



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS BEATITUDE ANTONIOS NAGUIB,
PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA FOR CATHOLIC COPTS, EGYPT**

Clementine Hall
Friday, 15 December 2006

*Your Beatitude,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Sons and Daughters of the Coptic Catholic Church,*

After your election to the Patriarchal See of Alexandria for Catholic Copts, Your Beatitude, your first official visit to the Successor of Peter is a moment of grace for the Church. I thank you for the words you have just addressed to me concerning your Patriarchate and for your prayers for my ministry.

I am delighted to meet you here, surrounded by the Bishops, priests and faithful of your Patriarchate, to celebrate the "*communio ecclesiastica*" which I had the joy of granting to you last 6 April. I cordially greet all of you who have come to take part in this important moment of fraternal communion and unity of the Coptic Catholic Church with the Apostolic See. I take this opportunity to greet H.B. Cardinal Stéphanos II, Patriarch emeritus, who has dedicated his life to the service of God and of the Coptic Catholic Church and whom I am happy to greet.

It is in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy that the communion in Christ which makes us brothers is most clearly manifested. It is here that the communion of all Catholics around the Successor of Peter is fully expressed. You, Your Beatitude, are Father and Head of the Coptic Catholic Church of Alexandria, a prestigious See honoured in the first five centuries as the most important Patriarchate after Rome. Your patriarchal Community has a rich spiritual, liturgical and theological tradition - the Alexandrian Tradition - whose treasures are part of the patrimony of the Church: it benefited from the preaching of the Evangelist St Mark, interpreter of the Apostle Peter. In this

way, a particularly fraternal bond links your Patriarchate to the See of Peter.

Thus, I wish to assure you of my prayers and support for the "special duty" that the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council entrusted to the Catholic Eastern Churches "of fostering the unity of all Christians, in particular of Eastern Christians" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 24), especially with your brethren of the Orthodox Coptic Church. Likewise, you play an important role in interreligious dialogue for the development of brotherhood and esteem between Christians and Muslims, and among all human beings.

Your Beatitude, in becoming Patriarch, you kept your first name, "Antonios", which recalls the great movement of monasticism born in Egypt that tradition links to the work of St Anthony, and later, of St Pachomius. Thanks to the Western contribution of St Benedict, monasticism grew into a giant tree which has borne abundant and magnificent fruits throughout the world.

In evoking the Coptic Church, how can one forget her writers, exegetes and philosophers, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, or her great patriarchs, confessors and doctors of the Church, such as Athanasius and Cyril, whose illustrious names have marked the faith of a fervent people down the centuries. You must ceaselessly follow in their footsteps, developing the theological and spiritual research proper to your tradition.

In today's world, your mission is of great importance to your faithful and to all of us men and women, whom Christ's love urges to proclaim the Good News. I hail, in particular, your attention to the human, spiritual, moral and intellectual education of youth through a high quality scholastic and catechetical network that is a service to the whole of society.

I warmly hope that this educational commitment may receive ever wider recognition, so that the fundamental values may be passed on, respectful of the identity of Catholic schools. Thus, the young today will therefore be able to become responsible men and women in their respective families and in society and ready to build greater solidarity and a more ardent brotherhood among all the members of the nation. Please convey to young people all my esteem and all my affection, reminding them that the Church and the whole of society stand in need of their enthusiasm and their hope.

I ask you to intensify the formation of your priests and of the many young people who desire to consecrate themselves to the Lord. The vitality of Christian communities in the world today calls for pastors according to the heart of God who are truly witnesses of God's Word and guides to help the faithful put down ever deeper roots in their life and mission in Christ!

I know the place that consecrated life occupies in your Church. May poverty, chastity and obedience lived in accordance with the evangelical counsels be a witness and an appeal for holiness in the world today! May the members of Institutes of Consecrated Life persevere in their

missions, especially with the young and the most forsaken in society.

At the end of our meeting, I offer you, Your Beatitude, my brotherly good wishes that the Holy Spirit may enlighten you in the exercise of your office, console you in difficulties and procure for you the joy of seeing your Patriarchal Church increase in fervour and in size. At the beginning of your ministry, I would like to repeat to all of you Christ's words to his disciples: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12: 32). While, through you, I address my cordial greetings to the whole Egyptian People, I entrust you all to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of all the Coptic Saints. I wholeheartedly impart to you, as well as to the Bishops and all the faithful of your Patriarchate, an affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

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