

Michael Voris: *All right, the first question I will ask you is with regard to the Christians left in Syria. The reports are that there are now roughly 50,000 left. There used to be 150,000. Do you see any signs in the near future that some of the Christians will come back and begin to restore that number?*

Patriarch Yonan: As a patriarch, I am the head of the Church, not only in Lebanon but also the various middle Eastern countries like Syria, Iraq. As you said well, I have to be concerned about the situation of our community in Syria as well as Iraq. In Syria, the whole Christian community used to be numbered with about 10 percent, but now it's perhaps the half of it, five percent, because of the turmoil that engulfed the whole country for the past some five years. People, of course, they have been suffering a lot. They did suffer, they were hurting, and it's very sad to say that there's no more hope for especially the young generation to stick to their land and the land of their forefathers. And they tried to just get out of that hell of civil war.

Based on confessional fighting between Muslims, different Muslim sects, the Sunni, many of the majority in Syria, and the Alawite minority, the one that has the power that runs the government, but not by itself, account for about 10 percent, and you have Christians and other minorities. And this makes the situation very complex in Syria. In Iraq, the neighboring country, the Shiites make the majority, and then you have Arab Sunnis and mostly Kurds, and therefore we also have that kind of fighting based on confessions between Muslim sects. And Christians and other small minorities, they have to pay the price, and they've been oppressed for many, many years by a kind of religious fanaticism. And also they are emptying their country. We can say that in Iraq we have already lost two thirds of the Christian community from things — let's say, the embargo on Iraq, it goes back to 1990, especially the invasion of the Allies in 2003. And in Syria, as I just said, for the past five years, everything is torn apart, and with the devastation of the country, either the cultural or the social or political, it's very much what we fear mostly for the future. Until now, we don't see any hope that the situation, the crisis, either in Iraq or Syria, will be solved politically.

Michael Voris: *Hmm. The Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church has been somewhat insistent that Catholics stay and that they don't leave, and yet huge numbers have left, and of course Pope Francis is saying emigrate and welcome the immigrants in your country. What's your position? What do you think about people under persecution leaving their homeland? Should they stay and undergo persecution?*

Patriarch Younan: The Chaldean Patriarch, Louis Sako, is one of the patriarchs, head of the churches. He is very concerned about his flock, as well as myself for Syriac

Catholics, and the Patriarch Ignatius Karim of Syrian Orthodox. We three churches have been the ones mostly hit because of that sectarian war going on in Iraq, especially for the Chaldeans. The question is of Iraq because they have been the largest church in Iraq, Chaldean, but now they are really — let's say, their numbers are going down. And I think Syriacs, right now they outnumber the Chaldean because there was a lot of immigration among Chaldeans since they have been here in Michigan, big numbers in the California San Diego area, and of course, of that situation, persecution.

We, what we call the message, we patriarchs usually extend to our flocks — either Chaldean Syriac Catholics, Iraq Orthodox, Assyrians — aid to respect their choice. We don't impose on them the choice of remaining in the country or emigrating. However, we can do nothing to stop the exodus of our people because we have been abandoned, even betrayed by the Western countries, and we really blame our Christian brethren in the West, either in North America or in the European Union, to just ignore us in our own country and just look to economic opportunism and to keep that politically correct language with the rich countries, the oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, Emirates, etc., and forgetting about our very existence and our forefathers that were there before. We risk to lose hope.

I am saying that not just myself, but all patriarchs, [have] been many times in Iraq and we tried to encourage our people, but it's not so simple because they, our people, lost everything. That means 14 months, back in August 2014, 140,000 Christians being kicked out of their lands, regions in the Plain of Nineveh and Mosul, the second largest city, and therefore they still live in very, very dire, bad situations, conditions. And they say, "How can we get back to our homes, our houses, our villages, our land?" And it seems that what they call the civilized world is unable to help us.

