

An Open Letter from an Arab Priest to his holiness, Pope Francis

March 14, 2021

Your Holiness,

Tomorrow, the cycle of ten years of the unjust global war against my home-country, Syria, is completed—but not the war!

Throughout these infernal years, you and your predecessor, Pope Benedictus XVI, managed to maintain a silence that provokes more than one question! You seem to think it sufficient to just call for “Prayer for Syria.

O how often have I, the priest, wondered, and asked you in successive Open Letters: “Do you not have anything else except prayer for Syria, even on your last trip to Iraq?

Do you, perchance, not know what horrors have happened to Syria, and what is wanted to happen to it still, until it is terminated?

Have you perhaps forgotten that, two thousand years ago, Lord Jesus chose to make for himself, in Damascus, itself—not in Jerusalem—from his worst enemy, Saul of Tarsus, the greatest preacher that Christianity has known?

Have you perhaps also forgotten what decisive role Syria played in those days, and throughout the first seven centuries, in establishing Christianity and spreading it? Have you also forgotten that, starting from 636 AD, Syria innovated and established a type of good relations between Moslems and Christians, and then between them and the Jews, that continued throughout the following centuries and until this day, a type of good relations that the whole West will do well to imitate, and be inspired by, before it is too late?

Your Holiness,

Let me ask you with simplicity and courage: Do you, perhaps, not know who has closed the door to Damascus to you, and why?... So that ‘he’ opens up sham doors to you in Iraq, then in Lebanon?

Does Lord Jesus have nothing to say to you, and to the whole Western Church, about this, at this particular time, and in Damascus particularly, before it is too late?

Do you, also, not have anything to say and do—at last!—about this, and at this time, particularly, as the representative of Lord Jesus Christ, when you see with your own eyes, and know for certain that the eradication of Christianity from the whole East is almost imminent, starting from Palestine, the land of his birth, crucifixion, and resurrection?

Are you not aware, yet, of the financial distress that approaches starvation that afflicts most of the Syrian people because of the war and siege imposed on them by the Western countries, headed by the United States, that are themselves 'outside' any law?

O how it pains me, I, the priest, to hear voices in the West, like those of Messrs. Michel Raimbaud, Oscar Fortin, and Thierry Mariani denouncing publicly, and courageously, these injustices, against all odds, even though they possess none of the complete immunity that you have... only their conscience! While you, You represent Jesus Christ who died on the cross for the love of man!

Your Holiness,

Let me at the end, remind you that crucified Damascus has become, today, and for a long time, the gate to resurrection of a peace that the whole earth needs!

I, the priest, salute you from Damascus with this last request and hope.

Fr Elias Zahlaoui