

Open Letters...

Father Elias Zahlawi

Damascus, 2019

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Preliminary Words

In my frequent visits to Fr Zahlaoui in his little room on the second floor of the Priests' residence attached to The Lady of Damascus Church in Al Qusour area in Damascus, especially towards the end of past April, in order to check and finalise the translations of the letters with him, I read to him my "Translator's Forward". As an adept translator, himself (from and into French), he was nodding approval at what I was reading/explaining to him. On concluding my "Forward", he said "but the reader has no clue who you are, Jack, and what your relationship with me, the University Parish family, and the Choir of Joy, etc is. So *you must* write an 'Introduction' to explain that, lest some readers think there are some ulterior motives..." So, here are my "Preliminary ('Introductory') Words" for which I beg the reader's indulgence. Fr Zahlaoui's and my paths crossed in the very early 1970s, when a few of us—university students and recent graduates—used to get together after celebrating Mass in the Armenian Catholic Church in Old Damascus to chat, 'shoot' a few goals in the school yard next to the church, or throw a few basketballs before we dispersed...(I had just come back from Beirut, with a BA in English Language and Literature and another BA from the English Dept, Damascus Uni, and wanted to reconnect with the roots in my home country after 8 years of absence. We wanted these casual meetings to become sort of regular so that we could feel free to come together in the school yard adjacent to the church—a secure and safe place away from the streets... We approached the young priest and he was very supportive of the idea. Soon we thought of giving our get-together a name so that other young men and women would feel they could also become part of this very informal 'gathering'. After some deliberation, we settled on University Parish Youths/Family, or some such name. One of the Ghassans in the group said that there was a University Parish in Sayyidat Dimashq (The Lady of Damascus) Church. "Oh Great!" I thought aloud. "Let's go meet with them", thinking that, that would save us the trouble of starting something from zero. We went there to meet the priest in charge, who—I was shocked to discover—was very annoyed and even aggressive at our "intrusion" in his work and what he was trying to do. He thought that we were some renegade youths who were there to disrupt his hard work... We clashed... That was my first meeting with the man I came later to know as Abouna Elias, i.e. Fr Zahlaoui.

I think it was the same good-hearted Ghassan who helped clear the air, and arranged another meeting a couple of weeks later. This time the meeting was very quiet—cautious and wary at the beginning, but as the meeting progressed, it progressed into a very amicable meeting. We just chatted and talked of what we were thinking and why we had come to Sayyidat Dimashq Church, etc. The more we talked, the more amicable the meeting became as we discovered that we were thinking along similar lines. We understood the reason behind Fr Zahlaoui's anger the first time we met. He had been designated by the Bishops of Damascus churches to look after the youths in Damascus, and here were some young people from some church who were starting something on their own, which he thought was an attempt instigated by some to disrupt his endeavor and cause a schism, etc. This

was of course not the case as we happened to simply feel the need for a place under the auspices of the church to get together. Misunderstanding cleared, we became very involved with Fr Zahlaoui's University Parish Family, and thus a relationship of trust and respect for him, for what he stood for, and for everything he was doing for the youths was established. This has never wavered throughout the 45 years plus that it has so far lasted.

A couple of years later, like many university graduates in The University Parish Family, I travelled abroad to pursue higher education. I went to Britain on a scholarship from Damascus University to read for a PhD in Linguistics. I went to St Andrews University—the first university that offered me admission. In the first year, I attained a Diploma in Linguistics—a preliminary requirement for enrolling as a research student for higher degrees. But I had by then received an admission from Edinburgh University, so went there and attained a Master's in Applied Linguistics in under a couple of years. Unfortunately, a few of the great names, whom I wanted to work with for my PhD at Edinburgh University left that year to other 'higher' posts in other universities inside and outside Britain, so I returned to St Andrews University to read for a PhD in Theoretical Linguistics. I was, I think, in my second year at St Andrews when the University realized that there was a need to establish an English Language Teaching Centre to help the postgraduates (from all over the world), who were not progressing well enough in their research because of the inadequacy of their English. Because of my Master's in Applied Linguistics (= teaching English to non-native speakers), I was chosen to take care of this one-year "pilot" project, recruit the teachers, and teach in it as well. After this first year piloting, the project developed into a fully fledged English Teaching Centre, and I became its "Director". This went on for about 5 years before I realized that I was too involved in the Centre and that it was taking so much of my time that my PhD was being relegated to a very much secondary position. So, had to stop my involvement in the Centre—and just in time, too—to finalise my PhD thesis. I finished my degree, and took the overnight coach to London the night I graduated, in order to fly home the next day—after a 12-year absence. After sorting out some legal issues with Damascus University due to my long stay in Britain, I started working as a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, at Damascus University, where I worked for over 20 years. During these years, I taught a variety of subjects related to language and linguistics including of course translation from and into English to various years. I became Head of Department for 3 years, and the Director of the Translation Programme in the Open Learning Centre at the Uni, also, teaching a variety of subjects including various types of Translation courses, Phonetics, and Reading Comprehension courses, for which I also prepared three books (in English of course) accompanied by 2-hour teaching videos each.

Early on, following my return home and starting to establish myself, I was invited to meet the director of the American Language Center. After a very pleasant one-and-a-half hour meeting with a man—a gentle American academic who, I discovered later, loved Syrians—I was offered a teaching job at the ALC. I was told to "Choose my times and levels." I was pleasantly surprised by the offer as I knew the ALC employed only native speakers. My teaching at the ALC went on for many, many years.

Soon after I managed to be excused from heading the English Department, I was called upon by the Minister of Higher Education to establish the Preparatory Year at the Syrian Virtual University and the English Programme. This was a superb pioneering university project, which I loved and into which I threw all my weight, initiating and organizing everything in it from scratch, recruiting and training teachers for on-line teaching—all of whom, without exception, were superbly cooperative and felt, like I did: that they were pioneering something great for the country.

About a year later, I was among the delegate of eight lecturers/professors (3 from the English Dept, headed by myself; 3 from the French Dept; and 2 from the Arabic Dept) which was selected to re-train in order to establish an “International Faculty of Interpretation”—a joint faculty between Mons-Hainaut University in Belgium and Damascus University. The retraining lasted 6 months, three of which were done in Damascus, conducted by the Professor Heading the Faculty of Interpretation, and his deputy at Mons-Hainaut University, and three more months were spent at the University in Belgium. This necessitated that I excuse myself from looking after the SVU as I could not head two projects simultaneously, each of which needed a massive amount of work. I felt that this new project was also great for the country and, as I felt that I have established the programme at the SVU and that it had really taken off, I felt that I could withdraw from it to be able to devote all my efforts to this “International Interpretation Faculty”. And indeed, being a faculty in the process of being established, it took massive amount of work and late-hour meetings on many levels to decide and design its structure, its relationship with the “mother” university, the number of departments it was going to have, its courses, the various programmes it taught, even its location, etc.

The ground work for this Faculty of Interpretation had just finished and the Faculty was about to be launched when I reached my retirement age in 2006. This meant that I ceased working for Damascus University in any form. I had only my work at the ALC left, so devoted more time to my family and garden until 2009 when it closed after the American meddling in Syrian affairs. Professor Maa’ Al Bared, who had been Damascus University President when I was Head of the English Dept, however, had become the President of the Arab International University (formerly the Arab-European University) and, on learning I had become free from any work obligation, called me to “Look after the English Dept at his University”. It turned out that I had to “take care” of 3 ‘unofficial’ Departments: English, Arabic, and the Requirements. Soon these ‘departments’ were made into the Faculty of University Requirements and I was named Dean of this Faculty. As usual, I worked hard at establishing this Faculty, structuring it, sorting out its courses, and organizing its affairs. At the AIU, I proof-read and designed the cover of a book in English on *the History of Ancient Civilisation*, and compiled a book entitled *Academic Writing and Research*. Both books were taught at the University. My work at the AIU went on for almost 4 years before the horrid war on and in Syria erupted, and it was not safe anymore to go to University Campus (about 50 km from Damascus on the road to Hot-Spot, Deraa), so the university, like others in that region, ‘temporarily’ relocated to Damascus and the various university faculties dispersed over numerous sites, sports centres, and hotels, as there was not a single place that could accommodate the 6000+ students and the thousand or more faculty the University had. It was real-

ly difficult, under the war circumstances, to hop around all over Damascus to run the faculty well, so I had to stop working for the AIU.

Even before the start of war on Syria, the ALC, operating under the American Cultural Center, had to close together with the US embassy and all American activities in Syria in 2009 as mentioned above. All the foreign teachers left the country, but somehow, the ALC after a closure of a couple of months resumed operation as the ALTC (Advanced Language & Training Centre) with a wholly Syrian management and teachers. I was called upon, soon after leaving the AIU in 2013, to oversee its academic side and the Teaching of English in it. I assumed this responsibility under the title of Director of Curriculum with the responsibility of upgrading not only the courses, but the teaching in it as well—a position I still hold. The Centre is now thriving, thank God, and doing really well as it is much more academically and professionally oriented than when it was the ALC.

A couple of years on, I was called upon to head the English (and Translation) Dept at Qasyoun University. This went on really well for a couple of years until a change in the top management of the university meant that we no more saw eye-to-eye on the whole concept of university and higher education, so I had to leave. Almost immediately I received an offer to work at the Sham University, where I am still working.

During all these years and various academic involvement and responsibilities, contact with Fr Zahlaoui never ceased. The Soufaniyeh phenomenon appeared, and I accompanied it from the beginning. Fr Zhalaoui would call upon me every now and then to be his interpreter if he had to give an interview to foreign delegations, foreign press or TV, or to meet foreign visitors and journalists. Fr Zahlaoui has always been a profuse writer in Arabic and French, and who else but me would he call upon when he needed to have any of his writings, whether related to the Choir of Joy, the University Parish Family, or his letters, translated into English?

A final note needs to be mentioned although it should be obvious to anyone who knows Fr Zahlaoui and all his tireless work for the youths, the Parish Family, the Choir of Joy, and all and everything he gets involved in: Everything, absolutely everything, in which Fr Zahlaoui is involved, and the effort of all and everyone involved with him, is done wholly and totally gratuitously—including these translations of some of his “Open Letters”, for which the man always thanks me..., when in honest truth, I am the one who is truly and humbly indebted to him for availing me of the chance to contribute, in a very small way, to what he is doing—and has been doing all his life—in the service of youths and country—in his words, “to serve God through serving man”, as he takes to heart the words of 2nd century Bishop of Lyons, St Irenaeus: “The glory of God is the human person fully alive”.

Jack-Sarkis Tumajian
Damascus, April 26, 2016

Translator's forward

Whoever has dabbled in translation, even a little, knows that it is a difficult job—and in some sense, even an impossible job. In the words of Fr Zahlaoui, himself: *translators are traitors*, which apparently is a French saying. This is because there is, of course, no absolutely 100% 'perfect' or even accurate translation! Inevitably, something will always be lost in translation, content-wise and/or language-wise, hence the translator is a "traitor" to the original text. This is, essentially, because the translator attempts to convey a specific "intended" message from one language into another, which on the face of it, sounds straightforward. The difficulty stems from the fact that language is so intricately embedded in culture that the two cannot be separated. This Language/Culture dichotomy is such a tyrannical ruler of the mind that it controls not only "how" we think but also "what" we think. Indeed it even gives existence to the world of phenomena in the whole universe, and without it nothing but an amorphous mass really exists.¹ Translation, thus, becomes a much more complex process in which the translator attempts to convey a specific message embedded in a specific culture (in the way it is conceived, structured, vocabulary choices made, etc.) into another language, with its own diametrically different structural entanglement in such a way that the reader in this "target" language understands it in the way it is intended in the original language/culture. In doing his job, the translator tries not to permit the original cultural imprint on the message (which must be maintained at least to some degree—indeed it even cannot be totally eliminated) to interfere with the readers' understanding. Just to compound an already near impossible task, the faithful translator has to try to maintain, as far as possible, a semblance of the specific way or style that is unique to every writer in his choice of diction, genre, sentence structure, style of writing, etc. as well as convey the spirit and power or strength of the original message. This is especially important when what is being translated is of such intensity and involvement, and when the writer is no other than Fr Zahlaoui, himself, whose whole persona permeates all his writings and makes them so unique.

Those familiar with Fr Zahlaoui's style of writing in Arabic know that it is characterized by long, complex, intertwined, and often inter-mingled rich thoughts. In translating these letters into English, I have tried to remain reasonably faithful to Fr Zahlaoui's distinctive style. I have diverged from this rule only when to stick to it too closely would confuse the meaning. Please forgive me if this makes reading not as smooth as it could have been had I concerned myself with conveying the "semantic" content or message of the letters only. I am aware that many a sentence could have been formulated structurally and grammatically in a simpler and more lucid way, but my attempt at adhering to the style of the writer dictated my choices.

The best translations are, unquestionably, those done in consultation with the writer. This is why the translation of these letters—indeed as with all translations I have

¹ The reader is invited to read the various and many treatise on this subject, especially on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, Linguistic Relativism, and Linguistic Determinism.

done for Fr Zahlaoui—was discussed, at various stages and in minute details with Fr Zahlaoui, so that the English version conveys the 'correct' nuances of meaning and appropriate connotation/s of any Arabic expression or specific implication/s.

Please keep in mind, though, that we are all human; and that despite repeated reviews and proof readings, I am sure that I have still slipped here and there. For these please forgive me. Never hesitate, though, to communicate to me any thoughts and comments regarding this at Fr Zahlaoui's official e-mail address: maxv-olin66@gmail.com, or at my personal e-mail address: tumajian@gmail.com

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An open letter from a Christian Arab Priest to the Christian President, Jimmy Carter*

April 1979

Mr President:

As a Christian Arab Priest, I wanted to address you as you are a Christian American President.

You have never ceased to insert a Christian background into politics.

Christianity, as you and I know, is love and peace.

Politics, as everybody knows, is Machiavellian.

This is why I was, as were many others, surprised by your statements.

I read these with anticipation in international magazines, which allocated to sections of your speeches, which reminded me very much of the language of sermons in churches.

You have chosen to focus your efforts on the huge hub in which war might erupt in the world: the Arab East.

Until today, March 26, 1979, arrived, which you did not hesitate to consider "the greatest day in the history of the 20th century."

Mr President:

I have no doubt that many have started to consider you one of the greatest presidents of the United States.

I do not blame you if the euphoria of the moment gripped you, so you, yourself, became convinced of this about yourself.

Is this not the meaning of the Biblical verse that you used in the signing of the treaty, when you considered yourself, Begin, and Sadat among "the children of God, who are makers of peace."

Nevertheless, allow me, I, the Arab Priest/citizen, to spoil this euphoria by not congratulating you. I do want, truthfully, to believe that you are totally honest in what you have managed to do... and I want to disregard what your opponents accuse you of (trying to retrieve your waning popularity), and of trying for a new presidential term.

I want all that, truthfully I want it.

Nevertheless, I find myself unable to congratulate you... not because I do not like peace, and not because I fear the Intelligence Agencies of my country, but because I do not, in truth, believe in what you have done and are doing.

Naturally, my stance makes no difference to you, and it does not perturb the international symphony of international congratulations, the honest and 'pretend' ones, which must be resounding in your ears...

But it might interest you, even just a little, to know the opinion of an Arab citizen who is a Priest at the same time, who believes in the same Christ that you believe in, and who is certainly concerned about the "peace" that you are trying to provide for his land and for the children of his nation.

* Published in the Parisian "Future", issue No 112, April, 1979.

Mr President:

You seek peace. You say this and ascertain it. I am sorry to tell you, however, that I have honestly tried to see the peace that you are seeking, but I have only seen the peace that Israel wants. Excuse me asking: Do you have a clear idea of the peace that Israel wants?

Are you truly convinced that what Israel wants is, truly, peace?

Does peace reside in Israel's continued disregard for the innumerable Security Council decisions, and those of the United Nations?

Does peace exist with continued occupation of lands, which the international 'family' considers Arab lands?

Can peace be based on continued eviction and driving away thousands of Arab residents, and on the continued arrests of thousands of the children of these areas?

Do you have real, or even partial conviction that the pressures you have personally exerted on Sadat, and which ended with his signing the "Peace Treaty" with Israel, truly serves and will serve the cause of peace?

Mr President:

You seek peace and you ascertain that, so what would you say, if one day, which might be very near, it became clear to you that you were just a victim of Israel, and that you lured Sadat with you into a game that has brought the world the horrors of more wars, where you wanted peace?

What would you say if the Arab East, starting from my country, Syria, were exposed, in a near day, to a precautionary pre-emptive Israeli attack resulting in more destruction, homelessness, killing, and vengeance, in addition to another Israeli expansion?

Can you be sure that these possibilities are unlikely to occur?

Besides, what would you say if it became clear to you one day that Sadat's Egypt had transformed into an Israeli colony and that its people grind the sand of the desert to fill their empty stomachs?

There might not be any Sadat, then, and you might not be in the White House.

But what would you want history and the lovers of peace to say about you, then?

What would you have done, then, on this day, March 26, 1979?

Will you still consider it the "Greatest day in the history of the 20th century"?

Do you not see it, in the light of these possibilities, as one of the worst days of the 20th century?

Would you not thus enabled Israel, after you have removed Egypt from the arena, temporarily, to strike the Arab world, and possibly the whole world?

So, where is the peace that you wanted, we want, and the whole world wants?

What could you say, or do, if Israel, having tranquilised Sadat and Egypt for a while, dealt Egypt a crushing blow so as not to be able to stand on its feet again?

Mr President:

You are a Christian believer who reads the Bible. I would like you to remember that the night that the angels preached peace to the shepherds, Herod's hands were stained with the blood of the children of Jerusalem.

I see the tragedy repeated today and at your own hands, but not only in Jerusalem

or Palestine, but throughout the whole Arab East. Everything seems today as if there were wobbly seats whose occupiers want them to settle on solid bases...

I hope that you, yourself, knowingly or unknowingly, are not another grandchild of Herod.

I hope, as well, that Sadat would not be the temporary executioner whose head Herod would cut off having carried out his master's orders.

Peace cannot be built on millions of skulls flying off since the days of Herod until now...

Mr President:

I have but one wish I would like to express to you: You are a believer, and I am a believer. A basic tenet of our shared belief is our certainty of the final and decisive day when we shall stand in front of God, the God of true peace, the judge of all... As a believer, I set you the sole appointment in which I can reach you, there in front of our judging God. As I do so, I honestly hope not to hear him say to you:

I was homeless, and you increased my misery,
I was unjustly treated, and you increased my injustice,
I was poor, and you increased my poverty,
And I was sick, and you killed me.

If not, then what will earning the love of Begin, Sadat, and the Zionist Lobby benefit you, when you have lost yourself?

Mr President:

I write to you while hundreds of thousands of the children of my nation demonstrate in the streets of Damascus and other Arab cities and capitals denouncing of the "Great Event", whose "hero", first and foremost, you are.

I write to you at the time when the Arab residents of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Israel express their denunciation as well of the same "Great Event".

I write to you in the calm of the faithful, to express to you, as a Christian Arab Priest, what is going on in my mind of fear for the same peace that you seek.

You might be surprised by what I have done. I do not expect that any ordinary citizen, like myself, has ever thought of writing to you—you the President of the United States of America!

I hope that the incense rising now around you would not prevent you from reading this long letter coming to you from a Christian Arab Priest from Damascus.

I pray that you will surprise me with an answer.

Mr President:

I conclude with a special thanks to you because with this "Great Event", you have offered the Arab leaders and the Arab people a last chance to adopt suitable stands before it is too late.

Please accept my respect.

Fr Elias Zahlaoui

An open letter from a Christian Arab Priest to the American President Ronald Regan

June 12, 1982

Mr President:

Let me, in my naivety, address you in the name of millions of Arabs as I recently addressed your predecessor, Mr Jimmy Carter, on the occasion of signing the Camp David treaty.

I write to you as—according to news agencies—you prepare to deliver a "historic and important" address in front of the Berlin Wall.

I wish I were near this wall, near you...

Not to hear what you will say about freedom and human dignity, but to analyse what you try to teach us in seconds what Israel has failed to teach us in forty years...

Mr President:

What you are truly trying to teach us is the desire to kill...

Yes, I, the Priest, tell you that you are trying to teach us the desire to kill...

You are teaching us this the moment your representative in the Security Council exercised the "right of veto" on the evening of June 7 in your "care to maintain balance" in the decisions of this respected international organization!

O, how lovely is the "balance" that your country's pet, Israel, is effecting in the whole Arab East, even in the world, by overrunning Lebanon by what you and your predecessors of the "pioneers" of freedom, dignity and 'righteousness', have gifted it with.

Mr President:

I am an Arab from Syria,
approaching fifty years of age,
living what every Arab has been living.

You may not be ignorant that what we live, we the Arabs, is no less than a horrid feeling of injustice that has descended and is still descending on our people and countries, one after the other...

Of course, I do not absolve my country of the ills nesting in it, the result product of the human, himself, society, and history.

I can assure you, however, that I have preserved myself from every feeling of vengeance, desire, and killing.

I have not felt the desire of vengeance towards even the Israeli so much as pity for him pouring his vengeance, that has been accumulated in him for three thousand years, on to my people, which are the only—yes, the only—people with whom the Israelis found refuge that has guaranteed for it great security, even flourish, position, and trust.

I have never, as a Priest, thought of killing a single Israeli, just for the killing...

And as a Priest, I have found myself repeatedly calling people to fight the Israelis in

order to preserve the right of the children of my Arab homeland in peace, dignity, and existence, as well as to save the humanity of the Israeli, himself, as he has turned into nothing but a monster due to his strange history and the dirty Western influence.

As a Priest, I was ready to carry arms to confront—not to kill—him, to fight with him...

I assure you that I managed, as an Arab Priest, to maintain this difficult balance of love towards my Arab neighbour and Arab brother, and to my Israeli enemy specifically...

Suddenly, I found myself fall...

Suddenly, I found a desire in me to kill...

I retreated... terrified...

Mr President,

Congratulations! You are teaching me to kill...

You are even teaching me worse things:

You are teaching me vengeance...

While my heart, as a human and as a Priest, has no room except for love...

So, congratulations again, Mr President of what is dubbed the greatest country history has known...

Do not wonder, after this, if this desire to kill has swept the hearts of millions of the children of my people...

The true wonder is in how some of my nation's greats, as well as ordinary people, remain in your lap and the lap of you States.

The heart of the Christian Priest, who every day holds in his hands the holy sacrament, the body of the Lord, and utters at the altar the greatest words of love and sacrifice ever issued from the lips of humans, this heart has now room—if I wanted—for vengeance and the desire to kill... All because of you, you, who proclaims freedom, dignity, and peace...

Mr President:

This is what I wanted to tell you...

Naturally, I am not so naïve as to imagine that these words will reach your ears while you perch on top of Olympus with the other gods in the West, deciding the fates of lesser mortals...

But it might reach the ears of some "officials" in some of your establishments, which might one day prevent me from entering the "heaven" of your States.

At any rate, I am satisfied with the "heaven" of my country and homeland...

I am not as naïve, either, as to believe that these words of mine might make any difference to anything...

O, how I wished that, that condemnation of your criminality came from Church sectors other than Priesthood, whether Arab or American, struggling with the poor in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Brazil, Argentina, and other countries that deserve your military and economic machine...

Mr President:

What is left for me is to convey to you what I imagine to be very, very warm longings of thousands of victims, the blood of whom drew the map of American injustice in the world, starting with Palestine, passing on to Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, El Salvador, the Malvinas islands, Chile, Nicaragua, and ending with ??? Maybe the United States?

A final word I whisper in the ear of the crucified, Jesus, the son of Palestine, for him to lodge in God's heart... God, who brings down the mighty and raises the weak...

"O God! Forgive them not!

For they truly know what they are doing!"

Mr George W Bush, President of the USA

September 17, 2001

Mr President:

Allow me, first of all, to offer to you and to the good American people my sincerest condolences, asking God to spread His peace and good hope all over America and the whole world.

Mr President:

I am a Catholic Priest from Syria, born in 1932 in Damascus to a Christian Arab family. I have been serving in one or another of Damascus churches since 1962.

A couple of days ago, I met a certain Fr Fox, an American Priest, who had come to Damascus and is leaving to America the day after tomorrow. We talked at length, with pain, about what had happened in New York and Washington, and about what events that might result from this, which could and perhaps would be even more disastrous to the whole world. This talk gave me a sliver of hope though, as Fr Fox assured me he could put me in touch with you personally via e-mail.

Being a priest, an Arab and a human being, I felt a certain responsibility to burden this American Priest with my personal letter to you, hoping that you would find some time to read it, despite your immense responsibilities and preoccupations.

Mr President:

What can I, a priest who has nothing but his faith, say to you, the Christian American, and ruler of the strongest and richest country in the world? Simply and humbly, I would like to remind you of certain axioms that you must know well, but may have forgotten, due to the position that you occupy or due to pressures, hidden or apparent, which are exerted over anyone who occupies such a position, as well as to the horrible events that hit New York and Washington, hitting America's pride in the heart. You are after all a human being and an American citizen.

Mr President:

The whole world feels with America today because what has happened is so sad and painful that it breaks even the hardest of hearts. I beg of you, still, to ask yourself, as the President of the United States of America, and together with all the highest officials around you, why did such a horrifying thing happen? I be of you, also, not to imagine that the whole world is in the grip of the "devils of terrorism", and that you, and all the heads of states in the West, are required to assume the role of the angels entrusted with saving the world from these devils.

Are you truly angels?

Are the others truly devils?

Are we not all human?

I beg of you also to wonder how all this happened without even the slightest bit of its news leaking to your super CIA, from which nothing and no person escapes?

I beg of you to wonder *why* has all the media in America and the whole Western world rushed to accuse the Arabs and the Moslems, discovering in a few days the names of tens of presumed terrorists without making sure of even Bin Laden's involvement—inciting, thus, a wave of hatred towards Moslems and Arabs—hatred

which might begin a wave of turmoil in the world which will not spare even America or the West? Is this what you really want? Who would benefit from this, if it happened, I wonder? Allow me also, please, to beg you to wonder why have these acts of aggression increased in the United States especially, since the seventies, including the horrifying attack in Oklahoma?

Mr President:

Do you, and those around you, believe that such acts of aggression and such animosity towards America are for nothing, cannot be understood, or without justification? Is it not possible that you, yourselves, are responsible to some extent, large or small, for the acts of aggression you are in a way causing yourselves, or for the growing feeling of animosity towards America throughout the whole world?

Would you please allow me to beg you to wonder, too, how come that all those who were for a long time "heroes" in your estimation—such as Taliban, Bin Laden, and even Saddam Hussein, himself—have now become "devils" and needed to be exterminated off the face of the earth even at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives of men, women, and children as has happened, and is still happening in Iraq since the infamous "Desert Storm" in 1990-1991, and even if this would cost hundreds of billions of dollars, which had they been used with some intelligence and far-sightedness, would save the world from many injustices and deadly diseases, as well as help alleviate the effects of natural disasters?

Allow me also to beg you to wonder what is it that forces such a great country, as the United States of America, to violate its own constitution, and all international laws and decisions, as well as all moral laws, whenever anything touches Israel in the United Nations, the Security Council, or in International conferences—such as Durban—and buckle at the knees and hastily and unhesitatingly use the right of "Veto"? This is while it (the US) asks for the severest of punishments—both intelligent and stupid—for whole nations because these nations have, in your view, not obeyed international law? What makes you do it? Is petrol enough reason for such bigotry? Or is there what is more dangerous than oil for the world, and for the United States of America, specifically?

Mr President:

Have you ever wondered what has happened, and is happening in Palestine, and in the whole Orient and the Moslem world since the United Nations divided Palestine, and then allowed Israel (and still does) to swallow the whole of Palestine and Arab "occupied" lands, with un-ashamed Western support, and unabashed American support, making the United States appear to all Arabs, myself, the priest, included, as though the US were one of Israel's states? What is happening?

Do you not see terrorism in what has been happening in Palestine and the Arab Orient for more than fifty years? Do you not see terrorism, especially in what has been happening in Palestine for the past year at least, of killing, destruction, and purposeful hunting down of children and women, uprooting of orchards and destruction of whole farms, starving and expelling people from their homes in what is obviously intended to be a repeat of 1948—all with the use of American weapons, from the small automatic weapons to the F16s, the Apache Helicopters, and tanks? If all this is not terrorism, what is it, then, I wonder.

If Israel thinks that by so doing it is preparing a future of coexistence and cooperation with the Arabs and the Moslems, it is clearly making a grievous error. This is especially so as the Arabs and Moslems were the only people in history who did not

know any Anti-Semitism, and among whom Jews have always lived in safety and peace.

Mr President:

Allow me to conclude with two points:

1. A question: Why does the United Nations not organize an international symposium which defines precisely, concisely, and specifically what terrorism in all its forms is? It can take appropriate and internationally agreed upon actions to combat it, instead of the dangerous and ominous operation you are threatening the world with, counting yourself, together with the heads of the Western world to be the "good angels", while most of humanity sees the arrogance of your countries and your shameless domination over other countries to be the homeland of international terrorism.
2. A prayer: A prayer to God to send you good and God-fearing men of the church and thinkers who will help you open your heart and eyes, so that you can decide with courage and wisdom to be one of the great ones who build a civilization for all humanity, with justice and dignity for everyone, such justice and dignity that will remove from the memory of everyone the image of the arrogant tyranny of most of the rulers of America and the world who came before you.

Mr President:

I wish to whisper my last few words in your ear, with love and hope.

You cannot be unaware that you may be called upon to meet your Creator any moment. As a priest, I would not want for you, nor for anybody else, to close his eyes and find himself in the presence of the Almighty, the Great and Only judge, whose judgment no one can ever escape, with hands carrying a world drenched in blood.

Mr President:

Thank you for listening to me. Please forgive me for taking so much of your time.

I pray for you and all America, and for everyone in it, as I pray for everyone on the face of the earth, for hope, peace, and joy for all.

Please accept my respect.

An open letter from an Arab Priest to the US President, George W Bush

September 9, 2002

Mr President:

In a couple of days, the first anniversary of the tragic events of 9/11 will occur. Back then, I wrote you expressing my condolences as an Arab Priest. No response or even acknowledgement of receipt was returned. I am proud to tell you that since 1966, I have written to numerous Western heads of states and their first ladies, and most of them had no hesitation in replying. Today, too, I would like to write to you, without really giving your reply or the lack thereof undue significance, as I am only writing out what is on my conscience.

Mr President:

On the day you were elected president of the United States, when that "strange game" occurred in the vote count in Florida, most Arabs feared your potential defeat against your opponent, Mr Al Gore, with his disgusting courting of the Zionist movement. Since your winning the election, however, the series of events which occurred confirmed our conclusion that, since the mid sixties, all the US presidents have been nothing but full time employees of Israel.

Then came the events of September 11, you were quick to point decisive unfounded fingers to the Arabs and Moslems, and declare "a Crusade" on our countries, thus proving without any doubt that you are more Israeli than the Israelis, themselves. Ever since then, you have been most proudly reaffirming your loyalty to Israel, putting it ahead of your own conscience, giving no consideration whatsoever to the most basic principles of ethics and diplomacy, and no respect to international laws and UN resolutions, but most importantly, placing Israel's interest above even those of your own country.

Then it became apparent not to the Arabs only but to the whole world, that you have, under the cover of fighting terrorism, been pushed (and you did not seem to mind it a bit) into a policy of terrorizing most countries—excluding Israel, of course, the country whose history is filled with acts of terror, and defiance of most international laws, UN resolutions, and the Geneva Conventions. To top it off, you went on with complete oblivion of historic as well as current facts on the ground, and described Sharon as "a man of peace", making me along with many people around the world feel sorry for the United States for having a president with your level of ethics and intellect!

Mr President:

May I ask you: Where do you see yourself leading this world, and your country in particular? The United States and you personally will eventually pay for this arrogant behaviour that you and administration have been practicing.

It seems that you are oblivious of the fact that history does not forgive. History is a fertile soil where you reap what you sow; you have planted the worst seeds ever. Is it possible that the intoxication of power has affected your reasoning so badly?

Did the crowd of those applauding crowds around you, and the many scared leaders

scuttling from all over the world to Washington, make you forget the death and destruction you planted in Afghanistan, and the fear you created in the minds, hearts, and pockets of your proclaimed partners in Europe, Russia, and China? Did they make you forget the rapidly growing hatred spreading in the whole world against America, or the shame and anger in the hearts of decent informed Americans protesting constantly your terrorist policies, picturing you as Hitler, carrying banners describing Sharon for what he is, a "war criminal"? Or is it your ambition for a second presidential term that is blinding you to all these issues?

I cannot help but continue to wonder where exactly do you think you are leading your country and the world?

Have you not had enough crucifixions in the world and especially in Palestine, perpetrated by your mentor and boss, Sharon? Palestine, where 2000 years ago there was only one cross that took away the life of Jesus Christ, whom you claim to worship, and who died for all of us, calling upon us to be humane—not wild animals where the strong preys on the weak.

I ask again: Where are you leading us to?

Is it not time for you to stop for a moment and close your ears to the phony applause, and stop looking at those cheering you out of stupidity or cruelty?

Have you not had enough bloodshed and threats of more bloodshed in the world—the Arab world in particular—in full obedience to the Zionist orders—the Zionist who has been for decades causing American bloodshed, preying on the American people's dignity, serenity, and finance? This is the same Zionist who has brought more hatred from all over the world toward the good naïve American people for nothing else but the fact that their leaders have been betraying the American constitution and history—a hatred that the good, misinformed Americans do not deserve.

Is it possible that you have not realized yet—even if for only a few fleeting moments—the dangers that Zionism poses to the most important virtues in existence, namely, Truth, Freedom, and Peace in the whole world and the US in particular?

Mr President:

As a priest, I ask you to take a few moments for yourself to reflect, to stand at the cross, to ask your Lord Jesus Christ what is needed of you before it is too late.

Does it not cross your mind that you are leading yourself and your country to a definite deep ugly abyss, to a world of anxiety, fear, confusion, and death—something you got just a taste of on September 11? Back then you found yourself a prefabricated and predefined scapegoat in the Arabs and Moslems. I say "prefabricated" because most people know that the atrocities committed on that horrible day, required in terms of planning, timing, and execution, abilities that far exceed all the Arabic and Islamic countries' potentials, even if some of the elements used, as claimed, were Arabs and Moslems.

Mr President:

Are you incapable of a moment of truth with yourself, to change events... to have a courageous stand and initiative compatible with the American constitution, and international law... to bring the world a glimpse of fairness and peace, starting in Palestine, saving Jews and Arabs alike, saving the United States from a worldwide hatred, saving the world from you, and saving you from the curse of history, and most

importantly from the curse of God, in front of whom you will most definitely stand one day?

All that I hope is that you remember that this horrible moment might be much closer than you think.

Mr President:

In closing, I would like to reassure you that as an Arab Priest I pray for you every-day. I wish I could close with a "Respectfully yours", but I feel so angry at you, and sorry for you that I cannot do so, so please forgive me.

Questions and Answers

February 10, 2009

Dear Ms McCarthy,

Thank you for your quick response. This is good. We hope that our answers will be brief yet clear.

1. Q: *Why is it important to you that the choir participate in this festival?*

A: What is of great importance to us in the festival is its aim: opening up to the Arab World: this provides both Americans and Arabs an opportunity to get to know each other that little bit more. For people to Get to know each other is a thousand times better than being closed in, and it is certainly far better than confrontation.

