jews” (Jn 20:19), locked themselves in the Cenacle, went forth in public and “proclaimed the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). Under the leadership of Simon Peter, the apostles began to proclaim openly the Good News of the life, death and resurrection of their Master and Lord: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). Central to the Christian kerygma is the presence of the Risen and Living Lord in the midst of the community of believers.

Consequently, ecclesial communion has its source in the Paschal Mystery. With one voice, the disciples proclaimed it “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:10). The results of St. Peter’s initial proclamation was the conversion of three thousand persons (cf. Acts 2:41). Through Baptism, they became members of the Church, which is the community of disciples of Jesus Christ. The change in them took place as a result of the Holy Spirit, who opened the horizon of the Christian faith to them and transformed their attitude towards others, as St. Luke testifies: “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32).

Communion is an integral part of witnessing. Indeed, in choosing Judas' successor, the Apostle Peter listed for about 120 brothers the criteria to be followed in the selection. He is to be "one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." (Acts 1: 21, 22). The Christian must be a witness (martyr) of the Risen and Living Lord in today's ecclesial community.

It is important to keep in mind that the outpouring of the Spirit and the gift of peace are not a shield against difficulties, challenges and persecution. At the beginning of their public ministry, the apostles were arrested and put in prison (cf. Acts 4:1-22). In such cases, contrary to every expectation, they "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for Jesus' name" (Acts 5: 41). This was the response of the first Christians to adverse situations. They met opposition and dislike from their own religious leaders, but they knew they "must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). In addition, their land suffered from occupation and became a part of the powerful Roman Empire. In this very difficult situation, they proclaimed the Word of God, whole and entire, which, according to Jesus teaching, included love for everyone: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44). Because of this, the apostles met the same fate as the Master, bearing witness to their faithfulness to the Lord of Life by shedding their blood in martyrdom. The gift of the Risen Lord is not to be regarded so much as the peace which must exist among peoples as much as the peace of the children of God: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (Jn 14:27). The disciples must live and proclaim this peace even amidst persecution. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus declared "blessed", together with peacemakers, those who mourn, those who are persecuted and hunger and thirst for righteousness, and those who are reviled and have uttered against them all kinds of evil falsely on his account (cf. Mt 5:3-12). At the same time, he tells the disciples: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Mt 5:12).

For many, the present-day situation in the Middle East is much like that of the primitive Christian community in the Holy Land, where men, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote the books of the New Testament. These holy writings, read in the intimacy of the Holy Spirit, are a call to Christian witness for individuals and entire communities. This is especially the case for the faithful living in the land of Jesus, where, oftentimes in adverse conditions which have lasted for almost two millennia, they have proclaimed in word and deed, the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth: "He is risen, he is not here" (Mk 16:6); He is the "Living One" (Rev 1:18), "the Alfa and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (Rev 22, 13). These biblical meditations are particularly

timely and appropriate in preparing for the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, scheduled to take place from 10 to 24 October 2010 to treat the topic: 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).

This spirit has guided the preparation of this Instrumentum laboris, the document which is to guide discussion in the work of the synodal assembly. It was drafted on the basis of the numerous responses to the Questions in the Lineamenta which were submitted by synods of bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches sui iuris, the episcopal conferences, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General, not to mention the observations from many individuals and ecclesial groups. Special gratitude is owed to the members of the Pre-Synodal Council for the Middle East, who have contributed, with dedication and generosity, to drafting this Instrumentum laboris, which is printed in 4 languages: Arab, French, English and Italian. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI has honoured its publication by wishing to present the Instrumentum laboris to representatives from the different traditions in the episcopate of the Middle East, during his Apostolic Visit to Cyprus. This gesture is yet another indication of the particular concern the Bishop of Rome has for the beloved Churches of the Middle East. Given the presence of the members of the Pre-Synodal Council for the Middle East, this gesture also serves to express his gratitude for their collaboration and is a fortuitous anticipation of the synod’s work to begin in Rome on Sunday, 10 October 2010, with the solemn Eucharist concelebration, at which the Supreme Pontiff will preside.

We entrust the successful outcome of the synod to the prayers of many members of the faithful in the Middle East and the entire Catholic Church. In particular, we invoke the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, her Spouse. They themselves came from the Middle East and raised the Son of God in the land which was their own. We ask them to continue to be spiritually near at this time, protecting the Holy Churches of God in the Middle East which, in their pilgrim journey, must pass through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God (cf. Acts 14:22).

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General Secretary*

Vatican City, 6 June 2010

INTRODUCTION

1. The announcement to convoke a Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops was greatly welcomed by the entire Church, especially by the countries of the Middle East, stretching from Egypt to Iran. This favourable reception was also seen in the choice of the very timely topic for the synodal session, scheduled to take place from 10 to 24 October 2010: “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)”. The importance of this event is illustrated in the fact that the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, wished personally to announce the synod, during a meeting with the patriarchs and major archbishops of the East on 19 September 2009. In this way, His Holiness acceded to the many requests of his brothers in the episcopate to convoke a synodal assembly in light of the difficult situation presently facing the Church and society in the region. In his solicitude “for the entire Church” (2 Cor 11:28), the Bishop of Rome has a particular concern for the faithful in the Holy Land, made sacred by Jesus’ presence through his life and teaching, which ultimately culminated in the Paschal Mystery. The Holy Father himself had the opportunity to grow in his affection for the Holy Land by travelling to Turkey from 28 November to 1 December, and then to Jordan, Israel and Palestine from 8 to 15 May 2009. The synodal event has been given added meaning through the Supreme Pontiff’s presentation of this *Instrumentum laboris* to representatives from the different traditions comprising the episcopate of the Middle East, during his Apostolic Visit to Cyprus, 6 June 2010.

2. During his pilgrimage to the Middle East, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, made important addresses to the Churches *sui iuris*, reading the signs of the times in light of the Word of God and applying that Word to the present situation in each country. The responses of the individual Churches to the *Lineamenta* mention that to understand adequately what the Catholic Church in the Middle East is experiencing will require, in addition to the Holy Father’s Magisterium, taking into account the documents of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and the subsequent Magisterium of the Popes and the Holy See on each topic, not to mention *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* and *The Code of Canon Law*. Likewise, the pronouncements of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East, especially their 10 Pastoral Letters, are particularly important. Clearly, priority needs

to be given to Sacred Scripture, which remains the lamp for the faithful in practising the faith and a light on the Church's path (cf. *Ps* 119:105).

A. The Goal of the Synod

3. The many responses to the *Questions* of the *Lineamenta* show that the faithful are clearly aware of the two objectives of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, namely: a) to confirm and strengthen the members of the Catholic Church in their Christian identity, through the Word of God and the sacraments; and b) to foster ecclesial communion among the Churches *sui iuris*, so that they can bear witness to the Christian life in an authentic, joyous and winsome manner. Obviously, in such a reflection, Catholics have to bear in mind the presence of other Churches and ecclesial communities in the region. This is clearly evident in all the responses, a sign of the increasing importance of the ecumenical sensitivity of the particular Catholic Churches and individual members of the faithful, who endeavour, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, to put into practice the prayer of the Lord Jesus. "*that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me*" (*Jn* 17:21). Ecumenism is a part of Christian witness everywhere, but primarily in the countries of the Middle East.

4. In a region where the followers of the three monotheistic religions have lived together for centuries, Christians must get to know their Jewish and Muslim neighbours well, if they are to collaborate with them in the fields of religion, social interaction and culture for the good of society as a whole. Religion, especially for those who profess one God, must increasingly become the basis for peace, concord and the shared commitment to promote the spiritual and material values of persons and communities. This witness ought to generate a feeling and desire to become faithful members of the community which, albeit suffering and saddened at the moment, lives in hope that these afflictions can be turned into joy (cf. *Jn* 16:20). The Risen Lord has promised to his followers: "*ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full*" (*Jn* 16:24).

5. Conscientiously fulfilling this vocation will require strengthening communion at all levels of the Catholic Church in the Middle East, beginning with each Church *sui iuris*. Clearly, the bonds of communion should also be reinforced with the other Churches and ecclesial communities, namely, the revered Orthodox Churches and communities

with roots in the Reformation. Strengthening communion is the task of all people of good will, including leaders in the social, economic, cultural and political fields.

