

Rebuild bridges between East and West

"The world needs bridges, not walls"

This is the call that Pope John Paul II sent to Christians and Muslims from the East to urge them to build bridges between them and the rest of humanity ..

To build those bridges you have to know ... You often hear Europeans wonder if there are Christians in Arab countries and they are of Arab origin or descendants of the Crusaders ... In response, listen to what the historians tell us Muslims:

"Once conquered Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad entered the shrine and ordered the destruction of all statues and icons in it except the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus" ¹.

So all Arabs are not Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs.

This statement is intended to give a clear answer about the future concern of Christians in the East. Therefore, introspection on North-South over the centuries and a little historical background of the Middle East is necessary. Here is the title of this lecture:

- I. **Christianity until the advent of Islam.**
- II. **Islam meets Christianity in the East.**
- III. **The Crusaders are against Islam.**
- IV. **The Ottoman Empire and Christianity.**
- V. **Survivors Christians of the East.**

Conclusion.

I. Christianity until the advent of Islam

The day of Pentecost, the Apostles² announce the Good News to the Pilgrims in Jerusalem for Passover. They were pursued and persecuted. Religious leaders instructed Saul of Tarsus to pursue the new community in Damascus. But this fiery Pharisee, Greek culture and Roman citizenship in return brilliant defender of the Gospel under the name of Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles. After a spiritual retreat in Arabia and a courtesy visit to the Church of Jerusalem, he began to preach the Gospel to Damascus and then to Antioch

*"It was in Antioch for the first time the disciples were called Christians."*³

But as Paul taught the end of the Old Testament and the advent of the New, the Church finds itself divided on the requirement of new followers to respect the law of Moses. It is the Council of Jerusalem in 49, he decided in favor of the preaching of Paul.

Paradoxically all logic, the Roman Empire, pagan and hostile to any new belief, plays an important role in the spread of Christianity through the Pax Romana, and persecution.

During the second half of the^{second} century, these persecutions are increasing and the popular saying epitomizes the precarious situation of Christians:

"Pluvia haesit, Christiani sunt" (Christians are the cause of the drought)⁴

To see calm his persecution and no longer be considered a prime target during social crimes and natural disasters, Christians should expect the Edict of Milan in 313 decreed that freedom of religion.

In 392, Christianity was declared the state religion and it's Golden Age:

- The Hermits are green the desert of Skete at Sinai;
- The Anchorite multiply in Palestine;
- Monasteries amplified ascetics in Syria;

- Churches flourish and diversify Liturgies;
- The cultural centers are filled with theologians;
- Study centers are growing ⁵.

This trend favors the expansion of the Gospel to cover the entire Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, Ethiopia, Persia and the countries bordering the Mediterranean. India seems to have known the time of Christ St. Thomas. China must wait for the Nestorians.

The Church is organized and large Patriarchs - known pentarchy - namely Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Constantinople, divide the areas of jurisdiction. The liturgical languages are Latin, Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian and Ethiopian.

Following this expansion, the authority of the Church began to decentralize and a certain desire for independence looms on the horizon, especially as the diversity of languages creates an initial misunderstanding between believers. The translations of sacred books - not always perfect - and the dissemination of the Apocrypha are harmful to the harmony doctrine of the Church. And to crown, Constantinople seeks to impose its supremacy by moving the religious primacy of Rome over the shores of the Bosphorus. These factors begin to sow discord within Christianity. The debates challenge both simple nuances that fundamental dogmas. Adverse effects were not slow to flood:

- Marcion preached by the ^{second} century the repeal of the Bible, only retaining a portion of Mark's Gospel where God is greater than that of the Old Testament and Jesus is incarnate in appearance. He was excommunicated by Pope Pius ^I in 144 and died in 161 without leaving any traces ⁶.
- ARIUS: In the early fourth ^{century}, Arius denied the divinity of Jesus proclaiming it is created and therefore inferior to the Father. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, it is considered heretical. His teachings go, the Middle East at least, shortly after his death in 336 ⁷.
- Nestorius: In 431, the Council of Ephesus condemned Nestorianism, Nestorius and file of the Patriarchal seat of Constantinople because he denies the Trinity and Jesus preaches that there were two persons and

two natures. But since his divinity to him from the Father The Virgin Mary is not *Christotokos Theotokos*: Mother of Christ and not Mother of God ⁸.

