

Synod head says it was logical to invite rabbi to biblical synod

VATICAN CITY - Inviting a Jewish scholar to address the world Synod of Bishops on the Bible was logical given the role of the Scriptures in Jewish life, said the head of the synod office.

Archbishop Nikola Eterovic, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, briefed journalists on plans for the Oct. 5-26 celebration of the 12th general assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will focus on "The Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church."

Also during the Oct. 3 briefing, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, said the synod's 253 voting members would include bishops from Hong Kong and Macau, but none from mainland China.

"An agreement was not reached" with the Chinese authorities to allow any bishops from the mainland to attend, Father Lombardi said.

Archbishop Eterovic told reporters Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Cohen, the chief rabbi of Haifa, Israel, would address the assembly Oct. 6.

The rabbi, he said, "will present how the Jewish people read and interpret the sacred Scriptures - the Torah, the prophets and the wisdom writings - which are, in great part, shared by Christians, who call them the Old Testament."

"It was a logical thing to invite a representative of our elder brothers to contribute, to express their experience of veneration and love of the holy Scriptures," the archbishop said.

Archbishop Eterovic said that, in preparing for the synod, several national bishops' conferences suggested inviting a Jewish scholar or rabbi, synod organizers agreed and "the Holy Father immediately accepted the idea."

The archbishop said he hoped Rabbi Cohen's presentation would assist the bishops

and “contribute also to improving the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people.”

The rabbi’s speech, he said, would be followed by a presentation by Cardinal Albert Vanhoye, retired secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, who will speak about the commission’s 2001 document, “The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible.”

Archbishop Eterovic also said that Pope Benedict XVI and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople would lead an evening prayer service Oct. 18 inside the synod hall.

After vespers, he said, they both will address synod members with a particular focus on the biblical letters of St. Paul.

Archbishop Eterovic also told reporters that some of the synod rules had been refined in order to allow more time for open discussion in the synod hall.

At the 2008 synod, he said, the “synod fathers,” the 253 members with full voting rights, will have a maximum of five minutes each to address the assembly. At the 2005 synod on the Eucharist, they each had six minutes and at previous synods they each had eight minutes.