6. The faithful of the Churches *sui iuris* are understood to be individual persons and their respective communities as a whole. Together with the faithful of the Latin Church in the Middle East, they are the reference point of the synodal assembly. Their Pastors, gathered around the Bishop of Rome, the Universal Pastor of the Church, will consider the faithful's joys and sufferings and their hopes and anxieties, so as to consider every aspect of their lives in the light of the Gospel. This desire is clearly expressed in the responses which have arrived at the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. Consequently, the synodal fathers are asked not only to describe the prevalent situation in their countries and analyse its positive and negative aspects, but primarily to supply Christians with the basis for their existence in a predominantly Muslim society, be it Arab, Turkish, Iranian or a Jewish society in the State of Israel. The faithful are relying on their Pastors to give them precise guidelines in (re)discovering their mission in each country, which is nothing less than being authentic witnesses of the Risen Christ in virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit, who abides in the Church of God. They are to bear testimony in the countries where they were born and presently live, countries which are characterised by not only social and political development, but also, unfortunately, conflict and instability.

B. A Reflection Guided by Holy Scripture

7. Synodal reflection will be guided by Sacred Scripture, which was written in our lands by people inspired by the Holy Spirit, in our languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek) and in the cultural and literary contexts and expressions which are our own. The Word of God is read in our Churches. The Scriptures have come to us through our ecclesial communities, having been handed down and meditated upon within our Sacred Liturgies. They cannot be ignored as a reference point, if we are to discover the meaning of our presence, our communion and our witness in the current situation in our countries.

8. The responses indicate a great hunger for the Word of God, even though the reading of the Bible is not as widespread as it should be. Some lament a lack of means to more precisely understand its meaning. Consequently, every initiative geared towards spreading the reading and distribution of the Gospel (publications, internet) is to be encouraged. In the

first place, those whose vocational choice calls them to recite daily the divine office should be conscious of maintaining contact with the Word of God, even in their task of witnessing and interceding for others (*pro populo*). In keeping with the tradition of the ancient Desert Fathers and Eastern Monasticism, verses from the Gospel or other biblical books should be memorized and become the object of meditation (*ruminatio*).

9. It seems important to mention that a sense of the Scriptures consists in demonstrating a unique, divine plan underlying all human events, which the Church calls “salvation history”. Concretely speaking, this means insisting on the continuous character of the New and the Old Testaments and the profound bond between them. In this regard, the fundamental, unifying aspect of Christian exegesis is its Christological character. In Scripture, the Church Fathers sought and found Christ, the key to laying open the Old Testament. Christ is not only a biblical exegete (recall the episode of Emmaus) but also its exegesis, because, according to Christian thought in the first centuries, all Scripture has him as its subject. In keeping with the ancient tradition of the Church Fathers, this Christological reading also becomes the identifying principle for Christians in the study of Old Testament texts. The Pastors’ task is to point out that, in the words of St. Augustine, “The New is in the Old concealed and the Old in the New revealed”.¹

10. Since the Bible is the book of the Christian community, only from within the community can biblical texts be correctly understood. Consequently, Divine Tradition is the hermeneutic key to the revealed text. This Tradition has always been the principle for understanding Scripture and the ecclesial context for reading the Word of God. Within this context a certain language is formed, thus supplying the fundamentals in approaching the Scriptures and avoiding arbitrary interpretations. Prevalent in Middle Eastern countries is an awareness that the reading of the Word of God is intimately bound to each Church’s tradition.

11. The Word of God guides all human life and gives it meaning and direction. It transforms life radically, guides it on paths towards hope and ensures the vital balance of our triple relationship – to God, ourselves and others. Exegesis of the Word of God is the source of theology, morality and spirituality. However, the temptation to look at the Bible as a prescription

¹ SAINT AUGUSTINE, “*Novum in Vetere latet et in Novo Vetus patet*”; *Questiones in Heptateucum*, 2, 73: PL 34, 623.

book in finding solutions to every problem needs to be avoided. Instead, the Bible is meant to sustain Christians in the choices required of them in life, while on their earthly journey, and to shed light on the future which awaits them in heaven, all the while respecting their freedom.

12. The Word of God provides assistance in facing the challenges of today's world. Consequently, the Word of God is meant for enlightenment, especially in the choices communities must make, and can serve as an inspiration for Christians engaged in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as well as political activity and is a reference point for Christians in the education of their children, particularly in experiences of charity and forgiveness. Finally, the words of the Gospel are not only addressed to Christians; they also contain truth which can be known by all people of good will and those in search of God.

I. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A. The Situation of Christians in the Middle East

1. *An Historical Sketch: Unity in Diversity*

13. The history of Christianity in the Middle East has significance not only for the Christians who live there but also for Christians the world over. Regrettably, the responses we have received reveal how little this history is known. Therefore, a treatment of a few of the more important aspects of this history seems warranted.

14. All particular Churches throughout the world, in addition to those in the Middle East, trace their roots to the Church of Jerusalem, made one by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This event is very important, because it shows that Divine Providence wished to reveal the plan of salvation in this part of Asia.

”God guided the patriarchs (cf. *Gen* 12) and called Moses to lead his people to freedom (cf. *Ex* 3:10). He spoke to his chosen people through many prophets, judges, kings and valiant women of faith. In "the fullness of time" (*Gal* 4:4), he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Saviour, who took flesh as an Asian!”²

15. The Church underwent divisions in the 5th century, after the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), principally over Christological issues. This first schism resulted in the Churches known today as the "Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East" (*Kanîsat al-Mashriq* or *al-Kanîsah al-Ashshûriyyah*) and the "Eastern Orthodox Churches," namely the Coptic, Syrian and Armenian Churches, which used to be called “monophysite.”

16. Oftentimes, these divisions involved politico-cultural factors, which were stated and clearly proven by the Eastern medieval theologians (Syrian and Arab). In our times, the problems in Christology have been overcome by joint Christological declarations by the Popes and the Patriarchs/Catholicos of the Eastern Orthodox Churches (Coptic, Syrian and Armenian) and the Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East.

17. Later, at the beginning of the 11th century, the Great Schism occurred, separating Constantinople from Rome and subsequently the Orthodox East from the Catholic West. Again, in this case, politico-cultural factors were

² JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (6 November 199), 1: *AAS* 92 (2000) 449.

the principal issue, not to mention an already existent division between East and West, resulting not simply from geography. The two peoples came to understand each other less and less!

18. These divisions, a bitter fruit of history, still exist today in the various Churches of the Middle East. However, the Holy Spirit is working to bring the Churches together and to tear down the barriers to the visible unity which Christ desired, so that they might be One in their diversity, in the image of the Trinity, enriching each other from their respective traditions: “*As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us. That they may all be one, so that the world may believe that you sent me*” (Jn 17: 21). These traditions are a source of richness for the universal Church.

2. Apostolicity and the Missionary Vocation

19. The responses received clearly define the true vocation of the Churches of the Middle East. Our Churches are apostolic in origin and our countries have been the cradle of Christianity. These lands have been blessed by the presence of Christ himself and the first generations of Christians. It would indeed be a loss for the universal Church, if Christianity were to disappear or be diminished in the very place where it was born. Consequently, we bear a grave responsibility not only to maintain the Christian faith in these holy lands but, still more, to maintain the spirit of the Gospel in relations with both Christians and non-Christians, not to mention to keep alive the memory of these Christian beginnings.

20. In being apostolic, our Churches have a special mission to bring the Gospel to the whole world. Such has been the case throughout history. Today, however, signs indicate that this evangelical ardour has decreased and the flame of the Spirit diminished. Our history and culture put us in close contact with hundreds of millions of people, culturally as well as spiritually. Our responsibility is to share with them the Gospel message of love, which we have received, and to offer them a glimmer of the hope which is in us, because of the outpouring of the Spirit in our hearts (cf. *Rm* 5:5).

21. Under the bishop’s guidance, pastors and priests engaged in pastoral care ought to be aware that their task does not consist in caring for their communities’ present-day needs only; they also have a duty in view of the future of their communities, requiring that they put into action a pastoral programme which includes making contacts with young people, providing spiritual direction and forming prayer groups for vocations. Fostering

vocations also needs to be more explicitly done in ecclesial movements. The Church will disappear, if she fails to work on behalf of vocations. Priests should have direct contact with Christian families in order to emphasize that a priestly vocation is a gift from God.

22. The primary supports for the ministry of vocations are found not only in mission camps which are organised in villages, prayer groups and apostolic movements, but primarily in numerous families who encourage their children to respond to God's call. The young are in search of a deep spirituality which can be experienced in spiritual retreats. Despite these initiatives, various factors have contributed to a vocation crisis: families emigrating; a declining birth rate; and a youth culture which is increasingly becoming devoid of Gospel values. The lack of unity among members of the clergy is both an obstacle and counter-witness, hindering a man from choosing the priestly life. At times, the human and spiritual formation of priests as well as men and women religious is inadequate. In seminaries, qualified spiritual directors, who live with the seminarians, are essential.

