

# LIGHT OF THE EAST

**"GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS."**

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, YOUNGSTOWN-WARREN OHIO CHAPTER  
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## **FROM THE EDITOR...**

**Our next regular chapter meeting will be 7 P.M. Tuesday March 8 at St. Charles Catholic Church 7345 Westview Dr. in Boardman. Our speaker will be Father Shawn Conoboy, Parochial Vicar at St. Charles. He will speak on the topic: "A Latin Priest's Experience of the Eastern Church."**

**Also, reserve the date Thursday April 7 when we will have a talk by chapter member Father Thomas Hopko. He will speak to us at St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Campbell.**

**PLEASE PAY 2011 DUES. SEND \$20 (\$25 FAMILY) TO ADDRESS IN MASTHEAD. THOSE LISTED HAVE PAID: EOCA, B. & C BERARDI, GALL, ROHAN, NAKLEY, WITMER, SCALISE, SPINOSA, S. KOLITSOS, GRAFF, PETRONY, RENDULIC, MANNING, SLEEVE, STANISLAW, SHAGLA, REVETTI, GAGE, CARCHEDI, MCCARTHY, MATTIUSI, BILLCHECK.**

## **MONASTERY SOLD**

Friends and members of our chapter the Benedictine Sisters of the Byzantine Church, Queen of Heaven Monastery have sold the monastery and property to the Orthodox Coptic Church which will use it as a convent for Orthodox Coptic nuns. The Byzantine sisters will occupy several apartments in the Infant of Prague Manor next to the parish church in Warren. Their new address is: Benedictine Sisters of the Byzantine Church, Queen of Heaven Monastery, 169 Kenmore NE #305, Warren, OH 44483. Phone: 330-856-1813 Fax: 330-856-9528

## **Patriarch of the West: Centre for Eastern Christianity**

*Posted by Society of St John Chrysostom UK*

The first Joint Theology Seminary of the new Centre for Eastern Christianity and Heythrop College will take place on the afternoon of 26th January 2011. In

connection with the current concern of the international Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, the focus will be on the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome and the role of the papacy in the universal Church. Part of the context is the removal by Pope Benedict XVI of the title, "Patriarch of the West". To some on the Catholic side of the dialogue, the title was irrelevant, referring to long historic conditions and thus defunct. Indeed, it has been claimed that it thus stood in the way of a genuine dialogue towards reunion in the conditions of the present. But to others and to many Orthodox, it appeared to disturb the arrangements that obtained before schism set in, especially the pentarchy of the historic patriarchates, and thus made it more difficult to retrace steps in the search for lost unity. The Seminar will look at all these issues as they affect - and are affected by - respective canonical principles and the sense of the Church's identity we have as Catholics and Orthodox.

**Canon Law and the Politics of Ecclesial Identity:  
The Patriarch of the West:  
contemporary Catholic & Orthodox perspectives**

*Dr Peter Petkoff*

Wednesday 26 January 2011, 4.30pm -6.00pm  
The Hopkins Room  
Heythrop College, University of London, Kensington  
Square, London W8 5HN.

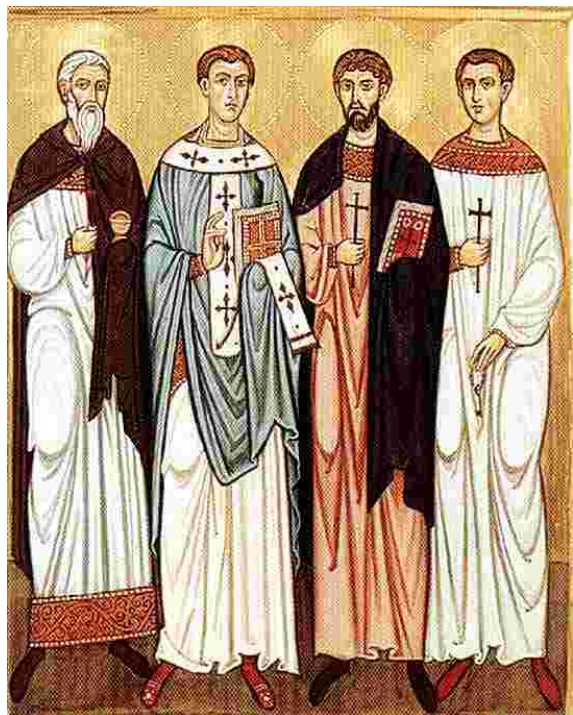
Out of interest, here are two relevant speeches made by Patriarch Gregorios of Antioch the Melkite Greek Catholics at the October 2010 Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church to address the concerns of the Churches of the Middle East:

- "We ought to have a Pope"
- Ecclesiology and Ecumenism

**\*The article above is edited from the website of the SSJC in the UK. View here: <http://www.orientalelumen.org.uk/>**

## ECUMENISM OF THE SAINTS

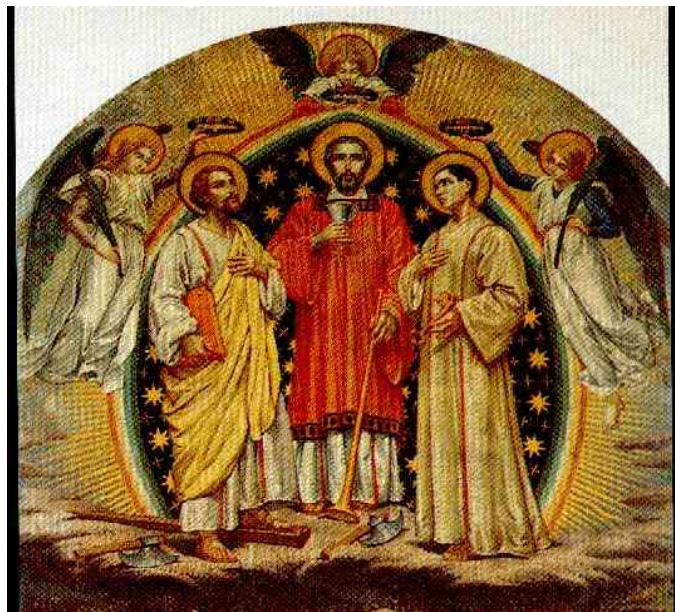
Edited from various sources by Vito R. Carchedi



Perhaps one of the channels that will carry us to unity will be the examples of our saints. Their veneration can be a bridge that vitally unites the Churches of East and West by promoting the exchange of spiritual gifts. Among these are the little known martyrs Sisinnius, Martyrius and Alexander.