2. Q: *How do the children feel about coming to Washington to sing as part of this celebration?*

A: The children have a two-in-one kind of feeling about going to the US: their natural curiosity about discovering something of the US; also their feeling that they themselves represent a curious phenomenon, carrying as they are, something of the Arabic civilisation to the US.

3. Q: *Has it been a big undertaking to make sure all of the kids are able to come?*

A: We have a two-pronged answer to this question:

- a. The children we are taking to the festival are not all the children in the choir. Those who are not coming comprise more than two hundred children. Most of these are younger than those participating in the festival; some others are of the same age as those participating in the festival, but were excluded for reasons relating especially to irregular attendance of the weekly choir practice.
- b. We have immense faith in Jesus Christ, and believe that He is looking after us. Throughout the life of the choir, and since its founding in 1977, we have actually had first-hand experience of God's care for us. This is why we have taken this step of participating in the festival with faith and total peace of mind. Be sure that this is the way the children feel as well. Thank God always.

4. Q: *What are you hoping that the kids will get out of this experience?*

A: We expect the children to get quite a lot from this experience, and from the tour they are going to make to Detroit and Florida. We say the same thing about the youths, both Christians and Moslems who accompany the children—most of the musicians are Moslems. I could mention that they will, for example, ...

- 1) get great self confidence as a choir
- 2) get a chance to have 'implanted' in them a great cultural, spiritual, and humanitarian charge with regard to the importance of the artistic, religious, and humanitarian work the choir is doing in Syria and in the whole world as well

3) Reinforce their aspiration for the future so that they continue to carry this humanitarian message to all the countries of the world, as they are qualified to be invited to participate in this great festival, held in one of the most important cultural centres in the world—the John F Kennedy Centre.

5. Q: *What are you hoping that the audience will take away from the experience of watching the choir?*

A: We hope and expect that the audience in the festival, as well as the audience in Detroit and in Florida, will leave with the right, bright impression of Syria—the cradle of Christianity and the meeting place of numerous civilisations, and where Christians and Moslems have been living together since ancient times.

6. Q: *I heard that you've been getting requests from news outlets in Syria to talk about coming to the festival? Can you tell me about the interest in this festival in your home country? Do you have a sense of why this has made news there?*

A: It is true that the Syrian Media have taken a great interest in the Choir's trip to the Arab World Festival in Washington. We can see many reasons for that:

- a) The Choir's trip is the first Syrian artistic mission which includes such a large number of participants
- b) This huge artistic mission consists wholly of children
- c) This is a private—non-governmental—mission
- d) Managing to cover the cost of this immensely expensive trip to us, especially with regard to our tour of Detroit and Florida, is the fruit of personal efforts made by the members of the choir and their friends in Syria and abroad, both Christians and Moslems
- e) The additional tour, after our participation in the festival, were organised by our Syrian friends, both Christians and Moslems again, living in Detroit and Florida
- f) This mission is going to the US to offer something beautiful and cultural of its Christian and Moslem heritage, as well as of its artistic and musical heritage. This is all happening at a time of extremely delicate political circumstances.

As to why this festival has become important news in Syria, this is simply because it is happening in the US. It is a fact that whatever happens in the US receives worldwide attention, especially when this is a positive artistic and humanitarian effort.

Dear Ms McCarthy,

We hope that we have answered your questions clearly.

Hoping to meet with you soon, we ask God to bless you and bless the whole world.

With our love and respect,

Claudia & Fr Zahlaoui

Music is a bridge of love

May 23, 2009

If I were asked to describe music, with all its types and origins, I would say it was a bridge... a bridge connecting man with himself, first, then with God, and with the others, all the others, those near and far, those who have gone by, those who are present, and those who are still to come.

This is how I've lived Church music since I learned it, sang it, and taught it.

When I started *Jawqat el Farah* (The Choir of Joy) in 1977, I wanted it to be a true bridge through which the singers and the listeners travel into their own souls, then on to God, and then on to others, all the others, sharing with them love and joy.

This is why I wanted to take our Choir of Joy outside the church walls to the wide world, in contrast with what all church choirs used to do in the Orient. Throughout the years, it has become apparent to us that God has been a great help to us in all the stages through which the Choir of Joy has progressed.

God—through the renowned Lebanese Christian singer, Wadee' Al Safi—helped us build a strong spiritual bridge with the Islamic world, thus paving the way for initiating the first ever Christian-Moslem religious chanting with the Omayyad Mosque Chanters in Damascus. God has so willed it that the beginning of this shared Christian-Moslem chanting in praise of God was towards the end of the ill-fated September of 2001.

Then, friends, both Moslems and Christians, who, like us, believed in the necessity of building bridges between nations through music and hymn singing, helped us organize two wonderful trips to European countries in 1995 and 1996, and then to Australia in 2003.

During all this time, I have repeatedly tried to build such bridges with the US and Canada, but all my attempts were smitten with failure, until the day Mr Michael Kaiser from Washington—from the John Kennedy Center, itself—visited me.

How can I interpret this? Others have their own interpretation, but I saw in his arrival, and especially in the way he viewed "The Arab World Festival", in these extremely dangerous international political circumstances, which are steeped in fundamentalism, racism, and belligerence... I saw in his arrival the working of God.

I could not welcome him warmly and thankfully enough. This is why I had total peace of mind and peace at heart throughout the various stages of preparation, financing, and making of the trip.

What happened after that—during our presence in Washington, and then in Detroit and Florida—strengthened my conviction that God wants such highly artistic and humanistic initiatives as these, and blesses them, so as to enable all the peoples of the earth, through them, to get acquainted, love, and cooperate with each other, and to sing the whole human civilization in a way which pleases God and spreads joy among all the people.

Our beloved Mr Michael Kaiser, Ms Alicia Adams, and Ms Gilda Almeida, May God bless you all, so that you grow in faith, love, and courage.

Please accept our sincere and warm gratitude, the gratitude of the Choir of Joy, and that of all Syria.

Let us, first and foremost, thank God with you—you, who have made this “Godly” event possible—and with all those who participated in it, helped organize it, financed it, and saw it through.

An open letter to all the participants in the Synod for the East (At the anniversary of St Francis of Assisi)

October 3, 2010

I find it my duty as an Arab Catholic priest from Damascus to write to you a few days ahead of your conference.

I have chosen to be a voice—just a voice, no more—and I hope that you see in me nothing else but a voice... perchance it brings back many of your stifled or suffocating voices.

Many of you have, no doubt, prepared well for this fateful conference...

I do hope, however, that some of you have gone beyond the “work tool” that had been placed in your hands months earlier—which filled over eight pages of the official “Roman Observer” newspaper—to what touches on the major problem to be discussed, not just its side issues.

This is because this “work tool” has only shyly touched on what I have called the major problem which is breaking the back of the whole East, Moslems and Christians. I mean of course the Arab-Israeli conflict, and what has followed it of truly horrifying Holocausts that have afflicted the whole of the East, starting with Palestine, and extending into Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, and continuing into all the Arab countries without exception, awaiting what is being secretly plotted for Iran. In this—and in this specifically—lies one of the reasons behind Islamic fanatic fundamentalism; this is also one of the most important reasons for its accelerating agitation.

This “work tool” has not even come near the major and even more dangerous problem which threatens the entire world—I mean the insane and unjust Western policy adopted by the United States of America all over the world, which has dragged into it all the Western countries as well as many other countries, including—sadly—most of the Arab countries.

Here too—No, here specifically—lies the biggest reason for the agitated Islamic fundamentalism across the world.

Let us not forget that Islam—as a religion—since the zenith of its power and strength and until this day, has respected Christians and Jews and cooperated with them unreservedly in all spheres of life, administration, culture, and learning. It pains me to remind everybody of where the West was during this period, of the widespread anti-Semitism, which is contrary to the teachings of the Holy Bible, and of the many religious wars that erupted in the West, in which Christians slaughtered each other for centuries.

This is why I find myself obliged, as an Arab citizen and a Christian priest from Syria, to ask you: What is the usefulness of this conference unless it confronts the issues that ensure the survival of humanity and its culture in righteous manner, dignity, and freedom?

Let me also question with you aloud about the point of such a conference, with all that will come out of it—of directives, committees, and expressed wishes relating to the semblance of Christian presence in the whole East, the nature of its relations with Moslems and Jews, etc.—if the land of the whole East is booby-trapped and on

the brink of explosion any minute, and its skies are filled with Western-made Israeli fighter jets threatening the very existence of humanity and its civilization every second with a very real possibility of annihilating them at the whim of the Israeli war lords, and any time they wish to do so. All this is done in total and absolute disregard for all international bodies and resolutions, and for all international treaties and agreements—which apply only to others, never to Israel. All this is done also without a single word of objection or denunciation—let alone condemnation—ever uttered by any Western country, but especially not by any Western church against the West’s spoilt child, Israel.

For the Western governments to be satisfied, in disgusting submissiveness, with their miserable Machiavellian policies, has become a familiar matter for hundreds of years. But for Christ’s church in the West not to arise and stand strongly and gallantly on the side of the oppressed, the crushed, and annulled people—starting with Palestine—and for this church not to raise its voice high in the face of the oppressors and not fight them is a matter that contradicts the teachings of the Bible, and must not continue.

Pray tell me: “Is God not more worthy to be obeyed than people?”

Should Jesus’ church today, in the East and the West, in the North and the South, not remember these simple words, said by Jesus’ first deputy on earth, Peter, the messenger, the disciple, to his executioners to be said by the church in turn in a thousand different ways, without hesitation or fear, to the face of all the rulers of the West?

Some of you might remember that I have felt it my duty, as an Arab Catholic priest from Syria, to direct, on January 2, 2010, an open letter to my supreme superior, Pope Benedictus XVI, concerning the call for your conference today, begging him to invite a select group of people from the Orthodox churches in the East and from its Moslems, too, because the subject matter of this exceptional, and first, Synod—due to the grave circumstances which the East has been going through—touches not organizational, ritual, charitable, or even some educational matters that concern only the Arab Catholics in some ways. This Synod touches essentially on the very existence of everybody in the East without exception. I did beg of his holiness also to invite a select group from all the churches of the West because the matters of the East that would be discussed in this Synod represent only one result of the West’s policies. For further clarification, I say: it is one of the results of the American policies, which are controlled, in such an explicit and glaring way, by the Zionist Lobby.

Someone might ask: What has the church got to do with politics? Did Jesus not say, 2000 years ago, “Give to Caesar what is his, and to God what is His” (Had Caesar destined to remain Caesar still)?

But for today’s ‘Caesar’, who has made himself a god, a god who demands that everything and every human obey him, even the representatives of Lord Jesus, while he destroys the world, and provides absolute support and backing to those who are destroying the whole East only to build their state in Palestine on the remnants of its original Arab inhabitants, in total, glaring, and debauched contradiction of all religious and human laws, is a matter that is improper for anybody to remain silent about, so how can the church of Lord Jesus remain silent about it?

In the face of this miserable international state of affairs, a pressing question imposes itself: Should the church in general, and the Western church in particular—at the head of which is the Church of Rome—not say something about this?

Also, should the 'dilapidated' Arab churches, whose very existence is under threat, not raise their voice high in the face of the Western churches to tell them what needs to be told, so that the Western churches, in turn, tell the Western officials and rulers what they need to be told?

Let me tell you here that the worst of my fears is that the Western church will do today what it did in the distant past, and in the recent past...

There are in the distant past two sad episodes, which the Western churches were party to by participating in the guilt with the civil authorities, starting from Constantine's era.

The first episode is the shameful anti-Semitism in the West—which took various and multitudes of forms throughout long centuries, ending with the Nazi Holocaust—which caused the death of millions of Jews and others, and which resulted, after the 2nd World War, in what seems to be a sudden passionate love for the Jews and Judaism on the one side, and a guilt complex towards the Jews and Judaism on the other, making this West forgive the Zionist Jews all their bloody injustices and barbaric acts the successive Israeli governments have been committing against Palestinians especially, and against the East in general.

The second episode is no less dangerous than the first. This is the marrying of the two authorities, the civil and the church, sometimes in cooperation and condoning, and at other times in competition and contention, even fighting; this also lasted for long centuries. What is truly astounding is that all this happened while the American continent was being discovered, and while the Western colonisation spate was going on, be it Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, British, Belgian, French, German, and Italian. This ugly colonisation imposed on the five continents an inhumane ruling system, the price of which was paid by whole peoples, some of whom have been annihilated, and some others have been enslaved, exploited, and sucked dry so that they could not rise again. It is so sad that the church's general condoning of the actions of the rulers of the West spared very few priests, nuns, monks, and bishops who, because of their commitment to their Bible, dared to denounce their rulers' behaviour, but paid with their lives for their stance in defence of the downtrodden peoples.

Please forgive me for saying the above words; I know they fall heavy on the ear and the heart, but truth is truth. If any of you doubts anything I have said, even a little, then I beg him to read the book—published with the approval of Pope John Paul II—in 1997 by the Italian journalist, Luigi Accattoli, (in three languages simultaneously: Italian, French, and English), *When a Pope asks forgiveness*.

This silence, in the distant past, of the Western church, was not justifiable. This is why Pope John Paul II, following in the footsteps of Pope Paul VI, pursued the road of repentance, and sought forgiveness, honestly and courageously.

The silence of the Western church today cannot be justified. It is time for it to liberate itself from this silence, so that it does not repeat today the mistakes of the past, which were very grave and costly across the whole West.

I believe that the church in all the East—Arab and non-Arab—has to courageously raise its voice high to wake up the church in the West from its unjustifiable slumber, perchance—if it responds speedily and courageously, and adopts the necessary stances—it will regain some of its lost credibility, especially in a West pervaded by widespread nonchalance and shameful accusations.

Lastly, there is a question I have to ask you, and I beg you to raise it honestly in the Synod: Is it possible for God's promises to man to be dissected according to some people's whims and interests, or do they all—from beginning to end, i.e. since the beginning of Genesis until their complete realisation in Jesus, the Lord—form one complete whole?

In other words, does God's presumed promise of land to Abraham—which is the excuse Zionism uses to steal the land, all the land in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Sinai; in other words from the Euphrates to the Nile—does this alleged promise agree with what Christ the saviour, the Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Palestine was, said, and did?

I pray that you do not to return to your home countries without a clear and definite answer from the Mother Church in Rome.

Your brother,

A letter to Minister Terry Jones

October 8, 2010

Reverend Minister, Terry Jones,

I am an Arab Catholic priest from Damascus, Syria, talking to you, an American minister in one of Florida's churches in the US to tell you that I have read your call for the burning of the Holy Quran all over the world on September 11, and I have been wondering what your goal, as an American minister, could be. I have been wondering how you view your job as a minister. Can you really be a Christian minister serving God in one of America's churches? Or, are you an American citizen only, claiming to serve Christ?

I have been wondering whether you have surrendered to your Americanism, instead of surrendering to your Christianity. What do you hope to achieve from your call? Is it to further agitate feelings of hatred and desire for vengeance among people?

Does this fit Christ's teachings, whom you represent in front of yourself, and in front of the people you serve?

Tell me, I pray you: Is there in the character of Jesus Christ, in His words, in His behavior, and in all the stances He adopted anything that justifies even an allusion to any feelings of dislike, hatred, or vengeance, among the people, *all* the people?

Have you forgotten that Jesus was the epitome of love, forgiveness, and peace?

Have you forgotten what He taught us when He taught His disciples and the people after them to pray to the Heavenly Father, God of *all* people: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"?

Have you forgotten that Jesus, on the Cross even as insults and foul language poured on Him, raised His voice calling on the Almighty God: "O, Father, Forgive them for they know not what they are doing."

Who do you represent?

Who do you want to guide to the right path by your call?

Is what has already happened—and is still happening all over the world since September 11, 2001, of killing and destruction, making homeless and starving of millions of people, starting with Palestine (the homeland of Jesus) at the hands of your rulers specifically, headed by George Bush, who claimed direct contact with God—not enough for you?

Do you not see with me that, with this call of yours, you have proven your total estrangement from Jesus, and also your dire need to discover Him anew, so that you become a true Christian Minister, calling, like Jesus did, for comprehensive love, total respect for every human being, and total commitment to His wonderful teachings, which call all who believe in Him, without exception, to stand on the side of the poor, the downtrodden, the unjustly treated, and the needy?

Brother Minister Terry Jones,

Could you tell me truthfully—if Jesus came today—on whose side, do you think, He would stand?

Would He stand on the side of the strong and powerful, the boastful, the unjust, those who control the world and insatiably suck its blood and all its goodness breaking international laws and exhibiting total disregard of all agreements, killing people in their homes, destroying homes on top of their residents, making them homeless people roaming all over the world?

Or He would stand on the side of the unjustly treated, the downtrodden, the hungry, and the homeless?

Can you have forgotten, or prefer to forget, what Jesus, Himself, is going to say on Judgment day to every person standing before Him: “All you have done to any one of my little brothers, to me you have done it.”?

Can you have forgotten, or prefer to forget, that Jesus, in His talk about Judgment day, never referred to anybody’s adherence to any specific faith? He only referred to the fact that all people belonged to humanity, and to the fact that He will be standing on the side of the downtrodden, the hungry, and the unjustly treated people of the world?

How then do you, the American Minister, stand on the side of the unjust people in your country, whose unjustness has pervaded the whole world?

Are you not worried about standing in front of Jesus on Judgment Day, weighed down by what must weigh down the conscience of your rulers—those rulers who have been blinded by the gods of power, money, might, and insatiability?

My brother Minister Terry,

Am I doing you an injustice if I perceive your spite against Islam to be what justifies your unholy call to burn the Moslems’ Holy Book, the Benevolent Quran?

Let me, I the Syrian Catholic priest, ask you: “What do you know about Islam?”

It seems to me that behind your call to burn the Holy Quran there lurks such ignorance of Christ and Christianity that makes me believe that you are more ignorant of Islam and the Moslems.

Believe me, my intention is not to condemn you. Nor is it to get into a religious debate with you, whether about Christianity or Islam. Let me suggest, nevertheless, (and after I prayed long) a joint action that we both, you and I, carry out on September 11.

“What action?” you might ask me while you are in Florida and I am in Damascus.

Here is what I suggest to you:

I invite you to visit Syria, where you will be my guest and the guest of my many friends, both Moslems and Christians.

Syria is a country the majority of whose inhabitants are Moslems. The Christians here are, nevertheless, natives to the land where they have been living, side by side with the Moslems, for many, many centuries.

Come! Fear nothing.

Come! Perchance you discover about Islam and the Moslems what comforts you, even surprises you and makes you happy. This visit will, I am sure, make you issue a different call to the people of beautiful Florida: An urgent call for all people to live together in respect for and cooperation with each other. All the people everywhere are in dire need for this call, instead of the un-Christian call for inciting a war of hatred.

Come to Syria! You will be astonished by the nature of the people, their warmth, their faith, their relations with each other, their cooperation together, and their friendly openness to all strangers.

Come to Damascus so that I offer you an experience that neither you, nor all the Western churches and their ministers and priests could ever imagine. Come to see and listen to two choirs, one Christian and another Moslem, singing together, on both Christian and Moslem occasions, in praise of the Lord God, the *one* God who created us all, and to whom we all shall return.

My brother Minister Terry,

I call you, brother—and I am serious in calling you brother—to seriously consider my invitation. I shall wait for a word from you.

Rest assured that you shall find in Syria a brother, indeed many brothers. So, get in touch without delay. I have an appointment with you in Damascus.

I pray God to make this hoped-for meeting a beginning for a long and bright road we shall walk together, with many brothers in Damascus and the whole world.

The world today truly needs a bright road.

Come! The Damascus road awaits you.

Your brother in Damascus,

An Open Letter from a Syrian Arab Priest to His Holiness Pope Benedictus XVI

February 7, 2010

Holy Father,

In these delicate circumstances through which the world in general and our East in particular are passing, I would like to intimate to you some of what is in my heart as an Arab Catholic priest from Syria. I am doing this with reference to the call you made a few months ago to those in charge of the Eastern Catholic Church to hold a meeting in Rome in preparation for a conference to be held in Rome, also in October, to discuss the status of the Christian Arabs and non-Arabs in all the East.

There are three points I would like—as a son to his father—to talk to you about.

1st Point: the call for this conference

I am certain that all those who have responded to your call have praised this initiative; but has anybody told you that it has come far too late?

I am also certain that the papers placed in the participants' hands have also met with admiration; but has anybody told you that these do not reflect the reality of the situation in the East—past and/or present—except in what the West sees and what the West wants the people of the whole world to see, whether they like it or not?

I am also very certain that the Vatican has ambassadors and specialists in the East who try faithfully to inform you of what happens here; but has anybody told you that all these people only see what those in charge of the Eastern churches want them to see, or what the boundaries of their responsibility allow them to see?

Last but not least, I am absolutely certain, as well, that those meeting in Rome have discovered grave 'holes' in the important papers presented to them; but has anybody informed you, either personally, or through the discussions in the meetings that there are 'holes' that the Vatican and its 'experts' (who are mostly Western experts) are unaware of, or perhaps do not want to see (especially in the absence or scarcity of Eastern or Arab experts)?

2nd Point: the invitees to the previous forum and the forthcoming conference

It has become common knowledge that the invitees are the Patriarchs, Priests, and the General Directors of the various Monasteries. I wonder if you personally are completely convinced that these invitees do indeed represent Christianity in the East, especially in these very grave, nay fatalistic, times.

What worries me is that the majority of these people, far from taking the unpopular stances and making the bold declarations that the whole East—both Christian and Moslem—expects of them, have learned—by privilege of their official positions and from their own perspective, as well as for personal and materialistic reasons—to avoid or at best soften such positions so much as to render them useless.

I have already said that this Conference has come very late—nay, very, very late—but what truly worries me is that the Conference would come out with resounding preliminaries, resolutions, and intentions that in reality produce no tangible results. On the contrary, these may truly be detrimental because they would add many new and weighty disappointments to an East already loaded down with weighty and ex-

hausting historical burdens, with unjust Western policies, and with cumbersome, and sometimes shameful internal blunders.

Hence comes my suggestion, if you would allow me, to widen the scope of the invitations issued by the Holy See so as to reach daring and active 'voices', both Christian (Catholic and Orthodox, priests and laymen), and Moslem—since the majority of the inhabitants of the East are Moslems and, because of this, it is expected that whatever is discussed in this Conference and whatever comes out of it concerns them as well as the Christians.

3rd Point: The responsibility of the Vatican (at the head of the Western churches) towards what happens in the world in general and in the Arab East in particular

Question 1: Would it be distorting the truth if I stated that all of what happens in the world in general, and in the East in particular, is the making of the West, especially the United States, Western Europe, Russia, Canada, and Australia? These countries, which monopolise the riches of the earth, hold alone massive military strike power.

Question 2: Would it be distorting the truth if I stated that most of what happens within the Arab and Islamic world, and in the Islamic regions everywhere in the world is but a reaction to injustices perpetrated by the West? These were mostly chaotic and bloody reactions that started and continued spontaneously. Some of these developed later into two types of armed movements: the first are the legitimate armed resistance movements in occupied Palestine—which were unjustly dubbed terrorist movements by the European Union in September of 2002—and the second are the extremist Taliban and Al Qa'ida movements, first against the Soviet hegemony in Afghanistan, then against the American domination in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. But is there anybody in the world who does not know that these two movements were created by the United States?

What is happening in the heart of the Arab world, and specifically in Palestine (the name which your Western churches have now replaced with the 'Holy Land') is quite simply unjust war—an occupation that gives itself the right to do everything: killing, imprisonment, torture, siege, and evacuation directed against the whole of the Palestinian people—Christians and Moslems alike. All this is happening under the gaze of the whole world and with total support of the Western world, so much so that Ms Clinton declared recently that striking Israel is tantamount to striking a city like San Diego in the United States, and Ms Merkel, the German Chancellor, stated also, unashamedly that striking Israel is tantamount to striking Germany itself!

Where is what has been happening—and is still happening—to the Palestinian people for over sixty years at the hands of the Israeli occupation? Where is this *vis-à-vis* the human rights proclaimed in the Declaration of Human Rights, and where is this *vis-à-vis* all the international treaties, in particular the Geneva Conventions, and *vis-à-vis* the hundreds of resolutions adopted by the UN and its pathetic Security Council against Israel? Has the whole West become a slave to Zionism so as to adopt such glaring double standards in dealing with Israel, on the one hand, and with the majority of the weak and powerless people of the globe, on the other?

All this and the churches of the West remain silent—Yes, all of them, starting with the Holy See itself—have gone silent since the passing away of Pope John Paul II, except for the brave Cardinal of Boston, Bernard Lau.

I have been for years a regular reader of the official Paper of the Vatican, *The Ro-*

man Observer. It has become apparent—since you have been chosen as Pope—that its language has become marginalised and superficial with regard to whatever concerns the Arab-Israeli struggle, and with regard to whatever concerns war tragedies, hunger, illnesses, exploitation, regular pilfering, and faking of facts—all tragedies that are brutally and progressively overtaking the world.

This, sadly, became apparent to me during your personal visit to occupied Palestine. I had expected from you some courageous and honest pronouncements, equal to those of your predecessor, Pope John Paul II, when his feet touched Syrian soil in 2001. He called then for the implementation of the UN Resolutions for a just and comprehensive resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

I had also expected from you brave and powerful words of empathy with the Palestinian people, who have for over sixty years been subjected to a non-stop and unabated ugly holocaust with the total support of the West. I had expected words that paralleled, even a little, some of what you had expressed of overwhelming sympathy with the Jewish people for example when you met with Jewish American personalities during your visit to the US on Feb 12, 2009, as well as during the visit of some Grand Rabbis to the Holy See on March 12, 2009! What you were quoted by *The Roman Observer*, page 2, as saying on Wednesday, January 27, 2010, on the occasion of the Anniversary of the Jewish holocaust, suggests that the daily occurrences in what is left of Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza) that have been going on for over sixty years are totally absent from your mind.

I am sorry to add that this silence of the Western churches has manifested itself through the desperate writings of some Catholic priests in France, Germany, and Canada following their visits to the 'Holy Land', as they equated Arab victims and Israeli persecutors. They have also been "greatly disturbed" by the "sufferings of the two peoples". They always ended such pronouncements by calling upon their people to offer prayers for "peace", and financial aid to the "Holy Land".

It looks as if they have lost their eyesight, so they see no more; they have also blindfolded their minds, so they know no more of the history of Palestine, the homeland of Jesus—its past or present—and know nothing of what is happening to this homeland of grave and destructive alteration to its historic landmarks; nor do they seem to know of the killing and evacuation that is happening to its original inhabitants, Christians and Moslems, alike.

Holy Father,

I have, lastly, six questions that I feel I have to ask of you at the end of this letter.

Question 1: Does the anti-Semitism that the West—Church, authorities, and people—practiced against the Jews for hundreds of years, justify the shedding of the blood of the people of the Arab, and non-Arab East—beginning with the Palestinian people—for the sake of the "poor" Jewish people? Does it justify the silence of all the Western churches regarding these atrocities, while these churches themselves never stop asking for forgiveness for the anti-Semitism they alone—not the Arabs or Moslems—have practiced?

Question 2: Is it not glaringly apparent to the whole West, that this position of the West and Western churches will result in two hideous evils for which I see no possible forgiveness? The first is the changing of all the Jewish people into killers; and the second is emptying the whole East, sooner or later, of its original Christian inhabitants.

Question 3: Do you not see, with me, a frightening and shameful similarity between what all the Powers of the West are doing in the whole world in general, and in the Arab and Islamic world in particular, and the practices of the European Powers—who opened up the American Continent centuries ago—namely, the organised brutal annihilation of no less than 40 million people of the original inhabitants (as Western estimates declare)?

Question 4: In the face of all these crimes against humanity, is it sufficient that a new Pope come along 400 years later to ask for the forgiveness of the people—as brave Pope John Paul II did on his extraordinary visits all over the world—for us to proclaim that The Church has done its duty?

Question 5: Must the Western churches not break out of their prison of silence, today before tomorrow, to proclaim the essence of the Good News, to defend the poor, the hungry, the sick, the prisoners, and those unjustly treated, with whom Jesus lovingly identified? These are not individuals any more, as in the Gospel of St Matthew; they have today become populations occupying most of the Globe. Such a proclamation might reach the ears—and thus liberate some—of those majestic and rich Westerners, whether those who have totally broken away from God, or those who have used God, as happens in the US, to kill—in His name—Christians and Moslems alike in the whole East, and to incite people against other people in ethnic and sectarian wars that widen day by day, and that will leave no one safe.

Question 6: This is a question I hear you ask me, as many other Western priests and religious men have asked me: "Would anybody listen?" I say to you and to all the Church in the West: "You are not better than Jesus. He came to His people, but His people did not accept Him," yet despite that, He spoke out, and what Jesus said no one has said and no one will ever say.

Is there still anything else to add?

Yes. One last thing:

Holy Father,

I—your son—the Arab Catholic Priest from Syria, beg of you, with all love and urgency, to take the initiative to call on an honest selection of secular and religious men in the Western churches, in order to discuss, in the Conference that you have called for next October, with church officials from the East, and with truthful, honest, and committed people, both Christians and Moslems, the extent of the responsibility of the West for what is happening today in the East and throughout the world, so that necessary and honest stances are adopted before it is too late.

A lot of time has passed, and the coming days are pregnant with new catastrophes no sane person would wish for.

God's world encompasses far more than the West: it is as spacious as God's heart. I pray that there is in your heart some room for my words.

Holy Father,

I ask you to pray for all my brothers in the East: Christians, Moslems, and Jews.

I offer you my sincere love and the respect of a son to his father.

A Second Open Letter to His Holiness, Pope Benedictus XVI

November 27, 2010

Holy Father,

Following your call for convening the Synod for the East a few months ago, I wrote you an open letter.

Today, four weeks after concluding the Synod, I find myself obliged to write anew.

Of course, I have read in the official Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, everything written about this Synod: the writings of all the church officials who participated in it, as well as of those various interested priests and educated people—both Christians and Moslems.

What pushes me to write now is a question that has much worried and puzzled me.

In your sermon in the opening Mass on October 10, 2010, you defined one objective for this Synod: “a basically pastoral objective”. You added that “Even though the pastors of the Eastern churches cannot overlook the social and political, delicate and sometimes tragic, situation of some countries, they want to concentrate their efforts on the aspects relevant to their mission.”

My question is two-pronged:

One: What is the Church’s theological position regarding the presumed “Divine Promise”, which the Zionist Jews use as a pretext in Palestine—Palestine which has been divided up by an unjust resolution, nothing of which has ever been carried out except what these Jews have wished to carry out—and in occupied Palestine as well, to kill off what is left of Christian and Moslem presence, after they have killed off most of what had existed for hundreds of years: of cities, villages, establishments, houses, farms, joint projects, and daily life that is free and dignified, and all aspirations for a decent human future. I firmly believe that the call issued on December 11, 2009 by church officials from Palestine, headed by Patriarch Michael Sabbah and entitled “A Righteous Stand,” in which they asked the whole Church—and Rome’s permission—to adopt a clear and frank theological position regarding the “Divine Promise”, has reached your Holiness.

Two: Does the Vatican—the supreme office in charge of the Catholic Church in the world—not realise that the survival of Christians in the whole East, and also in the whole Moslem world is, today more than any other day, subject to what your Holiness described in your opening sermon as “the social and political, delicate and sometimes tragic, situation of some countries.” Allow me, I, the Arab Catholic priest, and son of these countries—to assure your Holiness that this situation is not only “delicate and tragic,” but extremely so, and that it will most certainly become even more “delicate and dangerous” so much so that its foreseeable end-result will most certainly be the expulsion of Christianity from the East, the more the injustices of the West increase—and, permit me to remind your Holiness that, in the eyes of the Moslems, the West, lead by the

United States of America, is Christian, and it is perceived as (“Christian”) acting against the Arab and Islamic worlds.

The ‘Eastern’ Fathers of the *Synod for the East* (Patriarchs, Cardinals, Bishops, priests, and consultants) may have had their reasons for refraining—prior to and during the Synod—from insisting on addressing these two basic issues. Whatever these reasons are, they are unacceptable to me as a priest because what is at risk here is the actual existence of Christians in the East. This is an issue nobody is allowed to ignore or bargain over.

I also question with bitterness whether it is possible that there is no one in the Vatican itself, or in the Western churches, who knows fully well what has happened and is still happening in Palestine of horrid injustices for over sixty years, and what has happened and is still happening in Iraq of horrifying injustices for over thirty years, and especially since the beginning of 1991.

Is all this not in blatant contradiction to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and to the most basic moral principles, and all religious and civic laws, as well as international treaties?

Why have these church officials then not raised their voice high and loud, raising simultaneously the level of this Synod to uplift it with all its participants to reach further a deeper and a more holy objective than the “pastoral objective” assigned to it?

In fact, and expectedly, this Synod was—before and during its convening—in honest confrontation with a theological, political, and humanitarian reality that is truly tragic, and extremely unjust; there in no one among the participants in it who does not know that this reality will certainly kill off the Christians in the East by voluntary or enforced emigration, or by actually killing them, unless somebody raises the awareness of every church establishment in the West, and through them the Western public opinion, both Christian and non-Christian, to expose the Western political lies, and to honestly and daringly reaffirm the clear position of both Catholic and non-Catholic Christianity—with all its officials, and people in charge, and its media, starting with the Vatican—against all lies, injustices, and killings; and to reaffirm its pro-life stance in support of all that is right and just.

Is this not what was required of this Synod, rather than “pastoral” concerns, however grand and essential these concerns may be? Why then has this exceptional Synod not adopted the required theological, political, and humanitarian stand that had been hoped for?

O, how much the whole Church—in the West before that in the East—was in need of such a historic stand, so that it becomes reconciled with itself and, then, with the Western society to save it from the arrogance of power, wealth, and authority, which has been storming it for hundreds of years, and to finally be reconciled with Islam in the East and the world!

None of this has happened, although this was the basic requirement.

Despite this, however, your Holiness did point out clearly that you see this Synod as a “new Pentecost.”

O, how I wish, Holy Father, that this Synod had been a new Pentecost! How I, and all the Christians and free people in the world, and especially in the East, wished for it to have truly been a new Pentecost!

It could have been, not only a new Pentecost, but also a renewing Pentecost for the

Church and the whole world, had you, the supreme official of the Catholic Church in the world, emerged at the conclusion of this Synod—surrounded by all the participating church officials of the East and West, and by those who were absent—or were ‘absented’ from the Synod—and (with them and in their name in the final declaration for the whole world to hear) announced the following:

First, this theological fact: that the Catholic church does not acknowledge the Jews’ their presumed right to the land of Palestine because God’s promises make one indivisible unity that has been and is fulfilled by Jesus Christ in love, justice, and peace that encompasses every human being on the face of the earth, excluding no one.

Second, this political and humanitarian stand: that all the Catholic churches in the West want to be, in coordination with all the churches in the East, the voice of righteousness in the face of every injustice that is practised on earth; and that they denounce the West’s current unjust policies towards the Arab and Islamic worlds; and that, as they do this, they want to save both the aggressor and the aggressed against, from what these policies will, now and in the future, result in of grudge, vengeance, revenge, and killing that will, sooner or later, take the whole world by a storm—the horrific occurrences in the Church of Our Lady of Deliverance in Baghdad, following the conclusion of the Synod, is but a painful proof of what I am forewarning of.