Undoubtedly, the best way to solicit vocations to the consecrated life is through personal witness and a joy in the lives of persons who are consecrated to God. Equally important is communal witness through harmonious relations among congregations, religious institutes and bishops as well as the awareness and presentation of a vocation as a fulfilling life of service to society. The inconsistency between preaching and actions is unable to generate vocations to the consecrated and contemplative life. Instead, the best guarantee for a new ardour in vocations to the consecrated and contemplative life is a return to the source, namely, the Person of Jesus Christ.

23. Many local and international religious congregations of men and women pray and work together in our eparchies/dioceses. They provide invaluable service in the Lord's vineyard. Yet they stand in need of increased support so as to be able, in turn, to support the faithful in their vocation and their involvement in all sectors of public life.

The contemplative life, the pillar of true consecration, though present in some eparchies/dioceses because of various religious orders of a universal character, is noticeably absent in a majority of congregations of men and women in the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* in the Middle East.

3. The Role of Christians in Society, Although a Small Minority

24. Notwithstanding their differences, Arab, Turkish and Iranian societies share common characteristics. Traditions and a traditional way of life are prevalent, especially regarding the family and education. Confessionalism, characterising relations among Christians themselves as well as relations with non-Christians, deeply affects attitudes and behaviour. As one element in identification, religion not only differentiates people but can also be a source of division, when invoked to engender exclusion and hostility. At such times, people need to remember that Christians are “indigenous citizens” and thereby are entitled to be a part to the fabric of society and identify themselves with their respective homelands. Their disappearance would impoverish the pluralism which has always characterised the countries of the Middle East. Middle Eastern countries would be at a disadvantage without the Christian voice.

25. The situation in each Middle Eastern country varies and, according to the responses, the possibilities for the Church to lend support to their socio-cultural development depend on various factors, including the existing Christian presence, the proportion of Catholics and, naturally, the nature of the governing powers, the juridic order and society and culture as a whole. Generally speaking, however, Catholics, together with other Christian citizens and Muslim thinkers and reformers, ought to be able to support initiatives at examining thoroughly the concept of the “positive laicity”³ of the State. This could help eliminate the theocratic character of government and allow for 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 civic orders.

26. To spread the Christian message, to address the challenges which arise in response to this message and to maintain contacts with the faithful in the diaspora, the Church employs in her eparchies/dioceses technologies and modern means in social communication (short message service or *sms*, websites, Internet, television, radio). In doing so, she often sends her priests to study outside the area, especially to Rome, in order to develop their understanding of the Church and further their knowledge of theology, particularly by attending the Pontifical Oriental Institute.

³ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Discourse at the Welcoming Ceremony at the Elysee Palace* (Paris, 12 September 2008), Apostolic Visit to France: *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 17 September 2008, pp. 3, 4.

27. To accomplish the aforementioned task, some responses highlight the great contribution Eastern Christians are making to their countries in maintaining that individuals cannot be completely fulfilled, unless due attention is given to their social nature, that is, to their being a person “with” and “for” others. The common good concerns the person very closely and every aspect of life in society: family, groups, associations, cities, regions, States, communities of peoples and nations. Everyone, in some sense, is implicated in working for the common good, in constantly seeking the good of others as if it were their own. This is primarily the responsibility of political authority at every level, whose responsibility is to create social conditions which allow and foster for every human being the total development of the person.⁴

28. Although Christians are a small minority in almost every part of the Middle East, they are nonetheless active, forceful and involved where social and political situations allow. The danger lies in their isolating themselves out of fear of others. Our faithful need their faith and spirituality strengthened and relations and solidarity among them re-forged. This must be done, however, without yielding to a ghetto mentality.

29. The foremost task of the Church is to promote the family and to defend it from the various dangers which in recent times are threatening its sacred nature and stability. At the same time, given current demographics, the Church encourages parents to have large families.

To assist in building society in general, the Church provides her social doctrine to those who deal with social issues so as to offer an alternative and solution to the spiral of violence caused by injustices which are worsened by ethno-religious conflicts. In this connection, education is our greatest investment. Our Churches and schools should do more to help those most in need.

30. More than anything else, charitable works demonstrate to other Christians, as well as Muslims and Jews, the Church’s dedication to seeking the common good. This apostolic activity depends as much on the generous charitable assistance of the Church worldwide as on the concrete involvement of local Churches. In this regard, the healthcare ministry is a privileged opportunity for highlighting the role of Christians in society. In this charitable work, consecrated persons, especially women, deserve

⁴ Cf. JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et magistra*: AAS 53 (1961) 417.

mention for their laudable actions in playing a leading role in offering healthcare services to everyone.

31. Finally, in keeping with the Gospel's teaching on justice, the Church is to manage her patrimony in a transparent manner. Priests and bishops in particular must clearly make the distinction between what is given them for their personal use from what belongs to the Church. Furthermore, the Church's patrimonial holdings should be preserved in order to help safeguard the Christian presence in the Middle East.

B. The Challenges Facing Christians

1. Political Conflicts in the Region

32. All the responses to the *Questions* in the *Lineamenta* describe the current political and social situation in the Middle East. Ongoing political tension in the region have a direct influence on the lives of Christians, both as citizens and in their practice of religion, putting them in a particularly delicate and precarious situation.

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 on security grounds). Moreover, certain Christian fundamentalist theologies use Sacred Scripture to justify Israel's occupation of Palestine, making the position of Christian Arabs an even more sensitive issue.

33. In Iraq, the war has unleashed evil forces within the country, within political movements and religious confessions and has made all Iraqis victims. However, since Christians represent the smallest and weakest part of Iraqi society, they are the principal victims of violence, a fact which is not given sufficient attention in world politics.

34. In Lebanon, Christians are deeply divided at the political and confessional level and are lacking a commonly acceptable plan of action. 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. Moreover, this Islamisation also penetrates families through the media and school, leading to an unconscious change in attitudes which is Islamic in character. 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 "laicity" is currently posing more problems for full religious freedom in the country.

35. "Confronted by these different realities, some remain strong in their faith and their commitment in society, sharing common sacrifices and contributing to the overall social plan. Others, in contrast, are discouraged and have lost all confidence in their society and in its capacity to accord them the same equal status as other citizens, leading to their abandoning all engagement, withdrawing into their Churches and institutions, and living in isolation and devoid of interaction with society."⁵

2. Freedom of Religion and Conscience

36. Before addressing freedom of conscience, consideration must be given to the overall situation of human rights in the Middle East. Indeed, the good of the human person should be the criterion by which all social or political systems are judged. The notion of service underlies the creation of any such system. Service is meant to take into account the whole person, soul and body, as well as individuals and entire communities. Human rights derive their sacred character from the holiness of God who created us, made us recipients of rights and responsibilities and endowed us with a conscience capable of seeking truth and freely grasping it. The rights of a person are not in opposition to those of God. Therefore, whoever disrespects a person created by God disrespects the Creator. The many social problems facing us everywhere call for a complete range of programmes and initiatives of service to the human person, respect for human rights and affirmation of human dignity.⁶ Peace, justice and stability are indispensable conditions for promoting human rights in the Middle East.

37. 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 practice openly one's religion, privately or publicly, or to change one's religion for another. Generally speaking, religion in the Middle

⁵ COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS OF THE MIDDLE EAST, 10th Pastoral Letter on *Arab Christians Facing Today's Challenges: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us"* (Rm 5:5), General Secretariat, Bkerké, 2009, §13ff.

⁶ COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS OF THE MIDDLE EAST, 3rd Pastoral Letter on *Muslims and Christians Living Together in the Arab World "Together before God for the good of the person and society"*, General Secretariat, Bkerké, 1994, §36.

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.

38. In proselytism, conversion to the Christian faith is perceived to be from self-interests and not authentic religious conviction. Oftentimes, the conversion of Muslims is forbidden by State laws. Christians, though also subjected to pressure and opposition from families and tribes – even if less severely – remain free to change their religion. Sometimes their conversion to Islam results not from religious conviction but personal interests, particularly to be relieved from obligations related to family difficulties. Sometimes it happens because of pressure in Muslim proselytism. Some responses to the *Lineamenta* are strongly opposed to Christian proselytism, though they acknowledge some “evangelical” communities openly practise it. Clearly, the question of public proclamation requires serious reflection, taking into account the various ideas and attitudes among Muslims and Christians. A sincere dialogue should be opened on this subject in order to come to a common understanding which respects the rights and full freedom of conscience of everyone, whatever their religious affiliation.