Michael Voris: *When you're talking about the West, whom are you talking about in particular? Are you talking about all of the West? Which particular countries in particular, would you say?*

Patriarch Younan: In particular is the United States and France and Great Britain of the European Union. And other countries, it's very sad to say, they just pander to and obey the powerful countries — those three countries I did mention — and it's very sad to say that these Western countries, they were in oblivion. Maybe they forgot their principles, their Christian roots and evangelical values, and they just look for money, for opportunism. That is very much hurting us. We have to empty that region of the Middle East of its civilization. Lots of people, they brought their own civilization of Mesopotamia

and Syria, and this is what we blame the Western countries for, that we will be really abandoned. As I usually say, we've been rather betrayed.

Michael Voris: *Do you think that, moving from the Western countries over to, say, for example, Russia and Vladimir Putin, are you concerned at all with his movements in the Ukraine, or you know, moving any sort of artillery into Syria? That Syria is actually going to become something of a middle-ground struggle between the East and the West?*

Patriarch Younan: It is has been like that for the past five years. You can't imagine how bad the conflict is, the sectarian war. The country more than half destroyed, its archaeological and cultural patrimony is already also mostly gone, and billions displaced, hundreds of thousands killed. Perhaps this is the largest human exodus since the Second World War. And regarding the position of the international countries, let's say, the Western countries and Russia and China, of course Russia was more understanding of our situation, that if the sectarian wars will go on, we create a kind of Islamic terrorism that will spread very easily to other countries as it is now in the Middle East and even to Europe, and therefore even to Russia.

And therefore, since the beginning, this geopolitical agenda of the West was wrong, and we heard many times from some officials in the government in the West as well as Church leaders that regarding Syria as with Iraq, they were following the wrong lecture of the events since the beginning. And now, those who have been accomplished with this kind of, let's say, destruction, devastation, it's very sad to say, they don't want to try to find a kind of repair or to re-examine their politics. And especially, we have to my knowledge, to my understanding, an agglomerate media that doesn't help in resolving politically situations in Syria and in Iraq.

Michael Voris: *What is your opinion of the attitude of President Obama? Under the past five years, this has all been on Obama's watch. Do you think he has any concern and care at all for the plight of Christians in the Middle East?*

Patriarch Younan: Look, Michael, President Obama is not my president, he's your president, so I can't judge him regarding what he is doing, but regarding the American administration vis-à-vis the situation in Syria since the beginning, it was wrong in its approach to that situation in Syria. Since the beginning, they wanted to just change the government because they were telling people, the media, that this guy, Bashar al-Assad was a dictator, so he has to go to liberate the people of the country and to bring democracy. This, as I said, was a wrong reading of the situation. You can't export Western democracy into countries where you don't [have] separation of Church and

State, where you have what we call the hegemony of religion, and whatever you do, you'll be unable to implement this kind of democracy they were praising whatsoever.

And since the beginning, I myself and other patriarchs, when we've been interviewed regarding the situation, we used to say, "Look, please, don't be in a hurry to, let's say you are judging the government or criticizing and willing to put down the government with violent means because that will create a curse, and a curse will lead certainly to sectarian roles."

Since the beginning, I myself said that back in May 2011 in Paris at the Catholic conference site, when I was being interviewed by some journalists at the press conference, and I said to them, this situation in Syria is very complex and complicated. You can't compare it to that of Egypt or of Libya or of other Arab countries. The situation in Syria is very complex, complicated because you have several minority groups. They fear the Islamic totalitarianism. And therefore, don't be so naïve to say that the Arab Spring is now in Syria and the people will govern or whatsoever.

And then we used to be accused of siding with Bashar al-Assad. We told them every time we don't side with any system of government or any political party. We side with the Syrian people. We know what's going on, the situation, it's very, very critical. We have to be careful. But there was, in my opinion, a kind of hidden agenda that put the whole region in a kind of tsunami, and it was the result for us Christians. As I say it already, we've been targeted mostly because we were Christians, and we did suffer the most. Thousands of people have been hostages, either in Syria or some in Iraq, but mostly in Syria. Three months ago, our parish in central Syria was invaded, conquered by so-called — by the way, I don't like this acronym ISIS. You keep using this as it were a lady's perfume. ISIS is a terrorist Islamic state. We have to say that. But because of politically correct language, we refer to it as ISIS. So our priest was kidnapped three months ago, Fr. Jack Murad, in his convent in Qaryatain, Homs and with him about 200 of the parishioners, Syriac Orthodox Catholics. They have been kept hostages and nobody cares about them.