Had this stand been taken at the end of the Synod, it would have been similar to that daringly taken by St Paul—whose heir you are—the day of the first Pentecost, when he told the Jews of their sin against Jesus causing some of them to repent and the church to take off.

Jesus today is not alone. He is, as He said, whole peoples, crushed by injustices at the hands of the “Christian” West everywhere in the world, here and there, starting in Palestine, the land of Jesus, in Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, the Sudan, Yemen ...

No, I am not that much of an optimist as to expect that this daring and necessary suggestion be accepted with no hesitation or anxiety by those participating in the Synod, at the head of whom is your Holiness.

Nor am I that naive as to expect the impossible miracle: a sudden and total change of heart especially in the hearts of those in Washington and Tell Aviv, who think themselves above the gods as they control people’s destinies with no fear of any retribution or even chastisement from anybody.

But I am a priest, a faithful Catholic Priest; this is why I am asking my Western and Eastern Church together, to live their faith: a light, a service, a dignity, and a joy for every human being on the face of the earth.

Here, my Holy Father, I find myself obliged to speak even more frankly to you and to the Church in the West.

The Western churches have lived for centuries an actual and purposeful absenting the bible (from its life). This absenting of the Bible was translated into a silent and shameful condoning of the temporal civic authorities in the West, which cared for

nothing outside their temporal and materialistic interests, and their desires and wild terrifying hegemony over the world. This absence first affected the Middle East, then the whole world.

Yes, this has happened throughout hundreds of years—no one can deny it. Your predecessor, Pope John Paul II, described it repeatedly as a series of mistakes and sins for which the church needed to pound its chest in lament and repentance asking for forgiveness for it.

I said this happened in the past.

And I say, with heavy heart, that this is happening today, and has been happening for decades after the majority of churches in the West have adopted the silence policy. This is so strange that no believer can find an explanation or justification for it.

As an Arab Catholic priest, however, I thank God because He sent us at last, a man we knew well, a man we respected and loved as did many non-Christians around the world because he was, before anything else, the epitome of honesty. I mean of course his Holiness, Pope John Paul II, who dared to confront this shameful and bewildering historical truth, and carried the weight of all these sins touring the world to publicly ask for forgiveness because of these sins, until the day came when he allowed the Italian journalist, Luiji Accattoli, to publish his initiatives and words in a book with an astonishing title: *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness*. It was published worldwide in 1997 in three languages simultaneously: Italian, English, and French, and it will soon be published in Arabic because I have just finished translating it. O, how sad until death for Jesus I felt while translating it, and how shameful of the church, and what immeasurable admiration for Pope John Paul II.

In the past, the Catholic Church in the West had, regrettable standards that contravened the teachings of Jesus (the Holy Bible) as admitted by Pope John Paul II, himself, then by the Catholic Church, which followed in his footsteps. Despite that, the Catholic Church has, sorrowfully, submitted to those standards for hundreds of years. This may be one of the basic reasons why people in the West have given up on the Christian faith—and it seems will continue to do so for a long time to come.

Do you want the Catholic Church today to repeat those sins of the past so as to destroy what limited presence is left for Jesus in His land and in His East among the Moslems? These Moslems loved Jesus through the Holy Qur'an before they met those who believed in Him. They still love Him and His mother, and his believers, after they have met them and lived with them and cooperated with them for more than one thousand, three hundred years, starting in Jerusalem and Damascus.

Pope John Paul II described the Church's silence in the past as a "Grave Sin". I wonder how we would describe its silence today.

Holy Father,

The West's endemic and unremitting guilt complex towards the Jews may offer some justification or explanation for the West's sudden and blind love towards them, following the Nazi's concentration camps. "Anti-Semitism"—having basically lost its meaning after Jesus—practiced in the width and breadth of the West can in no way justify the Church's total silence towards what the Zionist Jews have been doing, for over sixty years in Palestine, in brutal cold-blooded programmed killing of groups and individual Arabs (both Moslems and Christians) in all Palestine... of organised robbery of their homes and lands, of burning of mosques and churches, and of continual burning of farms and crops. This is on top of what they have already done and

are still doing to a million-and-a-half people in Gaza, who—under the gaze of the whole world—are treated in such a way that if an animal in the West was subjected to a similar treatment, the whole world would rise up in arms against it.

What is, in your opinion, the justification of this silence?

Do you, in the Western Church, perchance approve of the changing of the Jews into a Jewish racist state, made up of thieves and murderers practicing their thievery and murder upon the Arabs (both Moslems and Christians), who have lived with them for hundreds of years in love and cooperation at the time when the whole West was pursuing them and persecuting them?

Holy Father,

Allow me to conclude this letter with a question that has always bewildered me.

What more should happen in the East so that the Western Church effectively, then practically, understands that Christianity in the East is under a real danger that threatens the existence of both of them? The great irony is that this danger does not come to Christianity from the Moslem world in whose heart Christianity has always resided, ever since it existed, and ever since they started living together. No, the danger comes from the policies of the unbridled and unjust “Christian” West.

O, how I hope that my words reach you!

Holy Father,

Every day throughout the year, the whole Church celebrates the feast of some saint. Most of these saints, as you know, are from the Eastern Church.

This church has always raised, and will always raise its heart-felt prayers for its East whose daughter it is and its extension and radiation...

And for the West especially, which is in dire need for an abundance of God’s mercy, for the spirit of Jesus Christ, and the prayers of the faithful... For the prevalence of justice, peace, and love in the whole earth...

And for all our Arab brothers: Christians, Moslems, and Jews.

Holy Father,

In the name of all the children of the East, especially the children of the wounded East, I ask you and I ask the whole Church in the West to adopt a righteous stand!

As I beg you to tolerate my honesty, I reiterate to you my trust and love.

Your son,

**An open letter from a Syrian Arab priest
to his holiness, Pope Benedictus XVI**

(On the Anniversary of the evil Balfour Declaration)

November 2, 2011

My Holy Father,

I decided to write to you again, as I contemplate the political and religious status in the world today, and as I live the atmosphere of our Moslem brothers' preparations for the approaching Adha celebrations.

I read with sullenness, in the *Osservatore Romano* on November 15, 2011, your letter to the Most Reverend Timothy M Dolan, the Archbishop of New York and the Supreme Official of the Board of the United States bishops.

Every person must automatically sympathize with the victims of such a tragedy, and ask God to spare humanity similar tragedies—although these are, unfortunately, happening increasingly.

I do beg you, though, to allow me to add that the way you talked about this tragedy suggests that you are not in full knowledge of the international political atmosphere which accompanied and followed this act of aggression, nor of the truth of this particular aggression.

Few are today ignorant of the fact that many American and European analysts, equally, accuse the American administration of being the real plotter of this aggression, with the purpose of continuing and promoting its policy which aims at robbing the whole world.

Furthermore, is there anybody who does not know that this whole American administration is in total subjugation to the Israeli lobby, which fully controls the United States? It is not *I* who make this dangerous accusation; it fills many very well-known and contemporary books written by American university professors, the like of Paul Findley, John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt, Franklyn Lamb, and Edward Tivnan; and former politicians, like Jimmy Carter, and the former Senator David Duke.

Anyway, to ascertain the truth of this matter, it is sufficient to note the unconditional and many-faceted blind support the US—not forgetting that of all Western Europe—given the Israeli policies in Palestine, and the whole Arab world.

All that is of course done in complete defiance of all international legislations and treaties. Not only that, but also in defiance, in fact, of the United Nations and the Security Council's resolutions.

Holly Father,

Let me go back to September 11, 2001. You, undoubtedly, know that among the thousands of employees working in the Twin Trade Towers in New York were four thousand Jews who, unexplainably, were all absent from work on that particular day!

As to Mr George Bush, Jr. Is there anyone who does not know that he claimed to have received many messages directly from heaven? The reality is that these messages dictated a policy that is in complete accord with the policy of the United States government for world domination. It is known that this is the same policy that made the Taliban and Bin Laden's movements some years ago to fight the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. This is the same policy also which ignited a war, which lasted eight years, between two countries that are striving for development and progress, in order to drain them of their last drop of blood. Let us remember here that during the Shah's rule, Iran was the darling ally of the United States, while in this war (between Iraq and Iran) Iraq was their biggest ally—Jacques Chirac and Ronald Rumsfeld described poor Saddam Hussein as "the great friend".

Should I remind you also of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, encouraged by the United States, with what followed it of a whole-world war against Iraq in 1991, and of the siege that—according to *American* reports—caused the death of 1,500,000 Iraqi children?

As to this tyrannically unjust and totally inexcusable war launched against Iraq in 2003, which fragmented that country, and destroyed—among what it destroyed—Iraq's ancient Church, it has become clear that that war was only one link in a plot that has aimed, for a long time now, to destroy the whole Arab world. This plot was declared quite openly in the Israeli "Kivunim" magazine, in the February issue of 1982. I find it befitting, and my duty to relate a few of its main objectives, perchance this will open the eyes of those in the West who insist—sarcastically—on exulting the "Arab Spring", and on attracting with money and false promises hundreds of Syrians who stupidly turn a blind eye to what has happened in Iraq and Libya, and insist on not seeing the hell this West—which has lost its soul and faith—is leading them into.

Here is some extracts of what that article said:

"(Regaining) the Sinai peninsula with its present and potential resources is a political priority for us...

Egypt does not constitute a military strategic problem due to its internal conflicts and it could be driven back to the post 1967 war situation in no more than one day.

The myth of Egypt as the strong leader of the Arab World was demolished back in 1956 and definitely did not survive 1967...

Egypt, in its present domestic political picture, is already a corpse...

Breaking Egypt down territorially into distinct geographical regions is the political aim of Israel in the Nineteen Eighties on its Western front.

... If Egypt falls apart, countries like Libya, Sudan or even the more distant states will not continue to exist in their present form and will join the downfall and dissolution of Egypt.

The Western front, which on the surface appears more problematic, is in fact less complicated than the Eastern front... Lebanon's total dissolution into five provinces serves as a precedent for the entire Arab world including Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula that track. The dissolution of Syria and Iraq later on into ethnically or religiously unique areas such as in Lebanon, is Israel's primary target on the Eastern front in the long run.

The entire Arabian peninsula is a natural candidate for dissolution due to internal and external pressures, and the matter is inevitable especially in Saudi Arabia...

Jordan constitutes an immediate strategic target in the short run but not in the long run, for it does not constitute a real threat in the long run after its dissolution, the termination of the lengthy rule of King Hussein...

The (Palestinian) autonomy plan ought also to be rejected, as well as any compromise or division of the territories... It is not possible to go on living in this country in the present situation without separating the two nations, the Arabs to Jordan and Jews to the areas west of the river.

Genuine coexistence and peace will reign over the land only when the Arabs understand that without Jewish rule between the Jordan and the sea they will have neither existence nor security. A nation of their own and security will be theirs only in Jordan.

Rebalancing the country demographically, strategically and economically is the highest and most central aim today."

Holy father,

In the face of such dangerous declarations, can we afford, not to see through this demonic series of international terrorism that has been planned and executed with utmost sophistication by the United States and its European mercenaries a long time before September 11, 2001?

It is very natural that you see the necessity of sympathizing, after ten years, with the American people. Can the Church afford not to sympathize with its children wherever and whoever they are?

But what hurts me—I the Arab Catholic priest—to the depth of my heart is that you have not displayed the same sympathy, in clear and frank expressions and words that are realistic and courageous towards the Arab and Islamic world in general, and towards Syria in its current crisis in particular. This pushes me to ask painful questions regarding the truthfulness of the Christian faith in the Western Church on the one hand, and on the other regarding the possibility of its being constrained by the Western (Zionist) political and material powers.

Holy father,

Let me tell you frankly the pain I feel as I observe the contemporary Western Church committing anew the very grave sins of collusion, alliance, and negligence, which it had committed throughout long centuries until a "Pope" the size of Pope John Paul II came along to admit and confess these past sins, and repeatedly ask forgiveness

for them—as he did in that awesome book entitled *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness*. How long must we wait until another "Pope John Paul" appears to confess the grave sins the Church is committing today?

All through this time, Palestine is dying, having almost lost what is left of its first church. Iraq is on its way as well, and Egypt is experiencing horrifying convulsions, not all because of internal strife. As for Syria, it has been standing in the face of an international plot aimed at destroying it for no fault except that, despite everything that has been said, it is the throbbing heart of resistance against Israel. Lebanon and Iran's turn will come, no doubt. Israel has declared publicly—during this very time that I am writing to you—its intention to launch a strike at Iran's nuclear reactors. Is there any importance to this if Israel does it, even if it risks starting a world war? Who in the West would dare even to reproach Israel? This never happened in the past. Every excuse will be found for Israel, and it will be offered every support possible. Let Israel live and let the people of the world die or roam the face of the earth homeless.

It seems to me that the love and justice which Jesus preached and lived have disappeared from the face of the earth.

Is it not yet time for the Church in the West to free itself of the horrible guilt complex towards the Jews?

The silence of the Church in the West is *collusion*. It is not befitting either Christ or his Good News, especially as this is leading the Jews in Israel—and those in Diaspora who support them—to become murderers and thieves. It is sufficient for us to see what they have been doing to Palestinians every day for over sixty years. Is this what the Church wants?

As to the Christians in the West, especially the Christians of the United States who support Israel—whoever they are, and whatever position they occupy in the church—they too are colluding in this historic crime.

Yes. This collusion and this silence constitute a crime—a triadic crime—first, towards the Jews themselves; second, towards the Moslems a large proportion of whom you are pushing to despair and, consequently, to a violent and belligerent extremism; and third, towards the Christian Arabs of the Orient—these brave descendants of the early Christian churches, and whom you are condemning to extinction. It would be befitting for you in the West to remember that *these* are the people who knew how to live with Islam for centuries; something the West never managed to achieve even among the its own Christians.

The whole world, today, needs this living with Islam more than it needs anything else. Is this not what the 2nd Vatican...called for, and what the prayer meetings in Assisi—which were realised with an initiative from Pope John Paul II--embodied, and what the Vatican's Commission for Dialogue among Religions seeks tirelessly?

Holy father,

This is the last chance for words and work.

Forgive me for addressing you in this manner; we are very late.

With my sincere and deep respect of a son to his father.

A Fifth Open Letter to His Holiness, Pope Benedictus XVI

July 30, 2012

Holy Father,

For a few days now, a compelling urge to write to you has gripped me... to talk to you as a son to his father.

This is not the first time that I write to you, even though my four earlier letters remained unanswered, whether those that I sent you through the Papal Embassy in Damascus, or those which I chose to address to you as open letters.

What pushes me to write to you today is an internal calling that possessed me a few days ago while I was celebrating Holy Mass in the Church of the Lady of Damascus, where I have been serving since 1977. I was reading the Holy Bible, Matthew 18, when I was struck by Jesus' wonderful and decisive words relating to those who lead even one child astray in response to His disciples' question:

"Who do you consider to be greater in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus, calling to himself a little child, placed him in their midst. And he said: Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself like this little child, he is greater in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoever shall accept one such little child in my name accepts me. But whoever shall lead astray one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him that a millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Woe unto the world that leads people astray! Although it is necessary for temptations to arise, nevertheless: Woe to that man through whom temptation arises!"

Holy Father,

This is some of what I was reading when I heard a voice reverberating in the depths of my soul insisting that I ask you personally and, through you, all the officials of the Western Churches, this one very persistent question:

If Jesus says that he who offends *one* child deserves to have a millstone placed around his neck and be drowned in the depth of the sea, what would the fate of those who have, for tens of years, been plotting and executing systematic policies, whose purpose is, in fact, only to terrorize and starve people, cause hunger, deformity, sickness, evicting people from their homes, and destroying millions of children with their parents, grandparents, and brothers and sisters throughout the world, and especially throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds?

This question spotlights the horrifying difference between Jesus' wonderful call for honouring and beatification of every child on earth, and what seems to me—I the

Arab Catholic Priest—a glaring carelessness, which is practiced by all the Churches of the West through their constant silence towards what the rulers of this West have been doing all over the world!

Is the Church not the “Pillar of Truth”, as St Paul describes it? What justification is there for its existence if it dares not speak the truth?

I know that my words will surprise and pain you, and I am sure that no one—not in the churches of the East, nor in the West—has spoken frankly to you of what I have spoken to you about, and of what I am talking to you about today. I wonder if I have the right, as well, to publicly confess that what I am telling you now is a heavy cross that I have been carrying for tens of years. I have tried to talk about it to church officials of the Arab Eastern Churches first, then to Western Churches, since my first meeting, in 1955, with that saint of bishop, Bishop Alfred Ancel, when he was the Head of the Priests of Prado, Lyon, France. It pains me so much to confess, for the first time, that he was the only person who tried in humbleness, openness, and pain to learn the truth of what the Arab East had suffered because of the tyranny of the West and its consecutive plots. He was the only one of a large number of French and other Cardinals, Priests, and theologians, whom I kept writing to and meeting with, though totally in vain—prominent people such as Henry de Lubac, Francois Marty, Helder Camara, Jean Marie Lustiger, Yeve Congar, Joseph Duval, Pierre Poupard, Roget Etchegaray, and Jean Pierre Ricard.

This is why, I, the Arab Catholic Priest, can only marvel at the honesty, courage, and humbleness of Pope John Paul II, who dared to call upon the whole Catholic Church in the West to review its past history in order to ask forgiveness from God and people alike for the slips and faults, nay the sins in which it involved itself, or which it ran towards, due to its permanent, total or partial, connivance with temporal authorities; also due to its long lasting, and sometimes bloody, fights with these at various eras and in various countries. This Pope reached the epitome of honesty and transparency when he encouraged his Italian journalist friend, Luiji Accattoli, to collect 94 of his statements—all daring and courageous—about this sorry past, and issue them in a book entitled “When a Pope Asks Forgiveness” (1997), and which appeared simultaneously in Italian, English, and French.

It is true that this painful book came very late, but it did come! So, what reigns in the Western Churches, today—as it has been for many years—and prevents it from condemning unjust and inhuman policies, which the West regularly churns up in a glaringly total and blind subjugation to international Zionism? If various church officials in the West dare not adopt such necessary stances for whatever reason, what prevents your holiness—the highest authority in the Catholic Church—from exercising your right and duty in defending the weak on earth? Are you awaiting (after hundreds of years?) the appearance of another Pope similar to Pope John Paul II to ask forgiveness from God and people for the sins of inciting Moslems against each other, for forcing Christians to leave an East in which they have lived for hundreds of years in harmony with the Moslems and Jews—in contrast to what was happening in the West, where Christians fought each other for long centuries.

Holy Father,

Excuse me for talking so much, but I still have 3 more issues which I find myself obliged to raise:

The first issue forces me to frankly question the composition of the various circles: management, legal, spiritual, representational, and media which the Vatican consists of, whether in Rome or throughout the whole world. Are these components of the Vatican—like other human establishments which extend into ancient times—not affected by such factors as self-satisfaction, decay, prejudice, and petrification, nay even personal exploitation? The Vatican, as it is well known, is the oldest establishment of all. If my concern is congruent with reality, even partially, is it not then necessary to hasten to re-evaluate its total management, inside the Vatican and across the Globe, especially with regard to the choice of its representatives, so that the West's monopoly—specifically that of the Italians—on occupying these offices is ended? And is it not time for the Vatican to open its doors wide to officials from various other nationalities, countries, and cultures, especially the Arabic ones?

The second issue: What I fear most is that the permanent anti-Semitism, and non-evangelical practices, which the Western societies and churches have carried out against the Jews, have deepened (in all of the West, and especially in its churches) a guilt complex that has shackled it, nay it has even pushed it to justify everything the Israelis do—and with them of course their devotees, the Western rulers—of destruction, pilfering, occupation, killing, evicting people from their homes that has affected both the Arab and Islamic worlds for a hundred years, and Palestine especially, for over 70 years. As to what is being launched against Syria of an unprecedented universal war, for over one and a half years now, is nothing but—as they hope—the last link in this evil plot. Is there even one church official in the West today who thinks that in the acquiescent silence of these churches lies atonement for the grand sin of anti-Semitism, which had been practiced by the West for centuries? Is this silence itself not yet another and graver sin that makes the Western Church bear at least part of the crimes committed by the West and Zionism together?

The third and last issue relates to the dealing of Eastern and Western Churches with Islam and the Moslems.

Here, in an attempt to keep out many mistakes that happened in the history of Christians and Moslems equally—as has happened in the history of all the people on earth—I feel it is my duty to shed light on a historical event, which is unique to Islam. When the Islamic armies conquered Syria, Egypt, and Spain, Islam registered a civilized behavior that was the first of its kind, as that had never been known in the history of conquering armies before or since: Islam knew how to deal with the Christians, the natives of the lands, and with the Jews in all the conquered countries with ease and forbearance, wisdom and far-sightedness. This is why it is said truly that the Islam of Syria is the moderate Islam, regarding faith, treatment, and shared living with non-Moslems. The war that is being launched against Syria is, in fact, planned to be a bloody religious war between Moslems and Christians in the first

place, and a bloody sectarian war among Moslems themselves, in the second. Is this not exactly what Mr Kissinger meant when he said, three months ago: “Islam in Syria must be destroyed because it is a moderate Islam”?

In order for primarily the Eastern Churches to contribute to saving this “Moderate Islam” and to saving their Christian Arab faithful, and also to saving a West that is dragged by Zionism to an open war with this moderate Islam, as it has dragged it into creating extremist Islam which will envelop the West in its extremism and fanaticism and violence), these churches must unify their stance in truth and courage (especially as much valuable time has already slipped by) and be guided by a select group of historians, thinkers, and politicians, both Christians and Moslems, in these fateful and exceptional times, to produce a “Work and Thought Programme”. Perchance such a Programme, or most of it, will be adopted at the Exceptional International Symposium, headed by your holiness, which will be held in Rome on November 7th, 2012—rather than leaving matters—as happened during the Synod for the East, held in Rome on October 10, 2010—in the hands of people most of whom do not realize that the fate of the world depends on the correct relations between the whole West, on one side, and the Arab and Islamic worlds, on the other.

Holy Father,

I beg your pardon for my lengthy honest talk.

I ask for your blessings for both the Arab and Islamic worlds, and for a strong healing word to a West that has been seduced by materialism, greed, and love of appearances so much so that it almost lost all values.

Please accept my love and respect of a son to his father.

An open letter from an Arab Priest to Ms Hillary Clinton Secretary of the US Department of State

Feb. 11, 2011

Let me first introduce myself.

I am an Arab citizen from Syria. I have received the blessing of priesthood in 1959 in Damascus. I am serving my ministry in a Damascene church with a very beautiful name: the Church of Our Lady of Damascus.

This Sunday morning, February 6, 2011, as I was celebrating Holy Mass—with my heart filled with thoughts of the peoples of Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen; and the horrifying holocausts in Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan; and worried about the Lebanon, the Sudan, and the whole Arab world—I prayed to God for the "grand" rulers of the world, especially those of the United States of America, who have filled the whole globe with injustice and terror, vengeance and death, repression and poverty, sickness and destruction, and desperation...

Suddenly, I recalled a loud and clear statement you made during your campaign for the American Presidency (which reverberated across the whole globe). On that day, you said verbatim that "Iran will be wiped off of the face of the earth the moment it launches its first missile on Israel."

On hearing this, I panicked, not because of fear from you, or from your country's massive 'intelligent' weapons—but fear for you, Americans, because of what things have come to in your United States of America, 'the leader of the free world'!

On the one hand, you have an unlimited, varied, and massive power that is dragging the entire world submissively to its inevitable destruction.

On the other hand, your total, blind, and absolute submission to Israel that is out with all laws, and which is extremely costly, financially, psychologically, and in human terms.

I recalled also another very poignant statement uttered, hundreds of years ago, by one of the greats of your country—Benjamin Franklin—when he called upon the members of the commission drafting the American constitution in 1787, to include an article in it prohibiting the Jews from residing in America, so that the day will not come when the American people curse their forefathers in their graves, after they become—as they are today—mere slaves to these Jews.

I am sorry to add an undeniable fact that the curses pouring daily on the United States are not only from inside it, but also from all corners of the globe.

Notwithstanding this, you go trotting the world over with obvious glee, offering with your smiles—repeatedly and totally unashamedly—lofty political advice and directives to the East and West, North and South, while you, inside America, are the

ones who most need going back to the basic principles in proper—not political but purely humanitarian—conduct.

You have found fit, this day specifically, to direct thinly veiled threats to this and that of the few Arab leaders who have dared to stand in the face of "the American Master", who has got used to world leaders kneeling to him, begging for approval and financial aid.

Madam Clinton,

Has no one even once dared to tell you, as an American citizen first, then as the Secretary of State, that you need to put your own house in order first?

Although your people are so good hearted and simple so much so that they allow their rulers sometimes to insult their intelligence, this does not mean that these rulers believe themselves to be prophets (as some of them claimed), nor does it mean that they are wise men as you claim.

There is in your country so much vanity and desire to play gods, which makes it ripe for rapid and inevitable collapse that is decisive and back-breaking.

There is in your country also so much wealth, but also so much poverty, which also prepares the grounds for such self destruction that will decimate it sooner or later.

There is in it, as well—despite all your scientific superiority—so much ignorance of God and man, that has blinded you; that will also bring about your self destruction—after you have systematically destroyed the world.

If the whole world cannot but look with respect and admiration at your myriad of scientific achievements, do you in the US, not realize that power—no matter how great and massive it is—will be weak and fragile if it sided out with justice... and that it will break in facing the will of the people?

If you doubt these facts, then allow me to suggest that you read—or maybe re-read—four books only, written by contemporary Americans. The first is one entitled *Who dares to speak out?* for the well-known author, Paul Findley (1989); the second is *The American Nightmare*, by Robert Dole (1997); the third is *The Dangerous Power*, by the two scholars, Noam Chomsky and Gilbert Ashkar (2006); and the fourth is *The Israel Lobby and the United States' Foreign Policy*, written by two university professors: John Mearsheimer and Stephen M Walt (2007).

From a different perspective, it seems to me that the wonderful "Youth Revolution" in Egypt has frightened you—the 'big guys' in Washington and Tell Aviv—so much so that it made you come up with a warning to the whole world, a warning that is so 'intelligent' that even the most ignorant can read in it your deep-rooted and endemic desire to see "Constructive Chaos" prevail in the whole Arab East in order to break it down and decimate it, so that your beloved and spoilt pet, Israel—which has become your and the whole West's master—can live in peace for ever.

Madam Clinton,

If you ask any Syrian citizen what he wants for and from his country—his answer will

not cover only Syria of course. He will answer you immediately that "I first want to regain my occupied land, and second I want to build this country to be a luminous centre for love and dignified living and a pioneer for justice and freedom in the region and the world, and I am willing to do whatever it takes to achieve this noble goal."

I assure you that this answer will be given by the simplest of people in Syria as well as by the highest official in it. This is in fact what made Syria say "No" to your face, despite all kinds of pressure that you have openly and secretly exerted for tens of years, and are still exerting on it.

What if I asked you and any American citizen, the same question? I am certain that your answers will be lucidly different and surprising in view of your foreign policy that is totally hidden from the American people.

At last, let me, as an Arab Catholic priest, tell you that it saddens me that all the churches in the United States have lost the wonderful face of Jesus, and turned to worshipping the "sorrowful" face printed on your dollar, leaving all their believers to change gradually to herds of slaves that are unaware that they are driven to enslaving all humanity.

I wish it were possible for the former brave Cardinal of Boston, Bernard Lu, to come back. I wish he could come back to raise the voice high and loud in the length and breadth of the United States, perchance he could wake up many in all the Western churches, starting with the Holy See, before it is too late.

Madam Clinton,

I end this letter to you this evening, February 11, 2011, after the departure announcement of Hosni Mubarak.

I can only call upon you, and upon every official and ruler on this earth to contemplate and ponder long what has happened in Egypt, and learn some lessons, in order for you to correct your treatment of the crushed, exploited, and unjustly treated people, so that you save yourselves from yourselves first, and then to put things right, acknowledging the dignity of people and of every human being.

I hope that neither you, nor all your officials in the West will forget, the millions who congregated in the Egyptian cities and towns, and learned how to peacefully, patiently, and with determination confront those agents of the state who crashed into them with cars, on camels, on horse backs, and shot at them with live ammunition, as well as the thousands of thieves and criminals who were released onto them from their jails, without the demonstrators ever responding to their violence with violence.

O, how great those people were... the old and young men and women, the, the children and the senior citizens standing as one together for prayer while the water cannons were blasting at them. How great their faith and hope were while caring for the wounded in their thousands, raising their martyrs to the heavens in their hundreds, spending their long 17 days and nights sleeping on the grounds from which

and from the heavens to reclaim their superb human and national spirit... this one deep-rooted, solid, loving, and even merry spirit, until a day came when they raised together the Holy Quran and the Holy Bible in joint prayer. I tell you that I have prayed for God's blessings to pour upon them, and my prayers were answered.

I wonder if you have ever known in all human history any people who managed to create such a great peaceful revolution, of such a great size, goal, behavior, and humanity.

Madam Clinton,

As I offer my love and respect to the American people, I pray for God's blessings of wisdom, humility, and the spirit of service for you, and for every official on the face of the earth.

To Barak Obama

May 19, 2011

Mr Barack Obama,
President of the United States of America,

As we, the undersigned children of Syria, were listening to you tonight while you loftily looked down on the whole world, many of us thought of one of many seminal passages from a new book bearing the exciting title: *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, written by two contemporary scholars, Stephen M. Walt from the University of Harvard, and John Mearsheimer from the University of Chicago.

What a vast difference between what you claimed, and what this book said. It explained very clearly how lowly and submissive every American official—without exception—is to the Israeli Lobby across the width and breadth of the United States.

We wondered, of course, how you, and every American official, can unashamedly practice this kind of double standards. You project the image of an able ruler, while, in reality, you and all officials in the United States are ruled by the Israeli Lobby.

The book, we mentioned, contains a massive number of accounts, coming from Presidents, State Department Officials, Congressmen and Senators.

Suffice it for me to remind you of what your former Head of Department of State, Mr. George Shultz, said and wrote in 1982 about what he considered to be effectively an annulment of him and that of President Ronald Reagan. Please read with me what appears on page 46 of the 2007 Penguin Books edition:

In early December [1982] ... I got word that a supplement was moving through the lame-duck session of Congress to provide a \$250 million increase in the amount of U.S. military assistance granted to Israel: this in the face of Israel's invasion of Lebanon, its use of cluster bombs, and its complicity in the Sabra and Shateela massacres! We fought the supplement and fought it hard. President Reagan and I weighed in personally, making numerous calls to senators and congressmen. On December 9, I added a formal letter of opposition saying that the supplement appeared "to endorse and reward Israel's policies." Foreign Minister Shamir called President Reagan's opposition "an unfriendly act" and said that "it endangers the peace process." The supplement sailed right by us and was approved by Congress as though President Reagan and I had not even been there. I was astonished and disheartened. This brought home to me vividly Israel's leverage in our Congress. I saw that I must work carefully with the Israelis if I was to have any hand in congressional action that might affect Israel and if I was to maintain congressional support for my efforts to make progress in the Middle East.

After all of the above, we can only say to you, from our beloved country, Syria, with all honesty, that you need to put your American House in order first, before you

claim to put the whole world in order, when, in reality, you are filling it with hatred, terror, murder, and poverty.

Is it not the right time for you to repent and put the fear of God in your heart?

I expect I shall be seeing you at the throne of Almighty God, the absolute Justice, on the Day of Judgment.

On their behalf,

An open letter from a Syrian Arab Priest to France's Foreign Minister, Mr Alain Juppe

June 9, 2011

Mr Foreign Minister,

I am an Arab Priest from Syria, and I have just learned of your statement in the United States concerning the legitimacy of our President.

As a Syrian citizen, I cannot remain silent *vis-à-vis* such interference in the affairs of my country.

As a university professor, you cannot be ignorant of the fact that the legitimacy of any president depends only on his people's consent, not on the whims and moods of any foreign individual or country.

As a Foreign Minister of France, you must know that Syria is a sovereign state, and a founding member of the United Nations.

But as a spokesperson of some current world 'masters', it must have seemed to you as though you could decide whimsically the destiny of other countries—including Syria.

Let me tell you, in the name of the millions of victims whom the West has crushed, that it is about time that you stop playing the role of the savage humans; it is about time also that you stop denigrating all the rights of other peoples, even to the limit of destroying their very existence, as you seem to enjoy doing in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and in all Africa, especially in Libya.

Mr Foreign Minister,

Let us get back to Syria. Have you forgotten that the long-term goal for all political, diplomatic, and riot inciting maneuvers which have, for over two months now, been prepared against Syria, have been blatantly exposed by the American Under Secretary of Defense, Ms Michele Flournoy? She was so certain of the success of this conspiracy against Syria that she declared publicly that "Syria can regain its security the day it renounces its ties with Iran and Hizbullah, and signs a peace treaty with Israel."

O, you 'famous' diplomats and Western politicians! Have you become mere mercenary spokespeople for the Israeli dictates? Or have you, in France and Europe, forgotten the great honour your resistance against Nazi occupation brought you? Your memory of your history—however weak it has become—must never allow you to forget that!

Should the Nazi occupation have tightened its grip on France and Europe more than it did so that your feelings of injustice and broken humanity would remain alive until now?

If you, as a minister of General De Gaulle's France, were personally able—for some miserable reasons—to turn a blind eye on this great historic honour, then let me—as

a Syrian citizen—tell you that Syria will never, under any circumstances, accept to abandon its vital duty in defending its own existence, first against the Israeli occupation, and then against the lethal danger that Zionism constitutes for the whole Arab nation.

Notwithstanding this, it seems to me that the West insists on continuing to act like a "Mater", although it is no more like that.

The truth is that the West is weighed down by its colonizing past, and weighed down even more heavily by its bloody occupations of other people's countries, by the criminal wars it waged, by the inhuman evictions of whole peoples, by its systematic robbery of colonized countries from the Near East to the Far East, Africa, and Australia, by its long-term 'random' and sinister breaking up of peoples and countries, and by its systematic annihilation of the native peoples, especially in all the American Continent, and the continents of the Pacific Ocean. This is why the West has always been propelled by an insatiable appetite to impose its will on others.

And because you, Westerners, trample all rights under your feet as you try to do now in Syria, you have never felt the least embarrassment in claiming that you have all and every right; the mighty, in your view, can never do wrong.

But, O, European lords, it has indeed occurred that you have actually moved from the phase of being the masters to the phase of subservience. Can you, in fact, claim that you are ignorant of the fact that all Europe is now dragging its tail behind the United States?

This is not a secret any more. You know very well many European thinkers who never cease to call for speeding up the liberation of Europe from the "American Trap".

What has happened is that the United States, itself, has become a victim of another trap—the Zionist Lobby—which has taken the States totally under its sphere of influence. Suffice it for me to remind you of what has been written on this subject by Noam Chomsky, Paul Findley, Stephen Walt, and John Mearsheimer to spare you the attempt of absolving yourself of this bitter result.

Are you in Europe, then, not the servants of the servants of Zionism?

Mr Foreign Minister,

Let us admit that, despite its massive might, the West has lost its credibility.

In fact, in the United Nations, in the Security Council, and in the other, so-called, international establishments, it has become clear that when the issues relate to non-Western countries, the representatives of the West transform into supercilious lions permitting themselves to practice all kinds of interferences, even to the limit of destroying whole countries. Suffice for me to mention Afghanistan and Iraq, and what is happening now in Libya. All this is done in the name of "democracy, the dignity of man, and human rights."