The position of the Church in this regard is expressed by the Holy Father: “Those who practise charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love.”⁷

39. To create the conditions needed for a change in people's mentalities and in society as a whole, some responses speak of the importance of a ongoing discussion on freedom, respect for the freedom of others and, going beyond confessional interests, towards greater justice and equality in law, in short, towards a “positive laicity”. Some call for political and Church initiatives on the international level, or even insisting among political leaders on respect for religious freedom and freedom of conscience.

40. In the field of education, the Catholic Church in some Middle Eastern countries shows significant potential. Her schools and universities are frequented by thousands of students from all social classes and confessions (Christians, Muslims, Druze and Jews); the same is the case in her hospitals and social service centres. Clearly, the teaching personnel in these

⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est* (25 December 2005), 31c: *AAS* 98 (2006) 245.

institutions must be suitably trained. Within the Church, some insist on pastoral activity which proclaims and witnesses to the Gospel values of respect for these freedoms, for example, having parishes participate in Human Rights Days. The mass media can greatly contribute to fostering this spirit.

3. *Christians and the Evolution of Contemporary Islam*

41. "Since 1970, the rise of political Islam has been an important phenomenon affecting the Christians in the Arab world and the whole region. Political Islam includes different religious groups who wish to impose an Islamic way of life in Arab, Turkish or Iranian society and on all those who live there, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. These Muslim groups maintain that the cause of every evil has been the failure to follow Islamic teaching. Their solution then is a radical return to Islam, giving rise to the slogan: 'Islam is the solution.' [...] For this purpose, some people don't hesitate to revert to violence."⁸

42. This attitude, though primarily seen in Muslim society, has an impact on the Christian presence in the Middle East. These extremist currents, clearly a threat to everyone, Christians and Muslims alike, require joint-action.

4. *Emigration*

43. A synodal assembly is primarily pastoral in character, dealing only indirectly or secondarily with socio-political problems. With this in mind, some attention needs to be focussed on the subject of emigration. The emigration of Christians and non-Christians from the Middle East, a phenomenon which began at the end of the 19th Century, chiefly arose for political and economic reasons. At the time, religious relations were not ideal. However, the "millet" system (of ethnic-religious communities) guaranteed a certain protection to Christians within their communities, though not always preventing conflict which was both tribal and religious in nature. Today, emigration is particularly prevalent because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the resulting instability throughout the region. The

⁸ COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS OF THE MIDDLE EAST, 3rd Pastoral Letter on *Muslims and Christians Living Together in the Arab World* "Together before God for the good of the person and society", General Secretariat, Bkerké, 1994, §7.

menacing social situation in Iraq and the political instability of Lebanon further intensify the phenomenon

44. International politics oftentimes pays 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. The Church must become involved in the matter by assisting all concerned with the personnel and resources at her disposal.

Another cause of emigration is the state of the economy. The current political situation in the Middle East is creating economic difficulties which make providing an acceptable standard of living for the whole of society impossible. Where the Church can do her part in helping to reduce emigration, the State itself has the major work of doing whatever is necessary in this matter. Furthermore, other key situations in some Middle Eastern countries contribute to Christian emigration: restrictions on cultural and religious freedom, inequality in rights and possibilities as well as limited opportunities to participate actively in political life.

45. Peace and democracy need to be accompanied by sufficient economic development, which in turn will lead to social and cultural change. In this way, the nations to which Christians belong can create an environment and provide conditions where Christians, as individuals and entire families, no longer feel forced to emigrate, as is presently the case. In this regard, the particular Churches in the West could exercise an important role in sensitising the governments in their respective countries to pursue political activity which contributes to the development of the countries of the Middle East at every level.

46. Another contributing factor in limiting emigration would be raising the awareness of all Christians, beginning with their Pastors, to the essential nature of their presence in society and the need for them to be actively involved in the daily happenings of civic life. Each Christian, no matter what country, is the bearer of the message of Christ to society, which must be announced even amidst trials and persecution.

47. On the other hand, emigration must be transformed into a new opportunity for support in our countries and the Churches. The strong family ties, which characterise our people, are the basis for enduring relations with Christians who have emigrated. The Churches contribute to maintaining these ties by sending priests to the countries of emigration, where they tend to the spiritual needs of these families, in cooperation with the local Churches and their Ordinaries. Some responses call upon the

bishops to visit more often these communities of the faithful, especially those without a proper Ordinary, to strengthen the bonds, in addition to liturgical ones, of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* in the countries of emigration.

48. Furthermore, associations, ecclesial or otherwise, can also be fostered to keep alive and effective people's relationships and bonds with their native communities, according to nationality or citizenship, depending on each case. In this matter, some responses encourage not only all forms of "twinning" on the level of tourism, university, culture and resources but also immigrants to acquire real estate in their native country.

5. The Immigration of Christians to the Middle East from the World Over

49. A new and important phenomenon taking place in Middle Eastern countries is the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers from Africa and Asia. Generally speaking, these immigrants are women engaged in work as domestic servants so they can give their children an education and a better life. Oftentimes, these people are subject to social injustice by the State which receives them and exploitation and sexual abuse by either the agencies which provide passage for them or their employers. In addition, many responses point out that oftentimes international laws and conventions are not respected in this area.

50. According to the responses, this immigration calls for the attention of our Churches which have the pastoral responsibility to assist them in both religious and social matters. Oftentimes, these immigrants find themselves in tragic situations in which the Church does what she can within the limits of her power and resources. At the same time, to overcome any temptation to look down at or scorn these people, the faithful urgently need to be instructed in the Church's social teaching and the concept of social justice.

C. The Response of Christians in Daily Life

51. The responses speak of the importance of Christian witness at every level. In this regard, "the evangelical values of the monastic life, which appeared at the dawn of Christianity,"⁹ are a treasure of inestimable value in the Middle East for both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Included

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consacrata*, 6 (25 March 1996), 6: *AAS* 88 (1996) 381.

in the mission of the contemplative life is intercessory prayer for society, more justice in politics and the economy, more solidarity and respect in family relations, more courage in denouncing injustices and more honesty to avoid being dragged into quarrelling or the pursuit of personal interests. Unfortunately, various responses lament the general absence of the contemplative life in the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* in the region. The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, however, has a significant number of such communities.

The consecrated life in both secular institutes and societies of apostolic life with roots in the West¹⁰ enjoys a widespread presence in the Christian East, bearing significant fruits in evangelical witness. Consecrated persons fundamentally dedicate themselves to the proclamation of the Gospel and human promotion in the fields of health, education and culture as well as ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Some responses ask persons in the consecrated life to resist the temptation to inactivity and request that they put aside personal interests for the sake of the faith. Consecrated persons are called to be witnesses through an exemplary Christian life in the practice of their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, by more closely following Jesus Christ, the model of every perfection.

52. All members of the People of God – Pastors, consecrated persons and laity alike – ought to pursue this way of life, according to their proper vocation, with particular emphasis, in our social, care-giving and educational institutions, on coherency between their personal life and that in society. In this way, the faithful can constantly be true witnesses of the Resurrection in the world. Some responses, therefore, ask that the formation of our clergy and faithful as well as our homilies and catechesis provide believers with an authentic sense of their faith and make them aware of their role in society in living their faith. They must be taught to seek and see God in all things and in everyone, striving to make him present in our society and our world through the practice of the personal and social virtues: justice, honesty, righteousness, hospitality, solidarity, openness of heart, moral purity, fidelity, etc.

53. To accomplish this, we must redouble our current efforts to search out and form the required "key persons" – priests, consecrated women and men, lay men and women – so that they can be, in our societies, true witnesses of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-11): *AAS* 88 (1996) 383, 384.

God the Father, of the Risen Christ and of the Holy Spirit who has been poured out upon the Church of God. In this way, they can give solace to their brothers and sisters in these difficult times, safeguard and strengthen the fabric of society and contribute to building the *civitas*.

II. ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

54. The Catholic Church “which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government and who, gathering together in various groups held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or Rites. Between these, there exists an admirable bond of union, such that the variety within the Church in no way harms its unity; rather it manifests it.”¹¹

The responses clearly indicate the faithful’s understanding that the divine life within the mystery of the Holy Trinity is the foundation and model for Christian communion. God is love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:8); the relations between the divine persons are relations of love. Thus, the communion of all members of the Church, the Body of Christ, is based on relations of love: “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (*Jn* 17: 21). This means living the very communion of the Holy Trinity within our Churches. The life of the Church in general and the Churches of the Middle East must be a communion of life in love, according to the model of the union of the Son with the Father and the Spirit. Each person is a member of the Body, whose Head is Christ.

