



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS HOLINESS MAR DINKHA IV
CATHOLICOS PATRIARCH
OF THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST***

Thursday, 21 June 2007

Your Holiness,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican, together with the Bishops and the priests who have accompanied you on this visit. My warm greetings extend to all the members of the Holy Synod, the clergy and the faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East. I pray – in the words of the Apostle Saint Paul – that “the Lord himself, who is our source of joy, may give you peace at all times and in every way” (2 Th 3:16).

On several occasions Your Holiness met with my beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II. Most significant was your visit in November 1994, when you came to Rome, accompanied by members of your Holy Synod, to sign a Common Declaration concerning Christology. This Declaration included the decision to establish a Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. The Joint Commission has undertaken an important study of the sacramental life in our respective traditions and forged an agreement on the Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari. I am most grateful for the results of this dialogue, which hold out the promise of further progress on other disputed questions. Indeed, these achievements deserve to be better known and appreciated, since they make possible various forms of pastoral cooperation between our two communities.

The Assyrian Church of the East is rooted in ancient lands whose names are associated with the history of God’s saving plan for all mankind. At the time of the early Church, the Christians of these lands made a remarkable contribution to the spread of the Gospel, particularly through their missionary activity in the more remote areas of the East. Today, tragically, Christians in this region

are suffering both materially and spiritually. Particularly in Iraq, the homeland of so many of the Assyrian faithful, Christian families and communities are feeling increasing pressure from insecurity, aggression and a sense of abandonment. Many of them see no other possibility than to leave the country and to seek a new future abroad. These difficulties are a source of great concern to me, and I wish to express my solidarity with the pastors and the faithful of the Christian communities who remain there, often at the price of heroic sacrifices. In these troubled areas the faithful, both Catholic and Assyrian, are called to work together. I hope and pray that they will find ever more effective ways to support and assist one another for the good of all.

As a result of successive waves of emigration, many Christians from the Eastern Churches are now living in the West. This new situation presents a variety of challenges to their Christian identity and their life as a community. At the same time, when Christians from the East and West live side by side, they have a precious opportunity to enrich one another and to understand more fully the catholicity of the Church, which, as a pilgrim in this world, lives, prays and bears witness to Christ in a variety of cultural, social and human contexts. With complete respect for each other's doctrinal and disciplinary traditions, Catholic and Assyrian Christians are called to reject antagonistic attitudes and polemical statements, to grow in understanding of the Christian faith which they share and to bear witness as brothers and sisters to Jesus Christ "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (*1 Cor 1:24*).

New hopes and possibilities sometimes awaken new fears, and this is also true with regard to ecumenical relations. Certain recent developments in the Assyrian Church of the East have created some obstacles to the promising work of the Joint Commission. It is to be hoped that the fruitful labour which the Commission has accomplished over the years can continue, while never losing sight of the ultimate goal of our common journey towards the re-establishment of full communion.

Working for Christian unity is, in fact, a duty born of our fidelity to Christ, the Shepherd of the Church, who gave his life "to gather into one the dispersed children of God" (*Jn 11:51-52*).

However long and laborious the path towards unity may seem, we are asked by the Lord to join our hands and hearts, so that together we can bear clearer witness to him and better serve our brothers and sisters, particularly in the troubled regions of the East, where many of our faithful look to us, their Pastors, with hope and expectation.

With these sentiments, I once more thank Your Holiness for your presence here today and for your commitment to continuing along the path of dialogue and unity. May the Lord abundantly bless your ministry and sustain you and the faithful whom you serve with his gifts of wisdom, joy and peace.

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