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The Holy Synod of Antioch issues statement regarding its eleventh ordinary session



بطريركية أنطاكية وسائر المشرق للروم الأرثوذكس
Patriarcat Grec-Orthodoxe d'Antioche et de tout l'Orient
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East



دورة المجمع الأنطاكي المقدس
تشرين الأول ٢٠١٩ - البلمند

Statement Issued by the Holy Synod of Antioch
Balamand, October 10, 2019

The Holy Synod of Antioch, chaired by His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, held its eleventh ordinary session on October 3-10, 2019 in Balamand and was attended by the Metropolitans and Bishops from the homeland and countries abroad. The participants were Their Eminences, the Most Reverend Metropolitans: Elias (Archdiocese of Beirut and dependencies), Elias (Archdiocese of Tyre, Sidon and dependencies), Sergio (Archdiocese of Santiago and all Chile), Damaskinos (Archdiocese of Sao Paulo and all Brazil), Saba (Archdiocese of Bosra Horan and Jebel al-Arab), George (Archdiocese of Homs and dependencies), Silouan (Archdiocese of Byblos, Batroun and dependencies), Basilios (Archdiocese of Akkar and dependencies), Ephrem (Archdiocese of Tripoli, Koura, and dependencies), Ignatius (Metropolitan of France, Western and Southern Europe), Isaac

(Archdiocese of Germany and Central Europe), Joseph (Archdiocese of New York and all North America), Ghattas (Archdiocese of Baghdad, Kuwait, the Arab Peninsula and dependencies), Silwan (Archdiocese of British Isles and Ireland), Antonios (Archdiocese of Zahleh, Baalbek, and dependencies), Nicolas (Archdiocese of Hama and dependencies), Basilios (Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines), Ignatius (Archdiocese of Mexico, Venezuela, Central America and the Islands of the Caribbean Sea), Athanasios (Archdiocese of Lattakia and dependencies), Jacques (Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and All Argentine). The following bishops were also present: Metropolitan Niphon Saykali, Moussa El-Khoury, Luka El-Khoury, Thomas Joseph, Demetri Charback, Elia Toumeh, Constantine Kayyal, Johannes Haykal, John Abdullah, Anthony Michael, Nicholas Ozone, Gregorios Khoury-Abdullah, Qais Sadiq, Youhanna Batash, and Theodore El-Ghandour. The Secretary of the Holy Synod, Bishop Efraim Maalouli was also in attendance. Excused were both Bishops Basil Essey and Alexandre Mufarij. His Eminence, Metropolitan Boulos (Archdiocese of Aleppo, Alexandretta and dependencies) was present in the prayers of the Synod fathers, despite his absence due to his abduction.

After the opening prayer and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the fathers lifted their prayers for the repose of the Thrice Blessed Metropolitan Spyridon Khoury, the previous Metropolitan of Zahleh, Baalbek and dependencies, that the Lord God may grant his soul Divine mercies. Then, the agenda was reviewed. First, the fathers discussed the abduction of the Metropolitans of Aleppo, Paul Yazigi and Youhanna Ibrahim, decrying the international silence on the case that has reached its sixth year. They called for releasing the bishops and closing this case, which only sheds a glance on the sufferings in the East.

The state of the “family” was a main topic on the agenda of the Synod. The Fathers invited a number of clergy and lay specialists to attend the Synod sessions concerning this matter. Leading these specialists was His Eminence Nikolaos, Metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki of the Holy Church of Greece.

The fathers considered the huge and multifaceted challenges that face the family, in the homeland and overseas. They were well aware that the economic difficulties are the first and most pressing of these challenges, which leave direct repercussions on the life and stability of the family. Therefore, they decided to call on parish priests and councils in all dioceses to intensify their efforts and initiatives towards alleviating the impact of these crises on the faithful in their parishes. Moreover, in addition to offering their prayers, they also tend to cooperate with concerned persons to find feasible solutions.

The fathers were concerned about the proliferating challenges that face the family nowadays, due to patching so many connotations to human freedom, to the consequent defilement of the values related to faith and human dignity, especially that these challenges are more seriously affecting the family and the salvation of its members. They pondered on the manifest deviation from the sound foundations of human life and social controls, the growing spirit of individuality and consumption that threatens the family to disintegrate and lose the living communion among its members in the light of the Gospel. They accorded time for research, reflection and attention to these matters, and to questions that concern the moral implication of families in some bioethics fields. The fathers discussed these issues in several sessions, that hosted priests, specialists, and active members in the life of the Church. They listened to deep perspectives on the subject, in view of formulating a Church discourse concerning the family related problems. The fathers examined pastoral ways to protect the family, help it remain steadfast in Christ, and immunize it with the spirit of the Gospel.