At dawn of the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 397 in a valley of Trent in northern Italy, today called Val di Non, the three men became martyrs. Two of them, the deacon Sissinius and the reader Martyrius, were killed and burned. The third, the porter Alexander, was tied to a cart and pulled along the ground for a long way before, still alive, he was thrown into the flames where the bodies of his companions had burnt. Saint Vigilus, bishop of Trent, in a letter to Saint John Chrysostom recounted the martyrdom of the three saints; “The bodies of the first two having been thrown into the fire, Alexander remained standing, wounded, ready to give new witness to his faith...but the ardor of his faith drove back the flames...and he was gathered up to heaven.” The three martyrs were monks originally from the church of Cappadocia, traditionally a land of saints and missionaries, and they were the first evangelizers of the Val di Non. Leaving their homeland and crossing Anatolia, Sissinio,

Martyrius, and Alexander reached Milan. There they were welcomed by Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and later sent to Trent to assist the young Bishop Vigilus who in turn sent them to exercise their apostolate in Anaunia (Val di Non). Vigilus, also destined to become a saint, in a letter to Saint Simplician wrote, “The lives of the three martyrs were an extraordinary testimony to their apostolic task of evangelization.” In spite of opposition from the pagans the three made many converts and Sissinius built a church. They were attacked in the church when the pagans tried to get them to participate in a polytheistic festival.



Vigilius sent their remains to John Chrysostom in Constantinople, to Simplician, Ambrose’s successor in Milan. Milan would later give some of those relics back to Sanzeno (the village where they were martyred).

{Sources: Messagero di sant’ Antonio. 1999. and Wikipedia, Vigilus of Trent.}

### PRAYER OF SOUFANIEH

UNITY OF HEARTS,

UNITY OF CHRISTIANS,

UNITY OF THE FEAST OF EASTER!



## Catholic-Orthodox relations: Ukrainian archbishop has important role

By Cindy Wooden  
[Catholic News Service](#)

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The election of a new archbishop for a church with 6.5 million Catholics could hold the key to determining if or when Pope Benedict XVI may meet Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow. Vatican officials are watching the Ukrainian Catholic Church's leadership with keen interest, but without the degree of anxiety for its ecumenical implications that would have been present even five years ago.

Pope Benedict XVI accepted the resignation of Cardinal Lubomyr Husar of Kiev-Halych, head of the Ukrainian church, Feb. 10, about two weeks before his 78th birthday. The cardinal, who as major archbishop of the Eastern Catholic church could have served for life, is almost blind and asked to retire.

The 45 Ukrainian Catholic bishops from Ukraine and other countries of Europe, North and South America and Australia must meet within two months to elect a successor; Pope Benedict must assent to the election before the new major archbishop can be installed. The Ukrainian Catholic Church is the largest of the Eastern churches in full communion with Rome, and it is pivotal in ecumenical relations.

When Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian Catholic Church was forcibly united with the Russian Orthodox Church and became illegal. During 45 years under communist rule, the push for Ukrainian independence and the demand for religious freedom for Ukrainian Catholics often went in hand in hand. The growth of Ukrainian democracy after independence in 1991 occurred at the same time as the church was being rebuilt.

However, the return of religious freedom meant that many Christians who were worshipping as Orthodox



Cardinal Lubomyr Husar of Kiev-Halych, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, celebrates the Divine Liturgy in 2007 at the Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine of the Holy Family in Washington. (CNS/Bob Roller)

decided to return to their Ukrainian Catholic roots. Church properties that had been confiscated by the government or given by the government to the Orthodox were re-claimed by Ukrainian Catholics in situations that occasionally included violence between Catholics and Orthodox.

Basically since 1991 the Russian Orthodox, previously a prime force in search for Catholic-Orthodox unity, have said they could not agree to a meeting between the Russian Orthodox patriarch and the pope until Catholic-Orthodox tensions in Ukraine are resolved.

A Vatican official knowledgeable about the ecumenical situation in Ukraine told [Catholic News Service](#) Feb. 10 that Catholic-Orthodox relations are "rather calm right now, but every once in a while the tensions return."

The real concern is about tensions between different Orthodox churches in Ukraine and how that is being influenced by the year-old government of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, a member of the Orthodox Church in communion with the Russian Orthodox's Moscow patriarchate and a politician who has promised to strengthen political and economic ties with Russia.

His support for the Orthodox in communion with Moscow appears to have fueled long-standing tensions between Orthodox loyal to Moscow and those who support an independent Orthodox Church in Ukraine. "Problems within the Orthodox Church have visibly worsened with the political change" of Yanukovych's election and may prove more dangerous than Catholic-Orthodox tensions, the Vatican official said. "It hurts more when brothers fight than when cousins do," he said.

In the past couple of years, he said, ecumenically "there have been no important steps forward, but no big steps backward either."

Observers credit Cardinal Husar's leadership with being a key reason Catholic-Orthodox tensions have not worsened, and they also praise his efforts to champion the rights and dignity of the Eastern Catholic churches in an overwhelmingly Latin-rite church.

Father Borys Gudziak, rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, said Yanukovych's policies have plunged Ukraine into a "political crisis" and many people were shocked that Cardinal Husar, "the most respected moral authority in the country," would resign at such a time.

"From an ecclesial point of view, it seems the government is moving toward a state-church model like in Russia," Father Gudziak said. Yanukovych has met repeatedly with the leaders of the Orthodox in union with Moscow, and the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church has "expressed concern over the government-assisted transfer of three (CONTINUE NEXT PAGE)

parishes from its jurisdiction" to the jurisdiction of the church united with Moscow, he said. From his point of view, he said, the Ukrainian Catholic Church needs to elect a successor to Cardinal Husar who can articulate compelling reasons for faith, keep Ukrainian Catholics united and promote Christian unity, "a topic to which Cardinal Husar has devoted some of his most eloquent statements and his best energy." "Thanks to Cardinal Husar's work, there is good harmony in the synod and among religious orders, and the number of priests has returned to its pre-World War II total -- 2,500 priests just in Ukraine," he said. Father Gudziak said that no matter who the synod chooses to lead the church, the leader will face the challenge of getting all Ukrainian Catholics to take personal responsibility for the church and its mission rather than giving in to "a syndrome of 'waiting for Moses,' of shirking responsibility and thinking, 'Let the big guy do it.'"

## INTERSECTION OF FAITH AND MUSIC



([CUA](#)) - Acclaimed theologian and musical composer Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev of the Russian Orthodox Church spoke at Catholic University on the intersection of faith and music on Feb. 9 in Caldwell Auditor

## “Light of the East” Conference (Irvine, CA)

Co-sponsored by SSJC-Western Region

February 9, 2011 by [Irenaeus](#) <http://eirenikon.wordpress.com/>

Many thanks to Fr Steven Tschlis, Pastor of St Paul’s Greek Orthodox Church in Irvine, California, for sending [a link to audio files](#) from a recent conference

entitled “*Light of the East: Steps to Common Witness; Steps to Unity*”.