- EUTICHES: Less than 20 years later, ^{the} 4th Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon held in 451 and condemned the teachings of Eutyches (wrongly called Monophysite) and the extreme opposite of Nestorius seems to confuse the two natures of Christ considering the human as apparently absorbed by the divine ⁹.

It should be noted that the teachings of Eutyches and Baradai St. Jacques, Bishop of Edessa and Father of the Syriac Church, have been politicized by Byzantium, which tried to impose its will on temporal and spiritual all Christendom.

Qualifier churches of the three councils of Monophysites seems to have been caused by the translation of terms dogmatic between Greek and Syriac, it would therefore be more accurate to call them: pre-Chalcedonian. (These churches Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopian and Armenian)

After Chalcedon, only the Patriarch of Constantinople remained in communion with Rome and the Maronites, refugees in Mount Lebanon. Even the Syrians in Melkite separate from the condemnation of Makar ^I, who taught in Monothelitism 640. ¹⁰.

II. Islam meets Christianity in East

Despite the failures and controversies, the Eastern Churches have saved, somehow, a certain dominance of the Eastern world. But facing the imminent danger and the overwhelming thrust of Islam, their reaction is not insignificant say ridiculous. This is a sad statement. The armies of Islam hold:

- Damascus in 635
- Jerusalem in 638
- Armenia in 640
- Egypt in 642 ... nothing seems to stop:
 - North Africa is not resistance;
 - The West turned a deaf ear
 - He did not wake up once occupied the Iberian Peninsula.

As for the Christians of the East, instead of forgetting their differences and create a united front, they invented a new **controversy: the iconoclasm** (661-787 and 815-842). Even the siege of Constantinople in 717, the left unmoved. It is sickening to see a fight break out between Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople (863-879) and Rome on the Latin expansion to the Balkans at the expense of the Greeks and the addition of the word *Filioque* to the Nicene Creed by Rome.

In 1054, Pope Leo IX mandate to Byzantium Cardinal Humbert to avoid irreversible Patriarch Michel Cerularius. The Roman prelate, unwelcome, behaves with arrogance and clumsiness.

Let us listen rather one of his first interventions:

"Anyone who persists in refusing the faith of the Holy Roman See is heretical and anathema, and his church is a meeting of schismatics and the Synagogue of Satan ^{11.}"

Following lengthy discussions between the deaf, a bull of excommunication is deposited in the Church of St Sophia (she accuses Mr. Cerularius ten heresies)

¹². In turn, brings its Byzantine prelates in extraordinary Synod to excommunicate the Pope's delegates ¹³ and rejects any subordination to Rome.

Then the great divide between East and West in 1054.

Returning to the Arab conquest, which is a Christianized East, but divided and hostile to the occupying Byzantine. She builds, so much so that many historians, Christians and Muslims, confirm that the natives have lent a hand to conquerors, they have even opened the doors of some besieged towns. **Damascus is a typical example**, especially that it has always enjoyed good trade relations with Arabia, and with the Arab tribes evangelized who roam the deserts of Syria and Iraq.

In recent years, Islam dominates the territories of the Byzantine Empire and Persia. Only Constantinople resisted. Besieged in 717 by the Umayyads, she manages to lift the siege by its uses in Greek fire, hitherto unknown.

Under Muslim rule, Eastern Christendom weakened, but managed to retain some autonomy through the conciliatory attitude of Islam beginning in a country where indigenous assure him - by their culture, their organization, technical knowledge, their science and language skills - the sound management of its vast empire, and Islam is grateful.