A. The Communion in the Catholic Church and Among the Different Churches

55. The 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 (*hâmat ar-Rusul*), “permanent and visible source and foundation of the unity of faith and communion.”¹² *The Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches* has codified in law this communion of life in the one Church of Christ. The Congregation for the Eastern Churches and the various Roman Dicasteries are likewise at the service of this communion.

¹¹ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 2.

¹² SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 18.

In inter-ecclesial relations among Catholics, this communion is manifested in each country by the various assemblies of patriarchs and bishops so that Christian witness might be more sincere, credible and fruitful. To foster a unity in diversity, a rigid or exaggerated confessionalism must give way to encouraging communities to cooperate among themselves, coordinate pastoral activities and manifest spiritual emulation and not rivalry. In this regard, some responses suggest periodically calling (perhaps every five years) an assembly of the entire episcopate of the Middle East.

56. In towns, the faithful of the various Churches *sui iuris* often frequent a Catholic Church different from their own, because it is nearest to them or one in which they feel most at ease. Such people are asked to maintain their attachment to their original community, i.e., the one in which they were baptized. At the same time, Christians should see themselves as members of the Catholic Church in the Middle East and not simply as members of a particular Church.

B. The Communion among the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful

57. Communion among the various members of the same Church or Patriarchate is based on the model of communion with the universal Church 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. In an eparchy, the communion of the clergy, consecrated persons and the laity is centred around the bishop. Prayer, the Eucharistic Liturgy and listening to the Word of God are moments which unify the Church¹³ and make her recall what is essential, namely the Gospel. The bishop has the responsibility to see that everything proceeds in harmony.

58. The ministers of Christ, consecrated men and women, and all who seek to follow him more closely have a serious spiritual and moral responsibility in the community. They are to be models and examples for others. The community expects them concretely to live the values of the Gospel in an exemplary fashion. Not surprisingly, many of the faithful expect of them a greater simplicity of life, a real detachment from money and worldly goods, a radiating practice of chastity and a transparent moral

¹³ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 9.

purity. This Synod would like to 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 remedied.

59. We need to rediscover the model of the primitive Christian community: *“Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold”* (Acts 4:32-34).

These early Christians constituted a real community where members felt connected with each other not simply in prayer but in life’s daily activities. Such communities, which often go beyond parish structures, are needed in our Churches.

60. The Synod should encourage the faithful to exercise more fully their role as baptised persons by participating in pastoral initiatives, particularly those in society, in communion with the Pastors of the Church. The clergy are asked to respect and even encourage this participation of the faithful.

61. International apostolic associations and movements must always adapt themselves to the mentality and approach to life which the tradition of the welcoming Church and country have to offer. Some responses suggest that these associations as well as religious congregations of Western origin integrate themselves into the Eastern tradition and be nourished by the spirituality of the East. They should always strive to work in communion with the local bishop and deepen their knowledge of the traditions, culture and, above all, the language of the country where they live or work.

III. CHRISTIAN WITNESS

A. Witnessing in the Church: Catechesis

1. A Catechesis for Our Times, by Properly Prepared Members of the Faithful

62. Being Christians means bearing witness to Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, and also to his abiding presence, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of the faithful in the Church and the world. Catholics in the Middle East “are invited by Christ himself. *He is the hope [which] does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us*’ (Rm 5:5). Thus, renewed by God, the faithful of Christ, will become for all their brothers and sisters witnesses of his love.”¹⁴ This testimony is transmitted to others through works and catechesis, above all, mystagogical catechesis.

Catechesis is meant to make the faith known and lived. Young people and adults, each individual and entire communities of believers should be properly catechised. In the case of the young, they can themselves be catechists to other young people. However, in this regard, they require a specific preparation, because of the many difficulties existent in fulfilling this particular activity in formation. Catechetical activity is also the task of parents, who ought to be prepared to assume this responsibility in the family as well as parishes. Outside the family, the principal places of catechetical formation are schools, apostolic movements and small Christian communities, which can provide a strong support in teaching the faith.

63. Many responses have highlighted the importance of catechesis in knowing and transmitting the faith. Catechesis for young people has the specific aim of showing them the need for a spiritual director, who shares initiatives for their spiritual formation and concrete Christian living, helps them overcome obstacles and a distrust which comes from living with people of different human and religious formation and cultivates in them a sound coherence between catechism and practice, in order to eliminate the separation between the truth believed and the life lived. In view of an efficacious catechesis, which takes into account the real problems and actual challenges facing the young, methods and occasions for this type of

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *New Hope for Lebanon* (10 May 1997), 1: AAS 89 (1997) 313.

formative activity need to be established in parishes, cultural institutes, universities and Catholic schools.

64. Naturally, no activity is possible without qualified persons to transmit the faith. Consequently, such people should acquire a sufficient knowledge of theology and spirituality proper to the Church to which they belong. It is equally important to recall that a catechesis limited solely to explaining the truth will not bear the desired fruits, unless it is confirmed through a life of witness. Before anything else, the catechist is a witness of the Gospel.

2. Catechetical Methods

65. An efficacious catechetical teaching cannot be limited today to the oral transmission of theological or moral teaching. Memorization can always be of positive assistance as well as teaching through images, especially in these times, when visual imagery is given priority to other forms of transmitting the truth. Nevertheless, the assistance provided by the written word has no substitute. Therefore, such texts are particularly indispensable in schools of catechism and religious instruction. Clearly, liturgical texts and also the language of icons is of great importance in catechesis.

66. A further method of teaching and understanding the faith is dialogue and discussion in small groups, in which each person, spontaneously and without external pressure, can directly and easily speak as well as listen. Various initiatives and associations are being pursued to assist further the teaching of the faith to young people, e.g., the scouting movement or groups formed for liturgical, musical or other purposes. Sometimes, however, the teaching activity in these groups is lacking, a situation which further emphasizes that the proper place for teaching the faith are centres for formation. Consequently, these centres should be established where they do not already exist. In this way, they can properly assist in forming and strengthening the knowledge of the faith in young people and adults.

67. Finally, the new means of communication – the internet (especially for young people), radio and TV – are very effective tools in witnessing to the Gospel. Our Churches must urge young people to become skilled in these fields and become involved in this work. "The Voice of Charity" (*Sawt al-Mahabba*) and especially *TéléLumière/Noursat* are popular throughout the region, especially where the Christian media are not permitted.

68. Since young people live in places characterised by all kinds of conflicts, they are to be catechised, strengthened in their faith and enlightened by the commandment of love, so that they can make a positive contribution. What does it mean to love one's enemy? How is this to be lived? How can one overcome evil with good? Christians need to be encouraged to participate in public life with the enlightening, powerful and gentle character of their faith.

69. Given the many divisions arising from religion, family or political clans, young people have to be trained to go beyond these bounds and internal hostilities to see the face of God in every person, so as to work together and build an all-inclusive, shared civic order. This must be the emphasis in our catechesis, especially in our Catholic schools, which are preparing young people to build a future based not on conflicts and instability but on collaboration and peace.

B. A Renewed Liturgy Faithful to Tradition

70. The Second Vatican Council declares that the liturgy “is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.”¹⁵ In a particular way, the central character which all Eastern Churches give to the Divine Liturgy is expressed, among other things, in an ample, rich variety of rites. Research into the harmony of rites, strongly recommended by the Second Vatican Council,¹⁶ can draw attention to this topic, which is of prime importance in the Christian East. Precisely because the liturgy is so strongly rooted in Eastern culture, the Divine Liturgy today is capable of not only keeping alive the faith of believers but also attracting the interest of those who have drifted from the faith or those who do not believe.

71. 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. Other responses mention specific cases where renewal is being attempted through the establishment of a commission of specialists for the reform of the liturgy.

¹⁵ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Constitution on the Divine Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 34.

72. The most significant aspect of the advances which have taken place in liturgical renewal thus far is the translation of liturgical texts and devotional prayers into the vernacular – principally in Arab – so that the people might better participate in the celebration of the mysteries of the faith. In this regard, while few prefer to maintain the original language, the overwhelming majority voiced the idea of adding the vernacular to the original language.