But if the issues relate to Israel, then all the Western countries—from the greatest to the smallest, without exception, at the head of which is the United States—transform into non-existing blocks... blocks that are blind, deaf, and dumb despite the fact that many journalistic investigations, which took place even in Europe, concluded that

Israel is the distinctively terrorist state. Some went even further and concluded that Israel constituted the greatest danger to peace in the world!

Israel had been a terrorist entity even before the declaration of its establishment in 1948. If you have the slightest doubt about this, then I suggest that you read a truly horrifying book—written by a French historian, Charles Enderlin, who is a Zionist Jew—with a title that suggests its content: *Par le feu et par le sang (With fire and blood)*, published in Paris in 2008.

Israel has remained faithful to itself: a killer, a thief, a warmonger, savage, and arrogant, adopting racist, expansionist and annihilationist policy. And even though the Jews received good treatment in the Arab and Islamic countries—their historians have enough integrity to admit that—they have found ways to levy a very heavy tax on the Arab and Islamic countries for what they have suffered of the West's anti-Semitism and Nazi holocaust. The Jews have planned to destroy these Arab and Islamic countries since "Ben Gurion" at the same time they inflicted on the Palestinian Arabs—both Moslems and Christians—a holocaust that has extended for over 60 years!

Mr Foreign Minister,

Allow me to ask you one final question:

How can you, as France's Foreign Minister, and a person who prides himself on his secularism, justify the unconditional support France gives to a country that wants to be absolutely and purely Jewish?

Finally, and as a Catholic priest, allow me to offer you my sincere condolences for the demise of the Church of France, as it seems to me that it has died and finished because of its sinful silence towards the series of catastrophes the West has never slackened in inflicting on the Arab and Islamic worlds, whose casualties are the land's native inhabitants, the Christians and their presence in the region, all for providing the conditions for the existence of Israel.

How right Pope John Paul II was when, in one of his visits to France, he started his address by calling out: "France!... France! Where is your baptism?"

Mr Foreign Minister,

Allow me to ask you to maintain at least the lowest level of honesty and dignity.

Contribution to the national dialogue committee consultative meeting

June 10, 2011

Ladies and gentlemen,

Permit me to salute the souls of the martyrs, the wounded, and all their families. I would also like to thank the organising committee for inviting me to talk to you in this historic national meeting.

In my talk, I would like to summarise 1st, my viewpoint on what has happened and is happening in Syria, and 2nd, my suggestions concerning the agenda of this meeting.

First, My viewpoint:

1. I do not hesitate to declare that what has happened and is still happening is a basic part of an imperialistic-Zionist campaign that aims, as all know, to divide the Arab world, even to disintegrate it. This campaign has been planned in earlier times, before and accompanying the Sykes-Picot treaty, the Balfour Declaration, and the British and French mandates imposed on the Arab East.
2. I do not hesitate to declare that what has happened and is still happening has come also as an inevitable and natural result of a general political course that has placed the country, according to a new constitution, in the hands of one political party all throughout forty years. The result of that was, on one side exaggerated claims for the capabilities of this party, and from another side, distancing many people who had unlimited abilities. I state nothing new if I remind you of what has resulted from that of large confiscations of freedoms of thought, speech, and innovation; and of the immense emigration of the country's brains, its technicians, and labour; and of spreading the spirit of fear and opportunism; and the sliding of many, who had assumed some position of power, into the maze of what we call openly today: corruption, which unfortunately if not dealt with speedily and at the roots, constitutes the most vicious of Syria's enemies.
3. I do not hesitate to declare that one of the worst results of what has happened and is still happening was that it absented the healthy conditions for the establishment of any dialogue between 'The Official' and the people. The gulf between them had widened so much that a day came when those elected to talk in the name of the people in the People's Assembly, talk, in most cases, only in the name of the ruler, and in his own or his group's interest...
4. All this could have lead the country to a catastrophe had it not been for two factors which seem to me decisive:

The first is the open nationalistic course—which was very costly politically, humanly, and economically—which Syria had always adopted in confronting Zionism—in the face of the betrayal of most Arab leaders—and which was deepened by President Bashar Al Assad. The solid proof of the success of this course and the size of its danger is this current assault which is launched by Israel through its

hirelings in the United States and Western Europe, whose open purpose, the US Deputy Minister of Defence made clear at the beginning of the crisis, as did so a few days ago, the former French Foreign Minister, Bernard Kushner.

The second is the horrific shock which this assault effected in most Syrians, and which aroused their deep-rooted love for Syria, which found what focused it and stirred it up in the person of President Bashar Al Assad because of his humanistic dealing with people and clear reformation direction, even though he constituted part of a system that left—despite its clear nationalistic direction—wounds, pangs (of pain), and reproaches in many people's hearts...

Second, my suggestions

1. About the national dialogue:

- 1.1. Dialogue means completely accepting the other as long as this other is a son of this country, and this means the practical recognition of all his rights and duties in the law and in life chances—and consequently his total right to exercise his responsibility everywhere in the country regardless of his creed, race, colour, and birthplace—in the accepted belief of the two sides of the dialogue of the necessity of reaching real results, especially if what depended on this dialogue is the destiny of a whole country, or whole people, or even the world.
- 1.2. A consequence of this is release of all freedoms, even the establishment of constructive opposition that plays the role of the watchdog which guarantees that everything is working well on all levels: political, economic, and cultural, and warns where warning is due, and specifies honestly where there are wrong practices and wrong doers, so that all the country's processes are rectified.
- 1.3. Ending illegal and arbitrary arrests completely and releasing all current prisoners of conscience immediately...

2. About modifying the constitution:

I find it necessary, not only to remove article 8 from the constitution, but also to change the whole constitution so that it is suitable for building a new developed country based on strong and systematic economy, that these great Syrian people deserve—these people who have, in few months, overcome pitfalls each one of which can cause a whole nation to slide down it—a country where every citizen has the right of citizenship, complete and in actual reality, and where no citizen is prevented from assuming any official position if he proved qualified for it.

3. Regarding the discussion of proposed laws:

3.1. Political Parties law:

I believe that new political parties should be allowed to form. This leads to political multiplicity and the principle of rotation of power on condition that parties are not formed on the basis of religion, tribe, or family.

3.2. Election law:

- Elections have to be real *elections*, not dictates!... so that the elected representative is truly a speaker for the people who have elected him/her, and so that the electorate can call to account whom they have elected.
- I believe that the name of People's Assembly must be changed to House of Parliament...
- There must be vigilance in order to prevent the 'purchase of votes' whether during the election campaign or during the elections, themselves.

The scope of elections includes...

- The House of Parliament
- The House of Parliament elects the President of the Republic. The presidential term in office must be four years, which can be renewed one time only, whatever the circumstances.

3.3. The Media law:

- It may be important—what has been much talked about of journalists' freedom, protecting them, and their right of access to information, and the right of the citizen in getting accurate information, which is based on a media that contributes effectively to raising awareness and knowledge—but what is more important is strategy, i.e. What does Syria want from the media, and how can this media serve its 'message' internally and to the outside world? This is what I hope will have specific timetables based on studied plans and stages that are wholly evaluated, annually.
- The Media law has to allocate youth a great importance, and has to note what effective role they had played in averting the dangers of the current crisis...

"Perchance you hate something while it is for your good."

And peace be with you.

An open letter from an Arab priest to President Barack Obama

June 26, 2011

Let me first introduce myself:

I am an Arab priest from Damascus, where I have been serving my priesthood since 1962.

About two-and-a-half years ago, I accompanied 120 children and 33 musicians from our church choir—the Choir of Joy—to the "Arab World Festival", organized by the John Kennedy Center in Washington.

We loved then to meet with you to present you with the true picture of our homeland, Syria, that is very different from the one presented to you. I had written to you earlier inviting you and your good lady, and requested that both of you and your children attend our performance. We were not that lucky as to meet with you or to have any response from you.

Having written an open letter to Mrs Hillary Clinton on February 2, 2011, I find it my duty to talk to you in front of the world opinion by writing this open letter to you—you who are seated at the top of the world—even though you are in reality only a human being who will eventually, like everyone else, stand before Almighty God on Judgment Day.

I write to you aware of the series of disappointments your election promises have caused many countries—starting with the United States.

I am aware of your repeated retreat from attempting to implement a just solution in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

I am also aware of your sad and truly pathetic weakness exhibited glaringly in backing down in front of the AIPAC on April 4, 2011.

I am aware as well of your speedy and bloody "Humanitarian Initiative" towards Libya in defense of "human rights" in it.

I am aware, further, of your plotting with Europe and Israel, and some Arabs, to destroy my home country, Syria, which is the cradle of many civilizations and the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, and the meeting place of the three 'heavenly religions': Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

I am aware also of your "very human fear" of what you call the right of some people inside and outside my country to kill our people and mutilate their bodies in order to spread your "creative Chaos" in it.

I am aware as well of your very strong desire for another term in the White House, even if the price for that is the annihilation of Palestine—Palestine, the birthplace of my Lord—and yours—Jesus Christ.

For all these reasons, and to avoid any futile talk, I thought of reminding you of two voices you know very well, and cannot afford to forget, although the "chair" (of Presidency) and the shameful silence of the churches in the United States may have

made these voices lost to you: these are the voice of Jesus, and that of your former president, John Kennedy.

Of the wonderful words of Jesus, I chose for you a passage from St Luke, and another from St Mathew. I entreat you to read them as in them lies what would be a great help to you, here on earth and in the life to come.

Listen to what Jesus says:

"Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil for the Son of man's sake.

Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received you consolation.

Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.

Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." (Luke 6: 21-26)

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy...

Blessed are the peace makers: for they shall be called the children of God."

(Matthew 5: 7 & 9)

As for John Kennedy, I hope very much that, today before tomorrow, you place under your gaze what he dared say in his wonderful inaugural address on January 20, 1961. Here is the full text:

"Fellow citizens:

We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom—symbolizing an end, as well as a beginning—signifying renewal, as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three-quarters ago.

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage, and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

This much we pledge—and more.

To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided there is little we can do—for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.

To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom—and to remember that, in the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside.

To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the Communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge: to convert our good words into good deeds, in a new alliance for progress, to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty. But this peaceful revolution of hope cannot become the prey of hostile powers. Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas. And let every other power know that this hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house.

To that world assembly of sovereign states, the United Nations, our last best hope in an age where the instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace, we renew our pledge of support—to prevent it from becoming merely a forum for invective, to strengthen its shield of the new and the weak, and to enlarge the area in which its writ may run.

Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction.

We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.

But neither can two great and powerful groups of nations take comfort from our present course—both sides overburdened by the cost of modern weapons, both rightly alarmed by the steady spread of the deadly atom, yet both racing to alter that uncertain balance of terror that stays the hand of mankind's final war.

So let us begin anew—remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate. Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us.

Let both sides, for the first time, formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms, and bring the absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations.

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the

ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce.

Let both sides unite to heed, in all corners of the earth, the command of Isaiah—to "undo the heavy burdens, and [to] let the oppressed go free." And, if a beachhead of cooperation may push back the jungle of suspicion, let both sides join in creating a new endeavor—not a new balance of power, but a new world of law—where the strong are just, and the weak secure, and the peace preserved.

All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days; nor in the life of this Administration; nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe.

Now the trumpet summons us again not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are, but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation," a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.

Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it. And the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you.

With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

Mr Barack Obama,

Maybe you agree with me that these two great voices need no comment.

I still have one last word, though. As an Arab Priest, I pray for you and for the dormant churches in the West, so that these two great voices reach your ears and the ears of those in charge in them before you stand in front of the Almighty God.

**The Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic
Dr. Sheikh Ahmad Badr Ed-Deen Hassoun,**

October 4, 2011

My brother, the Grand Mufti,

Memory has failed me, as I have tried very hard but failed to recall a name of any one parent in ancient or modern history, who lamented his son as God, the Almighty, gave you to do yesterday, even as the body of Sariya was in front of your eyes lying between your hands, and as TV cameras were trained on you.

I do not know what came over me when I saw you and heard you fight back your tears and pain, sailing away with Sariya in truly divine spheres of faith, love, honesty and forgiveness ... Oh, what spheres!

Were you the speaker, or was it another speaking through you?

I felt in your voice a strong echo of a higher world that flows straight into the depths of every human being who hears and sees you.

I wonder if you have had the chance to see what you were and to hear what you said.

I am certain that if you had had the chance to do so, you would have been the first to be astonished at what you were, and what you said

Were you truly the speaker, or were you in fact each and every father and mother who had lost a son?... Oh, how many these are in Syria, and in the world!

Were you the speaker, or were you each and every lover who had lost their beloved?... Oh, how many these are in Syria, and in the world!

Were you the speaker, or were you in fact every human being whose heart had been ripped apart?...

Oh, how many these are in a world which wallows in total disregard for God, the Almighty, and vies to devour the earth and human beings.

Were you not, as you spoke, each and every faithful and honest Muslim seared by how the values of Him, whose name is Great, and Who has never been but the compassionate and the merciful, have changed in the Muslim world?

Were you not, as you spoke, also every faithful and honest Christian, seared by what the teachings and values of Christ have come to in the Western World and in some of the East, which have never been but of love, sacrifice, and forgiveness? ...

Were you really the one who spoke?

You were. You were the father who is slaughtered in his son; you were also the Grand Mufti of twenty three million people, with whom you stood lamenting the loss of your son, but also—as the great man you are—offering *them* your condolences and guiding them at the same time!

Yes, you were all that, but you were also—and I have to say it—you were Syria itself, the Syria of the first alphabet, of history and civilization, embodied in a single

human being whose every cell is made of a mixture of Syria's wonderful spiritual and human heritage, a human being who stood among the people, in a way rarely given to any human being, to call all of them to return to the bosom of their one mother, Syria, not to tear her apart, but to be born anew, a birth of love, of forgiveness, of hope and of peace not for them alone, but for the entire Arab nation as well, and perhaps for the world!

My brother, the Grand Mufti,

I have had, by the grace of God, the privilege of knowing you for many years, and you have always been loving, smiling, a great man with a big heart and immense vision.

Today, however, and after the martyrdom of precious Sariya, God has given it to you that millions of people in Syria and in the world know what faith, love, tolerance, and forgiveness reside in the depths of your heart.

Did Syria—I wonder—need to pay such an extortionate price—the blood of Sariya and the blood of all the martyrs and the wounded in Syria, for Syria to merit the grace of this new birth?

In total humility, and with all who seek Him, I pray to God, the Hearer and the Respondent, that He grant us without delay this great blessing!

With you, with your distressed family, and with all the people of Syria, in the homeland and abroad, I raise my thanks to God—His wisdom be exalted above all the wisdom, and His love exalted—His love which made the fate of all people return to Him alone, He, the Compassionate and the most Merciful.

I kiss you in faith, consolation, and hope.

Your brother

A Call from an Arab Priest to the Churches of the East and West

May 19, 2011

I am an Arab priest from Syria. I have, for decades, been constantly thinking of a world dominated by a West drunken with the massive power it possesses, and which, it believes, gives it a supreme authority over all—an authority that is greedy, blind, and unjust. As I fear the worst because of the West's aggravating and uncontrolled attack against the Arab and Moslem world, I find it my duty to send this one and same call to the churches of the East and those in the West simultaneously.

In fact, Christ's Church, wherever it is located, has to be the "Pillar of Righteousness", as St. Paul very aptly described.

The Church in the West in its entirety, however, is the one primarily concerned here because this Church is supposed look after the West and guide it from straying. The fact of the matter, though, is that this West gives itself the right to practice a domineering policy that is based on terrorism and injustice, regularly violating all values of life and peace, especially towards the Arab and Islamic world.

Since the departure of Pope John Paul II, however, the Church in the West has, unfortunately, remained silent...

If it talked, then its talk meant very little in the face of the grave problems, and the aggravating human tragedies that are expanding and that this policy of silence, itself, causes. It pains me—I, the Catholic Priest—to dare to make this remark. But to ascertain the truth of what I am speaking of, one needs only to read carefully the Vatican's official newspaper: *Osservatore Romano*.

Here are some clear clues that point to this inhuman policy: the suffering that has been going on in Palestine for over 70 years—which is nothing less than an unprecedented holocaust—the unjust wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and the Sudan, and recently in Libya—where all the herds of the West rose up to 'rescue' it with unlimited cunning and energy, claiming of course to defend civilians' human rights in it... The last of these clues is President Obama's miserable address, today.

Throughout all this, the Eastern churches (both in the East and in the countries of immigration) have presented—through the Synod for the East—a sorrowful proof of their failure to address the major issues confronting our world, although these issues touch the life and rights of these very churches—nay, even their very existence in the East.

How can we explain and justify this double-faced and sinful silence the Catholic churches practice all over the world?

To avoid lengthy explanations, I call on all to read the Italian Journalist, Luiji Accatoli's book, entitled: *When a Pope asks forgiveness*, published in 1997 with the permission of Pope John Paul II.

This book, in its entirety, is a courageous, painful, and exhausting admission of the Western Church's silence—nay of its complicity—and, consequently, of its respon-

sibility towards historic stances, even towards mistakes that have been in practice for centuries.

Of these, suffice it to mention the following: Anti-Semitism, the Inquisition, the occupation of the American continent, the Western colonization, complicity with temporal authorities, and the slave trade.

The Western Church had to wait for a brave Pope—Pope John Paul II—for it to free itself a little from the weight of this permanent and painful silence, and to put forward a public and repeated admission of this "sin," for which Pope John Paul II had always asked God and the people for forgiveness.

It seems that the endemic silence that the Western Church has practiced for centuries has—since the departure of Pope John Paul II—regained control of the Church *vis-a-vis* a Western policy that is clearly pushing the whole world towards an inevitable tragic end.

Many people might find this conclusion an exaggeration, maybe even wrong. This, however, is the same conclusion that the Speaker of the Vatican, himself, Fr Raniero Cantalamissa, reached during the Religious Retreats he used to lead on Good Fridays between 1980 and 1996. These have been collected in a book issued in Paris in 1996 entitled: *We preach of crucified Jesus*. Here is what appears *verbatim* on pages 39-40 of this valued book:

“The book of Revelations contains seven letters directed to the churches of Asia Minor (chapters 2 & 3), and each of these ends with this warning: ‘He who has ears for hearing, let him listen what the spirit is speaking to the churches.’ Those who peruse the letters discover that each of them contains in its essence a word that has utmost priority—a word that means "Repentance! Repentance!" All who have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, today, know that it is saying the same word: Repentance!

On October 9, 1963, in the French Frioules region, the night before the collapse of Dam of Vajont, which caused the well-known horrible catastrophe, the people there heard cracking sounds coming from the area, but nobody paid attention to these.

Similar things are happening to us, if we but listen. This world that we have built for ourselves, and kneaded with injustice and irresponsible mutiny against God's laws is cracking, and the smell of burning fills the air. Had John, the Baptist been alive today, he would have yelled: “Here is the ax at the root of the tree! Repent!” (Mathew 3: 10)

This hovering threat is felt in a vague way even by the unfaithful world, but it is responding to it in a different way: it builds itself underground nuclear shelters. There are countries which spend a substantial part of its budget on such shelters. I wonder if by doing so they provide a solution to the problem!

We—the Christians—are looking for a nuclear shelter, too. But our nuclear shelter is exactly what we have talked about: to repent our sins!”

It is clear that the Church in the West has cast this essential repentance into oblivion, replacing it with a sorrowful tune that it keeps droning about what it calls the

danger that threatens the Christians of the Arab and Moslem worlds who are surrounded by Islamic Fundamentalism.

Is it not right and proper, and honest, for us to ask, once and for all, whether or not, in the final analysis, this Islamic Fundamentalism is a desperate reaction or an attempt at self-defence against two massive realities: the first is the wild desire of a West that craves to dominate the world, especially the Arab and Islamic worlds; and the second is this planned systematic annihilation of the Palestinian people for over 70 years, carried out, under the gaze of the whole nonchalant world, by the West's spoilt child, Israel, which is fed by the West until it is bloated, and which the West has already and in advance forgiven it all its sins?

Let me finally remind everybody that many of these Fundamentalist movements—starting with Bin Laden—are the making of the West, itself.

The Church in the West seems to insist on turning a blind eye to the real problems (with all their dangerous and current consequences, and the consequences that are yet to come) because of the West's endemic guilt complex which is the result of their inherent Anti-Semitism—although this is in complete contradiction with the Bible, and it is impossible to find a satisfactory explanation for it.

Does this not mean, then, that time is ripe for the Eastern churches to play their indispensable role, in their home countries and in the countries of immigration, and to untiringly continue to call on all Western churches to condemn the Western leaders and force them to take a close and honest look at the problems that 'rule' all the Arab and Islamic worlds as well as the future of humanity?

Only then will deliverance of the world come from the East.

At first look, however, this might seem to constitute an insurmountable problem, or appear to be unrealistic wishful thinking.

Let me, however, remind you here of an incident of a great realistic and symbolic significance. This is the fact that a single voice—that of the Archbishop of the Melkite Catholic Church in the United States, the late Damascene Yousef Al Taweel—was enough alone to push (on November 13, 1973—one month after the Arab-Israeli Tishreen war) all the Catholic churches in that country to vote unanimously on the first (and sadly, last) official statement of its kind that adopted a solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict, which called for the establishment of an independent viable Palestinian state to exist side by side with the state of Israel.

With this in mind, I wonder what all the Eastern churches—in their home countries and in the countries of immigration—can do if they untiringly call together for justice and peace for all.

Is it not time to put a limit to this arrogant Israeli policy even if this upsets all Western governments and churches? This policy—which enjoys the absolute and blind support of the whole West—has, in effect, turned all the Israeli people into a group of thieves and killers.

If it has become clear that the Western leaders are but slaves to the "Israeli lobby", then we have to admit that the Western people are able to learn the truth and the reality of what has been happening in Palestine since the establishment of Israel

despite the hammers of a well-studied and aggressive fact-distorting professional media which propagate a completely distorted picture. The solid proof for that is the ever increasing number of the superb supporters constantly flocking from Europe and America to effect a constant presence in Palestine. Is there anybody who does not know that noble young woman, the American Rachel Kouri, who was crushed by an Israeli bulldozer as she stood in its way to stop it from demolishing one of the houses in Gaza?

Can we also forget the brave and admirable voices which continue to denounce the reality called Israel, and which always call for justice and peace? Of these voices, I mention from Israel itself the scientist Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Israel Shahak, Tanya Reinhart, and Suzan Nathan; from France, Emmanuel Leven (a Jew), Rojer Garaudy, Fr Michel Lelong, and Abbé Pierre; from Switzerland, Jean Ziegler; from the US, Noam Chomsky, Paul Findley, Robert Dole, David Duke, Stephen Walt, John Mearsheimer, and Franklin Lamb.

O, precious Catholic Church! You will not save the world this way; nor do you represent Him who alone, and untarnished, embodied absolute love!

O, Catholic Church! O Mother! Is it not time for you to change course? The frightening multitudes of the hungry and the wronged await you on the opposite shore, as they, in the old days, used to wait for Jesus in Palestine.

**An open letter from a Syrian Arab Priest
to the ambassadors of the
United States of America, France, Britain, and Germany in Damascus.**

August 14, 2011

Dear Sirs,

I am a priest from Damascus. My roots go back to the 1st church in Syria, which, two thousand years ago, sent you St Paul to bring you light, love, and peace from Damascus.

Today, I find it my duty to address you together because, for years now, and despite the grand titles they give themselves, your countries have been acting as though they were a bunch of slaves serving one master, who, everybody knows, resides in Tell Aviv.

I would have loved to offer you a word of thanks for you to take to your presidents in your four capitals for the "democratic services" which you never fail to enact all over the world, especially in the Arab and Islamic worlds. These "services" have transformed Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and the whole of Africa even, especially Libya, to "heavens", that God Himself would not have dreamed of what you have planted in them of "joys, feasts, smiles, happiness, justice, security, peace, and dreams..."

And here you are today, having turned the whole earth into similar "heavens" that satisfy your insatiable greed, you have been striving, day and night and for long months—and prompted by Mrs Hillary Clinton—to excise the only "black spot" in it—my precious home country, Syria—because it is resisting your "benevolent" desires.

It would take me far too long to tell you and your countries' officials—not your deceived people—what you and they deserve... So I thought I had better leave this to those who are more knowledgeable than I, and who have higher and responsible offices and whose names and books have filled the world to tell you and all the people in your countries, in their own way and style some of what I want to tell you.

Allow me before that to offer my sincere thanks, in my name and in the name of every Syrian, every Arab, and every honest person, to those countries that stood in the face of your blind and stupid subservience to Israel: Russia, China, India, South Africa, Brazil, and Lebanon...

Messrs Ambassadors,

Here are the words of your great, honest, and courageous researchers:

1. The Swiss, Jean Ziegler, former consultant of economic affairs with the Secretary General of the United Nations, and current member of Human Rights Council in the UN. He said, in 2007, in the introduction to his brave book, "The Empire of Shame", on pp 16-17, on the policy of your "great" countries and the way it deals with the countries of the rest of the world:

In the Empire of Shame, which is governed by a policy of controlled starvation, war is not an emergency state but a permanent state; it does not constitute a crisis and a temporary state, but a natural state. It is no more an absencing of the mind but the justification for the existence of this Empire. The economic war lords have subjugated the whole earth to studied divisions: they attack the states' regulatory authorities, create doubt about the mastery of people, corrupt democracies, ruin nature, and destroy people and their freedoms. Their philosophical basis resides in spreading this economy, and shoving their "slight hand" to manipulate the market; their practical basis being the maximum increase in profit. I call this philosophy and practice *Structured Violence*.

Religion and starvation are the weapons of mass destruction used by the masters of the world in order to enslave peoples and steal the strength of their work, their raw materials, and their dreams...

The Food and Agriculture Organisation's report ascertains that the world agriculture, in the current state of development of the production forces can provide food in a normal way (i.e. can offer every adult 2700 calories a day for 12 billion people!

We count, today, 6 billion and two hundred million people.

In short: there is no inevitable destiny; every child that dies, is a child murdered!

The international economic, social, and political order built by the pilfering capitalism is not only murderous, but also futile; it commits murders, but it murders unnecessarily.

This order must be confronted with massive resistance! This book of mine desires to be a weapon in this battle.

Messrs Ambassadors,

Is this not your predatory "Order"—as described by many of your researchers—which you want to impose on the world at the cost of most of the peoples of the earth?

2- The French, Roger Garaudy, the famed thinker, who in 1979 said in a book of his, entitled "A call to the living" that the West is threatening the whole earth with destruction. He also published a book in 1983 entitled "Israel, the cause" in which he says in the first few lines of its introduction, the following:

We are facing a taboo subject: Zionism and the State of Israel.

In France, anybody can criticize the Catholic Faith or Marxism, crush atheism or nationalism, condemn the Soviet Union, the United States, or South Africa, and call for anarchy without suffering any grave consequence, except the normal exposure to criticism and refutation.

If anybody analyses Zionism, however, then one enters another world; he moves from the literary sphere into the legal sphere. On July 29, 1981, a law was enacted which targeted with infamy everybody who dares—due to his racial ethnicity, national, or specific religious affiliation—criticize the State of

Israel and its Zionist policy basis. Such a person would face criminal procedures.

Criticizing the State of Israel—and by that I do not mean criticizing this or that separate individual act, even if it were a criminal act, but the analysis of the self-approved logic for a country established on political Zionist principles—would immediately stigmatize you as a Nazi, and bring you threats to your life.

This writer can testify to that because he, himself and for this exact reason, was subjected to legal proceedings, accused of Nazism, and received death threats." (pp 7-8)

Messrs Ambassadors,

If this is happening to freedom and free research in France, the country of the great revolution, and the country of freedoms—formerly!—what would then happen to freedoms and democracies under your patronage in the rest of the world?

Suffice it for me to remind you of Mr Roland Dumas' admission in his latest book that "Israel controls France".

3- The Americans, Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, are two contemporary university lecturers, who in 2007 wrote a book entitled, "The Israeli Lobby and the US foreign policy". They affirm in this book, on the tongues of uncountable number of American political personalities, the decisive and constant influence of the Israeli lobby upon the American policy. I shall quote only two paragraphs from pages 338 and 339 of the Arabic translation in which they say the following:

These various elements (petrol, spreading democracy, and instigating creative chaos) constituted the strategic milieu in which the war decision was taken. These help us understand some of the basic forces which facilitated this choice. There was, however, another variable in the equation without which the war would most probably not have happened. This is the Israeli Lobby, especially the decision making group of the Neo-Conservatives, the strategic thinkers, who have worked a long time before 9/11 on pushing the United States to attacking Iraq. The group in favour of the war thought that overthrowing Saddam Hussein would enhance the American and the Israeli strategic positions, and would initiate a transformational regional operation that will benefit the United States and Israel, equally. Israeli former officials and chiefs supported these efforts because they were eager to see the United States overthrow one of their regional foes, the man who launched Skud missiles onto Israel in 1991.

... Our argument is that behind the push for the war, at least in a substantial part, is the desire to make Israel more secure. This constituted an argument provoking claim prior to launching the war, but the most provoking argument today is that Iraq has changed into a strategic catastrophe. Let us be clear: the people and groups who pushed for war thought that it would benefit both Israel and the United States. They had, most certainly, never expected the catastrophe at the end. Regardless of anything else, the suitable justification for the role of the Israeli Lobby in encouraging the war is a matter of proof, and there is an important proof that Israel and the groups supporting it—especially the Neo-Conservatives—played an important role in the decision to invade."

Messrs Ambassadors,

Have you any moral or humanistic value left for you and your countries after it has become clear to everybody, and has been for many long years, that Israel is using your "great" countries and the "respected" international establishments a pack animal/vehicle for it to secure its existence and to destroy the powerless peoples of the world, especially the Arab people, among whom is Syria.

But rest assured: the peoples of the world will not remain powerless!

Let me, finally, also tell you, as a faithful priest, that as long as the churches in the West seem dead silent vis-à-vis the successive and horrific crimes of your rulers:

"Live and let other people live!

But remember that you will not escape death or facing God!

An open letter from a Syrian Arab Priest to Mr Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic

September 21, 2011

Mr President,

This morning I received in Damascus an e-mail from France, dated September 15, 2001, informing me that you have said publicly, on that same day, that you wish for Syria what has happened in Libya.

My French correspondent wondered "Have we, then, been given all this life for this amount of vileness?"

Mr President,

The person addressing you is a French person.

He says it to you in the plural form, because, as a French person, he is doubtlessly informed of all the vileness related to the President of his/her republic.

I am Syrian, and I shall answer you as a Syrian.

I shall stop today at three occurrences related to your Presidential progress that is "brimming with scandals" as another French person described it.

The first event

Two years ago, I was in France on July 14, and I watched on some friends' TV the national parade which you presided over. It was indeed impressive. When I saw you insisting, under the heavy rain, on shaking hands with the surviving veterans of the resistance, I could not restrain the anger and total disrespect that overtook me towards you and towards the whole West, as my thoughts catapulted me immediately to the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance fighters whom you insist, in your meanness, to dub as terrorists because of your total and villainous subservience to Israel, even though you are aware that what Israel has been doing for over sixty years exceeds all the horrors committed by the Nazi occupation in France *and* Europe.

The second event

On December, 10, 2007, you had the "honour", as you said then, of receiving the Libyan President, Mo'ammr Al Qazzafi. On that day, you committed two ignoble actions; the first was your kissing his hand bowing low in front of him; the second was allowing him to pitch his marquee in the gardens of the Presidential Palace.

I wonder: Is its holiness, the Libyan Petrol, worthy of such debasing of oneself by one of General De Gaul's heirs?

The third occurrence

I read in my French correspondent e-mail, verbatim...

"Thank you for your second letter to our vain Jupe..."

He is our best, as Chirac used to describe him.

Anger has not left me since this morning because I heard also that Mr Bernard Henry Levi—whose wife, a singer, and is in the close circle of Mrs Sarkozy—was accompanying the President in Libya, where both were received as liberators... not yet as thieves! But their time is coming..."

Such judgment needs no comment.

Mr President,

Those who follow your actions and examine your words find the gulf very deep between you and another Frenchman, Mr Andre Parrot, who was the Director of the Louvre Museum, who uttered immortal words about Syria, which I find myself obliged to remind you of:

"Every civilized person in this world has two home countries: his country of birth and Syria!"

Could you be without a home country?

Allow me finally to say to you:

Have pity on France; it is your home country!

A Letter to Lord Jesus Christ on His Birthday

December 15, 2011

My Lord,

Your birthday is approaching, so would you let me reveal to you some of what is in my heart, which may not be far from what is in your heart.

Two thousand years ago, you found, with much difficulty, a humble place from which to look at our hospitable land in Palestine.

But today, what would you find, I wonder, if it occurred to you to come down not only in Palestine but in the whole planet?

Do you not see with me that the strong in the land have resolved, madly, to gulp down everything on it?

Do you not see also that they regularly steal people's joy, hopes, and friendships? They even block the horizons of all people, after they have succeeded in destroying love, peace, and life, and transformed the oppressed people into wandering herds preyed upon by confusion, terror, hopelessness, hunger, thirst, and anger!

Yesterday, Sir, you came to Palestine with your blessed mother and Joseph, the carpenter, and suffered estrangement, desolation, and freezing cold finding no warmth except with poor shepherds and their meek sheep.

Today, however, I see you suffering with the millions of the hungry, homeless, and those panting after shelter, food, warmth, and security.

My Lord Jesus,

What has happened to earth? Do you not have in it even a place you can find shelter in, and hold in it, in your big heart, millions and millions of the tormented and deprived?

Despite this, there are those who insist on celebrating your birthday lavishly, in great luxury, and as an occasion for entertainment.

Oh, how many are those who have rushed, many days ago, to put up tall trees glittering with lights in grand hotels, large squares, and big capitals (of the world), while they master the art of turning off the light of life and love and joy in the eyes and hearts of millions and millions of brothers of yours in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Tunisia, and my homeland, Syria.

Oh, how many are those who have for some days now spread throughout the whole world an advertisement after another for riotous nights here and there, where the big names of finance and authority, beauty and art will flock to night clubs, casinos and gambling parlors. All the time while they organize with satanic precision the thieving of clothes, food, petrol, gas, and 'roof' (over the heads) all over the world from millions of millions of your brothers, the world's poor.

How can I forget, also, "the masters" of the earth, who will, with arrogance and stupidity, look over herds of their people from their tottering capitals of the world, Wash-

ington, Paris, London, Berlin, and Rome to tell them—with their "sincere" congratulations on your birthday whose true memory has been relegated to oblivion—the news of their "great achievements" in stealing joy and security together with petrol and gas and life, here and there, from millions of millions of your oppressed brothers on earth.

My Lord,

Pray have mercy! Do you not see fit to interfere in the affairs of your tormented brothers everywhere in the world?

Why, then, did you come to Palestine specifically, two thousand years ago?

Is it not you who were, did deeds, and taught the things that gave man, every man that which would have never occurred to anyone?

Is it not you who did astounding, yet humble, deeds that returned to the sinner, righteousness; to the adulteress, dignity; and to the dead, life?

Is it not you who declared the sanctity of death because of your love of man?

Is it not you, too, who declared the absolute equality between loving God and loving man, every man?

Where can I see you today, I wonder, to cling to you and to forget all this that have absented you (little or much) from our land, so that I regain the breath in my lungs, and gaze with your eyes at people, all the people, so that my heart retrieves its capability for infinite love?

