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ASIA/SYRIA - Patriarch Gregory III, "May the Year of Faith be the Year of Reconciliation"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "May the Year of Faith be for Syria the Year of reconciliation: is the hope of Christians and all the Syrian people": is what the Melkite Patriarch of Damascus, Gregory III Laham, now in the Vatican to attend the Synod on the New Evangelization declares in an interview with Fides, on the eve of the opening of the Year of Faith.

"We Christians in the Middle East – explains Gregory III, Pastor of the Greek-Catholic community which in Syria has over 500 thousand faithful - feel an integral part of the Arab world and in this moment of difficulty, problems, fear, we have greater need to strengthen our faith, to be bearers of the Gospel. The presentation of the values of faith, made in the Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in the Middle East is very important: it is up to us to make this our heritage – made of religious freedom, coexistence, citizenship, rights, solidarity, love. Christians have always played a key role in the Middle East for culture, art, education and social work, and intend to continue to be a leaven in society."

Direct expression of faith is, for the Patriarch, the proposal of reconciliation in Syria: "Reconciliation – he warns - is the only way possible: otherwise Syria heads towards death. In the conflict that continues in Syria, chaos prevails and there are no appropriate answers. No one has them, neither the government nor the opposition, nor the international community. We are in the dark and, in this situation, faith is the answer and reconciliation is our proposal."

In such a state of political stalemate, the Patriarch supports the proposal of a "new diplomatic initiative to implement the Pope's appeals", released yesterday by Fides Agency, by Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Metropolitan Syrian Orthodox of Aleppo. "We welcome any initiative that promotes reconciliation: the word reconciliation – notes Gregorio III - has been a constant, it has always been present in any even small intervention of the Holy Father in his last trip to Lebanon. Reconciliation is the salvation of Syria and the future of Christians who, as St. Paul says, one does 'everything for everyone'. The Church is not for or against the regime, but it is a community that wants to give a testimony of love and wants to save Syria."

The Melkite Patriarch refers, finally, his own special initiative: "I asked the President of Lebanon, Michel Suleiman, to send the Holy Father’s speeches, of the recent trip to Lebanon, to the leaders of the Arab world as a message of peace and coexistence that from Lebanon radiates throughout the Middle East. This is the response to the Arab revolutions. And the president has welcomed my proposal." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/10/2012)

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