73. The responses also mention the necessity of subsequently undertaking the work of adapting liturgical texts for use at celebrations with young people and children. This would be a matter of simplifying words and expressions and suitably adapting them to the mentality and imagery associated with these groups of the Church's faithful. At the same time, this work would not simply translate ancient texts but use them as an inspiration in reformulating texts which would be faithful to the cultural patrimony handed down from ages past as well as an updated outlook on the contemporary world. As indicated in some responses, this task should be done by an interdisciplinary group comprised of liturgists, theologians, sociologists, pastors and lay people, who are engaged in liturgical programs.

74. Suggestions favouring liturgical renewal also include the area of popular piety. In fact, some responses mention that devotional prayers should be enriched with theological and biblical texts from both the Old and New Testaments. In this regard, the efforts and experiences which have borne fruit in the Latin Church could be of great assistance.

75. Finally, any possible liturgical reform should take the ecumenical aspect into account. Various responses, referring to the *Lineamenta*,¹⁷ mention that the liturgy could become a fruitful place of regular collaboration between Catholics and Orthodox. In particular, on the delicate question of *communicatio in sacris*, some responses suggest the formation of a commission made up of Catholics and Orthodox to seek a solution, all the while respecting the canonical legislation now in force.¹⁸

¹⁷ Cf. SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Lineamenta*, 60.

¹⁸ Cf. *The Code of Canon Law*, can. 844; *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 671.

C. Ecumenism

76. The prayer for unity, initiated by Jesus himself (cf. *Jn 17*), needs to be continued by the Lord's disciples in our times. Restoring unity is based on the Lord's teaching. "Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature."¹⁹ Indeed, a strong bond exists between the apostolic mission and ecumenism: "*that they may all be one, ... that the world may believe...*" (*Jn 17:21*). Furthermore, all Churches have the Bible in common as well as the first two councils, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the first millennium of Christianity (with the Byzantines), the sacraments and the veneration of Saints, especially the Virgin Mary as *Theotokos*, "Mother of God".

77. Relations with Christians of other Churches and ecclesial communities is based on Baptism which establishes an objective bond of communion and unity and makes certain acts possible and necessary, such as participation in common prayer, ecumenical formation in various institutions, various kinds of seminars, aids in the study of the Bible and the Church Fathers and solidarity with the brethren who are experiencing difficult situations, such as those in Iraq and the Holy Land. Of primary concern is to ensure that religious education expressly treats the subject of ecumenism so that everyone will agree on not publishing anything which might offend or upset other confessions.

78. 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."²⁰

This dialogue takes place at various levels. On the official level, the Holy See has taken initiatives with all Churches in the Middle East in collaboration with the Catholic Churches. On the unofficial level, the Foundation *Pro Oriente* 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.

¹⁹ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, 1.

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), 33: *AAS* 87 (1995) 941.

This group is also considering the role of the Bishop of Rome in the visible unity of Christians. Pope John Paul II, in the Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*,²¹ voiced the responsibility of seeking to “find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission” and keeping in mind the dual Latin and Eastern canonical tradition, would nonetheless be “open to a new situation”²². This entails singling out authentic approaches concerning the respective traditions, the relations between the two legislative bodies and the consequent concrete measures to be taken. Ecumenical involvement, “far from being the responsibility of the Apostolic See alone, is also the duty of each local or particular Church.”²³

79. In this regard, the following appropriate and necessary measures are to be taken: prayer, the pursuit of holiness, conversion and an exchange of gifts according to the teaching of Pope John Paul II in a relationship of reciprocity, guaranteed by a spirit of friendship, mutual charity, respect, solidarity and social justice. Such efforts are fostered and assimilated through teaching and the effective use of the media, but primarily through the exercise of charity in material goods, healthcare and the most-inclusive assistance possible.²⁴

80. 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.

81. This work of healing must also be undertaken by the faithful of other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities. They should be encouraged to participate in the special experiences of other Churches, such as moments

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 88-96, especially 93, 95: *AAS* 87 (1995) 973-978.

²² *Ibid.*, 95: *AAS* 87 (1995) 978.

²³ *Ibid.*, 31: *AAS* 87 (1995) 940.

²⁴ Cf. THE CODE OF CANONS OF THE EASTERN CHURCHES, canons 902-908.

of suffering and celebration, wishing for their own Church what we also wish for ours. The faithful can take advantage of the celebration of the sacraments of confession, the Eucharist and the anointing of the sick in a Church different from their own, in those cases foreseen in the canons.²⁵

82. In the area of ministry, the following are sources of edification in the work of ecumenism: collaboration among the heads of the diverse Churches, sharing the same apostolic work, joint-meetings of prayer for pastors, seminarians, movements, institutes and consecrated persons as well as concrete efforts to share pastoral programmes on mixed marriages and coordinate charitable activity. Likewise, the Council of Churches of the Middle East provides support in the activity of dialogue which is done in charity and humility, even in Catholic schools. Two particularly significant results in ecumenical dialogue are: an agreed upon date to celebrate certain Christian feasts (Christmas and Easter) and the common management of the Sites in the Holy Land. The shared management in love and mutual respect of the Holy Places of Christianity in the Holy Land by the two Orthodox Churches responsible for these places together with the Guardian of the Holy Land, is a powerful witness for all Churches in the region and the Churches throughout the world.

83. Furthermore, pursuing mutual communion among Christians also includes the duty to better know the situation of other Christians and the significance of their presence in the Middle East through attentively listening to one another and creatively utilising differences. Instruments which foster the spirit of dialogue and reveal a profound commitment to ecumenism are: a theological collaboration which takes the various ecclesial traditions into account, cooperation in the study of the Bible and catechesis and the development of an ecumenical culture through courses, congresses, preaching and the teaching of Church history from an ecumenical perspective.

Finally, although the Jewish civil media shows a certain openness towards Christian topics, Hebrew-language programmes are scarcely available in the Christian media. Consequently, Hebrew-speaking Christians need to be formed to become involved in such programming in the media. Likewise, due attention should also be given to a similar formation of Arab-speaking Christian journalists.

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, can. 671; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (25 March 1993), 102-107: AAS 85 (1993) 1082-1083.

84. Relations with our non-Catholic, Christian brothers and sisters can also improve through locally accessible activity, such as participation in Church confraternities which accept members regardless of their confessional membership. While openly rejecting a proselytism which employs means not in keeping with the Gospel, repeated attention should be given to the *healing of memories* which is more than ever necessary so all Christians can fix their gaze on the future and in the heavens, in short, on the Lord who draws all to himself (cf. *Jn* 12:32).

D. Relations with Judaism

1. Vatican II: The Theological Basis for Relations with Judaism

85. The subject of the relations of the Catholic Church with Judaism, whose theological basis is found in the Second Vatican Council, must be part of the discussion at the synodal assembly. The Church's relations with non-Christian religions are specifically treated in the Declaration *Nostra aetate*, a major portion of which is dedicated to the People of Abraham's Stock. This important document reassesses the greatness of the shared spiritual patrimony, uniting Christians and Jews, and promotes mutual understanding and respect, through biblical and theological studies as well as fraternal dialogue.²⁶

86. The spirit of the aforementioned conciliar declaration, however, must be taken in the wider context provided by two dogmatic constitutions from the same Council, namely, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* and The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*. In the first document, the treatment of various images of the Church in the New Testament is preceded by their prefigurements in the Old Testament²⁷ and the Church as The People of God is presented as that of the New Covenant in continuity with the People of the Old Testament.²⁸ Above all, however, the Church, in listing the peoples related to the People of God, clearly displays her benevolence and good will in her relations with the Jews, by giving "first place (to) that people to whom the testament and

²⁶ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions *Nostra aetate*, 4.

²⁷ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 6.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 9.

the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh.”²⁹

87. The second document, *Dei Verbum*, also refers to the Old Testament as a preparation for the Gospel³⁰ and an integral part of the history of salvation,³¹ thereby showing the importance for the Church of the Jewish people as the bearers of the first covenant. This brief theological exposition indicates how essential for the Church is the dialogue with her “*elder brothers*”, which at times is not without its obstacles.

2. The Present-Day Magisterium of the Church

88. These theological-pastoral principles serve as the basis for the various initiatives towards dialogue which the Church has made in recent times. Among these are: the establishment in Jerusalem of the Interreligious Council of Religious Institutions and the Latin Patriarchate’s Commission for Dialogue with the Jews, and the dialogue at the level of the Holy See with the Grand Rabbinate of Israel.³² The document of the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism³³ is also a clear sign of the Church’s position in relation to the Jewish People.

89. Christian-Jewish relations are affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this regard, the Holy Father, during his Apostolic Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, clearly expressed the position of the Holy See in two welcoming ceremonies. In Bethlehem, 13 May 2009, he said: “Mr President, the Holy See supports the right of your people to a sovereign Palestinian homeland in the land of your forefathers, secure and at peace

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 16.