The keynote speakers were Fr Ronald Roberson CSP, Associate Director of Ecumenical Affairs for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Fr Thomas Fitzgerald, Dean of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (Brookline, Mass.). Also in attendance were Gerasimos, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of San Francisco, and Bishop Tod Brown of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange. \*Here is the audio download link to listen to these talks:

<http://stpaulsirvine.org/retreats-seminars.html>

## Catholics, Orthodox in Belarus celebrate Christian unity week

Minsk, Belarus, Jan 30, 2011 / [edited \(CNA\)](#).- Catholic leaders in Belarus celebrated the annual week dedicated to Christian unity by gathering and breaking bread with local heads of Orthodox, Lutheran and other Christian denominations.

From January 18 – 25, Christians around the globe marked the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity, a time when members from various denominations traditionally meet to pray together for unification efforts among the faithful.

In Minsk, the capital of Belarus, Catholic Archbishop Kondrusiewicz and Orthodox Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Sluzk hosted various initiatives, including daily prayer with Belarusians from numerous Christian backgrounds and traditions.

At a joint celebration on Jan. 22, at the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Minsk, Catholics, Orthodox, Eastern Catholics, Lutherans and Christians of other denominations gathered to pray, preach and symbolically share a large loaf of bread.

In a Jan. 20 interview with global charity Aid to the Church in Need, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz remembered the words of Pope John Paul II, who said the churches in East and West were like two separate “lungs” and that “Europe must breathe again with both lungs.”

The archbishop said that not only do all the Christian denominations “share the desire for unity,” but that they also seek dialogue with the Jewish and Muslim communities as well.

Archbishop Kondrusiewicz said that the relationship between the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches is very peaceful and cordial. The Orthodox Church accounts for roughly 80 percent of the citizens of Belarus, while 14 percent or around 300,000 are Catholics.

He said leaders from both traditions meet together regularly, and both churches see it as their common mission to live the Christian faith and share it with others.

# Archbishop Hilarion on Christian Unity

***‘We should not pretend we are close to solving this problem’***

BY JOHN BURGER *Monday, February 07, 2011* **PORTIONS OF ARTICLE REDACTED**



**COMMON INTERESTS.** *Pope Benedict XVI exchanges greetings with Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk prior to a concert at the Vatican last May. The concert was a gift from Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow. Both the Pope and Metropolitan Hilarion have musical backgrounds.*

There’s been encouraging — sometimes tantalizing — news in recent years about the growing potential for Catholic-Orthodox unification. Pope Benedict XVI is said to be viewed more favorably by the Orthodox than his predecessor. The Catholic Archbishop of Moscow exclaimed in 2009 that unity with the Orthodox could be achieved “within months.” And the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation issued a document last October that envisions practical steps each Church can begin taking to begin the process of reunification.

But Russian Orthodox Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev is a lot more cautious about any predictions of imminent unity between East and West. Archbishop Hilarion heads

the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department of External Church Relations, a position that was held by now-Patriarch Kirill before Patriarch Alexei died in 2008. At 44, Hilarion has experienced a meteoric rise in the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church. A brilliant theologian and author, he was elected bishop at age 35, has served as bishop of Vienna and head of the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions in Brussels. He is deeply involved in ecumenical dialogues with the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion.

He’s also an accomplished composer and is in New York for the U.S. English-language premiere of his *St. Matthew Passion* oratorio this evening. He also delivered the annual Father Alexander Schmemmann lecture at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y., on Saturday, where he spoke about the meaning of icons in the Orthodox Church.

Thanks to Father John Behr and Deborah Belonick of St. Vladimir’s, I was able to sit down with Archbishop Hilarion for a chat after the lecture. Here’s a transcript of our conversation.

## ***How important is Christian unity to the Orthodox Church?***

The notion of Christian unity is essentially linked to the last words of Jesus Christ, which he pronounced at the Last Supper and, notably, those which were addressed to his father, when he preached about the unity of his disciples. It is a tragedy that Christ’s disciples throughout the world were unable to preserve this unity and that many schisms and divisions arose in the Church, and the call to Christian unity is the ultimate goal of our exposure to inter-Christian activities and to various dialogues which we lead with the Roman Catholic Church and with other Christian traditions.

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So I think for an Orthodox Christian, it is essential to participate in inter-Christian exchanges in order to bring different Christian traditions closer to mutual understanding in order to overcome centuries of prejudices with the ultimate goal of the restoration of the full Eucharistic communion between various Christian denominations.

Of course, the Orthodox and the Catholic are the closest ones. We have certain differences in dogma, certain differences in ecclesiology, but we have the same teaching on the apostolic succession of the hierarchy, on the sacraments and on the Church in general.

Therefore, though there are obstacles to unity, they are, I believe, in no way insurmountable.

***What in the Orthodox view constitutes full Christian unity? What does it look like?***

Full Christian unity is the Eucharistic communion. We do not need to reshape our Church administration, our local traditions. We can live with our differences within one Church, participating from one bread and one cup. We need, however, to rediscover what united us and what brought us to disunity, particularly in the 11th century.

So the basis for the restoration of the full communion would be, I believe, the faith of the Church east and west in the first millennium.

***And you are quite involved in these talks personally.***  
Yes.

***Has Catholic-Orthodox unity become more of a possibility in recent years? If so, since when, or because of what?***

I think certain feasible positive changes came with the beginning of the pontificate of Benedict XVI. He is a man of the Church. He is very traditional in his

understanding of the dogma and of morality and he is very close to the Orthodox Church. He highly respects Orthodox traditions. He knows Orthodox theology, and as he indicated in his latest book, Orthodox concerns are very close to his heart. He speaks very highly about the Ecumenical Patriarch (Bartholomew I). He speaks very highly and also very personally about his encounters with the current Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill. And it is clear that, for him, the relationship with the Orthodox Church is one of the primary tasks on his agenda.

***Do you think complete union between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches is a possibility in our lifetime? What do you think would have to happen before it could come about?***

I would respond by quoting the Pope: it depends on how long we will live. But I believe that the Eucharistic unity between the Orthodox and the Catholics is not something easily achievable within a few years because even if we look at our theological dialogue, it goes very slowly, and we sometimes are unable to solve even rather insignificant problems which existed in the past for many years.

So we should not anticipate that there will be major breakthroughs in just a few years time. But we should be hopeful, and, what is most important, we should work. We should be honest towards each other. We should not hide our differences. We should discuss them openly. But I also believe that, without aspiring that solving all theological problems that exist between the Orthodox and the Catholics we can learn how to work together, how to act together. And without being one Church administratively we can act as members of one Christian body.

