



Patriarch John X on Christian Unity.

Today, upon the walls of Damascus we lift up our prayer to Jesus for unity, the unity of Christians. We lift up our prayer to the One who spoke to Paul, taking dominion over his heart and sweeping the walls of his mind, that He may breathe a sweet breeze over this land and surround us with His true peace.

The walls of Damascus that hosted Paul are the ones that embrace us now. The land of Antioch, which imbibed the name of Jesus, is the land that sprouted us forth and which pulses in our veins as a single faith in Jesus. In Antioch, we first bore witness to Jesus Christ and were called by His name. At Antioch we went to seek to receive the “metal” of Christ and it was forged within us and our life was hypostasized in the nectar of his teachings.

We in this land—Rum, Syriac and other communities— do not cast blame on history and do not embellish current reality. However, we affirm and we see with our own eyes that we are progressing along the path of unity. Unity does not mean one vanishing into the other, nor does it mean seizing the other into one’s own fold. Unity is for all of us to say with one voice: We have all sinned and fallen short of the grace of God (Romans 3:23). In confessing this, we lay the first brick. We seize heritage and sift it, placing it in ardent prayer before the Lord Jesus. Christian unity is not an ideology and it is more than a protocol. It transcends merely celebrating feasts on the same day. It goes beyond the question of praying at a single service. It does not know proselytism. It is a lived journey and a life that is carved out so that the edifice of the Church may be complete and so that we can rise together—in spirit, body, mind and being—“to the measure and the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). It is wrong to think that unity is built only on human dialogue, for all its importance. Christian unity is a necessity of existence and it is a proof of Christianity before being the outcome of dialogues. Christian unity is built up and perfected in the measure that each of us strives to be united to Christ and to draw close to Him. I am united to my fellow Christian in the measure that I strive along with him to be in unity with Christ, pulled toward Him, in a way that is not bowed by the circumstances of history and before which the exaggerations of externals melt away, a way that is shaped and supported by true dogma and the faith that has been passed down from generation to generation.

We are brought together today by this common prayer with our brothers in the Syriac Church and with all the communities of the Christian Middle East. We have gathered together to say that we are united in prayer for this tormented Middle East, for these tormented nations that, from the depth of their torment look to firm hope the resurrection. We are brought together by prayer in the face of this utter darkness that will inevitably be cleared away by the power of God and by the power of our patience and our reliance upon Him. We live with you in brotherhood of faith, brotherhood of life, brotherhood of hardship, brotherhood of joy, the brotherhood of the kidnapped pastors Yuhanna and Paul, with whom who are united in prayer with us and with you for their return and the return of all who have been abducted, and for much-desired peace.

Today our hearts burn with prayer for Syria, for Lebanon and for every place in this world. The blood of the children of this Middle East is not worth less than the blood of anyone else. Its people are not tokens in the market of interests. We are here to raise our voice high in the face of those who have allowed themselves to tamper with our life in common. Enough with fanning the flames and importing ideologies that land of this Middle East has not known. Enough with theorizing, enough with analyzing, enough with



contempt for peoples who long for their former era of security. Enough with kidnapping, enough with laying siege to people under false pretexts. Enough with terrorism, takfirism and the forced expulsion of people who are fed up with the drums of war and who long for peace in the land of peace. My question today for all the international sources, all the decision-makers and all those of good will: Is it not time for our bishops to come back? Where are human rights in what has happened with the bishops of Aleppo, Yuhanna Ibrahim and Paul Yazigi, and all those who have been abducted? Why do advocates of human rights recoil when any person in Europe gets a scratch and wrap themselves in a burqa of silence when the issue pertains to a Middle Eastern person? Is it perhaps that these rights were written down in order to protect some people and to cast others into oblivion? Or is it that the dignity of our people is not to be treated in terms of human rights, but rather in the market of interests and according to the lofty principles of commerce? I will say it once again: The time has come for the world to wake up to what is happening and to look with a humanitarian eye, not the eyes of interests, upon every drop of innocent blood honorably and sincerely in defense of existence, values and nations that were accustomed to sheltering everyone under their protection and deciding their own fate.

We pray to You, O Jesus, that You might take this land into Your abundant care. O Orient of lights, be with this tormented orient, heal its wounds by the wounds of Your cross. O Jesus, who were given wormwood and gall to drink out of compassion for humankind, be with Your human clay and remove from it the gall of temptations and the bitterness of days. Be, O Jesus, with the victims of kidnapping and the refugees and wipe away the tears of the grieving. Be, O Lord, with us, so that we may be witnesses to the truth to the entire world. By Your purity, bury the recalcitrance of our thoughts and by Your calmness quench the hot coal of anger. Be for us a beacon to light our path to true unity. Enlighten our minds and our being so that we may cast off our slouching selfishness and clothe ourselves in You as God, Savior, a Light that sweeps through our being and causes our souls to shine, and a ship that carries us over the waves of this passing world. Be for us a glow of love and a breath of peace that drives the sails of our life and docks our boat in the harbor of Your salvation. Take our hand that in You we may be one. Be our strength and a pen of love that constantly writes the song of salvation. Be for us the steel that strengthens the structure of our unity along the paths of this world, so that we may be led to you as a Church without any blemish or stain. Tell us, O Jesus, of Your divine prayer and teach us all to call upon God as “our Father” so that we may be in Him always and forever as we are now—brothers and more than brothers, gathered together to you by the pure Virgin, the bashful Mother whom we all imitate and whose intercession before God we ask, with whom we call out to God, asking for His wisdom and the light of the mind as we say:

O illuminate my soul

And my sense of sight, O Lord;

So that I may clearly see

And proclaim thee as my God.

This translation is unofficial. Arabic original [here](#).