

The Challenges That the Christian existence is facing in the Middle East

The Middle East is the land where the Christian faith has started out and it is the dawn of several civilizations.

In this Middle East , the heaven and earth converged and Jesus the Son of GOD was incarnated and saved humanity, from this Middle East the joyful annunciation was spread to every corner of the earth.

In This Middle East is where different cultures and civilizations were borne, and the middle has preserved them and was and still considered as a paradise where different kinds of seeds and trees have grown; sometimes they scramble but they accommodate, sometimes they get weak and some other times they grow and blossom.

This Middle East that witnessed the propagation of Christianity and its booming/prosperity was soon enough faced by big challenges the very first and most dangerous one was the Christian desertion which lead sometimes to fighting and we are still suffering from it till date.

The existential challenge that has been existing since the 7th century which represented by the land and the ideology, but Christianity remained an essential element in culture, civilization and reflection despite the fact that it was limited geographically and in numbers in the last decades with the decline of patriotism and national oriented thinking and the emergence of extremist holistic religious currents and the conflicts that a lot of countries in the region are facing which made the Christians situation worst.

In addition to the lack of understanding and the continuous persecution to our Christian call we really did live by it. (The Light that reveals/Exposes)

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:16-25)

We are suffering from:

- Prevention of practicing religious rites, like for example in Saudi Arabia Kingdom, despite the presence of millions of Christians in it because of the work opportunities available.

- Prevention from building and restoring churches like for example in Egypt, and that is because an old known decree from 1856 is still effective (it has been issued during the Ottoman Empire rule (St Joseph Church for example).
- The absence of religious freedom, Freedom of conscience, except for Lebanon Where freedom of converting religions is in one direction, in addition to mixed marriages (people marrying from different religions)and child registration...
- The inability for Christians in many countries in the region to reach certain public offices positions, and they are forbidden from pursuing medical specializations and to teach school materials like Arabic Language, knowing that at a certain era Christians in the middle east has preserved the Arabic language and saved it from Turkification (Turkish invasion on the language)
- In addition to the unemployment facto, which includes everyone without exceptions, that lead to the migration of geniuses and experts which made the community weaker the country weaker.
- The current security situation resulting from the wars and revolutions that left a disastrous trace on nations and people especially on minorities including the Christians, these disastrous impacts were manifested at the Christians communities as follows:
 - The displacement of villages and towns and discharged from the population of Christians
 - Taking over lands, houses and properties for Christians; ten thousands of them have left their villages and houses with only their clothes on.
 - Elimination of religious inheritance (churches, icons ...) and the cultural inheritance, historical inheritance and artistic inheritance in addition to digging up graves, as if they are trying to uproot Christians from their roots.
 - Prevention of all religious symbols inside and outside the church
 - Imposition of penalties in their whereabouts
 - Insecurity, being exposed to kidnapping, blackmailing, abuse and murder. (The two bishops, priests and many others, ransom demands...)
- In addition to the non-declared political project/agenda which consists on dividing and shredding the region and this requires vanishing the Christians from this region! because they are the fourth link between provinces and regions in Syria and Iraq, for instance the Christian presence in Syria stretches/starts from the south (Suwaydaa and Houran) passing through Damascus to the centre of Syria and its Coast, its north and its east same case in Iraq they are seeking with the others to the unity and independence of their countries.

- We have to add the elimination of the diversified state to justify the racist state.

The most important challenges that I personally think that Christians are facing nowadays:

1. To be what we must be: to live our Christian call having faith in Christ and acting in according to bible teachings and to always be able to witness to Jesus through difficulties! As his Holy Pope Francis said in his message to middle east Christians “Our presence is something precious its outlook for East voracious you a small herd but you bear a great responsibility in the land where Christianity was born and spread you like the leaven between the darkness of people”.
2. To be a factor of convergence and dialogue between our different churches and our cooperation with other religions, in his letter to the Middle East Christians the holy pope urges us saying: “I pray that you will be able to live fraternal company like the 1st Jerusalem, the unity that our God wanted is more necessary than any time before in this difficult period, it is a gift from GOD who is questioning our liberty and awaiting our answer. May the word of GOD, sacraments and prayers nourish your community and renew it continuously and in the midst of the enemies and conflicts constitute the partnership lived among yourselves a sign of the kingdom of God. I’m happy – Says his holiness pope Francis - about the good relationship and the cooperation between the bishops of the western churches and the Orthodox Churches... the pain that the Christians are suffering from is priceless contribution to the cause of the unity of churches, its blood ecumenism that requires a confident surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit.”

The cooperation with other religions constitutes another sign to the kingdom of God: the dialogue between religions gets much more interest when situations get tougher. There’s no other way, the dialogue that is based on openness, in the truth and in love, it makes the best antidote to the experience of religious fanatic which threatens believers from all religions.

Dialogue is at the same time a favour to justice and an essential condition to the wanted peace.

We might be the only community that can dialogue with everyone and that must be a convergence, unity and reconciliation factor.

3. Another challenged posed by the holy Pope:” To help our Muslim citizens to show an authentic image about Islam like many of them want to.

4. And the biggest challenge in my opinion is to overcome our fears and to restore our trust that was cracked because of what we saw and lived. The lack of trust nowadays is what prevents future visions in this Middle East for Christians and pushes migration. The challenge is to know that our presence in this Middle East is a call and a mission.

and I conclude with the Holy Pope Francis Words: “Dear Brothers and Sisters, Christians of the middle east, you have a big responsibility and you will be not alone to face it, therefore I wanted to write for you in order to encourage you and to express to you how valuable you existence and your mission is in this land that God has blessed.

Your witness is very beneficial to me, Thank you! I pray on daily basis for you and for your intentions/wishes!....I really hope to have the grace to visit you in person and to console you. May the Virgin Mary be with you, the holy mother of God and our mother and May she protects you always with her tenderness.

I give you all and your families the Apostolic Blessing.

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