

The One Love

By Bishop George Khodr

Syria is united and we want it so. Its fragmentation would be a danger for the entire region, and mainly for Lebanon. The French mandate had divided it into three parts; however it soon regained its unity due to the solidarity among its people.

It is possible to reinforce this unity through peace, which assumes that the blood continues to flow in the Syrians' veins and arteries. "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God." (Psalm 51)

Neither power nor hope, to withstand the enemy, is possible for the Arab East without a powerful Syria, coherent in all its social spectra, free from the history of its conflicts and holding only its glories. Its dream was a civil rule and this has become recently the dream of Arabs. We aspire that this dream might continue to exist in the souls as a denial of a rigid heritage and of a distinction between divine and human natures or a distinction between divine judgment, i.e. the salvation of the souls, and the human judgment, according to which human beings ask for divine inspiration in their daily issues on earth. The first [i.e. the worldly life] does not turn into the Hereafter [i.e. the life to come], however the first years for the Hereafter and it moves toward it, while it continues to impact the worldly life.

This is mainly the concern of Arabism, since it asks one major question about the legitimacy of carrying the human nature, which itself justifies pluralism and the burden of diversity within the one homeland. Pluralism is not dissipation, and alignment in one form without different political colors annihilates the individuals. It kills freedom. Thus you have to choose between freedom that has necessarily sporadic thoughts and the single-party rule. Only God has the right to think that He is the whole Truth.

I hope that Arabs would reach at the conviction that their diversity enriches them and that God has not delegate anyone to run the world. This is what civil rule means. It is the people's gathering in a country, where they agree to think together, and I did not say that their minds are separated from God. Every group [or body] can think that God inspires it with whatever God's will is, but it cannot impose on other people what it assumes to be the ground of community life. To me it does not make sense when a country declares its belief in one religion or another. The state is a legal body, i.e. it has an abstract structure. However a homeland is about people who meet, interact and share their affections and their human depths, and from these depths the state takes its drive to proceed. In the homeland you are my brother and together we build the state. Through the encounter and the exchange of our thoughts and convictions we reach together at a rule which you and I can ratify. Though we must disagree, yet our alliance entails that I would not stretch

my hand to kill you and you would not stretch yours to kill me. The state, before anything else, is a place for peace.

No one knows the destination of the Arab Spring. It should contain some seeds of democracy, yet it might not be exempt of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism [in its turn] might not be of equal intensity in all countries, yet we must perceive that the dictatorship of a group may be worse than the dictatorship of a person. Facing such uncertainty, questions concerning freedom arise because of the different political philosophies.

However, my concern is not about the potential progress of every Arab Spring, since political Arabism has different colors or different aspects. What happens in Egypt had never occurred during the days of its kings. I have followed, in my youth, king Fouad's and king Farouk's rules, and then Egypt designated the Copt Boutros Ghali Pasha as Prime Minister, while Egypt's revolution against the British was organized by Muslims and Copts alike. That means that Christians' alliance with foreigners was not known. I don't know exactly why the attitude has changed after the June-revolution, so that I can give my opinion. Anba Shenouda, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, had refused absolutely that any Copt would think of a Coptic particularism on the political level. Could one of the causes of strain be that Copts were outstandingly successful in universities and professions, such as medicine and pharmacy? Scientific progress maybe does not serve one. We all remember that Anba Shenouda had forbidden his community to visit Israel, after establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. And the Coptic theology, similar to Orthodox theology in general, is stringent with regard to Judaism and Jews. Further, it was forbidden for anyone to dispute with Muslims, in case any of them had published a book or an article against Christianity. There is no doubt that Egyptian security bodies are negligent to act upon sectarian calamities. The problem needs a radical solution; since we all want that the beloved Egypt remains a distinctive Arab country. No one from my generation would be influenced by the Arab culture, unless he had been influenced by the Egyptian thought. And whoever knows the spiritual greatness, faith, and serenity of the Egyptian Copts, would be sad for their emigration.

What concerns us in particular is the triad of Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon, where there is convergence in characters and traditions between Christians and Muslims. I don't know the reason of having such privateness in the Arab world. However, we all obviously remember that the Arab rule, from its beginning, complied with Christians. Only the Mamluks' rule was harsh may be even on non-Christian communities. The culture of kinship continued to prevail among us, in the Ottoman rule, before our struggle and the implementation of the policy of Turkification in the beginning of the 20th Century. I can say with confidence that

mildness was ruling upon the relationships among the different confessions, and our characters would not change easily or hastily. Therefore, I do not see any reason for the fears expressed by some Christians. What has happened in Iraq, which faces a long war, cannot be considered as an example for the danger threatening the Christians. All people there killed each other. In addition to that, our mindset is different than the Iraqi mindset.

Do Christians lack courage and hope? We can stretch our hands to the hands of Muslims as we always did earlier. I understand that some may say that there are new movements, which are unrelenting.

However, throughout all difficulties we live with Christ, who has said that he will always be with us to the end of the age. Fear is the gravest force that drags us out of our place. It always annihilates what is commonly called the minorities, because numbers are everything for them. In addition, I feel that moderate Muslims who love us and wish our stay are more important and powerful than those extremists. And each of us knows a loving friend among them.

The time has come for Muslims to realize that the old charge, which claims that we were cooperating with the foreigner, is not true anymore. Don't you remember that Charles de Gaulle, who was committed to his Catholic faith, said that France deals with all the Lebanese confessions alike? While the Americans know that a State has no governor who rules forever. And they have never demonstrated that they are friends of Christians. What could we offer to them, while they have strong relationships with Arab countries, where no Christian lives? Besides, the Muslims' oil is appealing.

In the year 636 Arabs were besieging Damascus. Its Governor, Mansur ibn Sarjun, the grandfather of Saint John of Damascus, realized that he had to open the city gates lest Arabs enter it by force and expose Christians to danger. But when Arabs took over all the State departments, they discovered that Christians were holding all the offices. Thus Muslims maintained Christians in all the departments, because of their knowledge. This is to say that Christians understood that Arabs entered the Levant to become its rulers, and that they should cooperate with them.

Another thing that has to be said is that the Sunnites represent 85% of the Muslims worldwide and that the whole idea about the alliance of minorities is void and useless. This does not mean that we abandon our friendship toward the Shiites. They, first of all, refuse any confrontation with the Sunnites. And to all of them together it has been said: "You were the best nation brought forth to mankind, bidding the right and forbidding the wrong". We are delighted about the Shiite's renaissance, and we also like their poets, whether ancient or modern. In theology, we like their open-mindedness and one of their great personages, Imam Musa Al Sadr, has appeared who truly loved us. Thus we responded to their love in our truthfulness. However, we need to realize that we have lived sincerely and with

dignity among the Sunnites in the cities, and they do appreciate this matter. I think that we showed courtesy and love to them, which resulted in relating individuals and families together to the present day. We are not factional in our companionship with Muslims, and they are one nation. Our heart is open to all of them, since there is nothing other than love in our hearts, as long as we are devoted to Christ.

Nevertheless, we are, Christians and Muslims, in need of repentance and a continuous purification to embrace the other. And our national unity is an embracement in order not to be affected by dissimulation.

This is a homeland of bestowal founded on hope and constant purification. Muslims have the “wound of Issa [Jesus]”, which is the wound of love, as Ibn ‘Arabi called it, and they do not want to recover from it since to it belongs the principality. And we are with them in this love. This is how a homeland might be built.