

## In Middle East, democracy is the 'Great Jihad'

John L. Allen Jr. | Oct. 13, 2010



Prelates exchange greetings before the opening session of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East in the synod hall at the Vatican Oct. 11. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

**ROME** -- There's nothing like the realistic possibility of extinction to push people beyond euphemisms, forcing them to lay it on the line. That was the spirit of several presentations yesterday afternoon during the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East, as Catholic leaders from the region described a future that might be paraphrased as 'democracy or death.'

The disappearance of Christians from the Middle East also poses the real and present danger, speakers said, of exacerbating a 'clash of civilizations' between Christian and Islam.

The Synod of Bishops for the Middle East is being held in Rome Oct. 10-24.

Greek-Melkite Patriarch Gregorios III Laham of Syria offered perhaps the most forceful diagnosis, warning that the steady migration of Christians out of the region poses a whole series of worrying consequences.

'It will make Arab society a mono-color society, exclusively Muslim, facing a society in Europe that's said to be Christian,' Laham said. 'If that happens, and the East is emptied of its Christians, it could mean a new clash of cultures, civilizations and religions, a destructive conflict between an Arab Muslim East and the Christian West.'

In order to convince Christians to stay put, Laham said, it's time to speak frankly to Muslims about why Christians are afraid.

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Read NCR's full coverage of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East: [Index of stories from the Synod](#) [2].

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