My Lord,

I know for certain that you have given those who carry your blessed name the responsibility of defending the value of every human being, and the right of every human being in love and life.

O, how joyful it makes me to mention the many of them whom you have filled their being, so that they bore this responsibility with the highest level of faithfulness, truth, and sacrifice for two thousand years, until today...

O, how much pride I am filled with to mention of these the ones who have lived in this East, whose life remained until the end an astounding image of your unique life.

I wonder, though, today about a world that has turned concepts upside down, and surpassed wild beasts with his wiles, greed, materialism, and desire so that it started to walk the land in stupidity and arrogance to the abyss... I wonder where is the voice of those you have bade them carry the responsibility of raising the voice and the whip?

It so happened that a voice did come to me, today, not like any other voices! It is that of the best of the world's executioners, those who stand behind the enslaving of the West, and use it in blackmailing peoples, in what they have called, for tens of years, openly, the decimation of the Arab peoples. Yes, this was the voice of one called Netanyahu, whose heart having 'softened' towards the Syrian people, as to express readiness to help it, while he and those who have gone before him of former officials practiced annihilating people and history, and land, and religions all at once, in Palestine!

My Lord,

You met your killers with forgiveness, but I cannot but remember, today, what the first martyr after you, Stephanos, said to them, when he shouted at them: "O, you, thick necks, O, you, thick hearted and ears, you are still resisting the Spirit of God!"

My Lord, Jesus,

We need today more than any other bygone time, the likes of Stephanos in the East and the West, in the North and the South!

Do you not see with me that those who organize the pilfering of the earth, the killing of people, the destruction of peoples and history are they also "Thick necked with/and thick hearted and eared, and resisting the Spirit of God?"

Is there none on earth, today, who raise the voice and scourge strongly in the face of those who have stolen and still steal from the people their life, joy, dignity, apart from this exceptional hypocrite, Netanyahu?

My Lord,

Let me ask you with burning in my heart/bitterness: where has your church's voice disappeared in this stupid and unjust West?

Why is the voice of thousands of bishops, and tens of thousands of priests in the churches of the United States and the countries of Western Europe absent, and I only receive, every now and then, the voice of this or that of few priests, and the voice of one bishop from all of France?

How could they be ignorant of what is happening all over the world, while many honest researchers in the West have written, and are still writing in extraordinary courage, and demanding that an end be put to this global criminality?

As to what has been happening in Palestine for over sixty years, and what has happened and is still happening in Iraq for over thirty years, and what has been happening in Afghanistan for over thirty years also, and what happened in Libya a few months ago, and what has been happening in my home country, Syria, for over nine months is sufficient to open the eyes of even the dead. So, what is making the eyes and minds of the officials in Western churches insist on ignoring it?

I question with bitterness: How could they close eyes, block ears, and close mouths when they are the primarily responsible people in the churches of the West, while the officials of their people announce openly, day and night, their resolve to carry out their infernal plots against powerless, and poverty-stricken people whose sole concern is to achieve their right in rising, in dignity, liberty, and peace?

But if all your churches in the West insist on their defeatism and silence, is there not with those who carry the greater responsibility in it, I mean the Vatican, of faith, knowledge, and courage what makes it raise up all these churches, in successive, strong, and frank declarations?

My Lord, Jesus Christ,

What is the secret in your fiery words in the Bible, while the words of your representatives today, in all the West, at whose head is his holiness the Pope, are cold, 'non-aligned', circuitous, and nearer to bargaining than to confrontation and truth?

Pray, what, perchance, are they waiting for? Nay, what do they hope of the West?
Have they not reached maximum bankruptcy in their faith?

My Lord,

What I am talking to you about, pains me. So let me now rest my tired head on your chest and reveal to you also with some of what is in my heart and the hearts of all your tormented brothers on earth, of longing to life, peace, security, and joy. You know better what is intended for people these days of disputes, conflicts, and bloody battling, all attributed to God, while God is pure mercy, love, and security. In his great wisdom, He desired for us, in Syria, that we meet, Christians and Moslems, for hundreds of years, so as to build together a shared dignified life that has continued until today despite all difficulties, internal and external.

O, Jesus!

You are peace and love, would you teach us, in these difficult and hard days, with your wisdom, humbleness, and love, that we all retrieve the life of love and peace in all our Arab East, and in your first homeland, Syria?

Permit me on the anniversary of your birth, to shout with you in the face of this unjust world:

Glory to God in the highest... but!

What about earth?

Does God truly need glory in the heavens?

What glory is this?!

Nay, what chant is this,

Which many raise in true faith?!

And many, also, in false faith...

Of a land that is falling apart because of injustices that afflict the unjust before the recipient of this injustice!

How would God accept glorification in all the languages of the world,

While the human, His heir on earth... His great and sole heir,

Crushed, robbed of his soul, his freedom, and joy?

No, no, no... No glory to God in the heavens,

In the absence of dignity for man on earth.

Did not one of the Eastern Saints in ancient times (Irene) once say: "The glory of God is but the living human"?

May the man of the Arab land—

that land, from which the messages of the heavens emerged to the earth—

May this man become a living human, free, and strong...

So that his new birthday rises from his bereaved land,

And with his hands, kneaded with its good earth...

A Salute to Dr Bashar Al Ja'fari!

February 1, 2012

Who would have expected that the name of the French writer, Emile Zola, would be mentioned in the General Council of the United Nations?... and to be mentioned with love and admiration by a representative of an Arab country?

The international context in which he was mentioned was the zenith of a political and intellectual turning point that deserves a long and careful stop at it. This is because historic and humanistic intersections impose themselves every now and then, despite their temporal, religious, and social differences.

It is truly an immense and surprising irony that an Arab representative would bring up an incident from modern French history, and present it in such spontaneity and in such historic, important, and aggravated circumstances. This sudden and brave reminder by Dr Bashar Al Ja'fary of Emile Zola's accusation in 1898 of the French government at the time of practicing Anti-Semitism towards an innocent French Jew officer, called Alfred Dreyfus, a painful slap in the face for all the Western representatives... at least for those who know the modern history of France, and I am certain that most of them are ignorant of it.

This reminder of this well-known historical incident came from Syria's representative in the heart of the United Nations, within the sight and hearing of the whole world through TV screens, as a strong and courageous accusation to all who insist on ignoring the reality of the current events taking place in Syria, of Westerners and Arabs, today and have been doing so for long months, if not for years, with the aim of destroying Syria and annulling it, and by this totally destroying the Arab World...

However, the great irony appears when it becomes clear what France and Western Europe behind it were at the end of the 19th century of inherited and deep-seated, even instinctive animosity towards the Jews, and what matters have come to, today, in France and the whole West of disgraceful and submissive subservience to the Jews—a subservience that is clear to everybody, and that touches all officials without exception, and encompasses all of the political, diplomatic, financial, scientific, cultural, and services sectors, especially that of the media.

Whatever is the Arab person's evaluation of this new reality, he cannot ignore it or deny it because he finds himself in front of a transformation from one extreme to another, a transformation nobody would have imagined or expected in such a very short time that does not exceed 50 years, and which has become grand axioms of political life in the whole world.

Of course, I do not intend today to dive into the various reasons, apparent or hidden, which lead to such transformation in this short span of time. Nevertheless, it is a catastrophic transformation for all the Arabs and for the whole world, even for the Jews themselves. What the new reality has lead them to do in Palestine for over sixty years, on one side, and the constant and forceful pressure they exercised on the

great countries—at the forefront of which is the United States of America to get involved in military destructive adventures here and there, especially in Iran, Iraq, and Libya, and, for the past months in, Syria—on another side, comprises reckless and savage course that will lead the whole world to a certain catastrophe.

This new reality, with view to its danger and massiveness, necessitates that the Arab resistance front investigates it on a large scale, a scale which individuals cannot carry out. It needs scientific, historical, and intellectual establishments that observe all its ancient and new aspects perchance these establishments manage to draw an opposite plan which allocates to the Arabs a role that is suitable for them in the future.

It is sufficient for me today to quote two important documents which carry decisive proof of this surprising and radical transformation in expanding Zionist presence in Europe and the world, which is imposed on the Arab-Israeli struggle, in this new and decisive short term.

The first document is a book of small size but of great importance, written by a French theologian known, after the Second World War, by the name of Fr Charles. The book carries an exciting title: *The Solution of the Jewish Issue*. Under this title on the front cover was printed a well known expression by the famous French writer, Voltaire: *The Jew is the vicious enemy of all people*. This expression summarises the content of the whole book, as the author, very openly, calls in it to proscribe the Jews in France all rights whether in citizenship, property ownership, work, or even residence. He insists on the necessity of getting rid of them, not by expelling them to other countries from which they could get back to France, but to Judea in Palestine, so that they settle in it for good. All this is supported by facts the author culled from ancient and modern Jewish history to justify his viewpoint and support his intellectual, social, and theological stance. It is worth mentioning that the book carries no printer name or printing date. Naturally, the book is not unique in its title, as many authors, before this author and after him—most important of which is Karl Marx—have written books carrying the same title.

The second document is a well-known book, printed in Paris in 1983 by the French thinker, Roger Garaudy, and carries the title: "The Israeli Issue". What appeared in the first few lines of its introduction explains clearly what Zionism has reached in France of hegemony that infiltrated all aspects of life—in fact what applies to France today applies to all European countries. Roger says verbatim...

We are facing a taboo topic: it is Zionism and the State of Israel.

A man in France can criticize the Catholic or the Marxist Dogma, or attack atheism and nationalism, condemn the Soviet Union's systems, the United States, or Western Africa, call for chaos or royalty... without suffering any liability except for the natural liability of debate or refutation.

But if we start to analyze Zionism, we then enter a different world where we move from the realm of literature to the legal according to the law of July 29, 1981, which, rightly, addresses attacking anybody because of their ethnicity, nationality, race, or religion. The criticizing of the policy of the State of Israel and criticizing political Zionism, which had established this state exposes you to a court of justice.

The basic criticism of the State of Israel—I mean by basic, the criticism that targets not this or that individual act, even if this were a criminal act, but the basic logic of a state built on the Zionist political principles—exposes you immediately to the accusation of Nazism, and brings you threats to your life.

The author of this piece can testify to that because he was exposed, for these same reasons, to legal persecution, to accusation of Nazism, and to threats to his life.

Between these two documents there is only a short span of time: a little less than thirty years, so how did the Jews manage to fill the abyss that existed between these two periods, of their presence and expansion of their influence?

It is a question that places all the Arabs in front of a tough, but necessary exam.

What we are witnessing today, in the light of the events taking place in Syria, and around Syria, of almost total collapse of Arab rulers into the hands of Zionism and the West, requires, today more than at any other time, honest and studious study of establishments that aim to respond to the challenge that the Arab Lebanese thinker, Najeeb Azouri, issued as early as 1905, in his book, "The Prophecy: The awakening of the Arab Nation", and which has remained without an answer until today.

Is there anybody out there with a response?

Perchance the memory, at last, benefits those who turn a blind eye²

February 9, 2012

Two texts are sufficient for today:

The first is an article published in the Kivunim (Direction) Magazine, which is published in Jerusalem by the International Zionist Organisation, in its issue No 14, February, 1982.

The second is a letter written by David Ben Gurion, on February 27, 1954, to Moshe Sharit when he was Israel's Prime Minister. It appeared in the Memoires of Ben Gurion, published by his son in 1979.

In one of the passages of the 1982 article, we read...

“Reoccupying Sinai, for what it contains of natural resources, is one of our great priorities.

Because of its internal conflicts, Egypt no more constitutes a strategic problem for us. In less than 24 hours, we can return it to the position it found itself in after the June 1967 war. As to the ‘legend’ of Egypt being ‘the leader of the Arab world’, this has died and finished. Egypt today is a corpse... Dividing it into independent geographic regions must be our political target in the nineties.

When Egypt is disintegrated in this way, other countries like Libya and the Sudan and other farther countries will face the same disintegration.

The Western front faces trouble, but not the Eastern one. Dividing Lebanon into five states is an early image to what will happen in the whole Arab World. Exploding Syria and Iraq into ethnic or religious entities should be the prime long term aim for Israel...

The whole Arab Peninsula is ‘invited’ to the same disintegration under internal pressures. This is particularly the situation with Saudi Arabia...

Jordan is our current strategic target. It won’t constitute any threat to us in the long run, after its disintegration and the departure of King Hussein and the transfer of authority to the hands of the Palestinian majority...

This is what the Israeli policy must aim at. This change will mean the resolution for the issue of the West Bank with its massive concentration of Arab population...

We have to refuse the plan of an independent (Palestinian) state, and any other plan that includes bargaining over or dividing of land, which prevents the separation of the two nations...

The Arab Israelis have to realize that they will not have a homeland except in Jordan... and that they will not enjoy security unless they accept Jewish mastery (over the land) between the sea and the river...

² Published in Al Azminah magazine on February 12, 2012

It is no more possible, when we are at the threshold of nuclear age, to accept that three quarters of the Jewish settlers are grouped in a densely populated coastal strip and subject to dangers due to this strip's nature. The forced migration of these inhabitants is an extreme necessity for our internal policy. Judea, Samerah, and Al Jaleel constitute the only guarantees for our national existence. If we do not become the majority in the mountainous regions, we shall meet the fate of the Crusaders, who lost the country...

The re-establishment of the balance of the region on the demographic, strategic, and economic levels has to be at the foremost of our aspirations..."

In the whole Ben Gurion letter of 1954, we read:

"Moshe,

When I left the government, I had already decided not to interfere in the existing political affairs. Had you not invited me, you, Lavon, and Moshe Dayan I would not have expressed my opinion to you. But the moment you sought my assistance, I found it my duty to do what you have asked of me, especially in relation to you, the Head of the State. This is why I am permitting myself to return to an issue on which you do not share my opinion. It is the issue of Lebanon.

Without any connection with current events (at this time Mohammad Nageeb had been chosen anew a Head of the State; and this is an extremely clever move that Nasser and his people had made). It is obvious that Lebanon is the weakest link in the chain of the Arab League. With the exception of the Copts (in Egypt), all the other minorities in the Arab World are Moslems. Egypt, of all the Arab countries, however, is the most densely populated and the most stable, as the massive majority constitutes a very solid mass, which truly ascribes to the same race, religion, and language. The small Christian minority in it cannot really shake the political structure and/or the nation. This is not the case with the Christians in Lebanon as they constitute the majority in 'Historical Lebanon'; this majority has tradition and culture that are different in their essence from what the other peoples of the Arab League have. The Moslems in Lebanon—even within the expanded borders (and this is the gravest mistake that France made when it expanded Lebanon's border)—are not free in their moves for fear of the Christians, even though they might be the majority (I am not sure if they are). Establishing a Christian country in these circumstances is a normal matter. It might even have historical roots, and it might find support from important powers in the Christian World, whether Catholic or Protestant. Under normal circumstances, achieving such an objective would be almost impossible, first and foremost due to the absence of any initiative and/or courage among the Christians. But things change in an atmosphere of chaos, troubles, revolution, or civil war. Then, the weak can appoint himself a champion. It is possible (although there is never any certainty in politics) that the time is now suitable to push towards the establishment of a Christian State to be our neighbor. This will not occur without our initiative and assistance. I believe that this is our basic mission, or at least one of our basic missions, in our external policy. We must muster all means, time, and energy and work in all ways possible in order to effect a basic change in Lebanon.

We have to enlist Eliahou Sasson, and all our 'Arabists'. If there is need for money, we must never be stingy with dollars, even if it becomes clear that the money was spent uselessly. We have to concentrate all our energies on this goal. This is why we might have to immediately bring back Reouven Shiloah.

Missing this historic opportunity is an unforgivable mistake. And there is not any incitement from our side of the greats of this world. It is imperative for us, in my opinion, that we move quickly and with all our powers.

Naturally, this is not possible without some reduction of the border of Lebanon. But, if we find men and elements in Lebanon who enlist themselves for the establishment of a Maronite State, they would not be in need of a wide borders, nor of a large number of Moslem inhabitants, and there would not be an hindrance in that.

I do not know if we have men in Lebanon, but all the means are available to effect the attempt I am suggesting.

Your sincerely,

David Ben Gurion"

I wonder, have we, the Arabs, been in a state of death so that they dealt with us—and they still do—with our people, with our destiny, with our whole existence in this way?

An open letter to the French President, Francois Hollande

May 30, 2012

Mr President,

I do not wish on this day, May 5, 2012, to perturb the euphoria of your recent success in the Presidential elections, nor the joy of your electorates, or the hope of the French, after you have become France's president for the next five years.

This is why I made certain that I do not miss a single word of your interview with the French TV5, yesterday, May 29, 2012. I had vaguely hoped that you would, for ever, bury the clowning policy of your strange predecessor. As I started listening to you, however, I found myself questioning the justification for this hope that I had. I quickly became disappointed. Indeed, looking at your childish face, I was astounded as I listened to you blurting out arbitrary judgments on everything and on all people without any precaution or hesitation!

But when I heard you talk about Syria and its President, I imagined myself listening to those masters who have raised you to the first position in France for one aim: to complete the destruction of Syria, which your predecessor failed to accomplish.

What a 1st TV interview for you! After it, I became absolutely certain of the approaching disappointments that will afflict the French! As I had old knowledge of France and the French, I found myself saying to myself: O, what a frightening collapse since the departure of General De Gaul!

Mr President,

Before I continue, I find it my duty to point to a historical coincidence that you might not be aware of, or you would not have made this TV interview on May 29.

In fact, there is another May 29 in which France committed in Syria what brought France great shame! That was in 1945. On that day, mandated France, allowed itself to bombard the Syrian Parliament in Damascus. Then it released inside that great democratic sanctuary its negro soldiers who killed the Parliament's twenty-nine guards. Do you know that?

Mr President,

Allow me to ask you this, though: Is it not time for France—and consequently for you—to seriously contemplate this shameful policy, which you are leading, commandeered by Zionism since 1916, the year of a treaty that has as much secrecy as shame, called the Sykes-Picot Treaty, for the destruction of Syria and the Arab world?

Was there in all France, at that time, nobody who had sufficient nobility and enlightenment except the Foreign Minister, Mr Aristide Briand, to dictate—due to his concern prompted by that treaty—on November 2, 1915, to your General Consul in Beirut, Mr Georges Picot, this wise and clear direction: "Syria must not be a freak country... It must have wide borders that enable it to be a self-sufficient entity..."?

This self-sufficient country, the French Foreign Ministry had, since 1910, planned a clear geographical map for it. But is there anyone who is ignorant of what has become of Syria, after Cilicia had been excised from its north-west, and Mardin from

its north-east, and Al Mosul, which is in Iraq today, from its east, and Lebanon from its mid-west, and Jordan and Palestine from its south?

A day came in 1939, when France cut off from Syria's north-west also Antioch, and the bay of Alexandret (Iskenderun) to present them a gift to Turkey.

Is not all this a horrible political and humanistic wrecking that exposes the despicable level to which France had sunk because of its subservience to Zionism?

Mr President,

There is another question that is of extreme importance I find it my duty, as a Syrian Arab citizen, to ask you and all the Western leaders:

What is it, I wonder, that forces you to engage in systematic assassination of the Arab and Islamic peoples?

You did that previously, between 1980 and 1990, as you ignited the war between Iraq and Iran when Donald Rumsfeld and Jacques Chirac were trying to gain the affection of Saddam Hussein calling him "the great friend". Then came the pitfall of overrunning Kuwait, which was followed by the war on Iraq, and what followed it of a siege that lasted 13 years, during which 1,500,000 Iraqi children were killed according to American reports. Then came the 'heroic' war on terrorism... in Afghanistan! This was followed by a new war on Iraq that totally destroyed it, returning it to the Stone Age, as James Baker had promised them. But the "eternal" epic that the NATO alliance accomplished in Libya under the leadership of "General Bernard Henry Levy" has crowned all your atrocities, under the guise of "Protecting Human Rights"!

Here is the whole West today, which has, for fifteen months, been pouring all its vengeance, lies, killing machine on Syria alone while totally ignoring that there is a huge and aggravating amount of problems—at the forefront of which is the Arab-Israeli conflict—that truly threaten the survival of the whole human race!

You practice this disastrous Western policy with no shame or hesitation using pretenses that depend on all kinds of lies, frauds, cowardice, and betrayal of all laws and international treaties. You have embroiled with you all the international establishments, at the head of which is the United Nations, the Security Council, and the Human Rights Council, when all these were originally founded to lead the world towards more justice and more peace!

Are you, perhaps, in the West titillate the stupid hope that you could excise Islam from the earth in this way? Have your scientists and researchers not understood yet that this way you only encourage extremist Islam, which you insist today on financing, arming, training, and launching with many of your intelligence agents and army personnel in every direction in the Arab and Islamic countries, especially in Syria? Do you not realise that this Islam is only fabricated in your minds and laboratories, and that it will revert to you sooner or later in the hearts of your capitals, cities, and towns?

Therefore, let me, as an ordinary Arab citizen from Syria, remind you that this Islam is not related in any way to true Islam which Syria, and Egypt, and then Spain have known since the Arab conquest. Would you please refer to the Western historians, among them Jewish historians as well, to learn that they were the ones who described conquering Islam as the most merciful of conquerors?

Unless you, Western Leaders, in your various countries, that are satiated with affluence and “greatness”, were truly no more than servile executors of Zionist plots since the famous Sykes-Picot Treaty and the ignominious Balfour Declaration until today and for a long time into the future, it seems. You have no concern except rushing to support Israel any way possible, overtly and covertly, on all levels: political, diplomatic, military, financial, and in the media.

Why do you insist on assassinating and destroying whole peoples, only to enable Israel alone to survive and exist?

Do you, perchance, seek in this way to compensate for your horrendous guilt complex towards the Jews, resulting from the Anti-Semitism that you have practiced for more than one thousand five hundred years, and which only the West has known? And why do you do that at the cost of the existence of these Arab and Islamic peoples, among whom the Jews lived an almost ordinary life, characterized by amicability and fruitful cooperation?

Mr President,

If my questions seem exaggerated to you, allow me to beg you to read what has been written about the Zionist hegemony on the United States by people such as John Kennedy and Jimmy Carter, as well as by some courageous researchers such as Paul Findley, Robert Dole, David Duke, Edward Tivnan, John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt, Franklin Lamb, and especially Noam Chomsky.

As to the Zionist hegemony on Europe, it would be sufficient for me today to specify France alone. Could anybody in your position and responsibility ignore or be ignorant of what has been written, with extreme courage, by Roger Garaudy, Emile Vlajky, Pierre Leconte, Regis Debréy, and especially Michel Warchawsky, Stéphane Hessel, Serge Grossvak, and professor Andre Nouchi?

If it were possible that these names meant nothing to you, then let me remind you of some names that are very well known in Israel itself, as no man can be ignorant of these or ignore what they dared write over more than 40 or 50 years ago, even before Israel was established. These are Martin Buber, Albert Einstein, Yshayahou Leibowits, Israel Shahak, Suzan Nathan, and Tanya Rheinart.

Lastly, let me remind you of a text that has achieved so much fame that nobody can be ignorant of it. It dates back to February of 1982, and it constitutes and condenses in itself the ‘inevitable’ Zionist commands that have been imposed for tens of years on all Western politicians. This was published in the Zionist Kivonim Magazine, in Jerusalem. It is an article entitled “The Israeli Strategy in the eighties”, written by Mr Oded Ynon. It is sufficient for me to quote only one paragraph from it on page 62 in a new French book, entitled: “When Syria awakens...” This was published in Paris in 2011 by the Perrin Publishing, and written by authors Richard Labéviere and Talal El-Atrach. It says, verbatim:

Dividing Lebanon into five regions is the future vision of what will happen to the whole Arab world, including Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and the whole Arabian Peninsula. This is effectively the situation in Lebanon. The disintegrating of Syria and Iraq into regions that are racially and religiously harmonious, as in Lebanon, is Israel’s number one aim in the long term on its eastern front. Its goal in the short range is disintegrating these two countries militarily. Syria will be divided into many small countries according to its racial sects, so that the coast will become Alawite-Shiite; the Aleppo region, a Sunni country; and Damascus,

another Sunni country, belligerent to its neighbor in the north. The Druz will establish their own country which will extend, perhaps, to our Golan, to Horan and North Jordan, at any rate. This country will guarantee peace and security in the region in the long run: This goal is within our reach today.

Mr President,

In lieu of the important position that you now occupy, do you not see that the whole world is, in the final analysis, rushing with astounding speed—because of these Western policies, which are subjugated to the domination of international Zionism—towards an unprecedented era, from which no one will escape, of unjust tyranny, grudges, pilfering, depressions, hunger, slaughter, even systematic annihilations, and racial extremism?

Do you, perchance, realise that in reality, you yourself, Mr Obama, Mrs Merkle, and other leaders whose names make no difference whatsoever, are but rooks moved by Zionism?

And you, “leaders of the free world”, who now claim to defend “holy” human rights, in Syria—after you have “defended” it by killing it in Libya!...—how can you bear to be mere executioners of both the Arab and Islamic worlds in the service of Zionism?

Mr President,

I know that this language will look more than strange to you, especially since it is coming from a priest, and an Arab, who believes in Jesus Christ! But I want you to know that I am obliged to address you in this particular way because I truly believe in Jesus Christ. I see it an obligation for all the churches in the West, starting with the Vatican, itself, to have addressed you for tens of years in such language.

The churches have taken to cowardly and colluding silence, though! This is because the West, willingly or unwillingly, is destroying humanity as man, when man is absolutely the greatest of God’s creations, and for whom Christ died on the cross! As the West does that, especially in Syria, it turns a blind eye to the “tsunami” that it releases on the scope of the whole world, of unprecedented religious, social, and racial violence. While in the eyes of those who know Syria, it possesses the perfect solution to all these atrocities and dangers by virtue of its unique example of astonishing and stable living that it has experienced for centuries, which Christians and Moslems have known since the Arab Conquest until now. Unless you want to throw away all this in exchange for the Qatari gas, Saudi petrol, and especially the Zionist yoke.

Mr President,

Let me in the end insist on asking you, personally, to research the truthfulness of these matters, and the extent of your responsibility in them before it is too late.

O, how it would please me, that one of my friends, the French Priest, Jean-Paul Devedeux, who knows Syria very well and truly loves it, would have written to you on this day exactly. I see in his letter to you an honest call to get to better know the Arabs in general, and Syria in particular. The ‘bet’ deserves such a step. I hope for you to be liberated from the “role” that you have to search for, especially away from that which is wanted to be imposed on you.

Syria, which is the second home country to every civilised human being—as described by your great scientist, Andre Parrot—and the cradle of all civilizations, deserves a visit. It will astonish you, even will captivate you. I would love for you to

have the courage to get to know it at close hand, and return from it carrying a truly civilised political project which has legal and humanistic balance that is backed by defending the duties and rights of everybody towards everybody else!

O, Mr new French President,

I would love for you to dare. You will not be the loser if you dared, as much as your loss today, and without your loss tomorrow if you do not dare!

With this desire of mine, I bid you farewell, with my respects.

Journey to the bottom of hell

July 12, 2012

Nobody will blame me if, in my weekly article, I use what I wrote in 1980.

"Hell: the journey from Damascus to Paris?"

Certainly not!

Nonetheless, it came very close to touching it... From the first moment:

At the airport in Damascus, the last issue of 'Al Mustaqbal' (The Future) magazine: the editorial, by Nabeel Al Khouri, is on Sadat:

"Not an agent, nor a man who has no mind..."

What then? A traitor (full stop).

Until Sadat, the Arab East was a theatre for events that transformed some of its countries into hell...

After Sadat, it seems to me, the whole Arab East began transforming into hell...

All along the way, our Arab East never, even for one moment, left my mind...

What is in hiding for it?...

Over the Alps... The icy scene is indescribable...

But I only see Hannibal...

The Alps Mountains... and their conqueror, Hannibal...

In contrast: Jerusalem... and Sadat...

O God!... O, how shamed I am of history...

At Orly airport:

Youths' hands wave to me in the distance... Youths: some from my country... and my whole life...

Concern for the country... and destiny...

And the indelible question: Do we go back or not?...

O, my country!...

O, the sons of my country!...

What do I say?

What do I keep inside?

Contrary to the youths wish, I insisted on staying at the monastery where I got used to staying since 1955: It is a chance to meet many European, American, and African bishops and priests...

And from the first meeting:

What about Sadat?...

What about peace?...

Why do you leave the doors wide open in the face of Israel, while you are forever silent?...

Why don't you regularly meet with the officials in the Western Church?

Why are trips not organized to the Arab East, during which the educated in the West are informed of your causes?

Why?

Why?...

From the first day... until the last...

The Arab media is absent... Absent!...

The Zionist presence dominates...

This is not new...

But what is new is its variable presence, and its speed...

In the daily papers, In the weekly, monthly, and quarterly magazines...

On TV... On the Radio...

In the cinema, In churches, In libraries, In posters...

Even in the "Arab Scoop" which is the only Arab magazine specialized in Arabic advertising:

The same Israeli presence, in its issue of September 12, 1978, on page 38, under the title: "Cohen's saloon" we read "A warm welcome – Arabic hospitality":

Everything pours into the windmill of Israel:

The ancient past, The recent past, Religion, Lies, Nazism, The Roman invaders...

Dreyfus, Sadat, Idi Amin...

...

In vain do I look for a book that expresses objectively the Arab point of view, perchance I can present it to one of those bishops and priests with whom I have dialogue... Until the latest book of the Swiss playwright, Dornmat, entitled: "For Israel"

... On its cover a narrow white strip of paper with thick red writing:

"Against international thought terrorism"...

The best of congratulations to you, O, Israel!...

Israel, the slaughterer of Arab people, has become the poor sheep, whom the Arab wolf together with those petrol addicts who befriend it are threatening...

Twenty days in Paris,

Twenty days in contact with today's hell...

And tomorrow's hell? ... Tomorrow's hell?

I saw it with my own eyes in a new American film that created some commotion, "A journey to the bottom of hell"

That is its title: two visions of life in America and in Vietnam...

The weddings of steel workers turn into hells, Vietnam turns into hell...

Caravans of evacuees... Piles of bodies... Piles of dollars...

Fires, destruction, and death...

The raging American Ghoul, trying in vain to uproot a whole people...

What do I say? What do I keep inside? Vietnam?... No, my Arab East?... The American ghoul? No, Israel... The Vietnamese people?

I had better remain silent: Here, comparison is not right...

The end of the film:

The steel workers themselves, having returned from the war, return from the cemetery, where they have buried a colleague of theirs who had committed suicide in Vietnam.

They are meeting around a simple table, in the company of the fiancée of the victim, fighting tears, and singing with voices suffocated with grief:

"O God! Pour your blessings on America..."

Were they praying, or were they being sarcastic?

I did not know...

All that I knew is that I heard myself repeating in my depths:

O God! Pour your curses on America,

O God! Pour your curses on America..."

A Brief Open Letter to a Friend Priest from France

August 17, 2012

Precious friend,

Apologies for my delay in responding to your e-mail, dated June 24, 2012, in which you expressed your extreme concern regarding the situation in Syria. This concern was prompted by the contribution of the Papal Ambassador in Damascus, at a meeting held on June 23 in Rome, whose minutes were published on the World Wide Web, and which Mr Christian Cannuyer, the teacher at the Institute of Theology in Lille, France, interpreted maliciously.

I pray that my last Open Letter to His Holiness, Pope Benedictus XVI, dated August 5, 2012, conveyed to you the absolute negation of the claims of the Papal Ambassador, which are blatantly prejudiced towards Western positions.

It pains me today, to repeat, time and again, to the whole world that the whole Western Church, starting with the Vatican, finds itself being silently lead alongside all the current Western policies, exactly as happened at the time of Emperor Constantine. The proof of this—even if partial—is what appeared in the horrifying book: *When a Pope asks forgiveness*, published in 1997 in three languages simultaneously: Italian, English, and French, through an initiative by the Italian journalist, Luigi Accattoli, who was a personal friend to his Holiness, Pope John Paul II, and which I found it my duty to translate into Arabic about a year ago.

Is it the Western Church's destiny to repeat today and always, in insistent cowardice, the same sins of the past, as described repeatedly in this very book by Pope John Paul II, himself?

You know that the political West has always been extremely vicious, whether inside and outside its borders, all over the earth, and especially in the Arab and Islamic worlds. I do not see, however, that it reached such viciousness in the past as it has done in this dirty cosmic war which it officially launched on Syria a year and a half ago. The West's haughty politicians, whether American or European, as well as their arrogant masters in Israel, and their poor slave workers, Arabs and others, can vie in lying, cunning, dirt spreading, and viciously attacking people. They will all find, sooner or later, whether in Europe, the United States, or in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and especially in Israel, those who will condemn them with infinite denigration.

For the Western Church to close its eyes, today, and pretend not to see the determination of the whole West to destroy Syria, for the purpose of guaranteeing the existence of Israel, nothing else—this Syria that fate destined to be the cradle of the Alphabet and civilization, as well as the cradle of Christianity and Christian-Moslem living togetherness—this is something in which I see, as a Syrian citizen, a spiritual suicide on the level of the whole globe.

You might accuse me of exaggeration, as the West is now used to accusing me of. It is true that I cannot remain silent, as the officials of the Western Churches are used to doing. But, should man really pretend to be blind and remain silent, so that he no longer realizes that this bloody and fanatic Islam—which dubs all others 'infi-

dels', and which was blasted onto the world by Saudi and Qatari petrodollars, and which the "very democratic" West is striving with all means possible, openly and secretly, to spread out and ingrain in the heart of Syria—will eventually, and inevitably, take over this very West, itself, and possibly the whole world? How can they forget that Syria was, all throughout history, and since the Arab invasion of the region, the land that engulfed and spread moderate Islam?

My friend,

Would you, especially as the Feast of Al Fitr is pretty near, remember the Islamic Feasts that, a few years ago, you—the French Priest—lived for many days in constant amazement when you were a guest at your Moslem friend in Aleppo? But today, what a Fitr Feast the West is bringing us (as it did last year) with bloodshed and suffering that are fit only to a West whose history knew nothing but violence, vengeance, and murder, but it, in no way, relates to the humanitarian Islam which we have experienced in an almost continuous way in Syria!

My friend,

Allow me in the end whisper in your ear, and through you, in the ear of every Western who feels ashamed of his miserable history, two sad truths that no one can afford to ignore:

The first is the total loss of human truth in the West, due to the total and absolute absence of political freedom. The unprecedented media war waged on Syria today is but one of its manifestations. Many in the West, especially in France, are stating aloud that the loss of this truth has become an obvious and shameful matter. Suffice it for me to mention the French thinker, Arnauld Aaron Upinsky, in a massive book of his, shockingly entitled: *The Decapitated Head or the Decapitated word*, published in 1991 by O.E.I.L. What a freedom in a West that has become a slave!

The second is the vicious attack on people, which the West has made its profession throughout its history, and which it is not possible to ignore or deny any more. The West practiced this in the past, and it is practicing it today in a novel and malicious way. The cross-continental Western companies possess a water-tight holistic system, well programmed and applied on all the economic, political, social, and media levels, so that they are able to impose their will over the world at the cost of whole peoples who could do nothing but collapse and die like animals, without even anybody being aware of this. I, as a world citizen, call upon anyone who doubts this glaring fact to read what an exceptional Swiss researcher, Jean Ziegler, who dared to write, at least in three of his well-known books: *L'Empire de la Honte* (2005), *La Haine de L'Occident* (2008), and *Destruction Massive: Geopolitique de la Faim* (2011).