³⁰ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 3.

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 14.

³² Cf. SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Lineamenta*, 61.

³³ Cf. COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH JUDAISM, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (16 March 1998): *L’Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 18 March 1998, p. 6,7.

with its neighbours, within internationally recognized borders”³⁴, and in his discourse at Ben-Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, 11 May 2009, he expressed the wish that “both peoples may live in peace in a homeland of their own, within secure and internationally recognized borders.”³⁵

3. The Desire and Difficulty of Dialogue with Judaism

90. The responses to the *Lineamenta*, which echo the above sentiments, display certain subtleties on the subject of the Church’s relations with Judaism, arising from a diversity of cultural, geographic and social factors. In this regard, while clearly rejecting anti-Semitism, oftentimes expressed in a variety of ways, they also state that everywhere in the Church in the Middle East the religious sentiment in anti-Judaism has been overcome, at least in theory, by the pastoral guidelines of the Second Vatican Council. Instead, the actual animosity between Arabs and Jews seem to be political in character, due to the situation of conflict and the resulting political hostility. At the same time, widespread opinion seems to indicate that anti-Zionism is more a political position and, consequently, to be considered foreign to every ecclesial discourse. In all these situations, 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.

91. Various responses mention pastoral initiatives to open dialogue with Judaism. Though limited to the local level and small groups, these initiatives reveal nonetheless a conscious effort towards dialogue on the part of the faithful and their Pastors. In this regard, a primary place is given to prayer in common, principally the psalms, and the reading and meditation on biblical texts. Prayer opens people’s hearts and permits petitioning the Holy Spirit for the gifts of peace, mutual respect, reconciliation and mutual pardon and assistance in building good interreligious relations.

³⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Discourse at the Welcoming Ceremonies in Bethlehem* (13 May 2009), *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land: L’Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 20 May 2009, p. 11.

³⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Discourse at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv* (11 May 2009), *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land: L’Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 20 May 2009, p. 3.

92. Some responses indicate, however, that this initiative can pose problems, because, as noted, certain biblical verses can be subject to interpretation according to a “culture of violence”. Nevertheless, other responses clearly state that reading the Old Testament necessarily leads to a better knowledge and appreciation of the Jewish religion. In this regard, two important documents from the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the reading of Sacred Scripture should not be overlooked, namely, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (15 April 1993) and *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (24 May 2001).³⁶

93. The desire and intention to examine thoroughly the traditions of Judaism through serious historical and theological study, especially on the university level in theological faculties, deserves commendation. Such studies, in the first place, could also lead to a more accurate knowledge of various Eastern ecclesiastical traditions in relation to the history of Jewish traditions. Secondly, the aforementioned studies and research could also contribute to a better knowledge of the New Testament.

94. Every Jewish reality today can provide opportunities for collaboration. For this reason, the Patriarchal Vicariate for Hebrew-speaking Christians is of great assistance. Some responses speak of the importance of the Patriarchal Vicariate in Jerusalem as well as the Catholic Eastern Churches *sui iuris*. Others voice the desire to live together peacefully in society, thereby permitting a collaborative effort in working towards peace in the region.

E. Relations with Muslims

95. The Catholic Church’s relations with Muslims also have a foundation in the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council’s *Nostra aetate* which, among other things, states: “The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men.”³⁷ This understanding has served as the basis for the numerous

³⁶ Cf. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (April 15, 1993): *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, Vatican City, 1993; *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (May 24, 2001): *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, Vatican City, 2001.

³⁷ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions *Nostra aetate*, 3.

meetings among the representatives of the two religions at diverse levels which have taken place over the years, since the Second Vatican Council. His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, at the beginning of his pontificate, reinforced the importance to continue these relations. In his meeting with representatives of various Muslim communities in Germany, the Holy Father said: “Interreligious and intercultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is in fact a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.”³⁸ In this regard, two gestures of Pope Benedict XVI bear a certain significance: his visits to the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey, 20 November 2006 and the Al-Husseini Bin Talai Mosque, in Amman, Jordan, on 11 May 2009.

The responses make reference to the importance of Catholic-Muslim dialogue promoted by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and voice the desire that this dialogue be increasingly widened to include all classes of the Muslim faithful.

96. Several principles guide relations between Christians and Muslims. On the one hand, we are citizens of the same country and homeland, sharing the same language and culture, not to mention the same fortunes and misfortunes of our countries. On the other, Christians are members of the society in which they live, and work on its behalf as witnesses of Christ and the Gospel. During his Apostolic Visit to the Holy Land, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, added another principle: “Notwithstanding our diverse origins, we have common roots [...] Islam too was born in a world where both Judaism and the various branches of Christianity: Judeo-Christianity, Antiochene Christianity, and Byzantine Christianity were all present, and all these circumstances are reflected in the Koranic tradition, with the result that we have much in common in terms of our origins and our faith in the one God. So it is important on the one hand to have bilateral dialogues – with the Jews and with Islam – and then also trilateral dialogue.”³⁹ The rich patrimony of Christian-Arab literature also has particular importance in the Church’s dialogue with Muslims.

³⁸ BENEDICT XVI, *Discourse during a Meeting with Representatives of Various Muslim Communities* (20 August 2005), Cologne, Germany: *L’Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 24 August 2005, p. 9.

³⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Interview during the Flight to the Holy Land* (8 May 2009), Pilgrimage to the Holy Land: *L’Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 13 May 2009, p. 2.

Oftentimes, relations between Christians and Muslims are difficult, principally because Muslims makes 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.

97. Christians are called upon to involve themselves, in ever more authentic ways, in the societies in which they live. They should avoid isolating themselves in ghettos and a defensive and reclusive attitude which is sometimes seen in minority groups. Many believers emphasise that Christians and Muslims must work together to promote social justice, peace and freedom and to defend human rights and the values of life and family.

98. Consequently, we must prepare for the future by educating the younger generations 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. Young people must also undertake activities in common – Muslims and Christians together – which serve society and lead to establishing true friendship among them. As a result, religion will bring people together and not be a source of division.

99. The dialogue of “*truth in charity*” (Ep 4:15) does not mean adopting another’s faith but seeking a mutual understanding of viewpoints, all the while acknowledging that our dogmas are profoundly different. This dialogue in truth leads us to a mutual understanding and creates an open space of freedom and respect. The same dialogue in truth impels us to not only appreciate all that is positive in Muslim teachings and morality, especially their firm belief in God, but also respect for their convictions.

F. Witnessing in Society

100. On the subject of the Christian’s contribution in society, everyone in Middle Eastern countries today – Christians, Jews, Muslims and Druz alike – faces two major issues. In light of conflicts and other military operations, peace and violence are particularly relevant challenges. To talk of peace and work for peace, while war and violence grow, is a challenge. The solution to conflicts is in the hands of those who promote war. Violence may be in the hands of the strong, but it is also in the hands of the weak,

who, in an attempt to free themselves, equally risk reverting to easily accessible violent measures. Various Middle Eastern countries are enduring an unending war, and the whole region, for generations, is directly suffering as a result. This situation is exploited by the most radical elements in global terrorism.

101. Too often, people in Middle Eastern countries identify Christianity with the West. Although the West has Christian roots and a Christian tradition, its governments today are clearly secular, and its politics, in itself, is not based on the Christian faith. In fact, politics oftentimes holds positions directly opposed to it. Yet the Muslim world's reluctance to make the distinction between politics and religion is bringing great harm to the Church in the Middle East, because, realistically speaking, Muslim public opinion associates the Church with whatever political choices are made by states in the West. Consequently, a discussion on the meaning of the secular and the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities, as specified by the Second Vatican Council,⁴⁰ is particularly important.

102. In these circumstances, the Christian's contribution consists in not only promoting and witnessing to Gospel values, but also speaking the word of truth (*qawl al-haqq*) to the strong who oppress or follow political activity which runs contrary to the interests of the country, and to those who respond to oppression with violence. Promoting and working for peace is realistic. Although efforts on behalf of peace can be rebuffed, they also have the possibility of being accepted, considering that the path to violence, taken by both the strong and the weak, has led in the Middle East to nothing but failure and a general stalemate. The Christian's contribution, though requiring great courage, is nonetheless indispensable.

1. The Ambiguity of "Modernity"

103. A so-called "modernity" is increasingly penetrating society by such means as access to the media from the world over. TV channels and the internet have introduced not only new values in civil society and the lives of Christians, but also a loss of values, thereby making it an ambiguous reality.