This is what I call a strategic alliance between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church. This alliance is necessary in order **(CONTINUE NEXT PAGE)**

for us to learn how to work together, because the challenges we are facing are the same. One of the challenges is how to re-Christianize a de-Christianized world. This is what Pope Benedict XVI speaks about very often. In particular he speaks about the New Evangelization of Europe. I believe that this is a huge missionary task and even such a grand Church as the Catholic Church cannot accomplish this task alone. And the closest allies for it would be the Orthodox Church. I believe we can do many things together; we can face modern changes together, even without being one Church, even without having full Eucharistic communion.

***How would you describe recent dialogue on the issue of primacy? What is each side saying? Has either side shown any sign of possibly changing?***

Well, Pope John Paul II called on everybody, particularly on the Orthodox to express their understanding of primacy.

***In his encyclical Ut Unum Sint.***

Yes. I believe we the Orthodox are ourselves not altogether clear about what *we* mean by primacy and how this primacy should be exercised. We have, for example, certain differences between the primacy as it is understood by the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the primacy as it is understood by the Patriarchate of Moscow.

In any case, we do not believe that there could be a bishop above all other bishops whose decisions would be binding for the entire Church. We believe that the bishop of Rome in the first Millennium was obviously first in honor but he was first among equals. He did not have direct jurisdiction, for example, over the East. Therefore, when we come to the discussion of the primacy we would argue that the universal jurisdiction of the Pope is

something that didn't exist in the first Millennium and that if we restore, for example, Eucharistic communion, we would accept his role as first among equals but not as the universal bishop

***So what has some of the dialogue been like in recent months? There's been a lot of talk about breakthroughs and being on the verge of unity.***

I believe that when some people talk about breakthroughs, it was a wishful thinking rather than anything close to reality. We are still at a rather early stage of the discussions. We still discuss the role of the bishop of Rome in the first millennium, and even on this issue we see clear differences between the Orthodox and the Catholics. If we come to the discussion of the second millennium, the differences will become much more obvious. Therefore we should not pretend that we are close to solving this problem.

I think, however, that we should discuss it honestly; we should describe the differences in our positions, and we should see what would be the way out. For us, as I said, the way out would be the return to what we had in the first millennium.

## **BENEDICT XVI ENCOURAGES DIALOGUE WITH ORIENTAL ORTHODOX**

### **Expresses Hope for Greater Mutual Understanding**

VATICAN CITY, JAN. 28, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is encouraging the ongoing dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which is currently focused on historical expressions of communion with the Catholic Church.

The Pope stated this today in an audience with members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

He expressed gratitude for **(CONTINUE NEXT PAGE)**

the work that began in 2003 as a joint initiative between Catholic and Orthodox leaders.

The first phase of this dialogue, which lasted through 2009, resulted in a joint document, "Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church." This document outlined the shared principles of the Churches and identified issues requiring further discussion.

The Pontiff stated, "We can only be grateful that after almost fifteen hundred years of separation we still find agreement about the sacramental nature of the Church, about apostolic succession in priestly service and about the impelling need to bear witness to the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the world."

He noted that in this second phase of dialogue the commission is reflecting "from an historical perspective on the ways in which the Churches expressed their communion down the ages."

The Holy Father acknowledged, "During the meeting this week you are deepening your study of the communion and communication that existed between the Churches until the mid-fifth century of Christian history, as well as the role played by monasticism in the life of the early Church."

The will of Christ

He continued, "We must be confident that your theological reflection will lead our Churches not only to understand each other more deeply, but resolutely to continue our journey decisively towards the full communion to which we are called by the will of Christ."

Benedict XVI noted, "Many of you come from regions where Christian individuals and communities face trials and difficulties that are a cause of deep concern for us all."

"All Christians need to work together in mutual acceptance and trust in order to serve the cause of peace

and justice," he affirmed.

The Pope concluded, "May the intercession and example of the many martyrs and saints, who have given courageous witness to Christ in all our Churches, sustain and strengthen you and your Christian communities."

The six ancient Eastern Orthodox Churches include the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Orthodox Coptic Patriarchate of Egypt, the Syro-Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia, the Orthodox Church of Eritrea, and the Syro-Orthodox Church of Malankar.

These Churches separated from Rome after the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, over controversy arising from the council's adoption of the Christological terminology of two natures in one person.

## **The Church of the East**

**Jan 28, 2011 FIRST THINGS**

**<http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2011/01/the-church-of-the-east>**

***David Bentley Hart***

As you may be aware, several Christian churches in Kirkuk, Mosul, Basra, and Baghdad, as well as throughout the rest of Iraq, cancelled their festivities this past Christmas. Ever since the massacre of worshippers in Baghdad's Church of Our Lady of Salvation last November—followed by attacks on Christian neighborhoods in the city—the Christians of Iraq have been living in a state of unrelieved terror, and they simply do not dare celebrate their faith too openly right now. Moreover, there is no reason to imagine that their situation will become any more tolerable in any conceivable near future.

There are beleaguered Christian communities throughout much of the Muslim world, of course, but it is quite possible that the last remnants of ancient Persian Christianity in Iraq and perhaps Iran will disappear in our lifetimes. If so, and if Persian Christianity is largely reduced to a fragmentary diaspora community, it will mark the end of yet another tragic episode in one of the more extraordinary tales in Christian history—though it is a tale regarding which most Christians know absolutely nothing.

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Most of the Christians of Iraq belong to “Assyrian” tradition: the tradition, that is, of the Church of the East (often, and somewhat opprobriously, called the “Nestorian” Church) and of its sixteenth-century offshoot the Chaldean Catholic Church (occasionally, and somewhat opprobriously, called the “Uniate” Chaldean Church). Today, even many Christians who know something of the Eastern churches tend to think of the Assyrian communions as little more than exotic marginal sects; even among the “Oriental” churches (that is, the ancient Eastern communions that did not adopt the Christological formula of Chalcedon in the fifth century) they are often regarded as the least significant.

And yet at one time—from late antiquity right up into the high middle ages—the Church of the East was, in geographic terms, far and away the largest Christian communion in the world, and the most actively evangelical. Had there been such a thing as accurate cartography in the early thirteenth century, any good map of the Christian world might have suggested to a casual observer that European Christianity was little more than a local phenomenon, a sort of provincial annex at the western edge of Assyrian Christendom. Demographically, of course, the balances tipped in the opposite direction. Still, though, the Church of the East was anything but a marginal communion.