My Friend,

In the face of all this, can I—the priest of Jesus Christ—not ask myself, and you, as a French Priest, about why the Western church remains silent, and *how* it can remain silent?

As a friend, I have had for long years now the happiness of knowing you and loving you, both in Syria and France. Please accept my deep sadness, and appreciation of you, and my looking for a humanistic future.

An open letter from an Arab Priest from Syria to the Bishops of France

September 1, 2012

the 30th of September, 2012, is approaching, so I found it my obligation, therefore, as a Catholic Priest, to remind you of the famous "Declaration of Repentance", which you have proclaimed to the world on this day in 1997, which is an opportunity for me to ask you some questions.

On this day in (1997), a French Bishop read, in your name, in the town Drancy, near Paris, a dangerous declaration entitled "The Declaration of Repentance of the Church of France". This Declaration represents in my opinion, and in the opinion of many, a gigantic spiritual awakening, towards the slackening of your predecessors in confronting the unjust anti-Semitism measures taken against the French Jews during the Nazi occupation.

How beautiful it is for the whole French Church to arise from sleep! The more beautiful, however, is for it to admit that this 'sleep' was but a grave sin. This is what you truly were and did on the face of the earth.

But what is even more beautiful than both is for this Church itself, to go a step further and deeper and announce its insistence on continuing this awakening so that it bears all its responsibilities! Then it reverts to being a living compass able to remind everybody, in France and outside it, that life, freedom and dignity are the right of every human being on the face of this earth, that it is the duty of the powerful to guarantee these to the weak! Is this not, in essence, the teachings of Jesus?

Let me, here, remind you and my readers of what was written in the introduction to this declaration of yours, in its body and conclusion, as this might have receded into oblivion. I quote:

The Nazi attempt to destroy the Jewish people is a formidable event in the history of the twentieth century, and it raises in the mind terrifying questions that no human being can sweep aside...

The Church of France is asking itself the question in the voice of Pope John Paul II, which it is called upon to do so with all the other churches:

It benefits the Church to cross this bridge, as it is clearly aware of what it has lived... To recognize the stumblings of yesterday is an act of honesty and courage that helps us consolidate our faith, make us aware of current temptations and difficulties, and prepares us to confront them ... We need to admit that the Bishops of France did not speak out, acquiescing through their silence in these flagrant violations of human rights and leaving an open path to this spiral of death.

We are not passing judgment on the consciences, nor on the persons of that time. We ourselves are not responsible for what happened, but we must assess the attitudes and actions (of the past). It is our Church and we are obliged to note, today, in an objective way, that there were ecclesiastical interests which, were understood in an extremely narrow sense, and so overcame the demands of conscience, and we must ask: Why?

Today we admit that, that silence was a mistake. We admit also that the Church of France (at that time) failed in its mission of educating consciences and that she, thus, bears with the Christian people the responsibility of not having helped rescue, from the early stages, when protest and protection were possible and necessary.

This is a reality that we acknowledge today because this failure of the Church of France and its responsibility toward the Jewish people are part of its history. We confess this sin. We beg God's forgiveness and ask the Jewish people to hear these words of repentance. This act of remembrance calls us to increase vigilance for the benefit of humanity at the present time, and for the future.

Dear Bishops,

Every reader of these daring and noble words can only expect from its writers, and from those who came after them, a spiritual and humanistic awakening that puts the Church of France on a new path that dictates truly evangelical stances, honest and steadfast. Is this not what you have arrived at in your historic declaration?

Let us ask honestly what has, in fact, truly happened.

Has the Church of France realized, since that declaration until now, any other spiritual awakening apart from that one that relates to the Jews?

Is there anybody who does not know that tragic, nay catastrophic, events have taken the whole world by a storm, especially the Arab and Islamic worlds, all of which were championed by Western leaders, at whose head of course are the leaders of the United States of America? Where is the Church of France from these events? You might blame me for such general talking. Let me then detail it, then, in 6 brief and orderly questions, which will bring you and my readers nearer the living reality that I want to raise.

Question 1 concerns Palestine

What humanistic and spiritual awakening has been realized by the Church of France towards what has been happening in Palestine for over 70 years? Has it, perchance, not realized until now that what happens there every day is but a true and horrific holocaust enacted by the Jews on Palestine and its native Palestinian Arabs, both Moslems and Christians?

Question 2 relates to Iraq

What humanistic and spiritual awakening has the Church of France realised towards what has been happening in Iraq—first, during the first war against it, in 1991; second, during the horrific boycott imposed on it for 13 years and which—according to official American reports—has killed 1,500,000 children, apart from women, men, and the old; third, during the storming of Iraq which was lead by the United States in 2003 and all it caused of destruction, massacres, pilfering, forced evictions which made the Iraqis—Moslems, Christians, and Yazidis, equally—refugees inside their own country as well as outside?

Question 3 relates to Lebanon

What humanistic and spiritual awakening has the Church of France realised towards what happened in Lebanon—“the Lebanon that is dear to France”—specifically during the Israeli aggression against it in 2006?

Question 4 relates to Gaza

What humanistic and spiritual awakening has the Church of France realised, first, towards the inhuman siege that Israel imposing for the last five years; and, second, during the horrific war Israel waged against Gaza towards the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009?

Question 5 relates to Libya

What humanistic and spiritual awakening has the Church of France realised towards the present destruction of Libya—with a shameful French initiative, and with total participation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation—when you were fully aware of its results—at the head of which are the West's pilfering of its oil, gas, and killing no less than 150,000 people, and continual tribal fighting—apart from the various forms of misery, poverty, and violence that ensued.

Question 6 relates to Syria

What humanistic and spiritual awakening has the Church of France realised towards the West's infernal insistence, for over a year and a half, with blatant direction from international Zionism, for many objectives, at the front of which is the total destruction of Syria, in order to guarantee the existence of Israel? All this—as in Libya—under the pretext of protecting the civilian population! Thus, all the West collaborates with some of Syria's neighbouring countries to send into Syria thousands of Salafi mercenaries coming from all corners of the earth, after military specialists from the US, France, Britain, and Turkey supervised their training, their arming, and their organisation while Saudi Arabia and Qatar—'the very, very democratic countries'—supplied them with abundant amounts of money! What can I add regarding the blatant prejudice of international organisations, like the United Nations, the Security Council, and the Human Rights Council, in addition to the flood of lying and bloody Western and Arab media.

Reverend Bishops,

I might sound boring and vexing to you, but these are facts that cannot, and must not be ignored.

Can you please explain what justified your humanistic and spiritual awakening regarding the Jews, and what justifies, by contrast, your killing silence regarding all the issues I raised above?

Do you, perchance, want to convince people that you do not know the reality of what is happening, at the time when Jewish people from your own kind, i.e. French writers, made so much noise about the truth of what is happening in famous books such as *Israel's Original Sin* (1998) by Dominique Vidal, and *With Blood and Fire* (2008) by Charles Enderlin?

Or do you want, perchance, to convince the world that the guilt complex towards the Jews, that you have been carrying for centuries on end, justifies alone your silence that is impossible to explain?

Do you not realize that, with the speedy developments of catastrophic events, that your blind and constant submission to this pathologic guilt complex is pushing you to betray yourselves, as well as He whom you claim to represents on earth, Jesus Christ, and pushes you also to cause irreparable harm to the Jews themselves?

Whether you wanted it or not, you are contributing towards making the Jews, in general, and the Israeli Jews, in particular, thieves and murderers? Yes, thieves and murderers able even to give lessons to the Nazis, themselves! This is exactly what

some of the most prominent Israeli personalities like Israel Shahak (1933-2001), the founding member of the Israeli Human Rights Committee, and the Physicist, Ashia Leibowitz (1903-1994), and a while ago Avaham Burg who was the President of the famous Jewish Agency and the president of the Israeli Knesset between 1999 and 2003, and who chose to spend the rest of his life in France after he published his book there in 2007, which was horrific in its honesty, entitled: *Victory over Hitler*.

Reverend Bishops,

Allow me in conclusion to whisper in your ears two truths that seem to me basic: the first relates to us, the Christians of the Arab world, and the second relates to you, as Bishops of France.

As to us, the Christian Arabs, you have to understand well that Christian-Moslem living together, which we have known and lived since the beginning until now in Syria, Egypt, and Spain is a life that we prefer way over the Western delinquent life, despite all its temptations, development, and advanced science and technology because yours is based on “values” that are power, money, coveting, and abundance, which are values that are in the final analysis, deadly.

It has become very urgent for you—the Bishops of Jesus Christ in France—to realize that this Christian-Moslem co-existence, which your leaders have, for a long time, been striving for, with every means possible, to destroy in the Arab world in general, and in Syria, in particular, especially at the present time, is but the only portal for the deliverance of humanity from this hellish confrontation, which your leaders insist on pushing the whole world into, and which will inevitably engulf the West as well.

I pray that you would tell all those who are able to listen to you—especially your respected ambassadors in the Arab and Islamic countries—that it is safer and better for them to proclaim loudly, clearly, and truthfully everything they have witnessed and lived, despite our various and many shortcomings, without perjury or ‘modification’!

As to what concerns you, I can only remind you of wonderful and decisive words, written 2000 years ago by the spiritual son of Damascus, St Paul, when he said of the church that it is “The Pillar of Truth”.

In a world where rights are trampled under the feet of the leaders of the West, are *you* truly the “Pillars of Truth”? If you are not, then what on earth are you—after today—and what are you doing in this world?

I beg of you not to leave to his Excellency, Sayyed Ali Khamenei alone the honour of standing up to current and approaching global injustice, as he did in Teheran a few days ago at the Conference of the Non-Aligned nations.

Will you listen to my voice?

Despite all, I offer you my love and respect.

An open letter to the hoped-for Pope

March 10, 2013

My Holy father,

About a month and a half ago, I wrote you an open letter, inspired by Jesus' words in the Bible, where he says: "...whoever leads astray one of these little children, who trust in me, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck, and to be submerged in the depths of the sea." (Mathew 18: 6)

Today, Sunday, November 11, 2012, I celebrated Holy Mass in the Lady of Damascus Church and read the verses of the merciful Samaritan, and Jesus' wonderful words prompted me to write you another letter.

Since, unfortunately, many Christians, even in our East, do not read the Bible, and most of my Moslem brothers in the world do not know the Bible, I find it my duty to cite the whole text of the merciful Samaritan, and then ask you, personally, the questions that imposed themselves on me while I was reading this text in the light of what is happening in the whole world, and in Syria, specifically, Syria, my home country, which the West dissected a hundred years ago, and which strives today, and while wantonly singing the praises of Freedom and Human Rights, to crush and annul it, under the gaze of the whole silent world.

The Holy Bible of Luke, 10: 25-37, says:

{25} And behold, a certain expert in the law rose up, testing him and saying, "Teacher, what must I do to possess eternal life?"

{26} He said to him: "What is written in the law? How do you read it?"

{27} In response, he said: "You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart, and from your whole soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

{28} And he said to him: "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."

{29} But since he wanted to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

{30} Then Jesus, answering, said: "A certain man descended from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell upon robbers, who plundered him. And inflicting him with wounds, they went away, leaving him behind, half dead.

{31} And it happened that a certain priest was descending along the same way. And seeing him, he passed by on the other side.

{32} And similarly a Levite, when he was near the place, also saw him and passed by.

{33} But a certain Samaritan, being on a journey, came near him. And seeing him, he was moved by compassion.

{34} And he went to him, bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. And setting him on his pack animal, he brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

{35} And the next day, he took out two denarii, and he gave them to the proprietor, and he said: 'Take care of him. And whatever extra you will spend, I will repay to you on my return.'

{36} Who of these three, does it seem to you, was a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?"

{37} Then he said, "The one who acted with compassion toward him." And Jesus said to him, "Go, and do likewise."

This is the gracious text which is read today, Sunday, November 11, 2012, in many Catholic churches in Syria.

Permit me, Holy Father, to ask you, personally—as you are the highest official of the Catholic Church in the world—not anybody else of the officials of the Catholic churches of the East and West, four questions, inspired by this unique text:

First: Have you not questioned even once, as you read and re-read this wonderful text, who these robbers, whom Jesus talked about, would be today?

Second: Has it not occurred to you, ever, that these robbers might be the rulers of the West, who have taken upon themselves, for tens of years, to destroy the Arab and Islamic worlds, in proclaimed infernal regularity, in cold blood, and unlimited covetousness and hypocrisy that is worse than the devil's, himself?

Third: Is it not time for you to see how this mad policy destroys, on one side, everything human and legal in the whole world, as it destroys, on the other side, the presence of Jesus in the Arab East in general, and in Palestine—his earthly home country—and in Syria—the spiritual homeland of St Paul—in particular?

Fourth and final: Have you not seen yourself, even just for moments, in the person of the priest, whom Jesus spoke about that "he passed by the man who fell among thieves, saw him and passed by on the other side"?

Holy Father,

I hope that if your eyes pass by the words of this letter that you do not pass by on the other side...

Please accept my love,

A very urgent letter to Lord Jesus Christ

August 27, 2013

My Lord,

I have come to you today begging you to make a hasty visit to Syria, your earthly home.

Isn't Syria that land which God chose since the beginning to present himself to suffering humanity, until it became the liaison between heaven and earth?

Don't abandon it, Lord!

For there are in it very many lovers, Christians and Moslems, the like of whom cannot perhaps be found anywhere else in the whole world.

Come, Lord; you are Love, and love does not let (lovers) down...

Didn't you love Syria from the beginning, of all parts of the world?

Come, my Lord, before an inferno swallows it—the fire of which was lit by the devils residing in Tell Aviv and their servants in Washington, London, Paris, and Berlin.

My Lord,

Is it not you also who honoured this land with three appearances—an honour no other land in the whole world was accorded?

Is it not you who, two thousand years ago, chose to strike by your light on the road to Damascus—not Jerusalem, nor any other town in Palestine—that Jewish Salafist, Saul, and send him forth, from Damascus, a messenger, unlike any other, to carry to the whole world your light, your love, and your peace?

Is it not you who chose to gather together here in Damascus 1377 years ago the Moslem invaders and its Christian Arab inhabitants, all along seventy years, in the church of the 'Martyr of Truth'—John the Baptist—for the first time in history, in prayer and life that extended to Jerusalem, then to Egypt, and on to Andalucía in a new type of amicability and cooperation that has been unprecedented in the history of mankind, even until today?

Is it not you, my Lord, who thought fit, thirty-one years ago, to adopt one humble house in Damascus, as in Palestine in the past, a home for you and for your blessed mother, in order, together, to call, in clear Arabic language, all the people of the earth to repentance to God, and to love among people?

My Lord,

Come! Come! The whole earth is about to turn into an inferno, as nothing is heard on it except the voices of the arrogant rulers—the thieves, the hypocrites, the killers, and the clamor of their destructive weapons—rulers in a West that is "seduced by materialism, desire, and fame so much that it has almost lost the values," as you, yourself, described it with words as cutting as the edge of a sword, in 2004.

Is it not you who, at the time, told us—we the children of the Orient, both Moslems and Christians:

Preserve your Eastern identity.

Do not permit your will, freedom, and your faith in this East to be taken away.

All this, my Lord, and your churches in the West are silent as the graves!

If any official in these churches ever spoke—as your representative in Rome very rarely does—then he uses two-sided language that knows not in the least how clear your language was, how daring, challenging, and full of universal love it was!

As to my churches in the Arab East, I beg you my Lord to excuse me if I too choose to remain silent *vis-a-vis* the actions and words of most of these church "officials"!

In any case, you know us all.

My Lord,

I beg you, come! Come before "The Children of snakes"... The Children of snakes who imposed themselves gods in your land over what is left in it, of what you wanted for it, from the beginning, of respect, nobility, hope, joy, and love!

Come, before they crucify it and divide its white robe among themselves one last time and forever...!

An open letter to Mr John Kerry, The United States Secretary of State

August 31, 2013

Mr John Kerry,

Let me—I, the priest of 81 years of age—tell you from Damascus that, as you addressed the world about Syria, yesterday, you reached the lowest level of pettiness and hypocrisy.

There is but one thing—just one thing of extreme grandeur—that you, unawares, reminded me of throughout your vacuous address, and that is the words of Lord Jesus, the son of Palestine, addressing the Jews in that time, a few days prior to his crucifixion. He said:

Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. (Mathew 23:27)

Yes. This is the one grand matter which I remembered during your speech: Lord Jesus Christ's condemnation of the "whited Sepulchers", which prosecuted him then, and which prosecute Syria today, after it imposed its stench on the whole earth, from the time it established its might in the American Continent, over the bones of millions of its native Indian children!

Mr Kerry,

You speak from up high... as your murderous ancestors did, deciding the destinies of whole peoples, as if your viewers and listeners were ignorant simpletons who must only bow to your 'American truths'!

Let me remind you, and remind all those who are able to hear my words, of the truthfulness of what has happened and is still happening, and is intended for it to happen in Syria, through what one of your most prominent thinkers, Noam Chomsky, wrote in a book of his, entitled *The Dangerous Power*, published in Canada in 2007. In it the Israeli journalist, Stephen Shalom, conducts a lengthy and frank dialogue with both the Jewish/American thinker, Noam Chomsky, and the French thinker of Lebanese descent, Gilbert Achkar. The whole dialogue centers on the Arab-Israeli struggle, and the West's stand, especially that of the United States towards it. On pages 184-185 of its French translation, we read:

Shalom: There is talk of the probability of a military action by the United States against two other countries in the Near and Middle East—Syria and Iran. How do you assess the United States' policy towards Syria?

Chomsky: The United States' policy towards Syria has always been very exploitative... In 1990, George Bush, Sr, supported the presence of Syria in Lebanon because he wanted it to join the anti-Iraq coalition... But, through the years, Washington reverted to a different position *because Syria does not submit to Washington's orders... In most countries, the officials there simply bow in front of the United States, but Syria does not.* In order for us to see how serious the United States' criticism of Syria is, regarding its violations of human rights, it is sufficient to cast an eye on the dates of events. In fact, *there is a list of coun-*

tries which support terrorism, i.e., countries which in reality the US is not happy with for a silly reason. An example of this is that Clinton offered Syria in 1994, to cross out its name from this list if it accepted certain American-Israeli proposals regarding the Golan Heights, which Israel had occupied during the 1967 war. As Syria wanted to regain its land, it refused this 'exchange', so it remained on the list of countries supporting terrorism. Is there a need to say more on this subject?

In 2004, there was a chance to get rid of Syria. The officials in the United States contrived with France, and imposed on the United Nations a decision to force the Syrian army to leave Lebanon. Today, the United States is exercising massive pressures to topple the Syrian regime, but not for the reasons which the United States claim. The real motive is the same motive the States used in bombing Serbia: *It is not obedient!...*

The reasons which pushes the United States to oppose Syria are not honourable at all. We can say the same about France, in as much as I can express my opinion. What pushed the United States to insist on ousting Syria from Lebanon is that Syria refused to join the 2nd war launched against Iraq in 2004. It adopted, by contrast, an antagonistic position... This is why the United States decided to punish the Syrian regime.

Is there anybody today who does not know that all this, and a lot more horrifying things of what has happened and is still happening for the destruction of both the Arab and Islamic worlds, is but for guaranteeing Israel's security and its existence, after the United States have become a Zionist colony?

Mr Kerry,

It is true that you are today the US Secretary of State, but, today and tomorrow, you are a human being before anything else. Let me remind you even for just a moment that you will on a day, close at hand, stand before God, whether you like it or not...

I wish that it were not I, the Arab priest, who reminds you of this one and-only decisive truth, but that it were one of the 'big' and many officials in the churches of the United States... but it seems that all of them, without exception, have decided to be, while still alive, "whited Sepulchers"...

I am sorry for Lord Jesus Christ for what has become of His churches in the West.

An open letter to His Holiness, Pope Francis 1st

September 6, 2013

Holy Father,

Your urgent for prayers for Peace in Syria and in the whole globe specifically today, September 7, has revived hopes everywhere; as you know best our world's need for prayer.

In the same vein, do you not think that this world needs, and especially so, truth as well? Allow me, therefore, as a Catholic Priest from Syria, to intimate to you some of what is in my heart.

Holy Father,

I have a question that has 'possessed' me and I need to pass it on to you:

If Jesus were in your place exactly, would He have contented with calling people to prayer only?

What we see and hear, the horrors and annihilating catastrophes that we fear will happen in Syria and the whole Arab East, and possibly farther afield, do you not think that you needed, besides calling for prayer, to proclaim and do more of the truth?

Holy Father,

You know well that Jesus, in His Bible, has clearly condemned even the shadow of desire for evil, whether by looking or in thought.

Can you imagine how He would have, today, described what the Western Powers allow themselves to do all over the whole world, but especially in the Arab and Islamic worlds, under pretexts that were later proven to be false and fabricated, by the admission of the Western officials, themselves, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, or in Libya, and today, in Syria, my homeland?

In the face of these disgusting "achievements" of the West in wars, massacres, lies, starvation, or various forms of pillaging and homelessness, all of which are planned by expert hands and carried out systematically and in cold blood (escaping any punishment, of course) towards whole peoples, I wonder if Jesus would have closed his eyes and mouth in facing them, as the Western Church does today?

How could the Holy catholic Church, which represents Jesus Christ on earth, remain silent and limit itself to only calling people to prayer in the face of such a huge amount of incessant assailing of reality, truth, freedom, and life of whole peoples?

Unfortunately, the Church—the Holy Catholic Church—since the departure of Pope John Paul II, is shrouded in silence.

Yes, this church, the Church of Jesus Christ, is silent.

Do I, the Priest of Jesus Christ, have the right to wonder about what keeps it silent?

It is one whole Church that is present everywhere, so could it be ignorant of what has happened and is happening in all these countries?

Is it possible that it is ignorant of what has been happening in Palestine for over seventy years?

Is it possible that it is ignorant of what has been happening in Iraq for over thirty years?

Is it possible that it is ignorant of what has been happening in Libya for over three years?

Is it possible that it knows nothing of the one hundred Jihadi fighters sent to Syria over two years ago, among whom are Americans, British, Belgians, Chechens, and French..., who have been recruited, armed, trained, financed, and directed by Western countries and their secret services, in addition to the "very democratic" Gulf countries, especially Qatar and Saudi Arabia?

Holy Father,

If the god of money can forgive this magnitude of crime, which corrupted the earth and destroyed it, Jesus Christ, to my knowledge, cannot...! He expelled from the alter of Jerusalem some miserable sellers present there!...

Holly Father,

Being ignorant of or ignoring this magnitude of crime against humanity constitutes, for Jesus Christ's Church, a catastrophe.

The catastrophe of catastrophes, however, is in the Church's knowing all of this without openly and courageously condemning this Western policy, which is in total contradiction with the Bible and with everything human.

As a Catholic Priest from Syria, I cannot ignore an extremely sorrowful reality, that the whole Western Church is, with its cowardly and stubborn silence, and in an incomprehensible way, renewing today, and has been for centuries, the commitment of the self-same grave sins of colluding, collaborating, and nonchalance, which it cowardly committed throughout past centuries.

Is there anybody, in fact, who does not know that the Pope, himself, encouraged his Italian journalist friend, Luiji Accattoli, in 1997, to write and publish a stupendous book entitled: "When a Pope asks forgiveness" in which he relates Pope John Paul II's struggle inside the Catholic Church to make it examine its conscience? He collected in this book ninety-four of the most important official statements in which the Pope openly asks for forgiveness.

Holy Father,

Must all these peoples drown, once and for all, in the "Creative Chaos"—which is distinctly American!—i.e. in endless wars, terrorism, hunger, hopelessness, vagrancy, and death, so that a far off day will come in which a new Pope appears to ask the world, in the name of this self-same silent Western Church, to "Forgive us"!??

Holy Father,

I know well that this language of mine will shock you. I pray that you realize, though, that my taking refuge in this writing causes me great pain!

The truth is that it is not for me, today, to tell you what I have continuously been saying for over forty years to the officials of the Western Church, it is for Jesus Christ, whose Bible is read every day in the holy sacrament—this unmatched Jesus, who, is supposed, to fill your hearts, minds, and consciences.

The sorrowful silence which I have faced in all my meetings and correspondences with these officials has led me to the belief that the Western Church has been emptied of its essence, so much so that it gives the impression that it is as good as dead!

Despite all this, though, O how I, Jesus Christ's Priest, wish for this Church to remain standing! Standing with all the poor, with all the weak, and all the crushed people on the face of the earth, starting with those remaining in Palestine!

Holy Father,

In these critical and decisive moments, this Arab and Moslem East, of which I am from, and which I love, expects, with all its church, from you personally, together with the prayer you called for—which is extremely important—a courage that prompts you to officially condemn the policy of this West, which perseveres in its madness, loss, and arrogance!

I wonder! Is it too late for building a new world worthy of God and man together?

Holy Father,

Please accept the respects of a son to his father.

An open letter to the non-Arab friends of the Soufaniyeh all over the world

February 21, 2014

I, the Arab priest, son of the first Christian church in Syria, am writing to you from Damascus.

By the grace of the Lady of Soufaniyeh, you and I had the chance of getting to know each other, first in Damascus, and then in your various countries: Canada, the US, Europe, Australia, Russia, the Ukraine, Slovakia... We corresponded profusely and held brotherly prayers together, which nurtured our relationship and friendship throughout the years.

Little by little, this, eventually, culminated in your pilgrims—priests, nuns, bishops, journalists, TV correspondents, doctors, theologians, and psychoanalysts—becoming witnesses, even messengers for this unique spiritual event.

It was clear that Syria had captivated your hearts, so much so that a number of you never tired of declaring, to your TV correspondents, that they felt such security in Syria that they never felt in their own countries. Others went even further by declaring an affinity with Syria as their second country.

Suddenly, this same Syria turned, about three years ago, into an ostracized beast of universal proportions that had to be terminated at whatever cost. Immediately, all the descendents of Herod in our world today ganged up against it, totally casting away the strange differences that existed among them—both current and approaching—whether political, economic, social, or cultural.

An unprecedented 'spontaneous' international siege was imposed on Syria by over 140 countries!

Instantaneously, all the officials in the international establishments—establishments, which were founded basically to secure justice and peace throughout the whole world—transformed into 'circus clowns' commandeered by the 'lords of darkness', whom no one but the dumb would pretend not to know who they are.

For years, an organized media war against Syria was launched everywhere—a war that is filled with as much Machiavellianism as with hegemony—in order to justify all kinds of possible and expected military and Jihadist interventions including, of course, the so called 'humanitarian intervention', exactly as happened in Kosovo, Iraq, Somalia, and Libya!

The result? Briefly, and according to what the Director of the CIA of the USA, announced a few days ago: 150,000 fighters coming from 83 countries—of whom no fewer than 7500 Jihadists from Europe, Canada, Australia, and the US—are all marauding in Syria under a patronage that you know very well, which recruited them, armed them, financed them, trained them, and organized them.

Of course all this happens in the name of 'Human Rights', and in the name of Democracy, Freedom, and Human Dignity.

Allow me, here, to remind the French among you of the horrific words of your poet, André Chénier, as he faced death on the guillotine:

O, Freedom! How many crimes are committed in your name!

And the results of all that on the ground?

Of the 23 million people in Syria, 'only' 130,000 martyrs, 6 million displaced within Syria, and 2 million refugees in neighbouring countries and across the world. This, of course, is in addition to tens of thousands of people unaccounted for.

I refrain from mentioning thousands more—in respect of their memory—because they were victims of extreme villainous and vile acts, which all of your leaders and all 'Officials' of international organizations, who, because of their cowardliness and baseness, saw in these horrendous acts nothing but crimes which they attributed to the 'Syrian Regime' in order to justify their systematic destruction of the country.

This destruction followed a truly diabolic logic: everything in Syria has become for them a killing and destruction project: the human being, whoever he/she is— university professors and scientists; civil and military officials; representatives of both Islamic and Christian religions, whether the 'Ulama', Imams, Priests, Bishops, or Nuns; places of worship, whether mosques or churches; cemeteries, and mausoleums; banks; media centres, whether TV stations, Radio stations, or newspapers; media correspondents and journalists; universities and university centres; hospitals, and health and medical centres; prisons; schools and institutes; government establishments; provisions and food supply centres; commercial centres; grain silos, and grand flour mills; thermal energy plants; factories and industrial complexes; oil and gas fields and their installations; airports, roads, and railways; all means of transportation; cities, towns, villages, and private houses; and lastly, the unique ancient ruins of Syria!

All possible means of killing and destruction have been sanctioned by these marauding invaders, especially the horrifying suicidal explosions, and the intensive use of mortar shells of which Damascus alone 'received' 12,000 of them in the last four months of 2013. I leave it to you to picture the horrific destruction these have caused of houses, schools, shops, hospitals, mosques and churches in Damascus alone, and in its suburbs, and the thousands of victims, including hundreds killed, among them whole families and tens of young school children under 10 years of age, as well as hundreds of youths, among them a young man and a young woman of *The Choir of Joy* that you know very well; they were martyred by indiscriminate mortar shells a few days apart towards the end of 2013; both of them had barely turned twenty.

As to the deep wounds that every Syrian, whether inside or outside the country, carries deep in his heart, these I leave to almighty God, and to the future, to heal.

O, had it not been for Russia and China?!...

Let me here, O, friends of the Soufaniyeh in Canada, Europe, the US, Australia, the Ukraine, and Slovakia, ask you a few questions:

All along this hell of a time, pray what have you done?

Yes, practically, what have you done?

What have you been thinking?

What have you tried to find out?

What have you been told in your churches of what your governments are doing in Syria—if your churches dared say anything?

What have you tried to do?

And lastly, what have you turned into? Yes, what have you turned into?

Should I say it to your face?

Alright, let me answer you:

- In the whole of France, only seven priests and two nuns, one of them is the Matron in a convent; 2 prayer groups; two doctors; one family; a woman; a journalist; a former Member of Parliament; and three young correspondents expressed their pain, love, solidarity, and offered prayers.
- In Canada, only one former TV correspondent and one nun expressed similar sentiments.
- In Belgium, one Turkish journalist of Syrian descent.
- In Switzerland, three friends: a Protestant minister, a female doctor, and a female nurse!

This is it. This small group comprised the only people who have 'acted'—from a West that has enjoyed the gifts of the Lady of the Soufaniyeh.

In the face of a state of such measure of misery, do I, the Syrian priest, not have the right to question, and ask you in turn to question, what really is happening in the depth of this West which claims to possess civilization, on the one hand, and of what might occur in this West and because of it, later on, on the other?

I shall not pursue this point further, leaving you to follow your thoughts and, I hope, your deep sorrow as well, perchance you arrive at a spiritual awakening which prepares—even at a minimum level—for a general spiritual awakening in the West to save it from the definite death that it is sinking in, and that it is leading the whole world into.

This is, unless you prefer to suffer, yourselves, the atrocities and horrors which your rulers are inflicting on us and on the whole world with their inhuman policies! Only then would you realise the immensity of the horrors of your silence and passivity. Clearly, I do not wish for this to happen to you, but the eternally unwavering reality is that history has no mercy.

I call upon you today, from Damascus that is crucified with all Syria, to hold onto what Lord Jesus and the Virgin Mary graciously told us in clear and direct Arabic all along twenty-two years—this is an event that everybody knows that it had no precedent in the whole history of Christianity.

For Lord Jesus and his Holy Mother to have insisted on uttering all this in Damascus itself, is a matter that, in my view, constitutes a glaring challenge in the face of what the executioners of today's world are thinking of or plotting against Syria. I have two witnesses on what I am saying: the future and the message that Jesus gave the whole world on Holy Saturday on April 10, 2004—admit with me that this is an astonishing message, and you all know that it was given in the presence of a significant crowd of people: doctors and theologians from Europe and the United States, and in the presence of a large number of pilgrims who had come from various parts of the world.

It is sufficient for me to present this message, verbatim, for you to agree with me that what has been happening for many years in the whole world in general, and in Syria in particular, is the most poignant comment on it.

Here it is verbatim:

My last commandment to you:

*Return, everyone to his home,
but carry the East in your hearts.*

*From here a new light has emerged,
you are its rays,*

*to a world that has been seduced by materialism, desire, and fame,
so much so that it almost lost all values.*

But you:

Preserve your Eastern identity;

Do not permit your will, freedom, and your faith in this East to be taken away.

Dear friends,

I look forward, then, to seeing you in Damascus!

Yes, in Damascus, at the feet of the icon of the Lady of Soufaniyeh, this humble and great icon!

In Damascus, after it had regained its life, its peace, and its universal love.

In a prayer for a world that pines for dignity and justice.

An open letter to the American Senator, Richard H Black

June 2, 2014

From Damascus, I, the Syrian Arab priest, salute you.

Your letter to President Bashar Al Assad surprised me as it might have surprised many in America and all over the world. What surprised *me* in it, as a Syrian national, does not necessarily coincide with what might have surprised others.

Some might think that your initiative involves a great deal of courage in the face of an Administration, powers, and media that have reached, simultaneously, such a level of barbarism, lies, arrogance, and stupidity, that is unprecedented!

What I see in it, however, at best, is nothing but a mere attempt that has come too late, for a personal apology for the horrors which your country has been relentlessly committing, for tens of years, especially in Syria, without a flicker of an eye of regret or shame!

Whether you like it or not, Senator, you are an official in this administration... and so, you should have done this a long time ago. No, indeed you should have aroused many of the men of state and others to do so—and you may have done so, and failed... so it has become difficult for you to publicly admit that.

In your letter, many issues stopped me.

From the first lines, you pile up thanks to the Syrian Arab army. Why? Because, as you have written, it saved the souls of the Christians in Al Qalamoun, and "liberated the Christians and other Syrians" in Yabroud, and "saved thirteen nuns in Yabroud", also!

Your open focusing on the "Christians" raised a huge question that I ask of you, and of every official in the width and breadth of the West:

What about the non-Christians? What do you do with them?

Are they not people created in the image of God, and as such, then, have their sanctity and have Godly right in a dignified, secure, and happy life?

Secondly, what draws your special attention to Christians?

Is it because you are afraid for them from the Moslems? Let me then tell you and every American and every Westerner all at once that what you have made Arab Christians alone in the Arab East suffer, since the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine until today has exceeded in horror thousands of times what they have suffered since the Arab invasion until now!

Mr American "Christian" Senator, let me ask you also: What does Christianity mean to you, when you are in your responsible position in an Administration that seeks, all of it, in a scientifically studied brutality to swallow the whole world?

Could you please tell me: Where is Christ from all this? Where is the responsibility of His church in the United States towards such a country that is destroying the world in an orderly manner, robbing the land, and mercilessly starving people and making them homeless, and killing whole peoples, as it did in Korea and Vietnam, and as it repeated this some years ago in Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and then

Libya, and as it is doing now in my home country, Syria?

Does this American church have nothing to say vis-à-vis all this that is in total and complete contradiction to the teachings of Jesus?

Do you not have acquaintances, even friends among the bishops and priests in the United States? Does it not happen that you evaluate the actions of this country of yours in the light of the teachings of Jesus? This is unless you have replaced, as seems crystal clear, the dollar god in place of God, Jesus, and the Bible(!) even though you fill churches every Sunday! Have you perchance accepted a life that is totally schizophrenic between what you claim of faith and what evil acts you perform? Would you not, as it seems to be, sick people who need treatment, making the whole United States nearer a mad house than anything else?