⁴⁰ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 36.

On the one hand, the phenomenon has a certain attraction, because of the prospects of material well-being and the end to oppressing cultural or spiritual traditions. At the same time, “modernity” is the struggle for justice and equality, the defence of the rights of weakest, equal status among men and women as well as believers and non-believers and the recognition of human rights, all of which are values demonstrating the immense progress made by humanity.

104. On the other hand, “modernity” to most Muslim believers is perceived to be atheistic and immoral and a cultural invasion, threatening them and upsetting their value-system. Many do not know how to react to this phenomenon, while some fight against it with every fibre of their being. “Modernity” has the power of attracting and repelling at one and the same time. The Church’s role in schools and the media is to form persons who can distinguish the good from the bad in this area, in order to retain only what is the good.

105. “Modernity” is also a risk for Christians. Christian communities are likewise threatened by a lack of a sense of God, atheism, materialism and especially, relativism and an attitude of indifference. Consequently, God needs to be recalled and restored to his proper place in one’s personal life and the life of society, with Christians increasingly dedicating themselves to prayer, as witnesses of the Holy Spirit who builds up and unites. The risks associated with “modernity”, like extremism, can easily destroy Christian families, communities and entire Churches.

2. Muslims and Christians Must Pursue a Common Path Together

106. From this vantage point, Muslims and Christians ought to walk a common path together. As Christians, we belong to the Middle East; we are identified with it; and we are an essential part of it. As citizens, we share the responsibility of working to build up and restore. Furthermore, this is our 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 building a more just, sound and humane society.

107. In doing so, we follow in the footsteps of generations of Christians who have preceded us. Their contribution in the past, in the areas of education and culture and works to benefit society, has been outstanding. They have played an essential role in the cultural, economic and political life of their countries and have been pioneers in the rebirth of the Arab nation.

108. Today, the participation of Christians in political life is more limited, primarily because their number has been reduced. Nevertheless, where the Church is present, the role of Christians in society is recognized and generally appreciated, thanks to the many ecclesial and religious institutions. Christian lay people are called upon to become increasingly involved in the societies in which they live.

109. States with a Muslim majority, with the exception of Turkey, do not have a secular character. Instead, Islam is generally the religion of the State and the principal source of legislation, inspired by the *sharia*. In some cases, particular statutes exist for the Christian community concerning personal prerogatives (family and inheritance in some countries), whose ecclesiastical tribunals are recognised and their decisions applied. The Constitutions of every country affirm the equality of all citizens before the State. Religious education is obligatory in private and public schools, but not always guaranteed to Christians.

110. In some countries, the State is Islamic and *sharia* is applied in not only private life but also society, even for non-Muslims, with the consequent deprivation of human rights. Islamic States generally do not recognise religious freedom and freedom of conscience, instead they acknowledge freedom of worship, which excludes the freedom to preach a religion different from Islam, much less embrace a religion other than Islam. Furthermore, with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, attacks against Christians are increasing almost everywhere.

G. The Specific and Unique Contribution of Christians

111. Christians have the unique and specific contribution of enriching with Gospel values the society in which they live. They are witnesses of Christ and these new values which Christ has brought to humanity. Consequently, the Church's catechesis ought to form, at one and the same time, believers and citizens, who work in the various sectors of society. A political commitment lacking Gospel values is a counter-witness and brings more harms than good. At certain times, Gospel values, especially concerning human rights, coincide with those of Muslims, thereby providing the opportunity of joining each other in promoting them.

112. Various tensions in the Middle East are an offshoot of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Christians have a special contribution to make in the area of justice and peace by courageously denouncing violence no matter

what its origin, and suggest solutions which can only be attained through dialogue.

113. Furthermore, while, on the one hand, this work demands justice for the oppressed, it necessitates, on the other, the message of reconciliation based on mutual forgiveness. Through the power of the Holy Spirit pardon can be both asked and given. This is the only path to creating a new humanity. Those having political power also have need of this spiritual approach which Christian humility and self-sacrifice can bring them. Permitting the Spirit to penetrate the hearts of men and women who suffer from conflicts in our region is the specific contribution of Christians and the best service they can render society.

114. Since situations in the countries of the Middle East vary greatly, applications vary also. First of all, the public in general and Christians themselves need to learn attentively to consider the contribution which they can bring to the different sectors of life as well as the civil and political institutions, because Christians know that their task is to take to heart the common good and problems everyone share, e.g., poverty, education and the struggle against violence and terrorism. Their plans are on behalf of peace, harmonious living and creating relations and a rapport between individuals and peoples. In fact, the task of Christians is to teach and call people to openness and not fanaticism and to utilise peaceful means even to insist that the rights of Christians be acknowledged by civil authorities.

115. The most important Christian witness in the social field is the free-gift of love towards others, manifested in social service in schools, hospitals, clinics, and academic institutions by welcoming everyone and proclaiming our love for all for the sake of a better world. The Christian's charitable activity towards all without distinction, to the poorest of the poor and those pushed to the periphery of society, represents the clearest way of spreading the Christian message. Oftentimes, only Church institutions guarantee these services.

116. Evangelisation in a Muslim society can only be achieved through the life of Christian communities, a life which is ensured through timely, external intervention. In any case, the most dutiful task for Christians is to live their faith in deeds. Living the truth and proclaiming it with charity and courage demands a real commitment. The most effective witness is allowing actions to speak louder than words, living Christianity faithfully and showing solidarity in all Christian institutions, thereby rendering a striking testimony of what we as Christians are and live.

117. We Christians should not deal superficially but go to the depths of matters to make credible everything which took place in the Holy Land through the life of Christ and his apostles, who courageously lived a mature faith, even at the cost of sacrifice. Prayer, harmony within the Church, the promotion of unity among Christians, life according to the spirit of the Gospel, the interior life and participation at the liturgy are the true and proper acts of a committed, authentic witness, for which everyone must be prepared, especially the young, by employing methods adapted to their age and culture.

CONCLUSION
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?

118. Heartfelt thanks is due to the representatives of the particular Churches in the Middle East who, despite the limited time at their disposal, have provided very pertinent information in their responses to the *Questions* in the *Lineamenta* which was used in drafting this *Instrumentum laboris*. Their responses show a great concern for the present difficulties they are facing, yet, at the same time, full of filial trust in Divine Providence, they express a hope, founded on the Christian faith, for a better future.

History has made us a little flock. However, through what we do, we can still become a presence which has great value. 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. This will be a major factor in our presence and our witnessing in our countries.

119. Despite the fact that both Pastors and the faithful might oftentimes be tempted to discouragement, we must remember that we are disciples of the Risen Christ, who conquered sin and death. We have a future! We must firmly grasp it. Much will depend on the way we collaborate with people of good will in promoting the common good of the societies in which we live. Today, the Lord Jesus can again say to Christians in the Middle East: "*Do not be afraid, little flock!*" (Lk 12:32). 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!

B. Hope

120. For over 2000 years, the hope which was born in the Holy Land has sustained peoples and individuals in trying times the world over. In the face of difficulties and challenges, that hope remains an inexhaustible source of

faith, love and joy for the witnesses of the Risen Lord who is ever-present within the community of his disciples.

121. Hope means, however, trusting in God and his Divine Providence, who watches over and guides the course of all human history, acting in union with God, as his "co-workers" (*1 Cor 3:9*), and doing whatever is humanly possible to contribute to the developments now taking place, under God's grace, in every aspect of public life in our societies, especially all that touches on human rights, human dignity and religious freedom. In this way, succeeding generations can develop a greater confidence in the future of their region.

122. Abandoning ourselves to God's Providence also means a deeper communion on our part, greater detachment and better freeing ourselves from the thorns which stifle the Word of God⁴¹ and his grace in us. As St. Paul recommends: "*Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer*" (*Rm 12:10-12*). And Christ says to us: "*If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you*" (*Mt 17:20*; cf. *Mt 21:21*).

123. This is the kind of believers needed in our Churches, leaders, priests and faithful alike, believers who are witnesses and are aware that faithfully witnessing to Christ can lead to persecution. May the Virgin Mary, who was present with the apostles at Pentecost, help us to be men and women ready to receive the Spirit and to act with his power! May the Churches in the Middle East continue in our times to respond to the words voiced by the Mother of Jesus at Cana in Galilee: «*Do whatever he tells you*» (*Jn 2:5*).

⁴¹ Cf. *The Parable of the Sower and the Seed*, for example, in *Mt 13:7* and parallel Gospel texts.

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