We do our best, but it's not — we have really no impact on their liberation. They did destroy, as you know, Palmyra; that is one of the most famous archaeological sites in the Middle East. Actually, Palmyra is called in Arabic Semitic language *tadmor*, that comes from Aramaic Syriac *tedmurtā*, that means "wonder." It is really a wonder, that city, built around B.C., the birth of Christ, by the people there, and they pay the Romans like a wonder in the desert. And it's very sad that the Western countries, they are

interested in some endangered species more than they are Christians in the Middle East.

Michael Voris: *Let me ask you if I can. You can actually switch gears for a moment if you can. You're aware obviously of the upcoming Synod on the Family in Rome next month. Do you have any of your own thoughts? You know, there are many bishops in the West of the Latin Rite, Germans, the New Zealand contingent, many from Belgium, who are coming to the Synod saying we need to start giving Holy Communion to the divorced and remarried. We need to accept open homosexuals and celebrate their homosexuality and welcome it in the Church. What do you think of those positions?*

Patriarch Younan: As you know, last year it was what we call the Pre-Synod for the Family. I was one of the members, and actually this year, too, next month. We try, we Catholic patriarchs, to have kind of a common approach to these very important issues, giving the Universal Church our experience. But marriage is a sacrament. It has to be reserved and for the sanctification of the people of God of the family. We have to understand that marriage is, according to our sacramental theology, a union between a man and a woman who raise their children, either biological or adopted ones. We have to understand that the Church, the Catholic Church, the Church, the Body of Christ, is *Mater et Magistra* ["Mother and Teacher"]. *Mater* is always compassionate vis-à-vis Her children, and *Magistra* also has the duty, the responsibility, to teach them, to put them on the right path. So we will try to do our best not to just consider this very important issue as it was kind of the daily social issues of a society that developed in our times, but it is also a matter of our faith. And we will see what we can do, how we can present this very important issue to our brethren at the Synod.

Michael Voris: *Cardinal Müller, head of the CDF [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith], has said the way the Germans, for example, sort of leading the charge, are talking, is threatening of schism. That's what he said. Is that a fear or a concern of yourself and maybe the other patriarchs, that there's this loss of faith among many bishops of the West?*

Patriarch Younan: I can say that what we heard last year that all were concerned about this very important and even critical issue of the family. I don't think that it will go to a kind of schism by some European Catholic Church. The Pope, the Holy Father, will surely have the head of the Holy Spirit to lead us, at least for this particular synod. And perhaps it will be kind of a solution pastorally to try to find the bishop's conference in one country how to educate, how to form, how to give what we call the *kerygma* to those who have been out of the Church life for a long time. Since we have couples that

want to be reintegrated in the Church, we have to find for them a kind of environment that would help them reintegrate in, but according to the sacramental theology of the Church. That means, perhaps at the local level, it would be very important to call upon those who really want to live their Christian vocation and to try to help them out to deal with this issue — because on a human and social level, we have a real and very delicate situation. And as I see it, we have to remember the Holy Church is *Mater et Magistra*. So we have to implement this compassionate Magisterium in the life of the ecclesiastical community of ours.

Michael Voris: *Is there anything else you would like to talk about? We're at your half an hour. I don't want to take up too much of your time.*

Patriarch Younan: I would like to remind our Catholic brethren of the plight of their brothers and sisters in the Faith in the Middle East, especially this very, very critical situation in Iraq and Syria. If they want to go and visit sometime those countries just to touch or to see stones and archaeological sites, okay for them. But if they want really to go and meet living Christian communities from the time of the Apostles, where the Christian roots were started, did grow, they have to help us stand up for the principles of human right, and not just being manipulated by the media because of opportunism in the economy and because of politically correct language.