If Christianity means anything to you, then what has kept you silent, and kept silent not only the church of the United States alone, but the churches of the whole West towards the organized and blatant destruction, which Israel has been enacting for over seventy years, towards the homeland of Jesus, Palestine: land, people, and Holy Sites?

Yes, what silences you and silences the United States towards uprooting everything that is religious in all Palestine, and especially in Jerusalem?

Does your Christian faith accept that this Jerusalem metamorphoses into what the Zionist occupation wants for it to turn into: a city for playfulness entertainment, nothing more, after it had been the exceptionally Holy City for all Jews, all Christians, and all Moslems on all the earth?

There are other points in your letter on which I would like to present my opinion before I bid you farewell.

You say with total frankness that "few Americans realize that the fighters in Syria are controlled by Al Qa'ida!"

By this, you raise, on the level of America and the world, two extremely grave issues. The first is the issue of terrorism, which your country cooperates through it with organizations it, itself, declared, and the official international bodies declared, as terrorist organizations.

The second is the issue of the American media, and the Western and Arab media people subservient to it, and which rain on the whole world systematic, organized, and fabricated lies in order to justify your policies seeking for ever to extract the support of public opinion in order to justify the total destruction, which your benevolent country adopts towards whom it classifies as its "enemies".

You said also that "many officials in the United States do not approve of the policy of arming and training of terrorists who cross your borders"...

Sir,

These American officials, who do not approve of this policy, where are they? Why is no voice heard of them? Why do they not write and complain in this country of yours which you claim to be distinctly the country of freedom? Why do they not move out-

side your borders? And why do they not move others, politicians, media people, administrators, and church officials in the United States?

You also say in your letter to the president "You have continued your father's course in dealing respectfully with all the Christians and the small Jewish sect in Damascus, and permitted them to worship freely according to their faiths."

Allow me here, Mr Senator, to invite you to read all the Arab history books, because, most certainly, you are ignorant of this specific history, or else you would have known that this tolerant dealing with non-Moslems, in which you find "generosity" from President Hafez Al Assad, was not new, except in your view, and that it started, grew up, and was established in Damascus, and along the width and breadth of the Arab and Islamic world, since Damascus opened its gates to the invading Moslems until today. This is because the Moslems, unlike any other invader before them or after them, surprised the world then and until today by a type of dealing with the conquered people that the world has not known ever! This good and generous dealing between the Moslems, Christians, and Jews, throughout all history is a model that the West, today and tomorrow, must be guided by before it is too late, and before the rockets of your terrorist friends, arriving in Syria from 83 countries—among which are the United States, Canada, France, England, Belgium, Chechnya, and others—rebound to your chests and the chests of your children, establishments, and your dreams, to give you a taste of some of what you have made the children of Syria taste!

Lastly, Mr Senator, I hear you say to the president with total naivety that "I pray that your army kicks out the Jihadis from Syria!"

And I, the Syrian Arab Priest, call upon you, and upon every American to repent to God in truthfulness and humility, and to pray to Him, so that all the officials in your country, civilians and military, especially those of the church, return to their conscience and humanity, and deal with all the countries of the world and their peoples with respect and humility, and help all countries, without discrimination, to deal among themselves with respect and true support, within the responsible international establishments, so that common sense and law return to the whole earth in order for man, every man without exception, is able to reclaim what God has given him of dignity and sanctity.

Mr Black,

Accept my thanks and respect.

Open questions to Mr Laurent Fabius

May 20, 2014

Why do you, as the Foreign Minister of France, persevere day after day in your moral degeneration towards the Syrian tragedy, when you are one of its most vicious perpetrators?

I wish you had only adopted the stance of your corrupt predecessor, whose most important concern was to strut in front of Mrs Hillary Clinton, while almost exploding with what filled him of lies and arrogance. But you, just yesterday, May 13, 2014, dared to blame the American Administration, while you were in the heart of Washington, for not directing a military strike at Syria.

You exceeded in your folly, in response to the invisible hand that moves you like a marionette, and prevented the Syrians living in France from practicing they right in electing a president for them.

I cannot but ask you here:

Pray, what have you turned into?

Are you perchance nothing but a monster with a human face?

I do not intend to expose your achievements when you were France's Prime Minister, this overflowing record at the fore front of which is the famed Blood Bank scandal.

But let me ask you an extremely simple question:

Who, I wonder, do you serve with this policy of yours? France?

Is there anyone who does not know that France has been, for decades, continuing in its shameful downslide, which it started with the annihilation massacres in Rwanda, and moved the catastrophe towards Syria after it had collaborated extremely shamefully with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which are countries "overflowing with democracy"!

Israel?

As if you are ignorant of what some of its thinkers and officials have said and written, since the "miracle" of its establishment until now.

Their abundance only confuses me. Let me mention only one of the most prominent of them.

He is Israel Shahak, the former president of the Israeli Human Rights Defence League. He published, in Paris, in 1975, a book entitled "The Racist nature of Zionism and of the Zionist State of Israel", which was all a very harsh condemnation, of what he saw, as a hardcore Zionist, as the aspired-for Human Rights' Homeland.

Here is what he said on page 58, verbatim:

"In the Jewish state, the Jews only are considered humans, while the status allocated to non-Jews is that of animals. Animals which are useful sometimes, and

harmful at others, no, even dangerous. Some people hold the view that it is not right to behave harshly with animals and non-Jews, while others think that does not matter. Everybody who believes in the principle of the Jewish State acquiesces as well that in the Jewish State, he who is not a Jew is not a human being (according to the definition of Kant, the philosopher: in other words, not an end in it/him/herself); they are only one of the elements of Jewish interest.”

Mr Fabius,

I wonder if you are ignorant of the fact that Mr Shahak had to flee Israel, so that he continues his life in dignity in the United States? Let me then, at the end, beg you to abandon the role expected of you in the French Diplomacy, so that you regain, with some dignity, what is supposed to remain for you of your humanity.

A Word at a Meeting

May 25, 2014

“Every person has two home countries, the one that he lives in, and Syria.” (*André Parrot*, the former Director of the Louvre Museum in Paris.)

Why Syria, in particular?

Because all researchers admit that Syria is...the birthplace of the first Alphabet, the birthplace home of first architecture, the birthplace home of first agriculture, the birthplace home of first musical notation, the birthplace home of first cities.

Additionally, Syria is the birthplace of the three ‘heavenly’ religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Then a day came in 636 AD when its capital, Damascus, became the first ever, unique and civilized, meeting place of civilization that has continued until today between Eastern Christianity and the ‘conquering’ Islam; this conquering Islam that was dubbed by some Jewish and Western historians as "the most merciful of conquerors" in history.

From Damascus, this type of new and civilized ‘meeting’ between Christianity and Islam spread to Jerusalem in 638 AD, to Egypt in 641, and to Andalusia in 711, where this new type of shared living among Moslems, Christians, and Jews—unprecedented in the whole history of humanity—persevered until the year 1492. During this period, the Jews lived their golden era, as all their historians admit.

This Syria (of civilization, of dignified people living together in peace and harmony)... why does the whole West, with most of the Arabs, strive to totally uproot it from existence?

Is it because you want to destroy the Moslems at the hands of the Moslems, themselves, so that—as you might think—you can totally ‘rest’ from the danger of Islam?

Or is it because you seek Israel’s rest and comfort for ever from a foe that insists on its right in existence, on the necessity of respecting the international law in its entirety, so that every country is able to enjoy with its people the right to live in dignity and in peace?

This Syria... Why has your media ‘Satanised’ it throughout three years? Is it to justify to the Western public opinion its destruction and ridding the world of it.

Why have you been sending us hundreds of thousands of Jihadi fighters from 83 countries—having selected, trained, financed, armed, directed, and provided them with militarily, political, diplomatic, and media support and publicity? The admitted number of these Jihadis has reached 250,000 fighters, according to Western sources.

This Syria... Why have you been sending it no less than 7500 Moslem Jihadis from the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe, as the Director of the CIA has admitted?

And you know, more than others some of Syria’s losses so far. These are...
200,000 persons killed

6,000,000 people displaced inside Syria

2,500,000 refugees outside Syria

Not to mention the thousands of bereaved mothers and fathers who have lost their children, the orphans, the hundreds of thousands of disabled, disfigured, paralyzed, and the tens of thousands of people unaccounted for.

As to the massive destruction which befell all the private and public sectors of the country—the cities and towns, the establishments, the roads and infrastructure—these I leave to your satellites to tell you about because these media for sure know more than I do, or even the sources of the Syrian government, themselves, does about this destruction.

This Syria numbers no more than 23,000,000 inhabitants, so you can imagine the amount of horror, death and destruction that you have afflicted—and still afflict—my country with.

Is this how you understand Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights?

Or is this how you understand your allegiance to the Zionist lobby? A matter about which your distinguished thinkers have started to grumble, thinker like John Mearnsheimer, Stephen Walt, Paul Findley, Franklin Lamb, even Noam Chomsky and Senator David Duke?

Here, let me—I, the 82-year-old Syrian citizen, the Christian, and Priest— tell you my views on all this.

God has chosen for my life to encompass a spacious expanse of social, religious, and cultural and artistic life. This has enabled me to weave within and without Syria a network of friendships with Moslems—a network that I wish for every person on earth to have. I have scribed some this life in a book that was published a few days ago, entitled: *I may have something to say*.

Let me tell you, and tell those who might hear me through you, that these friendships are the type of relationships that the West needs today more than at any other time... perchance it replaces the destructive concept of "Culture Clash," that you have invented, and which you delude yourselves with as the only means to confront the danger of Islam and to rid yourselves of it. What makes me even more convinced of this is that you read a lot about Islam, but you know nothing about the Moslems, especially those in our region.

Please redo your calculations before it is too late; the wind that you have agitated in Syria will rebound onto you a tsunami of disappointments, of grudges, of vengeance, and of killing that will sweep across the width and breadth of the whole West.

As an Arab, a human, and a priest, I do not wish this for you, nor do I wish it for any person on the face of the earth.

Do not be deceived by the might you presently possess; history is full of surprises, and a day may come in which you will discover that this might of yours hides a fatal flaw that resides in the heart of your societies.

If you are in doubt about this, let me suggest that you read Noam Chomsky, Baldwin, Robert Dole, and Jean Ziegler.

Finally, let me, with you, ask God to teach all to respect and love each and every one.

A whisper in the ear of Mr Anders Fogh Rasmussen 12th Secretary General of NATO

June 3, 2014

I watched you today on Al Mayadeen TV saying in a meeting of a large number of Representatives of European Governments that "The elections now taking place in Syria was nothing but a farce!"

Your statement surprised me, I the Syrian citizen, and increased my sorrow for you and for Europe!

I am not specifying you with an Open Letter, as I have used to do for over forty years, with most of the officials in the West. This is because writing it requires precious time from me—time that I would rather spend with the living and dignified sons of my country and my nation, not with those who, it has become clear to me, have become mere moving mummies which possess no control over its own decisions, its nations, and its people, whatsoever.

Nevertheless, I want to whisper in your ear a tell-tale memory that was left to us in Damascus, by he who had previously occupied your exact position, I mean Mr Xavier Solana.

It so happened that he visited Damascus towards the end of pessimistic September of 2001, at the head of what used to be called the European Troika, when Mr Louis Michel, the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs then, a member in it.

This visit is tied up in my mind with a religious chanting event, on the evening of September 27, 2001, in the (open and spacious) courtyard of Haret Al Zeitoun Patriarchate in Damascus in which two choirs were involved, one Moslem: The Grand Omayyad Mosque Chanters; and the other, Christian: The Choir of Joy.

Mr Xafier Solana came with the European Troika, accompanied by the Syrian Foreign Minister then, Mr Farouq Al Share'. Because of their intensive schedule, they were able to stay for only twenty minutes listening in amazement to what they were hearing and seeing. As they were about to leave, the Belgian TV correspondent, Mr Joseph Martin, who was accompanying them, stood in front of the TV camera and said, among other things, a very rich statement, which he repeated a number of times so that it engraved itself in my memory immediately as I was standing beside him, and I congratulated him warmly on it for what it contained of grave meanings that you, in Europe, are in dire need to discover it and understand it before it is too late.

He said: "Berlusconi: Instead of insulting the Arab world and Islamic civilization, come here in order to fill up the pit of your ignorance."

I am quoting, below, in French, verbatim, Mr Joseph Martin's statement for your interest:

"BERLUSCONI aurait dû, au lieu d'insulter le monde arabe et la civilisation musulmane, venir ici pour combler son ignorance".

Mr Rasmussen,

I hope that you delve deep in this statement before this infernal Tsunami, which you have tried to sink Syria in, overtakes you and the whole West.

An address in the People's Assembly in Damascus

at a meeting with the Culture and Guidance Committee;
the Media, Communications, & Technology Committee;
and the National Reconciliation Committee

Monday, February 16, 2015

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your gracious invitation to me to express my opinion on the reconstruction of the human being in Syria and, maybe, to exchange opinions on this issue.

Allow me at the beginning, however, to salute with you and with every person inside Syria and outside it throughout the whole world who loves Syria and what it represents all those who have made its legendary steadfastness throughout four years in the face of 140 countries and in the face of all the international forums (which were founded essentially for the establishment of justice and peace in the whole world) and in the face of killers who have come from 83 countries to eradicate Syria from existence in the service of Zionism first and foremost!

What about re-building the human being in Syria?

This is truly a question that means, first of all, a frank and courageous admission that some destruction has afflicted the human being in Syria in the heart... This is an inescapable healthy diagnosis.

Consequently, this means attempting to learn the near and far causes of this destruction, and its apparent and hidden results, in an honest confrontation from which there is no escape.

It is obvious that this knowledge requires the holding of many well-planned conferences—not conferences with the spontaneity we have been used to—with no pre-composed resolutions written in the name of all participants even before these conferences are held... Conferences that are well prepared for with a sequence of field studies that are serious, honest, and cumulative that complement and complete each other... and lastly, conferences that are for specialist Syrian participants only.. those who have been proven categorically and permanently to be lovers of Syria and what it represents for itself and for the whole world—Arabs and foreigners.

In the same vein, and finally, there must exist an honest desire for change, a desire that is able to effect this change. I mean by this, first and foremost, an adamant resolution on the part of the leadership and all officials, of all ranks of responsibility, to power the national "us" over the selfish "I". This "I" that seems to me so sickly and involuntarily widespread in the depth of every Arab due to general history that has reached the zenith of various glories in a very short time, then fell apart over many centuries in cumulative collapses until the current comprehensive hell which is about to kill off what is left of slim hopes in both the Arab and Islamic worlds, the matter that has left in the depths of every individual (except God's selected few) a hunger to 'substitutional' personal glories, which he tries to build for himself consciously, but mostly unconsciously, even at the cost of the nearest person to him...

It is clear to everyone that the building of the human being in any society faces the problem of the relationship between this human being and the authority within the scope of which this human being moves in the society. The 'authority' here is *au-*

thorities... It is the authority at home, which is mostly the authority of the man; the authority at school; the authority of traditions and social customs; the authority at university; the authority of the one political party; the authority of the media (written, oral, and visual); the authority of the students' organizations (from the Pioneers to the Revolution Youths, to the authority of the National Students Union); the authority of the army; the authority in the mosque or in the church... and the authority in various governmental and official circles... As to the authority of the security forces, then one can speak unreservedly, as this has settled in the depths of most people, in an automatic way, counting their breaths and watching their smallest thoughts, words, and moves... although most of these 'authorities' exercise some of the noblest functions on which societies are built!

Vis-a-vis all these authorities, and others that I have not mentioned, I raise an obvious question which would remove dangerous misunderstandings for many:

Who of us has chosen his religion, home, or society?

There are other burning questions I often used to ask myself—all throughout the past hard years—every time I had a discussion with this or that university student or confused friends oscillating between staying or emigrating. Of these questions, for example, is this: "What is the real extent of freedom available to the human being in our country that he can exercise in security, honesty, and joy, in order to feel his value in the various stages of his life, even in what is called "the great joy", i.e. marriage?

All these questions lead me to another question that sums up all questions:

What is the use of authority if it were not in the service of man as an individual and as a group, in his present time and in his destiny?

Mistaken is he, of course, who thinks that I refuse authority, as authority is vitally important; or that I belittle the difficult political and economic circumstances which we have been facing since the establishment of Israel... but I question in a loud voice in front of you:

What would the authority holder—whoever he is and whatever the circumstances surrounding him are—lose if he sweetens his authority with true and constant love and humility?

Permit me here, as I am speaking about authority in general, to relate to you two personal experiences that I lived, following my ordination in Damascus in 1962, with childhood and the youths... As I relate these to you, I am not claiming to be a role model at all.

The first of these experiences was in 1964. After two years of dealing with the youths—at the secondary school and university levels—it became clear to me that everybody needed joy; Yes! Joy! I started encouraging the officials to spread the spirit of joy any which clean way they can, through holding evenings, lectures, prayers, 'acquaintance visits' to families, camps, and trips inside the country for a day or for a few days, and sometimes to Jerusalem. Our motto in that period was "Let's plant joy!"

I shall summarize the second of these experiences by my work with the Choir of Joy. In 1977, I was appointed the 'shepherd' priest in The Lady of Damascus Church, which revived my old dream of establishing a Children's Choir, even though I had, by then, already lost what beautiful voice I had for over eleven years. God en-

abled me, however, and with love alone, to make use of the powers of challenge and love those children had, implanted in them in their homes... and the Choir grew, found wonderful lovers, Christians and Moslems, inside and outside Syria. Then a day came when God enabled us to tour Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, and, later on, France, Holland, Germany, and Belgium, and even further on to Australia. And lastly, in 2009, we were the opening ceremony of the Arab World Festival, organized by the John F Kennedy Centre in Washington, which invited us—a hundred and eighteen children, thirty-three musicians from the Higher Institute of Music and companions from the Choir itself...

The question that I now address to all those who have for long years been responsible for tens of thousands of children, youths, and young adults, who were in the Pioneers Organisations, the Revolution Youths Union, and the National Union of Syrian Students. Here is my question:

What has prevented you from overtaking the world?... Yes, the world?

Syria is the golden treasure of humanity, full of history's gemstones and epics. So, what has prevented you from teaching this treasure to Syria's children and youths in a studied and programmed way... and then to go forth with them to introduce Syria and the Arab and Islamic worlds to the whole world... with what you had of wonderful and varied potentials in these children and youths, and with what you had of all the parents' and officials' trust, and of actual management, financial, and media authorities, and with what you had of artistic, managerial, political, and diplomatic connections locally and internationally? Why did you not do what you should have done? What did you do with all these unlimited potentials, authority, resources, and hopes? Had you acted, would you not have added important gains to the varied and many achievements Syria has accomplished on many levels of life?

Naturally, such questions, and many others, beg other questions to which I see no possible solution except in a central authority, enlightened, strong, flexible, pure, loving, and longsighted, able to make use of distinguished select, that is honest and responsible that surprises us every now and then with decrees that are necessitated by emergency situations, even preceding them by a long shot, like the 11th decree of 2015, which incorporates the teaching of Christian theology in the curricula of the Sharia (Jurisprudence) Faculty at Damascus University, which came, as I and many others hope, in order to put an end, through accurate learning, to many dangerous misunderstandings—such as accusing Christians of worshiping three gods—which are 'misunderstandings' that all of us, Christians, and Moslems, and even atheists can certainly do without.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These are what I see as some of the problems that exist in Syria between man and the central authority within the scope of which he moves.

The problematic relation between man and the central authority increases in complexity when God, as the highest authority which is above every human authority, is inserted in the midst of this relation. It seems to me that this problem is what concerns us in the first place in Syria, today and tomorrow.

This is why I shall try to seek guidance from the two great prongs of religion, the Christian and Moslem—but only in some of their major stations—to arrive through these to what would help us in Syria to establish clear and stable bases, in our minds first, then in our constitution and laws, that return to the One and Only Al-

mighty God, whom we all worship, His majesty and purity, leaving to man, every man, his freedom and responsibility...

Then what about man in Christianity, and what about authority in relation to him?

In answering these two questions, a horrific historical irony, which I have always been ashamed of since I was a youth reading the history of Christianity, and which nevertheless we need to confront in effect every day and, today, in front of you.

Man, in Lord Jesus' views, is everything. He is the recipient of Christ's total love, and constant acceptance, who, after God, is the grandest value which Lord Jesus considers that all that exist in the universe, of life, love, and nature; mind, beauty, and joy; knowledge and law; innovations and establishments must all be in his service, his dignity, and his happiness until he meets the face of his creator.

Lord Jesus was very careful to instruct his disciples to ever be in the service of people, all the people, following his example. He repeatedly told them that "He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to sacrifice himself for many..." He wanted to be in absolute empathy especially with all the tormented, the oppressed, the hungry, and the crushed, i.e. with all whom societies totally disregarded!... The verses of the Bible are absolutely clear on this issue.

Everybody knows what He said in the Final Supper after He washed his disciples' feet. I shall quote verbatim from the Holy Bible what is written on this:

He said to them: Do you understand what I have done to you?

You call me Teacher and Master, and it is well that you say this because I am that. Thus if I, the Master and Teacher, have washed your feet, then you also have to wash each other's feet.

I have given you an example, so that you, too, do as I have done to you.

Verily, verily I say to you: There is no slave greater than his master, nor a messenger greater than he who sent him. If you have learnt this, and done accordingly, then blessed are you." (John 13: 12 - 17)

This is then what Lord Jesus said, and this is what he did, and what he was.

By contrast, what has the church done after him, and what was it?

I shall summarise more than two thousand years in these quick but sufficient references.

1. At the very beginning, the rich faithful people in Jerusalem, for example—as the Holy Bible relates in The Acts of the Apostles—rush on their own initiative to sell their possessions and lay their values at the feet of the disciples to distribute these to the needy. In the same vein also, some newly established churches which were somewhat affluent used to share what they had with the other needy churches...
2. Christianity spread in the whole Ancient East with the good word and good behaviour nothing else, in spite of the constant and vicious Jewish plots, and despite the viciousness of the Roman Emperors and their deputies in the various regions of the Empire until Emperor Constantine's era...
3. In the year 313 AD, Emperor Constantine officially accepted Christianity's right in existence... From that time on, the true tragedy of Christianity began, as that meant the sliding of Christianity into the mazes of temporal authority,

which has a beginning but no end... Many church officials, having escaped the nightmare of oppression, started becoming amicable towards those in power at the time, especially in Constantinople, the Capital. Little by little, many have themselves changed, willingly or unwillingly, into "the authority's people". Many of them started resembling the people of authority in their residence, privileges, and even in their attire, especially in church ceremonies: crowns, gilded clothes, sceptres, which we still see, and are surprised by, today. They tended also to befriend the men in power, even living next to them. Some even exaggerated in their adoption of these men's behaviour, even to the degree that they asked for their help against each other sometimes, as well as against the bitter enemies of yesterday: the Jews. I must make a stop here that would clarify to many what has happened and is still happening, for over a hundred years, in Palestine, and all over the Arab and Islamic worlds, and all over the world, even.

The church—after having been subject to persecution for approximately two hundred and fifty years—started itself to practice persecution against the Jews. Along these lines, it used to push the officials in the Empire to introduce laws that limited the Jews' trade, and prevented them from government employment, even preventing them from living in some areas, the matter that little by little forced the Jews to go back to living in their special, isolated ghettos. This relationship between the church and the state on the one hand, and the Jews on the other, increased and deepened so much so that with the passage of time, it started, what was later called, Anti-Semitism, i.e. the tendency to make enemies of the Jews.

This tendency reached its zenith, precisely where it should have disappeared, i.e. in the official prayer in the churches, especially during the "Week of Agony", when it even was translated into harsh words towards the Jews, especially in the prayers in which it is mentioned that Lord Jesus had forgiven them!...

It is truly a shameful contradiction, but it has happened, and continued to grow and take many forms in all the Western countries, where it exploded, sometimes, especially during the "Week of Agony" into slaughters that hit the Jewish quarters, as the 'faithful' left the churches.

Yes. This is how some church officials understood their authority since Constantine's era, and this is how they practiced it for long centuries ... until the Hitler era in the middle of the twentieth century! O how it pains me, I, the Christian Arab Priest, to point to this calamitous historical reality, which explains the horrible and sickly guilt complex which the whole West with all its churches face everything that has related to the Jews, since the "Partition" (of Palestine) Resolution in 1947 until this present moment and until, what seems to me, a long time to come...

Is this everything that relates to church authority since Constantine's era?

Clearly, I shall not be telling you anything new when I tell you that matters in the two great Christian capitals, Byzantium in the East and Rome in the West, have gone on to calamitous accumulation, in the concept of church authority and its mostly haughty practices, and its alliance or competition with the temporal authority for purely temporal gains that ended firstly, with a schism between them that still exists until today! Then the Byzantium Empire ended with its peoples in Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Armenia longing for liberation from it, until a day came in which they welcomed the conquering Arabs as liberators! And so Byzantium ended by falling into the hands of the Ottomans in 1453 AD.

In the West, the authority of the Popes went on in haughtiness over all in such a way that serious and weighty warnings from inside the church establishment were futile, and so were the harsh criticisms levelled at it from those who had abandoned it. The inquisition courts were established and persevered for centuries, and many people were burned in public squares, many excommunication decrees were issued against kings and princes; Popes called for wars that were dubbed Crusades, fanatic beliefs appeared, horrible religious wars erupted, and continued for hundreds of years, group baptisms were forced on thousands of people here and there, hundreds of thousands were made homeless, and some scientists were forbidden from carrying on with their research... What happened after the American Continent was discovered in 1492, however, reached an unprecedented level of barbarism as millions of Red Indians were annihilated, and millions of negroes were forcefully brought from Africa and sold as slaves thrown into mines, or large plantations... in the American continent...

As a result of all these tragedies, I point to only three issues, which are of extreme importance.

The first is that the Western Church, in Europe, in the American Continent, or in Australia, has actually connived with the colonizing temporal and military authorities regarding all that these authorities had done, from that day until now, of horrors that are in complete contradiction with the teachings of Lord Jesus Christ.

In doing so, the church is also in contradiction with itself and with its message, until the previous Pope, John Paul II, came and adopted a new course in a daring and comprehensive review of this black history, and issued a statement after statement asking for forgiveness in the name of the whole Catholic Church from God and from the unjustly treated peoples.

It was expected that this new approach would extricate all the churches of the West from their permanent silence, at least in this time of ours, towards what all their governments are committing (at whose head is the United States) of novel horrible injustices all over the world in what has become a threat to all humanity and, today, in all Syria!

All these churches, however, still maintain their silence. This is why I have maintained my angry stance regarding this shameful silence, and hence were my meetings with some church officials in the West, my Open Letters, which I found it my duty as an Arab Priest to address to various church officials and politicians in the whole West, in the hope that I would effect some sort of awakening!

The second was the deep schism that occurred in the whole West between the church establishment and the people there...

The third was the alienation of most thinkers and scientists in the West from the church. They have endured grave sacrifices in forcing their way, away from the church, which is trying today to gather its faithful in the face of grave challenges that threaten these societies, as it tries to catch up with the ever accelerating modern science and thought!

After this painful exposition, let me admit with you, that dealing with God, especially in matters political and social, is a very thorny matter, and causes ultimately the most offense to Almighty God, Himself!

Now I arrive with you to the second station of my talk, that which relates to Islam and its stance in relation to man.

The Venerable Quran offers two wonderful verses regarding God's creation of man and societies.

In the first, we read the following:

“We created man in the best mould.” (The Fig: 4)

In the second, we read:

“O, people, We have created you, male and female, and divided you into nations and tribes so that you get to know one another... The noblest of you in God's sight is the most pious.” (The Chambers: 13)

So what in reality is the status of man in Islam? And what about authority in Islam?

The answer to these two important questions, I leave to the knowledgeable in Islam to provide as I have tried to do in what relates to Christianity. Apart from that, suffice it for me from this great station to point to three most important issues.

The first relates to the accelerating scientific development in the Arab and Islamic world, especially in the Abbasid era. All historians and researchers admit the precedence of Islamic civilization over that of the West in this vital and decisive arena... There is then a question that imposes itself. What was it that froze this civilization, while the West, which was way behind it, set forth and left *us* panting after it, living on the remnants of its astounding productions?

The second relates to the reality of the Arab conquests in the lands of Al Sham, Egypt, and Andalucía. Nobody can deny that these conquests were different from all that is known in the history of the world. Here is a conqueror—and he was the most powerful—who took to dialogue and understanding with the original Christian residents, and established with them a new society and a distinctive civilization in which the Christians, the Moslems, and the Jews lived together throughout many centuries. This is a historical occurrence witnessed by absolutely all historians, especially the Jewish historians, old and contemporary. They admit that the Islamic rule in Andalucía, for example, was their golden era. This is why some of them made this well-known statement: “The Arabs were the most merciful of conquerors!” It pleases me to point out, here, that the “Cultural Centre in Grenada”, which was opened recently, contains in one of its halls a plate with the inscription: “After two years of the Arab Islamic Conquest of Spain, the Jews were freed from slavery”...

Allow me to question with you: Were our great grandfathers, Moslems and Christians, as they adopted dialogue and shared living, wrong in what they innovated and lived? Or did they, perchance, aspire to do what pleased God, and by doing so taught all humanity in the whole world what it needs today, and in the future, more than anything else? I believe that this unique line of dealing between the Arab conquerors and the conquered people was of such intelligence, realism, and far-sightedness that made it continue alive and effective until today, and it will rise a luminescent example in front of the whole world, after the end of the crisis in Syria, because this is its only saviour despite the grave troubles, contemporary and approaching, caused by the Western campaigns, the Mogul and Tatar invasions, the Mameluke rule, the Ottoman Empire, and the dirty Western interference, old and new. Yes, it persevered until today a style of living and cooperation that knew its zenith in the “national era” when Fares Al Khoury was the Speaker of Parliament and then the Prime Minister...

For a few past years, I thought that this deep rooted type of living together would have to lead us in Syria, sooner or later, to laying the foundations of a spontaneous civil rule that would place us all on the same level of equal citizenship that is pioneering and forging ahead on the scope of the whole Arab world...

But suddenly, this crisis erupted...

The third issue relates to religious authority in Islam.

Here I can only call upon you and, through you, all Moslems to take time to contemplate the opinions of some of the great Moslem thinkers, the like of Abdul Rahman Al Kawakibi, the Imam Sheikh Muhammad Abdo, the Azhar Sheikh Ali Abdul Razzaq, and Dr Muhammad Amara, our contemporary. All these unanimously agree, as Sheikh Muhammad Abdo says—and I quote:

Islam has no religious authority except the authority of good advice, the call to goodness and repulsing evil. This is an authority that God gave to the lowest of Moslems to chastise their highest, as He gave it to their highest to deal with their lowest. (Muhammad Amara: Islam and Religious Authority, p 36).

Is there in what the Imam Sheikh Muhammad Abdo says an affront to Almighty God, or is there in it what absolves it of every human excess, and consequently what returns to the faithful man his freedom and responsibility?

Allow me now, in our stations, to briefly get to what is happening in Syria today, and has been happening for almost four years.

What has happened and surprised us all... Did it perchance descend upon us from some hell? It is only the doing of Zion and the West, and they have gotten us used to their planning for hundreds of years, while we, the Arabs, until today, improvise. Does it not also reside in what has been exercised of authorities, usurpation of responsibilities, accumulation of fortunes, the brain drain, and planting in (our)selves and minds what has produced vengeance that would not have existed, and a poverty on which one of the greatest Arabs and Moslems said that “It almost approached blasphemy”, a religious and cultural ignorance that has become a roaming place for similar beasts, that has preyed—in a similar fashion and in religious wars that tore for hundreds of years—upon Western peoples called Christians?

This leads me to state that poverty, ignorance, and vengeance are not the specialty of one kind of people but not others, and that their occurrence forces us all to an honest and responsible review, fast and repeated, of the deep past... so that the coming days do not become pregnant once again with what is similar to what has happened!...

Here, in this honest review, I see the building of the human being.

I see it first in the official, whatever his responsibility.

I see it second in the citizen, whoever this citizen is.

As to the official, I see him a servant, not a master. I see him somebody who sacrifices, not an investor. And I see him especially happy looking for distinguished human raw materials he hastens to acknowledge and support, and feels happy for placing these in their suitable right positions, instead of stifling, annulling, and forcing them to emigrate.

I mean by this all the aspects of responsibility in the country without exception, from the highest to the lowest, where only suitability alone, not the name, sect, religion, power, or money are the criteria for choosing the official...

As to the building of the citizen, I see it, in himself, a free thought, a responsible freedom, a real dignity, and honest work; I see it in his family living comfortably, securely, joyfully, and work; and in his public life, I see it in exercising free politics that is truthful and effective, not being somebody's underdog, opportunistic, or working for one's own interest (arrivism).

Finally, I see the building of every human being in every citizen, a real pride in belonging to a homeland he knows very well to be exceptional because it has, since ancient times, been and is still until today the second homeland to every civilized person—a homeland called Syria.

I say an exceptional homeland, not from singing empty romantic praise but from historical truth.

We all know that Syria is the birthplace of the first alphabet, the mother (birth place) of the earliest civilizations, and the meeting place of the three "heavenly religions".

Here a pivotal question, with surprising and promising content, imposes itself which I share with you in the last part of my address:

Was all this that Syria has been from the dawn of history, and all that Syria has originated since the first Moslem-Christian meeting in Damascus (which is still holding), the making of its sons only, or has it also, especially, been through the will of He who if He says to anything "Be!" it would come into being?

You have absolute right in questioning whether I have justification for such a strange question.

To answer this, I beg you to allow me, in the name of the trust you have given me, to spread in front of you, though very briefly, what resides in me of absolute certainty regarding the whole Syrian Crisis, due to a super event that no one would have expected either in Damascus or anywhere else, and that I, myself, was, at the beginning, the furthest person to accept it...

Most of you have, no doubt, heard, more than thirty-three years ago, the story of the flowing of the oil from a small picture of the Virgin Mary in a humble house in Damascus... What was written in the press at the time did not encourage anyone to take interest in the event... In fact the media 'absented' the event.

The reality was different from everything that was said or written about it. The oil did really flow from a small picture of the Holy Virgin, and the flowing continued day and night, while people—Christians, Moslems, and Jews—came spontaneously to pray side by side... A paper was hung on the door of the house stating that the residents of the house refuse any donation, and they remain adamant about this position of theirs until this day. I am a witness to this. Many supernatural healings have taken place, the first of which was of a Moslem lady from Rukn El Deen (on the foot of Qasyoun mountain overlooking Damascus)... The police conducted strict investigations from the second day of the event, and they were accompanied by a specialist doctor. Everybody remembers the uncomfortable security conditions at that time... Between December 15, 1982, and March 24, 1983, the Virgin Lady appeared to the young bride, the owner of the miraculous picture, five times, and talked to her in both the standard and colloquial Arabic. Then it so happened that, starting from May

31, 1984, she saw Lord Jesus Christ, and after that she saw Him very many times, and He also spoke to her in Arabic, but in Standard Arabic always. I add also that the wounds of crucifixion (stigmata) opened in the young bride's body six times between November 25, 1983 and April 10, 2004. The oil used to flow from her face every now and then, and she would go then into a world of light, in which she saw either the Holy Virgin or Lord Jesus Christ. We were always careful to have doctors and church officials present in all these happenings.