The Christianity of all of Syria was from a very early period both an exceedingly scholarly and an exceedingly ascetical tradition. But there was also something of a difference in sensibility between the religious culture to the west, whose intellectual center was Antioch, and that to the East, whose intellectual center was Nisibis. What became the distinct Assyrian tradition, with its distinctive Christological vocabulary, emerged out of the latter. After Nisibis was conquered by Persia in 363, the educated Christians of the city removed to Edessa and other parts of Syria still under Byzantine control; but a little more than a century later, when the Emperor Zeno (d. 491) attempted to impose the Chalcedonian settlement throughout the region, the East Syrian Christian scholars were forced to retreat to Nisibis again, and to the shelter of the Persian Empire, which turned out to be quite tolerant of them.

**In 498, the bishop of Nisibis assumed the title “Patriarch of the East.”** After 553, when the Second Council of Constantinople formally condemned the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-429), the Antiochian theologian and biblical exegete whose writings were foundational for East Syrian theology, the Assyrian Church was more or less a theological world all to itself. As it happened, however, this proved to be anything but a historical

catastrophe. Pushed out beyond the farthest boundaries of the Byzantine empire, with no hope of reconciliation, the Assyrian Church found itself on the frontier of all of Asia, where no other Christians could even hope to venture.

The Christian scholars of Nisibis and, later, Jundishapur were a disciplined monastic community, devoted to the study of theology and philosophy, as well as to the translation of scripture, Christian literature, and classical Greek texts into Syriac, and renowned for the quality of their medical training. Their zeal for winning converts did not seem to falter before the vast geographical distances or dangerously alien cultures of the Central and East Asia. The Church established itself over time not only in the Mesopotamian region of the Persian Empire, but in eastern Anatolia, Kurdistan, Turkestan, and well beyond. In 635, Patriarch Yashuyab II (d. 643) inaugurated a mission to China that flourished right through the age of the Khans.

East Syrian Christian missions naturally followed the trade routes to the Far East. Merchant caravans from the Arabian Peninsula, India, Central Asia, and China passed through Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and the monks of the Assyrian Church—with their very useful their technical, scribal, and medical skills with them—followed in their van, looking for places where their training would make them and the gospel they had to preach welcome. Simply in providing trained physicians and scholars, the East Syrian Church often proved itself an immense benefit to the areas where it settled. Wherever the Church established a new bishopric in its eastward migrations, it built a school, a library, and a hospital. By the late fifth century, the Assyrian mission to Turkestan was under way and would in time reach out to the Mongols. In 781 a Turkish king petitioned Nisibis for a bishop, and soon Episcopal sees were established in Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand. Soon missions were also sent to the Keraites, Uighurs, and other Central Asian tribes.

And then there was China. We know much of the early story of the “Radiant Religion”—that is, Christianity—in China principally from a stone stele dating from 781 and discovered by Jesuit missionaries in Sian-fu in the Shaanxi province in 1625. The T’ang Emperor T’ai-tsung (d. 649) granted an audience to a Persian monk around 638 and was impressed enough (or indifferent enough) to give him permission to preach and found a monastery. For two centuries, the Assyrian mission thrived. Churches and monasteries were established in at least ten provinces.

We know also that the mission suffered a temporary reversal of fortunes **(CONTINUE NEXT PAGE)**

in the ninth century, when the Emperor Wu-tsung (d. 846) laicized all the native priests and monks in the kingdom. But there were still monasteries in China in the eleventh century, and around 1095 the Patriarch of the East, Sebaryeshu III, appointed a bishop to the see of Cathay (or Northern China). Even as late as the thirteenth century, when the Radiant Religion enjoyed the favor of the Mongol court of Kublai Khan (1215-1295), Chinese monasteries were still being built. And in 1280, Mark, the Chinese (Uighur) bishop of Cathay became the Syrian Patriarch of the East, under the name Yahbalaha III (d. 1317).

How far the East Syrian missions reached we are never likely to know for certain. The "Thomas Christians" of India were East Syrian in theology, loyalty, and population from an early period, and in the eight and ninth centuries the new immigrants who swelled the numbers of the Malankara Christians of India were definitely East Syrian. As early as the sixth century, Cosmas Indicopleustes encountered East Syrian Christians on the remote island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean, and there are passing references in texts from later centuries to one or another bishop of Socotra. And East Syrian missions definitely penetrated into Tibet before the late eighth century. Some historians even believe there is sufficient textual and physical evidence to suggest that East Syrian Christians reached Sri Lanka, Java, Sumatra, Japan, Korea, Burma, Malaya, Vietnam, and Thailand.

**By the end of the middle ages, however, the Assyrian communion** had been reduced to a shadow of its former magnificence. There had been some pressure upon the native sees from the time of the Islamic conquest of the Persian Empire, but East Syrian scholars and physicians had for centuries occupied a vital place in the Caliphate. But the greater Assyrian Christian world of Central and East Asia had remained intact and largely unperturbed into the fourteenth century. Of course, the Christians of Central Asia suffered terribly along with everyone else when the "Golden Horde" of Genghis Khan (c. 1150-1227) was destroying every village and city in its path. But the grandsons of Genghis—Möngke (1208-1259), Kublai (1215-1294), and Hulegu (1217-1265)—were for the most part well disposed towards the Assyrian communities. Hulegu even took a Christian wife.

In the late thirteenth century, however, the great reversal began. In Baghdad, Ghazan Khan (r. 1295-1304) adopted Islam, and at once the East Syrian Christian community became the object of ferocious persecutions, including numerous massacres. Then, in 1369, the Ming Dynasty came to power in China and instituted a systematic extermination of foreign creeds. The Assyrian Church had soon disappeared.

And in Central Asia the rampages of the Turkic Muslim warlord Timur (1336-1405) left no living traces of East Syrian Christianity in their wake.

And yet, down the centuries the Church of the East has persisted: a small community, perennially persecuted in the place of its birth, and until very recently seemingly indomitable. Far away from there—in India, where it has had a home for centuries, and in North America, where it has had to find a new home in a dark time, and elsewhere—its scattered branches continue to bear fruit, not copiously, perhaps, but indefatigably. But in its homeland it is being pushed towards the edge of extinction.

So it goes, I suppose. History is not at our command, and the future does not lie in our power; we must do what we can, but we can do only so much. And, in the end, all cultures rise and fall; none is eternal. Nevertheless, for anyone who knows the strange, glorious, and too often forgotten history of the Church of the East, it is difficult to view the current situation without a very special and very intense bitterness.

David Bentley Hart is a contributing editor of *FIRST THINGS*. *His most recent book is* *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (Yale University Press).

## Search for Christian unity is 'moral imperative,' pope says

By Cindy Wooden  
[Catholic News Service](#)

ROME (CNS) -- Giving in to the temptation of thinking the Christian churches will never be fully united is a sign of weak faith, Pope Benedict XVI said.

