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ASIA/LEBANON - Patriarch Bechara Boutros Rai: in the upheavals of the present time, even Christians are inspired by the "Arab renaissance" of the nineteenth century

Harissa (Agenzia Fides) - In the great upheavals that are shaking the Middle East, the historical precedent in which even Christians can find inspiration is Nahda, the cultural and political renaissance experienced by the Arab peoples in the nineteenth century. The eloquent historical reference was proposed by the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Rai in his speech during the opening session of the Assembly of Patriarchs and Catholic Bishops of the Middle East, which began yesterday afternoon, December 3. According to the head of the Maronite Church, created cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI in the Consistory on 24 November, the Churches and Christian communities in the Middle East must protect "the right and the duty of Christians to take part in national life in their various Homelands, and to enjoy full citizenship, without being treated as minorities." Christians in the Middle East, said His Beatitude, " must share with their fellow Muslims the different values of their culture, as they had done in Nahda in the nineteenth century, and in particular the freedom of belief and worship."
Nahda is a varied phenomenon of "awakening" that animated the Arab elites while the Ottoman Empire was dying and the Western powers tried to impose its hegemony on the Middle East. In that context, even the Christians - for example with texts in Arabic published by their printing house - offered a decisive contribution to the cultural and political revival of "'Arabness." At the heart of the ongoing work in Harissa – where over a hundred representatives of the Catholic Churches in the region take part - there is the reception of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in the Middle East. The meeting will end on Thursday 6. Yesterday also the Apostolic Nuncio in Lebanon spoke, His Exc. Mgr. Gabriele Caccia, who in his speech pointed out how the recent visit of Pope Benedict XVI in the Land of the Cedars revealed "the vitality of the Christian presence" in the Middle East . (GV) (Agenzia Fides 04/12/2012).

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