

**SPEECH BY**

**THE GRAND MAGISTRAL DELEGATE**

**FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS OF THE**

**SACRED MILITARY CONSTANTINIAN ORDER OF ST GEORGE**

**HE MR ANTHONY BAILEY, OBE, GCSS,**

**AT THE SYRIAC ORTHODOX CHURCH IN LONDON**

**ON 11 DECEMBER 2011**

Your Eminence, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Serene Highness, Your Excellencies, My Lords, Reverend Fathers, Knights and Dames, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this especially happy occasion, in this your new mother church in Britain, and surrounded by many of your devout followers, I would like to extend to Your Eminence the very best wishes of the Grand Master of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George, HRH Prince Carlo of Bourbon Two Sicilies, Duke of Castro.

May I also extend to Your Eminence the prayers and blessings of our Grand Prior, His Eminence Renato Raffaele, Cardinal Martino, our Delegation Prior, His Eminence Cormac, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, and our Sub-Prior, His Grace The Most Reverend George Stack, Archbishop of Cardiff.

Your Eminence, the Constantinian family, which has existed in the British Isles since 1728 and in Italy for many centuries before, counts today over 3000 knights and dames across the world. Today they are all united in their wish and desire to recognise Your Eminence's considerable personal merits.

The Order also wishes through you to recognise the significant contribution which **His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas** and his followers, have played in fostering greater Christian unity and inter-

religious understanding throughout the world.

This desire to recognise Your Eminence, your Church Council and your community is felt all the more so knowing of the dreadful struggle which has forced so many of your followers to leave both their homes and their country. The Order also wishes to pay tribute to Your Eminence's leadership and determination to build this new Cathedral Church against all the odds and in the most difficult economic times.

May I also welcome in a special way today the Charge d'affaires of Republic of Iraq in London and the high representatives of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few weeks ago Pope Benedict XVI arrived in Assisi for a gathering of inter-religious leaders, in celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first such gathering, in 1986. It was the blessed Pope John Paul II's conviction and that of His Holiness The Patriarch that what unites the faiths is far more important than what divides them, and their belief that the religions must be the primary bridge-builders in our fractured world. This understanding was as you know at the heart of the common declaration signed between them in 1984.

Our Order is proud of the relationship of cooperation and trust which we have built across the boundaries of faith and race, relationships which have led to a understanding that has borne fruit especially in times of tension as we see today.

The Syriac Orthodox Church much like the Order continues to play a significant role in quietly but effectively, and over many years, fostering a new peaceful order of coexistence based on religious freedom and mutual respect.

The encouragement of a culture of dialogue and solidarity is at the heart of the Royal Order of Francis I, which was created in the mid-1800s by order of the King of the Two Sicilies to honour people of outstanding merit who have contributed to the well being of their society. In Britain among its ranks in recent years are the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Gregorios, The Duke of Westminster, Baroness Thatcher, Sir Sigmund Sternberg, Lord Carey of Clifton and the late Sheikh Zaki Badawi.

It was through the vehicle of the Order that our knights and dames were able to launch a series of interfaith conferences and initiatives in recent years in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Italy and Great Britain. These gatherings illustrated how we are brought together *because* of our faith, not *in spite of* it, and this message is one that needs to be heard loud and

clear in our contemporary culture, which can only see conviction as intolerant.

Distinguished guests, I am very confident that, with your commitment and prayer, these efforts will continue to grow.

The Order therefore wishes to recognise the efforts made by the Syriac Orthodox Church and so in thanking your Patriarch and Church and this congregation for all you have done, are doing, and will continue to do, and in the spirit of Assisi, and conscious of our great heritage, and for the sake of God and our fellow human beings, it is my pleasure to present in the name of our Grand Master and our Grand Prior the insignia of the highest rank within our Order – the Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Order of Francis I to Your Eminence.

Thank you.