"One must resist the temptation of resignation and pessimism, which is a lack of trust in the power of the Holy Spirit," the pope said Jan. 25 at an ecumenical evening prayer service marking the close of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The pope presided over the service at Rome's Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls (**CONTINUE NEXT PAGE**)



Pope Benedict XVI greets Christian leaders as he leaves an ecumenical evening prayer service that marked the close of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome Jan. 25. (CNS/Paul Haring)

with a German Lutheran delegation, an international group of Oriental Orthodox bishops and theologians and Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant leaders from Rome.

Special prayers were read by Orthodox Metropolitan Gennadios of Italy and Malta and by the Rev. David Richardson, the Anglican archbishop of Canterbury's representative to the Vatican and director of the Anglican Center in Rome.

In his homily, the pope said the search for Christian unity is "a moral imperative, a response to a precise call of the Lord."

The theme of the 2011 week of prayer, "One in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer," described the unity experienced within the early Christian community, the pope said.

The early Christian community in Jerusalem "was not closed in on itself, but from its birth it was catholic, universal, capable of embracing people of different languages and cultures," the pope said.

"It was a community not founded on a pact among its members, or on the simple sharing of a project or ideal, but on profound communion with God," he said.

Pope Benedict repeated what he had said Jan. 19 during his weekly general audience at the Vatican: The theme's four ingredients are the four pillars of Christian faith and are "the fundamental dimensions of unity of the visible body of the church."

To be fully united, he said, Christians must hold firm to the faith taught by the apostles, they must gather together, they must share the Eucharist, and they must pray constantly.

Because unity must be based on faith believed and lived in common, he said at the prayer service, Christian unity cannot be reduced to a recognition and acceptance of differences and an agreement to coexist peacefully.

"That for which we yearn is the unity for which Christ himself prayed and which, by its nature, is manifested in a communion of faith, sacraments and ministry," Pope Benedict said.

## **Catholic and Orthodox Unity: Close Enough to Imagine**

Jan. 18, 2011

Article By Paulist Fr. Thomas Ryan

**COMMENTARY** Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<http://ncronline.org>)

As we celebrate another Week of Prayer for Christianity, what is there to fuel our hope that this isn't all just an exercise in futility? What's to celebrate?

Signals are there that this movement called "ecumenical" does in fact *move*, that reflection as we go along on an increasing degree of "life together" is shaping our perception of the future in positive ways.

One noteworthy sign of this was the statement by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation last October.

For the past forty-five years they have been sifting through the pastoral and doctrinal issues that historically have prevented our churches from sharing a single life of faith, sacraments and witness before the world. But in this document, as indicated by its title, they are getting down to brass tacks: "Steps Towards A Reunited Church: A Sketch of an Orthodox-Catholic Vision for the Future."

Their listing of what we share is substantive and long. In short: We believe our life as churches to be centered on the Divine Liturgy, the Word of God, and the sacraments from baptism to marriage.

Both churches recognize each other's bishops as legitimately ordained into the apostolic succession. Both venerate Mary, the Mother of God, and a whole range of holy men and women from every age, many of them common to both our traditions. Both our churches cherish ancient practices that help the faithful grow in holiness, such as reverencing sacred images, fasting, the monastic life, and various forms of contemplative prayer.

All of which pushes the commission members to state:

It is urgent that Orthodox and Catholic Christians find an effective way to realize our common tradition of faith together, and to present the world with a unified testimony to the Lordship of Jesus. To be what we are called to be, we need each other.... To become what we are...we cannot stop short of re-establishing full Eucharistic communion among ourselves.

After 950 years of division between us, the language is now that "it is urgent" to put an end to this. One might say that, thanks to prayer, local action, and the work of commissions like this, there's been a sea change! **(CONTINUE)**

Consultation members do not shy from addressing the hard issues head-on and recognize that this cannot be achieved without “new, better harmonized structures of leadership on both sides: new conceptions of both synodality and primacy in the universal Church, new approaches to the way authority and primacy are exercised in both our communions.”

At the heart of our differences, they note, is the way each of our traditions understands the proper exercise of the primacy in the leadership of the Church, not only within Christianity as a whole but also within the various regions of the Christian world.

In the Christian East, “primacy” has a less supra-national character than it has acquired in the Latin Church. The underlying pattern among the Eastern churches was what is called “autocephaly” -- ecclesiastical independence correlative to the emerging nation-state, with the head of the church in a given nation (the patriarch) seen as exercising primacy.

What is encouraging about the Consultation’s statement is that they have reached the stage where they are imagining in concrete terms what it would look like to be in full communion with one another. Some of their observations and imaginings:

- The bishop of Rome’s “relationship to the Eastern Churches and their bishops would have to be substantially different from the relationship now accepted in the Latin Church.... The leadership of the pope would always be realized by way of a serious and practical commitment to synodality and collegiality.”
- The bishop of Rome would be seen as a member as well as head of the college of bishops, the senior patriarch among the primates of the churches. His fundamental worldwide ministry would be to promote the communion of all the local churches.
- There would also be some implications for the way the Roman curia presently functions. Its relationship to local bishops and episcopal conferences in the Latin Church “would become less centralized: bishops, for instance, would

have more control over the agenda and the final documents of synods, and the selection of bishops would again normally become a local process.”

The reader will sense some give-and-take here on both sides, but the end result would truly be a cause for celebration all-around:

The Pope and the Orthodox Primates could invite all the faithful under their jurisdiction to recognize each other’s Churches as ‘sister Churches’ that fully realize the Apostolic faith in doctrine, sacraments, and ecclesial life, despite the historically different forms in which our liturgy is celebrated, our doctrine taught, and our community life structured.

The fact that consultation members have reached the stage where they are concretely imagining it means that full communion between the Latin, Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches is closer than it has ever been before.

That is ample reason for us to join our hearts and voices to those around the world in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and throughout the year.

[Paulist Fr. Thomas Ryan directs the Paulist North American Office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in Washington.]

