
Interview: Antoine Audo

The U.S. must lift the embargo on Iraq

Monsignor Audo, SJ, is the Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, Syria. He was interviewed by Liliana Celani on May 13, during the month-long Synod of Bishops from Asia, which took place in the Vatican. Monsignor Audo is a member of the Synodal Committee which is advising Pope John Paul II on the Middle East and, in particular, on the issue of lifting the embargo against Iraq, as requested in the final message of the Asian Synod.

The Asian Synod (see EIR, May 29, pp. 56-58) called for debt renegotiation for Third World nations, and church leaders strongly condemned the policy of globalization. The final message called on the “churches of the First World to be in solidarity with the poor in Asia and to be their advocates with their own governments and with world economic institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, so as to bring about what Pope John Paul II called in this year’s World Day of Peace Message: ‘Globalization without marginalization. Globalization in solidarity.’ We strongly recommend that during the Jubilee Year 2000, the Third World debt be renegotiated and its crushing burden alleviated.”

EIR: During the final press conference of the Asian Synod, an Italian journalist asked, “Is the Pope going to go to Iraq to lift the embargo as he did in Cuba?” I pose this question to you.

Monsignor Audo: First of all, I think that Iraq trusts the Pope. They are convinced that he can do something, although I am not sure he can. The Pope has been speaking about Iraq for years. I know the situation very well, because I am a Chaldean bishop. This year the Pope twice said to two Chaldean bishops from Iraq: “The Synod has to discuss the problem of the embargo, has to demand that the embargo be lifted.” I think that the Pope is seriously worried about the children, the women in Iraq, and wants to do something about it. The Iraqi government expects this, and is convinced that the Pope can do something about it.

At the same time, we are waiting. You know the situation there better than I do: It is very bad. There is a sense of discouragement, moral problems, problems of emigration, the youth are discouraged.

EIR: Has anything changed since the implementation of the

UN oil-for-food arrangement?

Monsignor Audo: No, nothing has changed. They are still waiting for something to happen.

EIR: Was there an invitation to the Holy Father from the Iraqi government?

Monsignor Audo: I am not sure, but I know that our Chaldean bishop told the Pope that he is welcome in Iraq, and that President Saddam Hussein is waiting for him to visit. It would be very helpful to Iraq. You can see from this that the Pope has no political power, but he really has moral power. I also heard that after his visit to Cuba, the President of Libya, [Muammar] Qaddafi, asked the Pope to come to Libya, as he had gone to Cuba. The Holy Father told us this when we were invited for lunch at the beginning of the Synod.

I think that the economic issue is very important, the issue of justice, because when you see so many Arab and Muslim countries getting enraged, their youth choosing Islamic fundamentalism, there is a reason. Why are they making this choice? I think it is because there is a feeling of humiliation. It is not only a matter of faith. Politicians then easily use the dimension of faith to serve their purposes. But behind it there are people who starve, who have no job, who experience humiliation in the face of the power of the United States, and I think the United States should do something to show their human face, and not the face of strength.

This became very clear during the Gulf War. Even people who were moderate started opposing U.S. policies, and there is something wrong with this, because you do need cooperation in order to face the global crisis you were talking about.

EIR: Do you mean to say that if there were economic development, the phenomena of fundamentalism and terrorism would not be so widespread?

Monsignor Audo: Yes, of course. In Paris, in outlying districts, the youth from Morocco, or Algeria, create problems. But why? They say it is in the name of Islam, that they are looking for an identity. But, at the same time, they have no job, they do not go to school; there is a problem of integration, of justice. And, the same is true in Algeria, and many other countries. Of course, they use history, they use the background of history, fights between Christians and Muslims, crusades — everything can easily be used.

EIR: From this standpoint, how would you judge the recent statements made by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Libyan President Qaddafi to the effect that terrorism is consciously used by the British secret services?

Monsignor Audo: Well, if Mubarak and Qaddafi state something so important, it must have some basis. I heard it also in the case of Algeria, many times. But I have no direct confirmation of such an important statement. I am very surprised. It surprises me because I wonder how they [the British] can promote such a violent policy.