The fathers listened to reports on facts about the family and the surrounding milieu in various dioceses. They discussed topics on marriage, education, bioethics, homosexuality, cohabitation, media and related issues. Hoping that the faithful in the Church will cling to their freedom in Christ, as salvation is our most precious goal, the fathers decided to send a pastoral, educational, and instructional encyclical to the faithful in the coming weeks, entitled "Family: the Joy of Life." This encyclical outlines the theological foundations of marriage and the Church's approach to all these contemporary challenges, the questions on bioethics, the role of the family in the life of the Church and the Church's recommendations to the faithful. They considered launching pastoral support measures towards the "family" in the Archdioceses that would promote this message among the faithful. As for the pastoral frameworks of these measures in the parishes, they would be determined by each diocese.

The Synod fathers discussed the challenges facing the various Orthodox Churches,

and the dangers facing the unique Orthodox testimony in today's world in case these challenges are not overcome. They called for multiplying the efforts to heal the wounds inflicted on the Church's body through conciliar and common consultative work.

The fathers heard reports about the Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology in Balamand, the Patriarchal Department of Humanitarian Relief, and the Antiochian Orthodox Media Center. They praised the efforts of these institutes' directors, stressing the role of the Church in consolidating the voice of truth, justice and peace in the world. The fathers also discussed the issue of immigration and displacement in the homeland and overseas and stressed the pivotal role of the Church, that constantly offers service to humankind in any place. They expressed the importance of the Antiochian presence in the dioceses overseas. Upon hearing the related reports, they commended the efforts of the all bishops and priests, who personally contribute to embrace all the faithful of the Church of Antioch overseas, and call these faithful to preserve the Antiochian uniqueness, to be always rooted in the Gospel values, and to empower and strengthen their presence in the community life. The fathers decided to form a new Disciplinary Council for Clerical Appeal, after the resignation of its previous body, and approved the new body.

Within the framework of the Holy Synod of Antioch, His Beatitude Patriarch John X and the hierarchs of the Holy Synod participated in a Divine Liturgy on the morning of Sunday, October 6, and attended the Byzantine Music Concert entitled "Crown them With Glory and Honor," presented by a joint Antiochian Choir that included chanters from all the Lebanese and Syrian Archdioceses. The event was held on the main campus of Balamand University.

Regarding the Syrian crisis, the Synod fathers welcomed the initiatives aimed at finding a political solution to the years-long conflict. This solution ought to respect the unity of the state and the fears and aspirations of the Syrian people. The fathers called upon the world to look at the scale of the human tragedy, and the expanse of human suffering caused by the war and the economic blockade. They call for serious action to lift the sanctions imposed on Syria, whose citizens bear the burden on their livelihood and health, and to provide the conditions for the return of displaced, migrants, and refugees. They also urged all people to work for national reconciliation and to contribute courageously to solutions that provide security, peace, cohesion and stability and cause growth, progress and prosperity. They also expressed their condemnation of any aggression targeting Syrian sovereignty and exposing its people to death, displacement and refuge.

Regarding Lebanon, the fathers of the Holy Synod requested that the government

take whatever measures that would settle the difficult economic situation, alleviate the burdens on citizens and avoid imposing more taxes on low-income people. They also call on all Lebanese officials to work for terminating the rampant corruption in the state administrations, for this situation affects all areas of life and threatens the collapse of the government. While calling to prefer political over personal interests and considerations, and to cleanse public administrations from corruption, the Synod fathers welcome the initiative of the Council of Ministers to fill public vacancies. They emphasize the need for transparency in recruitment as a must. Candidates should meet competence and expertise, and their selection needs to confirm with the confessional system's distribution, not preferring one denomination over another. In this regard, the fathers assert that the existing of a clear mechanism allowing the most efficient candidates to be appointed to the positions remains the best option that takes the appointments away from the logic of quotas and cronyism.

The fathers pondered upon the so-called "Deal of the Century" that is being marketed in the region. They stressed that the Palestinian cause is the strife of a people whose most basic rights are violated on a daily basis, and who are subject to the worst forms of racial discrimination by an occupying power. Calling on all countries of the world to work towards the establishment of a Palestinian state and the implementation of international resolutions on the right of return, they affirm that any solution to the Palestinian issue outside the framework of justice and guaranteeing the rights of the Palestinian people remains unjust and unacceptable.

The Synod fathers prayed for Iraq and for other peoples and countries of the region, and ask God to enlighten the minds of the authorities responsible for the destinies of the peoples of the world and the region. May they realize the oppression and suffering inflicted to the human being, and may they take the initiative to make the world more peaceful and just without conflicts, violence, greed, polarization and divisions.

The fathers discussed the deteriorating environmental crisis due to the continued pollution with its various causes and the indiscriminate exploitation of the earth resources. Noting that this crisis is a threat to nature and life, including human life, they called for courageous living options that respect the environment, and reduce the greed of consumption that dominate nature for quick and easy profit. They also called for enforcing policies that guarantee the prospects for future life and contribute to protecting the access by future generations to the goods of the earth.

The fathers offered their prayers for the peace of the whole world and pray that the Almighty Lord may send His Spirit of peace to the world and preserve the faithful of

the Holy Church of Antioch everywhere, in the homeland and overseas through the intercessions of the Holy Virgin, Our Lady of Balamand, Saints Peter and Paul, the founders of the Holy See of Antioch and all the saints.

- Source: facebook.com/Antiochpatriarchate.org