12/21/2010

## **ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH**

Bartholomew I: we will continue to dialogue with the Pope and Islam

by NAT da Polis

The Ecumenical Patriarch defends the choice of dialogue with Catholics, Jews and Muslims, despite

criticisms from some sectors of Orthodox traditionalists. Ecology: "The environment, nature, are God's creation and do not belong only to us who live today in 2010. They belong to all future generations." **(CONTINUE NEXT PAGE)**



Istanbul (AsiaNews) - On the eve of the holiday season, Bartholomew I delivered a major address before an highly qualified audience from the Orthodox world, defending the Ecumenical Patriarchate's choice for inter-faith dialogue. "We will insist on dialogue, despite the criticism that we suffer," he said. "There is, unfortunately, a certain religious fundamentalism, a tragic phenomenon, which can be found among Orthodox and Catholics, among Muslims and Jews. These are people who think they alone have the right to exist on earth, almost as if they alone have the right to rule on this our planet according to the Old Testament. And they say there is no room for anyone else, and are therefore opposed to any dialogue. "

The Patriarch continued: "We are subject to criticism and attack because we maintain relations with the Pope (because we are strong supporters of the ecumenical dialogue between Orthodox and Catholics), with Islam and the Jewish world. But we will continue to move forward on our journey, according to the path laid by our predecessors, well aware of our actions, regardless of the criticisms of which we are object. These fringes, characterized by extreme positions, are everywhere. It is therefore natural that we suffer their criticisms, according to their ideological dictates, all of us who try to widen our horizons and have a theological view of things. Because we want the peaceful coexistence of all, based on the principles of charity and friendship. "

Bartholomew I added: "This is the credo of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and I want to remember that in 1920 the regent of the patriarchal see, along with the synod, had addressed to Catholics and Protestants an encyclical, called 'The community of churches', along the lines of the newly created 'society of nations'. That encyclical is considered today by the World Council of Churches as the 'Charter' of the ecumenical movement of our time. This is a well known fact to insiders, and it is good that it should be made as widely known to as many people as possible".

Then Bartholomew I went on to highlight: "With regard to interreligious dialogue, it is our belief and our creed. Because we need to know each other better, to work together while respecting the religious beliefs of others, their cultural identity,

without oppression. This is the only way to live in peace. For this reason, the Patriarchate, in addition to having a dialogue with other Churches and Christian denominations, has established over the past 25 years a dialogue with Islam and Judaism. We have had several successful meetings. With the Muslims and Jews, our brothers, we do not discuss purely theological issues as it would be difficult. But we talk about social issues, social issues that effect all people, all humanity, all over the world. "

Ecology has been one of the favorite themes of the Ecumenical Patriarchate since 1989. The Patriarch said: "Everything that we try to do, we do because we believe it is our duty, because the Church should be actively present in the contemporary world and be sensitive to people's problems, raise awareness and encourage them to love and protect nature like their own homes". He added: "The environment, nature, is God's creation and do not belong only to us who live today in 2010. They belong to all future generations. "

Bishop, Dositheos spokesman for the Patriarchate, commented on the Patriarch's homily for *AsiaNews*, "a certain confusion prevails in some sectors of the Orthodox Christian world between the two terms, tradition and traditionalism. Tradition, to which those minorities often refer, is the ongoing search to interpret and understand the truth, while traditionalism which essentially belong to these minorities, is an intellectual sterility which often is identified with nationalism in the Orthodox world".

## Introduction at OL EuroEast by Bishop John Michael Botean

September 12th, 2010 from <http://www.ecpubs.com/wp/>  
Jack's Corner (Jack Figel)

I've had several requests to post the introductory remarks by Bishop John Michael Botean at the opening session of the Orientale Lumen EuroEast III Conference held in Constantinople on July 5-10, 2010. In the presence of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia, Archbishop Cyril Vasil' SJ from the Congregation of Oriental Churches in the Vatican, and all the participants, here is what Bishop John Michael, (**Continue next page**)

the Catholic Co-Patron of the Society of St John Chrysostom in the US and the OL Conferences, said:



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Your All-Holiness, Your Eminence, Your Excellency, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, Venerable Fathers and Sister, beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord and Savior,

Christ is among us!

As episcopal co-patron of the Society of St. John Chrysostom in the USA and as moderator of this conference, it is my singular privilege and great pleasure to welcome you all to this, the Third Orientale Lumen Euro-East conference in Istanbul.

I cannot help but note at the outset that I have had the joy of knowing many of you for a number of years and in a number of capacities. Unfortunately for a few of you here, I know you as your bishop, but even then, for the rest of us it can truly be said that we have all become friends in spite of the great unlikeliness of this ever happening. In other words, we can truly say that, but for the efforts and considerable sacrifices of one Jack Figel of Duquesne, PA, we may never have gotten to know one another at all. But over the course of the 14 years in which these conferences, inspired by the Apostolic Letter, Orientale Lumen of Pope John Paul II, of blessed memory, we have become more to one another than the servants of God that our baptism made us.

Indeed, we have become a company of friends and a “house that Jack built,” inspired in our common quest for the unity of all the holy churches of God by his uncommon, burning desire for that unity of which our friendship is but a shadow, albeit a shadow that now bears a glimmer of promise for a new day on which, by the grace of God, we will experience the full sunshine of visible koinonia that is the prayer of Jesus Christ for His Church. Our Lord keenly expressed his desire when he told his disciples, “I no longer call you servants, but friends” (Jn 15.15) who know what their Master is about.

Another noteworthy aspect of this gathering is that its participants are, to a very large extent, American Eastern Catholics, particularly Byzantine- or Greek-Catholics—that is to say, Uniates like me, and it is to you Uniates that I direct my next remarks.

Now some of you may squirm and be uncomfortable at my use of the term “Uniate.” Well, I’m sorry, but as one of your pastors I would counsel you to get over it. It is what we are, and if people want to call us by this or some other offensive name, or if they in so many other ways treat us scornfully and derisively, let them, and let us bear this treatment with dignity and humble love. I propose we wear this title, when it is imposed upon us, as a badge of honor given to us by none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who “endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). We must ask ourselves if we can do better than be emulators of the One who was scorned and derided for our salvation, if this is not, in fact, our honorable calling and our noble destiny.

It is we Uniates who, little known in the church of our communion and a sign of contradiction in the churches of our origin, who have disturbed our quietude to come to this Royal City for this conference—indeed, it is we American Uniates who have organized and convened it, and we who are paying for it. To borrow a phrase from one of our more worthy presidents, “the world will little note nor long remember what we do here,” but this OL Conference is our widow’s mite, our little offering that we lovingly place in God’s hands, as a child gives a bouquet of **(CONTINUE NEXT PAGE)**

dandelions from the garden to her mother. We know it pleases our Father to do this, and that is enough for us. It is He who will enable our offering to bear fruit, in His good time and in His good manner.

It is the universal experience of our churches that they are little appreciated and only barely tolerated in their homelands. I had the providential pleasure of listening, in the car as I drove to Jack's house to come here, to the lectures in honor of Ss. Cyril and Methodius sponsored by the seminary of that name in Pittsburgh, PA, given by two of our speakers, Archimandrite Robert Taft and Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, in 2001 and 2002, respectively. My heart was lightened and my hope enlivened by these lectures that critically but positively evaluated the facts of our existence and our impact upon the Church. To some, indeed, we are westernized easterners, and to others, we are merely easternized westerners. The truth is that we are both, and that "people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some who are first who will be last" (Lk 13.29-30).