This event continues today, after thirty-three years, in absolute gratuity, in daily prayers. It has brought to Damascus large crowds of pilgrims, and a substantial number of doctors, scientists, theologians, cultured and media people, who have come from France, Canada, Russia, Brazil, Denmark, the United States, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Norway, Poland, Holland, Italy, the Ukraine, and Slovakia. It became clear to all of them that all that had happened and they saw and examined was completely beyond any human will.

Many have written extended corroborating research; many gave TV and Press interviews and witness accounts that were responsible and important.

As to the messages that came on the tongue of the Holy Virgin and Lord Jesus Christ, they were very important, and calling, in their majority, to repenting to God, to practicing comprehensive love, to avoiding violence, and for people to adopt forgiveness in dealings with each other...

Of Jesus Christ's many messages, I shall stop at only two; these are his last... Both of them apply clearly to the Syrian Crisis. I am inviting you today to contemplate them meticulously.

The first came on Saturday, April, 10, 2004, i.e. one day before Easter. I shall quote it verbatim:

My last commandment to you:
Return, each one of you, to his home,
but carry the East in your hearts.
From here a light emerged anew, you are its rays,
onto a world seduced by materialism, sensuality, and fame,
so much so that it has almost lost all values.
As for you, preserve your Eastern Identity.
Allow not your will, your freedom, or your faith in this East
to be taken away from you.

As to the second and more important message of Lord Jesus Christ (and it is the last until today), it came on the Thursday of 'the Holy Week', in 2014. It pleases me to mention that, that day coincided with the anniversary of Independence Day (the departure of occupying soldiers from Damascus) in Syria, i.e. April 17, 2014. I quote:

The wounds that have bled on this land,
are the self-same wounds (that are) in my body,
because the cause and perpetrators are one.
But rest assured,
that their fate is similar to the fate of Judas.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Has it become clear to you what pushed me to expose to you, in this honourable place, this religious and humanitarian and truly great event in the history of the Arab

East?... This event that has continued for over thirty-three years, in daily prayers that include Christians and Moslems, and with the faithful calling us from the four corners of the globe to enquire about the safety and security of Syria?... This event which God has willed for Syria, and Damascus specifically, to be its main station in the whole world?

Lastly, let me tell you, in the light of this event and in the light of what we live in Syria of tragedies that have extended over four years ...

And as Jesus Christ rose from a death that the Jews wanted for Him, Syria will rise from what its enemies want for it... And it will rouse the whole world from systematized destruction plotted for it by the great Western powers, after the United States has solely monopolized its destructive one polarity status...

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I reiterate my deep thanks to you, I am filled with certainty that you realize with absolute clarity that I am not attempting to preach. This has never been a concern of my thinking or work.

In the exceptional circumstances that we live, and under the dome (of this Parliament) the symbol, that covers us, and in front of all of this gracious audience, I wanted my address to be an honest witness account for history in front of the whole Syrian people, and in front of God!

And because it is so (a witness),

I say to Syria with you...

And I say to Syria by you...

Will you remain standing, my homeland?

May the peace of God and His love be with you and with all Syria!

A word from Damascus

(Delivered at a Forum held among intellectuals in France
on Syria on June 27, 2017)

June 23, 2017

My friends,

You asked me for a personal contribution from Damascus.

Please accept my thanks. Here is my written response. I would love to have been among you, but my health makes this impossible. I hope that we will meet in October.

Allow me to make it clear that I shall only address a small part of this war, which was launched, over seven years ago, against my country, Syria by 140 countries—all members in the United Nations.

This small part is the lies that have been pouring (on you) day and night, throughout all your media to convince you that the war on Syria is nothing but a civil war, even a religious war between Christians and Moslems on one side, and between Sunni and Shi'it Moslems, on the other. In the West—and France is part of it—you are told that they are not interfering in Syria except to safeguard human rights, freedom, and democracy.

Let me declare immediately that I am not going to give you either a political address or a religious analysis.

It is sufficient for me to lay in front of you two groups of facts from which I conclude with frank results.

The first group deals with the historical living together, which has existed uncontested for long centuries among Moslems, Christians, and Jews since the arrival of the Arabs in Damascus in 636 AD, in Jerusalem in 638, in Egypt in 641, and in Spain in 711.

The second group and the less important but just as real is the personal experience, which for approximately 85 years, I have lived as an Arab priest from Syria—Syria which had been Christian for centuries, and whose inhabitants today are mostly Moslems.

What about the first group?

Historians agree on this event which is so unique in the history of conquests as to merit calling the Arabs "the most merciful of conquerors".

To corroborate this, I provide two historians only, and I have purposefully chosen them to be Jewish. The first is an Israeli called Abba Eban, and the second is the French Rabbi, Josy Isenberg.

Abba Eban was Israel's ambassador in Washington from 1950 to 1959. In 1975, he published through Poche Shatil publishing house two books: the first was entitled "My People", and the second, "My Country".

The eleventh chapter of the first book, which consisted of 26 pages, had the heading: "Islamic Solution". I quote below a few passages from it.

On page 137, Eban says the following:

“The resurrection of life in the Jewish community in Palestine was amazing. Having suffered much injustice at the hand of the Byzantine rulers, the community, under Islamic occupation, witnessed a renaissance that almost reclaimed its authority over the whole Jewish world... And despite the law of Emperor Hadrian, which forbade Jews from living in Jerusalem—a prohibition maintained by the Christians, and by the Moslems at least in theory—the number of Jews in Jerusalem increased rapidly. Seventy Jewish families were allowed to reside in Jerusalem following negotiations with the Caliph.

This group grew very widely due to the influx of multitudes... The Jerusalem Jews received support from the whole world... This group remained in Jerusalem until 1099, when it was annihilated by the Crusaders...”

On page 138, he continues:

“The Jews in Syria also knew similar renaissance. As following the departure of many Christians, successive waves of Jews arrived in Tripoli, Tyre (Sour), and Aleppo, which were cities considered part of the Promised Land. Damascus, specifically, occupied a domineering position, as a basic centre of life and thought for the Jews, especially after the Seljuk occupied Jerusalem in 1072.”

On the same page he adds also...

“In Egypt as well, the retrieving of the glories of the past was accompanied by a substantial economic renaissance. Cairo had become a centre for Jewish cultural life since the Fatimid era in 969. The Fatimid rulers offered freedom to all religious officials in Cairo, as in Syria and Palestine. Thus the various Jewish groups were able to increase in power and, sometimes, even coordinate among themselves.”

On page 139, in a comprehensive view, he states ...

“In all the Islamic states, the social position of the Jews was subject to favourable laws... The rulers, in fact, applied these laws selectively. The Jews were not restricted to living in specific ghettos, and they were able to keep their own private establishments. Their courts functioned with utmost freedom. This saved them from having to refer to Arabic jurisdiction... I can even say that the Jewish groups used to enjoy high internal self independence.”

And on page 140, he says...

“Briefly, no Arab ruler or Jewish Rabbis were able to prevent the development of some kind of brotherly relations among people. Jews and non-Jews were pushed, day after day, to cooperative dealing with each other due to mutual interests on the level of work, or just because of curiosity. This existed especially among the rich sections of the community.

... In actual reality, the Moslems used to have no problem appointing Jews in important positions. No Jew, neither in Byzantium nor in the Persian Empire was able to occupy an official position. While today, the Arab Caliphs and rulers frequently resort to their services. Very often they appointed them consultants, especially in financial and political matters, and in foreign affairs.”

On page 142, he says...

“The new Moslem masters of the Orient have granted the Jews the freedom of worship, choice of abode and profession, as well as the freedom of movement. When the Jews were appointed to the highest positions, they were able to excel, especially in the field of economics.

In relation to this, those considered infidels have no right to serve in the army or to occupy governmental positions of responsibility...”

On page 155, he writes...

“The reality is as follows: all along two centuries, and under a very sensitive Arab rule, the Jewish communities in Spain and Al Maghreb (Morocco) have known an unprecedented rejuvenation, that was not present either among the Jews of the Diaspora or even in Germany and Austria in the nineteenth century, and not even in America in the twentieth century.”

The French Rabbi, Josy Eisenberg's book, "The History of the Jews", published in the Pocket Books series (Livre De Poche) in Paris in 1970, spoke about Islam in two passages. The first is entitled *In the Shadow of Islam: Al Thummiyoun (Ahlul Thim-mah: i.e. people of the Thimmah: Non-Moslems enjoying the protection of Moslem law)*; and the second is entitled *In the shadow of Islam: The life of thought and economy*. These extend from page 199 to page 252. I have chosen for you the following passages:

The writer says on pages 209 and 210 that...

“Before Charles Martel stopped their march, the Arabs had established in under a century a huge empire that is massive in scope as the lands of Fares (the Persians), Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain had succumbed to the rule of Islam. The Jews at times and occasionally resisted this march, as they did in North Africa where they collaborated with the Nomads, but at most times they approved of this march due to their animosity towards the two empires: Byzantium and Persia. In Spain they opened the gates of Toledo to the invaders, expressing deep compassion towards them, so much so that the invaders assigned them the job of protecting the conquered cities. In Palestine their feelings were mixed; while they defended Gaza against the conquerors, they opened the gates of Caesarianism to them. In the land of Persia, the Jews and Nestorian Christians—whom the Byzantines and the Persians persecuted—received the conquerors as liberators.

The conquerors were not of such huge numbers as to be able to force the new creed on the conquered people—as they must have wished for political and religious reasons equally—therefore, they sought to win the people's allegiance to Islamic rule, so they promised them lower taxes. In their desire to maintain order and functionality, the conquerors respected the independence of the many religious minorities, and allowed them to keep their social and religious establishment, and so guaranteed their allegiance after they had been subjugated.

From another side, the support of the conquered people was necessary for the flourishing of the new empire. The elite of these conquered people exceeded in civilization their conquerors; they had a technology that had proven its success in matters of organization and management. Thus the conquerors kept the working people in their lands to guarantee production. The conquerors were of the opinion that to guarantee Arabs' settlement (in these lands) and to expand

their conquests were two of the most important functions of the conquered countries. This is why when the new subjects of Islam did not accept Islam as their religion they were invited to form an alliance with their masters and, in order to enjoy the protection of the law, they had to pay a number of taxes and had to be subject to some laws that were forced on them. Thus "Al Thummiyah" concept was formed and continued to rule the various Jewish and Christian minorities in the land of Islam until modern times."

On pages, 214 and 215, this historian states that...

"In order for the Thummiyoun (people of the Thimmah) to be protected by the law, they had to be faithful subjects and refrain from forming alliances with the enemy. They had especially to pay many duties and taxes, the most important of which were the Jizyeh and Khiraj taxes, which appropriated a large part of their income..."

It is true that the laws were not always strictly enforced. The history of the Jews in the land of Islam was rife with very many breaches (of the law). The Jews did not refrain from taking Arabic names or from criticizing the Quran in public debates or in their writings. They were often appointed to high and sensitive offices.

The social reality often alleviated the severity of the law. This can be traced to many reasons among which is economy, as the Jews had their presence in all professions, and were pioneers in some. They were necessary for correct conduct of economic life. They mingled in a natural way with the Moslems and established ties with them and sometimes deep friendships, and a form of brotherly relations were established between the two on the social level.

There is a matter that formed a very effective factor here; this is the numerical importance of some of large Jewish communities in Baghdad, Egypt, and Spain. The (ruling) authority, careful to maintain political and governance effectiveness, was obliged to acknowledge what the Jews represented, their legal persona, and accept their privileges. This way the authority aimed at maintaining the cohesion of the social order. This is also why the Jewish properties were protected, as they also needed to remain inside the Jewish community even if the owner converted to Islam. This way the Thimmah system served the interests of the rulers..."

He states on pages 217 - 218

"The Jewish communities had the power to manage their faithful according to Jewish jurisdiction. This did not apply only to worshipping, the Kneset, or the Talmudic schools, but also included the family structure, civil affairs, trade relations, and the total social and economic life. These communities had their officials, who numbered between three and seven. These were generally distinguished people known for their wealth or influence, and they represented the communities towards the authority. These communities also had their courts of law, which dealt with civil and criminal matters. The jurisdiction of these courts was very wide as all Jews had to answer to them. Their decisions had the power of the law in complex matters that apply to the family, especially matters of inheritance, work rules and wages, investment contracts, and commercial and money exchange contracts.

Lastly, the communities were distinguished centres for social security. In addition to social support funds and popular restaurants, which existed in each community from ancient times, new establishments were formed, such as elderly homes, health centres, and hospitals. These latter establishments were more widespread in the West than in the East, where racial discrimination against the Jews was less widespread, thus the poor, travelers, and the sick could benefit from Islamic establishments..."

My friends,

Let us admit that these more than frank witness accounts about the reality of shared living between Moslems and Jews, and consequently, Christians as well, need no comment. This is diametrically the opposite of the barbaric Anti-Semitism exercised by the whole West towards the Jews since Emperor Constantine until Hitler!

Now, allow me to move to another less complex level. This is my personal experience as an Arab Priest living in Syria. I shall stop at some main points.

My earlier childhood was spent in a humble Christian alley, which used to directly touch the first fields of the expansive oasis which used to surround Damascus. This meant that the residents of this alley were in direct daily contact with the Moslem farmers, who were obliged to go through our alley on their way to and from the city. Visits between the two sides were familiar. The children, boys and girls, never refrained from playing together in total trust. Exchanging visits on both Islamic and Christian feasts was something normal. It pleases me to mention that these childhood friendships have maintained their warmth until today—naturally with those who are still alive.

Even in the school which were managed by priests or nuns, no serious problems arose among the pupils, Christians and Moslems alike, and the same with teachers, a large number of whom were Moslems.

In Jerusalem, where in 1952, I started studying philosophy and theology at the hands of the White Fathers, our barber was a Moslem. We established deep friendships with many Moslems in the Holy City all along six long years, and also with Palestinians—who were living in refugee camps—and we exchanged visits with each other.

I was ordained in 1959 but was appointed in Damascus in 1962. In faithfulness to all this past, I was insistent that I be nothing but a mere human being dealing with other human beings. Not one of these beings had chosen his life, his family, religion, or the country in which he was destined to live!

I had spontaneously and naturally blended in with a large network of friendships and activities, research and requests, and also a web of questions, pains, and hopes. All this enabled me, day after day, to find myself, whether in church or various social milieus, as though I was among my family.

Let me tell you frankly, as well, that in the midst of this large society, it was very often clear to me, as a committed priest, that I had much more understanding, love, and trust from the Moslem community than I received from the Christian one, where any talk about renewal seemed queer, strange, renounced, and consequently subject to condemnation.

I have tried with all my being to live this priestly mission that is based on love, truth, understanding, concordance, and friendship in the face of all forms of resistance

across all the sections of society without exception, whether Christian or Moslem, or even those of which were far from any religion, even antagonistic to it. I am happy to be living this mission until today with my whole being through listening, praying, giving sermons, the theatre, rest periods, journalistic articles, my open letters to the "greats of this world", my TV interviews, the Internet fast messages, lectures, church hymn singing, even ordinary singing, this singing that a choir that I established forty years ago, and which counts today 620 singers of both genders, children, youths, and old people, this choir which is called the Choir of Joy, and which with one hundred and fourteen children from it, toured France in 2016, and astounded all who listened to it.

My friends, it is time for me to conclude.

Except for what indescribable infernal matters that are happening in my country and on the scope of the whole world, instigated by the West especially, I would have considered myself the happiest person on earth.

It is unavoidable to have to admit and announce loudly that, today more than any other time, the world needs love.

Love is nothing else than what belongs to every human being of respect, dignity, and peace.

Know that there are those outside the West who ask of you this respect, this dignity, and this peace.

If you, in this West, however, persist in sucking the blood of people, spreading terrorism, hatred, causing vagrancy, hopelessness, and death, know then that all of you—yes all of you—with all your euphoric arrogance and certainties will sooner or later sink in the atomic volcano that you have for years established under your feet in the zeal of mad people who have lost every sense.

As a priest, I have never stopped raising my voice high that it has become very urgent for the Church in the West, at whose head is the Vatican, that it awakens from the unforgivable slumber in which it persists.

Tomorrow will be too late!

A word from a Syrian Priest: Fr Elias Zahlaoui

(Delivered in the European Parliament on December 6, 2017)

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Syrian crisis has provoked, and will continue to provoke questions, which are, to say the least, disturbing.

These questions are, firstly, about the legitimacy of this universal war on Syria.

Secondly, they are about the overt and covert political and economic bets on this war.

Thirdly, they are about the possible effects of the approaching end of this war on both the regional and international levels.

I, the Catholic Arab Priest, the descendant of the first Christian community in Syria, have seen fit to share with you, as a Syrian citizen as well as a citizen of the world at the same time, my perception of one of the deep reasons lying behind the totally unexpected resistance with which Syria has confronted this war, especially as this selfsame resistance is, as you know, what brought Syria unconditional support from its allies: Russia and Iran, as they realised that they would face the same fate if Syria were to fall.

Throughout almost seven years, your domineering media have been bombarding you, day and night, with "unquestionable certainties", among which is that the war in Syria is a civil war, and that the regime is a dictatorship slaughtering its people unpunished.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Does this not remind you of the scenarios used to destroy Iraq, and later, Libya?

What happened next was that the whole West was overtaken by such 'gallantry', led by the United States in the United Nations, which ended with 140 countries, no less, declaring war on Syria and imposing on it an unprecedented military, economic, and financial siege.

In the face of the failure of applying the "principle of humanitarian intervention" (a term invented by Mr Bernard Kushner), hundreds of thousands of Islamic 'Jihadis' poured into Syria. They were, as you know, selected from about a hundred countries in Europe and America, armed, trained, financed, and directed, nay, lead by the most powerful select intelligence networks in the world. They poured into Syria in successive waves, year after year, with the intention of "achieving Democracy in it and defending human rights", as it was claimed.

The consequence of this miserable adventure, is "on the human level", according to United Nations' estimates...

1. Exactly half of the 24-million population of Syria have become homeless wanderers on the roads inside Syria, throughout the whole world, and even on the seas...
2. 400,000 killed, of all religious and social affiliations, and of all ages...
3. Hundreds of thousands, disabled...
4. Tens of thousands, "missing" and unaccounted for...

Despite this, the Syrian State has stood fast. Its president stood fast. Its army stood fast. Its people stood fast. Its establishments, with all their departments, stood fast. Its diplomatic bodies stood fast. Its universities and schools, both public and private equally, stood fast. During all this, the employees, serving and retired, and even those held inside the areas besieged by the 'Jihadis' of Al Qaeda, Al Nusra, Da'esh and its off-shoots, still, until this day, receive their salaries...

In the face of this reality on the ground, which cannot be denied, one of the most knowledgeable people about the Syrian crisis, Mr Michel Rimbaud, dared to say that "this approaches a miracle"...

Miracle or not, let us admit that this unexpected Syrian resistance has provoked a lot of questions and loosened a lot of "certainties", which were considered politically "correct"...

In brief, this resistance demands, without any delay, honest efforts in carrying out persistent and courageous research, away from any petty interests or fanaticism. This is because you are all invited to understand the secret of this deep and pure Syrian human substance, which alone can explain what may seem to you unexplainable in this particular resistance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Rest assured that this concerns you to the maximum, as on it, it seems to me, depends the future of, not only the West, but that of the whole humanity as well.

Let me confess to you that, but for this necessity, I would not have allowed myself to come here—due to my extreme suspicion of the whole West: both society and church equally.

In fact we—all the inhabitants of this wonderful planet—urgently and decisively, have to learn the lesson before it is too late.

However vexed or astonished you may be by this decisive assertion, I, as an Arab priest living in an Arab society with a Moslem majority, and believes he knows very well the Moslems and their history, I have to tell you, you Westerners, that you have created in the whole West—consciously or unconsciously—two Islamic worlds, which, in reality, are unrelated to Islam.

The first of these two worlds includes the innumerable Moslem communities that are scattered all over the whole West; those communities that you have used for tens of years to carry out the menial work which your citizens do not deign to do. The reality of the matter is that the majority of these people have always lived—even today—on the margin of your societies, weighed down by an inferiority complex, which is

dreaded lest it transforms suddenly into an explosive torrential vengeance. You have already experienced worrying examples of this vengeance.

The second of these worlds includes uncountable 'Jihadi' groups, which you presumed that you could create and use to destroy "others", while you thought you were immune to any worrying 'surprises'; you have bet only on your defensive networks, which you thought no power could penetrate. Soon, however, you were disappointed.

You might ask me: What is Islam, then?

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to invite you to an objective reading of the first Islamic conquests:

Damascus: 635 AD
Jerusalem: 638 AD
Egypt: 641 AD
Andalucía: 711 AD

In all these conquests, with no exception, the Islamic ingenuity innovated a style of living with the Christians of the conquered countries, which has not known the like of in history at all, neither before Islam nor after it. This new style of dealing with others produced a shared living which was based on real cooperation with the inhabitants, respecting their churches, monasteries, homes, properties, and work, all for a charge that turned out to have been lower than what the "Christian Byzantines" imposed on them. This is besides the various forms of injustices and violence, the "Orthodox" Byzantines inflicted unrestrained on the non-Orthodox inhabitants of these countries. This is why the inhabitants of these countries ended up considering the non-Christian Arab conquerors, liberators!

I shall not forgive myself if I fail to point out that this astonishing shared living has enabled all the inhabitants of these conquered countries—Moslems, Christians, and Jews alike—to live together, work together, even cooperate at the highest level of Caliphate governance.

During the centuries that followed, this shared living deepened and became richer... so much so that a number of Christian Arab thinkers in the 19th century were the ones who created the idea of Arab Nationalism. A number of others, in the 20th century, established and led effective political parties in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.

This shared living is precisely what constitutes the strong fabric in the Syrian society. It is what explains one of the deep reasons for its steadfastness over the centuries despite all the troubles that have stormed through this society until this day. This is because no storm, however strong and long lasting it might be, can uproot a whole 'forest' of shared living that has, for 1400 years, been extending its roots in the depth of good earth. This is Syria, today.

If you entertain even the slightest doubt regarding these assurances, allow me to refer you to Jewish historians, even Israelis, not others. I shall mention only three—all contemporary—historians.

- The first is an Israeli called Abba Eban in his book, "My people".
- The second is the French Rabbi, Josy Einsenberg, in his book, "A history for the Jews".
- The third, an American called Abraham Leon Zakhar in his encyclopedic book, the "History of the Jews".

Yes, friends, facing the West today is a lot of what it needs to learn even from 'conqueror' Islam so as to save itself from the Islam that it has created, first, within its societies, and then throughout the whole world.

History teaches us that the true worth of every human being, society, people, and religion is most manifest when these are at the peak of their power...

Is it so demeaning to confess that Islam in its zenith of power succeeded through its faithful followers, whereas Christianity has failed miserably through its faithful followers?

The West, today—the whole West without exception, however powerful—is in most need to review all its policies, within its borders and without it throughout the whole world...

Yes, I say today, not tomorrow because tomorrow hides, as many fear, a global catastrophe that is being prepared in blind arrogance, a catastrophe compared to which the 2nd World War would look like child's play!

Allow me at the end relate to you an incident that has great significance. This happened on September 27, 2001.

On that day, for the first time in Damascus, a *joint* evening of religious chanting was held, presented by a church choir, I had established in 1977, and the Chanters of the renowned Omayyad Mosque.

That evening was held in the courtyard of the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Damascus. The audience crowded the spacious courtyard of the Cathedral. At the forefront of the audience were church ministers, priests, and Moslem Sheikhs.

Among the most distinguished guests was the "European Troika", which was headed by Xavier Solana, and among its members was the Belgian Foreign Minister at the time, Mr Louis Michel.

Accompanying the European delegation was a Belgian TV team, with Mr Joseph Martin as its reporter.

The European Troika delegation was in a hurry due to other commitments, so they were able to stay for 20 minutes only. As they were about to leave, Mr Joseph Martin started to give his report to the Belgian TV camera, and I heard him very well because I was standing near to him. His words dug deep in my memory, and I would like you to listen well to them. He said...

"Instead of cursing the Arab World, and denigrating the Islamic Civilisation, Mr Berlusconi had better come here to fill up the pit of his ignorance."

Ladies and gentlemen,
Thank you.

Damascus, December 1, 2017

An Open Letter to the Officials of the Catholic Church in the United States

January 6, 2018

Your Excellencies,

You, the Cardinals and Bishops, number in hundreds.

And I, as an Arab Catholic Priest from Syria, am allowing myself to write to you openly, today, to ask you one single question... just one question, no more.

Do you truly know what your successive rulers have, for decades, been doing to impose and maintain your country's absolute hegemony on the world?

There is not a single person on earth who does not know of the horrors and injustices caused by the various forms of 'Tsunamis', that your 'grand' country excels in perpetrating to destroy whole countries, among which is my home country, Syria.

Your complete silence suggests that you are totally ignorant of all these matters.

Even though many are the researchers and writers—some of whom are from your country—who dare proclaim these acts in every way available, and some at the cost of their life!

Should I mention to you James Hepburn, Edward Tivnan, David Duke, Paul Findley, John W. Deam, Jean Ziegler, Ameen Maalouf, Noam Chomsky, John Mirsheimer, Steven Walt, Robert Dole, Emile Vlajki, Roger Garaudy, and Edward Sa'eed...?

And you, the Cardinals and Bishops of the United States, you remain silent in the face of these acts which totally contradict everything that Jesus Christ, whom you are supposed to represent, was and taught!

In fact, was what everything Jesus was and said not for the respect of man, nay for the love of man unto death? Can you, the representatives of this Jesus, be ignorant of what your 'great' country—which some of your leaders even describe as "the greatest of countries"—has relentlessly and for decades persisted, with its infernal plots, in destroying tens of millions of people?

Or are you perchance afflicted with blindness, deafness, and dumbness, so that you do not see or hear and... do not scream, out of fright, in the face of the types of atrocities your country perpetrates everywhere all over the whole world?

Despite all that, a colleague of yours, Cardinal Bernard Law, thought, in 2002, that he had to expose this to the whole world in an open letter he addressed to your "genius" president, George Bush... and you all know that this stance cost him his life, without any of you, or of your predecessors, uttering a single word...

Let me then ask you in the name of millions of Christians and non-Christians in the world:

Pray, who do you serve Jesus Christ or the dollar?

Is it possible that you are not aware that your silence means collusion in the crimes of your successive governments?

But, if the Judgment of humans concerns you but a little, or even not at all, allow me, as a priest, to remind you that you will, in a day not very far off, stand in front of Jesus Christ.

Then what are going to say to Him?

Your Excellencies,

What do you need to be liberated from your slumber?

Do you have to wait for a day in which your 'great' country sinks in the infernal hell it excels in spreading everywhere in arrogance and stupidity?

I pray that this day is not as near as I fear.

Your Excellencies,

Have a blissful sleep.

An open letter from a Syrian Arab Priest to His Holiness, Pope Francis

June 29, 2018

Holy Father,

Today, the joint celebration of the two great Syrian saints: Peter and Paul.

I—the Catholic Priest of eighty-six years of age, the descendent of the first Damascus Church—want to offer you my congratulations.

I wanted these congratulations, a request inspired by St Paul's model stance in front of the Higher Jewish Council, which, a few days earlier, had managed to crucify Jesus.

This Council warned St Paul to stop talking about Jesus.

Is there anyone who does not know the answer?

"God is more worthy to be obeyed than people!"

Holy Father,

Here is my request in all simplicity:

Why do you not adopt, decisively, this stance that is more than clear, which St Paul adopted in the face of a West that does not find a justification for its existence—in order to maintain control over the world—except organized and continued killing of whole countries, among which is my homeland, Syria?

All this is happening, as everybody knows, either in absolute silence of the domineering media, or in unbridled commotion of "truths" that are lies which always justify all the atrocities in the name of "Human Rights, Democracy, and Freedom."

And despite that you believe, as every ordinary Christian does, that Jesus died truly for the love of man!

Is this not the essence of our Christian faith?

Jesus had said in loud clarity:

"As you have done to one of my little brothers, to me you have done it."

Why then is this constant and unjustified silence, which the whole church adopts, at the head of which is the Vatican, towards this assassination of all humanity, so long as the executioner will end with the victim, to the self-same catastrophe, sooner or later?

Despite that, I insist on my regular reading of the Vatican's Official newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*.

It saddens me to admit that for years now, and precisely since the departure of Pope John Paul II, I have done that with no pleasure, in an insistent attempt to find in it even just one word, courageous and effective, but in vain.

The truth is that all through long pages of studies, dubbed “theological”, ‘parishioner’, spiritual, diplomatic, etc..., I have not come across in it anything except empty words/talk never exceeding the usual clerical softness the church has adopted/become familiar since the era of Emperor Constantine, and which it never departed from except in extremely rare cases.

There are in the West, though, extremely brave and noble voices that have arisen here and there. I would not want to mention any of them lest I subject them to danger. Although some of them have paid very high price for their stances, some even with their life.

Holy father,

I pray that this cry of mine reaches you, repeating to you my clerical/Priestly trust.

An open letter to His Holiness, Pope Francis

February 12, 2019

Holy Father,

In my last Open Letter to you, dated June 29, 2018, I promised myself not to write again.

However, as I read by chance in the *Osservatore Romano* on June 28, 2018, the address that you delivered spontaneously in front of the General Board of the Society for the Support of Eastern Churches, named (ROARKO), I decided to write to you anew.

What prompted me to do this is that in your address, entitled *The Cry of Pain of the Middle East*, you found it sufficient to express some emotion, sympathy, and complaining.

I wonder, if the many grave issues you raised—in your spontaneous improvised address, as you desired to point out—did not deserve a clearer stand of more commitment and responsibility from you?

In this Open Letter, I—a mere Catholic Arab Priest from Damascus— shall allow myself to re-visit these same issues, one after another, using your own words, in order to ask you the questions that my conscience dictates to me.

The first issue

You say that “In the Middle East, there is also a danger—and I do not want to say, some intention—which is the danger of “eradicating” the Christians...”

My question:

Do you believe that your audience, and consequently your readers, are ignorant, as your words suggest, of the countries which strive, with open insistence, and since the establishment of Israel, to totally eradicate the Christian existence in the whole Near East at the time they are about to accomplish this in occupied Palestine, which you call “The land of Jesus”, and which has become the land of injustice, vengeance, and death, and whose true name has been obliterated to become only, the “Holy Land”?

The second issue:

You say that “Today, the Middle East is crying in pain. The world powers may look to the Middle East, without caring for the culture of these people, their faith, or their existence. They look at it in order to steal a piece from it, so that they become more powerful.”

My question:

Is it right for you, in view of your universal and unique spiritual responsibility, which is *your* responsibility, to suggest to your audience, and consequently to your readers, that you were in total ignorance of the bets, phenomenal costs resulting from wars that do not stop overtaking the Arab world since the establishment of Israel, in order to find what absolves you of the great responsibility which you bear towards these “World Powers”, at the head of which is the United States of America, which forced about 140 member state countries in the United Nations to declare war on my home country, Syria, and which drove to it, from a hundred countries, all mem-

ber states in the United Nations, consistently and all along approximately eight years, gangs estimated to count four hundred Jihadis, haunted by the evil of money, blood, avarice, and power?

The third issue:

You say that “The Christians—and this is what everybody says—are the early inhabitants of the Middle East, and that we must respect them. But the reality contradicts this. The numbers of Christians is diminishing.”

My question:

If you want to suggest that the Moslems are the ones who force the Christians to leave “the land they love”, as you said, how then can you explain their emigration at a worrisome rate since the establishment of Israel, while they, throughout hundreds of years, lived, fought, and continued, side by side with the Moslems?

The fourth issue:

You say that “The Middle East is the Cradle of Christianity, and the land of Jesus.”

My question:

Is it possible that you are ignorant of the unbridled acceleration in Jewdizing occupied Palestine, contravening all laws, will very soon end every presence of Christians in “The Land of Jesus”?

The fifth issue:

You say that “In the Middle East, exist great churches, ancient churches with their theology and rites and we have to maintain all that, and that forces a battle on us.”

My question:

What are you practically doing—with all the Western Churches without exception, including churches in Europe, and those spread all over the American Continent, as you have become shackled by a horrific and sickly guilt complex towards the Jews (the victims of your eternal and unique Anti-Semitism) until you have closed your eyes, ears, and mouths—*vis-à-vis* all the atrocities that are being committed openly and in flagrant violation of all laws, against all the Arabs, Moslems and Christians equally, in this self-same Middle East since the establishment of Israel, without even attempting to help the Israelis and their supporters all over the world to save what humanity that they might still have, as have, for some years, some distinguished Jews, such as the scientist Leibowits, Israel Shahak, Gilad Atzmon, Jacob Cohen, and Michael Warshawski?

The sixth issue:

You say that “The Middle East, today, is in pain, and it is a land of death and emigration.”

My question:

If every land on this earth, in normal conditions, is a land of immigration and emigration, how could you, as you are responsible universally and uniquely, raise the issue of emigration in the Middle East without talking openly about the forced intense and sequential emigration which moved from Syria alone, inside and outside its borders, 12,000,000 human beings of its population of 23,000,000 without pointing an accusing finger at those who are responsible for these planned and inhuman emigrations

in a country that was considered, before the so-called “Arab Spring”, one of the safest countries in the world?

The seventh issue:

You say that “In the Middle East, there exists a grave sin, the sin of war, that is accelerating, and with advanced weapons... That is the grave sin... The sin of war...”

My question:

These are very forceful words, but let me ask you, as you are shouldering a unique universal spiritual responsibility: Do you have the right to talk about “The grave sin of war” without pointing in the end an accusing finger to countries such as the United States of America, Britain, and France, on the global scope, and to Israel on the scope of the Middle East, as they do not stop exploding totally unjust war, accelerating in its destructive power, so as to prevent the countries of the region from utilising unlimited potential of human, scientific, social, and structural development, in addition to what they plant in these countries’ depths and on all levels lies, disagreements, tensions, clashes, horror, vengeance, and despair, while they raise the voice high in their domineering international media, day and night, that they are forced to do this in order to rescue their infernal trinity: Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights?”

The eighth and final issue:

Holy father,

You say at the end of your address to the ROARCO Society that “God will not leave us alone. This is why I am saying that the Middle East is a hope, a hope that we have to take care of.”

My question:

This cry of hope that you wanted to end your address with, I wonder, is it based on the prophetic and wonderful messages the Holy Virgin, and Jesus Christ gave in Damascus, in the humble Soufaniyeh Alley from December 18, 1982 throughout the years until April 17, 2014 in what was a warning and a conclusion, simultaneously, concerning the horrific and decisive universal battle that has been raging on this holy land called Syria?

Allow me to quote now the last of these great messages, which came on the tongue of Lord Jesus, on Thursday, April 17, 2014, of Holy Week. It is worth mentioning that that day happened to coincide with the anniversary of the National Day in Syria. He said that

*The wounds that have bled on this land,
are the self-same wounds that are in my body
because the cause and perpetrator are one.
But be confident that their fate is similar to the fate of Judas.*

At the end of this letter, I would call upon all who find my language exceedingly daring to read, even to re-read the horrific book, which Pope John Paul II wanted to be published in 1997 in three languages simultaneously, and which I found it my duty to translate into Arabic and publish in Damascus in 2011, which carries an extremely daring title: When a Pope asks forgiveness.

Holy Father,

Allow me, as a priest, to express to you my hope in you, and declare in front of you an expression of the infinite hope that I place in Lord Jesus Christ.