The existence of the Uniate churches is not the great obstacle to unity some have insisted that it is. Is it not we who have come to Constantinople seeking this unity? The great obstacles to church unity are, now as ever, human weakness, pride, and sin, and it is fitting that we have come here, not as Crusaders, but as pilgrims and penitents, beseeching forgiveness in prayer and in the humble listening to one another that we undertake this evening.

Panagiotate, Patriarch Bartholomew, we are truly honored and blessed by your presence among us and by the privilege of being here in your great city. Being so warmly welcomed by the one who now occupies the throne of our Holy Father John Chrysostom and the successor of the Holy First-Called Apostle Andrew, we cannot help but be touched by the apostolic ministry you so generously exercise tonight on our behalf, as befits the Ecumenical Patriarch. Speaking in the name of our assembly, I humbly thank you for this great honor. Speaking personally as a Romanian Greek-Catholic bishop, I feel a great kinship with you as well, for I am likewise a bishop of a church that has suffered and continues to suffer crucifixion at the hands of

political and historical circumstances that are inimical to our very existence. Your All-Holiness and the Great Church of Constantinople are always in my prayers. May the poverty and persecution we both endure become fertile, common ground between us.

Your Excellency, Archbishop Cyril, it is likewise a great honor and blessing for us that you have made time for this conference and consented to be one of our speakers. Since you represent the Holy See of the blessed Apostle Peter, we look forward to your presentation and pray that it may be for all of us, together with the churches we represent, a lively experience of the fraternal support and strengthening with which Our Lord charged Peter at the foundation of His Church.

Learned speakers, it is the case that each of you is no stranger to *Oriente Lumen*, as each of you has been a presenter in previous conferences. It is a testament to your devotion to the Church and the cause of her unity that you have consented to share the fruits of your academic labors with us once more. It is no less a testimony to the uniqueness of these conferences, which Patriarch Bartholomew has coined the "*Oriente Lumen* Movement." As a movement led by the laity, it has been able to enjoy a freedom, spontaneity, and friendly camaraderie in your free exchange of thought that is impossible to find among hierarchs and theologians in their official capacities.

My friends, and we are all friends because that is what Jack Figel and *Oriente Lumen* have made us, I would like to conclude this long welcome with words from a letter to Jack from Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, Archbishop-Major of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, reflecting upon his own experience at the last OL conference in Istanbul in May of 2007. His Beatitude writes:

"It was the first time I had a chance to be in this company. I stress company, even before the subject matter, because I feel the singularity of the meeting. The presentations were non-confessional; at least I did not feel the need to classify the speakers by their church membership. This, my impression, which I tried in a very impromptu way to express at our meeting on Thursday (**CONTINUE NEXT PAGE**)

was strengthened even further by my meeting on Thursday night with Metropolitan Kallistos. To my mind, the whole relationship of the participants was not a buddy-buddy friendship, but something that I imagine could be considered as a foretaste of perfect communion—realized unity. Another impression: how damaging is politics to Church unity. I feel that the extraordinary atmosphere which so impressed me was due to the absence of political ambitions. Maybe I am naïve, but I communicate to you how I felt, and why I am so grateful to you. All I can ask of you is, please continue gathering us. Maybe, we will be able to give a more articulate and effective expression to our experience at the Orientale Lumen meetings.”

May this third OL conference in Constantinople be a true gathering of friends, and the “more articulate and effective expression [of] our experience[s]” for which Cardinal Husar hopes. Să ne dea Dumnezeu. May God so grant us. Amen.

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
ON THE OCCASION OF CHRISTMAS GREETINGS  
TO THE ROMAN CURIA**

Sala Regia

Monday, 20 December 2010 (excerpt)



**Profound Union with the Orthodox Church**

As my second point, I should like to say a word about the Synod of the Churches of the Middle East. This began with my journey to Cyprus, where I was able to consign the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod to the Bishops of those countries who were assembled there. The hospitality of the Orthodox Church was unforgettable, and we experienced it with great gratitude. Even if full communion is not yet granted to us, we have nevertheless established with joy that the basic form of the ancient Church unites us profoundly with one another: the sacramental office of Bishops as the bearer of apostolic tradition, the reading of

Scripture according to the hermeneutic of the *Regula fidei*, the understanding of Scripture in its manifold unity centred on Christ, developed under divine inspiration, and finally, our faith in the central place of the Eucharist in the Church's life. Thus we experienced a living encounter with the riches of the rites of the ancient Church that are also found within the Catholic Church. We celebrated the liturgy with Maronites and with Melchites, we celebrated in the Latin rite, we experienced moments of ecumenical prayer with the Orthodox, and we witnessed impressive manifestations of the rich Christian culture of the Christian East.

**...Synod of the Churches of the Middle East**

During the Synod itself, our gaze was extended over the whole of the Middle East, where the followers of different religions - as well as a variety of traditions and distinct rites - live together. As far as Christians are concerned, there are Pre-Chalcedonian as well as Chalcedonian churches; there are churches in communion with Rome and others that are outside that communion; in both cases, multiple rites exist alongside one another. In the turmoil of recent years, the tradition of peaceful coexistence has been shattered and tensions and divisions have grown, with the result that we witness with increasing alarm acts of violence in which there is no longer any respect for what the other holds sacred, in which on the contrary the most elementary rules of humanity collapse. In the present situation, Christians are the most oppressed and tormented minority. For centuries they lived peacefully together with their Jewish and Muslim neighbours. During the Synod we listened to wise words from the Counsellor of the Mufti of the Republic of Lebanon against acts of violence targeting Christians. He said: when Christians are wounded, we ourselves are wounded. Unfortunately, though, this and similar voices of reason, for which we are profoundly grateful, are too weak. Here too we come up against an unholy alliance between greed for profit and ideological blindness. On the basis of the spirit of faith and its rationality, the Synod developed a grand concept of dialogue, forgiveness and mutual acceptance, a concept that we now want to proclaim to the world. The human being is one, and humanity is one. Whatever damage is done to another in any one place, ends up by damaging everyone.

**Christianophobia**

Thus the words and ideas of the Synod must be a clarion call, addressed to all people with political or religious responsibility, to put a stop to Christianophobia; to rise up in defence of refugees and all who are suffering, and to revitalize the spirit of reconciliation. In the final analysis, healing can only come from deep faith in God's reconciling love. Strengthening this faith, nourishing it and causing it to shine forth is the Church's principal task at this hour.