It should be noted that Islam respects the religious *Nassara* ¹⁴ (Christians). The Qur'an calls them *People of the Book*, but rather read these verses:

"... And you will find that certainly more prepared to love the believers are those who say: We Nassar. That there are among them priests and monks and they do not swell with pride ..." ¹⁵

"... And if you're in doubt about what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those before you, read the book ..." ¹⁶

Christians can be prepared with the new power, it is true theocracy, but also conciliatory. Thus, they neglect the Syriac to master Arabic and translate their sacred books and their liturgy, they write using the alphabet Aramaic (Karchuni).

Both communities are well together until the time or mingle the spiritual and this is when Islam is being radicalized especially when the numerical pole exchange with followers who believe they can supplant the Christians in the administration and the social.

Following this development, the position of deference *People of the Book* subit un changement prohibitif. Now they are *Dhimmis*¹⁷ with fewer rights and more obligations towards the State. For clarity, here are some lines about this crucial mutation.

Dhimmi status has been established by the Prophet of Islam when he entered the agreement with the Khaibar Jews and the Promise of Najran¹⁸ with *Nassar*. This statute, enacted and advanced in 750, states:

- The Christian who refuses to switch to Islam has two possibilities:
 - Pay *Djiziat*¹⁹ **and Kharaj** the caisses of Islam who protects;
 - Leaving *Dar Al Islam* and live away from his homeland.
 - The Christian who went to Islam was sentenced to death if he leaves Islam.
 - A Muslim can marry a Christian, but the Christian who wishes to marry a Muslim must convert to Islam. In all cases, children born Muslims.

Having no other choice, many Christians can be prepared with the new Statute, some expats, but many people who proclaim their Islam:

God is too high,

Byzantium is too far

Rome has lost its eyes and ears.

III. The Crusaders are against Islam

Following the suffering endured during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Peter the Hermit poignant appeals to all Christendom in Europe for the liberation of the tomb of Christ at the hands of Saracens ... Pope Urban II echoed this call ... The Crusades begin about 1095.

Historians call the Muslims the Crusades: "*The Wars Franks*,

as if to say that the Cross can only be a symbol of peace, tolerance and charity.

This paragraph speaks of the Wars of the East point of view ...

But here are the first findings:

1. The Byzantine church these shipments suspected of wanting to control the Greek empire and impose the authority of Rome.
2. The Franks Latins - imbued with their power and their faith - consider the Eastern Churches: *'blinded, degenerate and rooted in their lamentable and many heresies'* ²⁰.
3. Apart from the Byzantine, Oriental Churches, at the beginning of the show sympathy for the Crusaders, thus inducing local authorities suspect them of being in the pay of the Franks and to call "Rumi: Roman / Greeks. "
4. But as and Franks argue that their behavior provokes hatred and arouses hostility. Some historians describe the time of their atrocities and even acts of cannibalism committed Maara, Syria, in 1098 ²¹ and as described by Amin Maalouf.
5. When the Holy City fell to the attackers, she moved to the sword: 70,000 people perished in one day ²².
6. The East is cut in 5 states, measure the Princes of the war ... come save the tomb of Christ.
7. In 1215, Pope Innocent III in Lateran Council, decreed that each diocese should have a single bishop necessarily Latin, which are subordinate to local churches.
8. As if all these gaffes were not enough, the Franks overthrew the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Antioch, which exacerbates the East.
9. To complete in 1204 they attacked and stormed Constantinople. The devastation in horror over the violence of Islam ²³.

Then the beginning of the end:

Conquered by Saladin, the Crusaders left Jerusalem in 1187

- **Beaten by the Byzantines, they lose Constantinople in 1264**
- **Disarmed by the Saracens, they were expelled from Antioch in 1268**
- **Acre dislodged, they mourn the East lost forever in 1291**

It is impossible to conclude this way without the express sympathy and gratitude of the Christians of the East to all unknown soldiers who came in good faith, shed their blood on the Holy Land that East saddened by the greed,

experienced by ambitions and martyred by war throughout its history and to this day.

The result of the Crusades is bad for the Christians living in Islamic ocean more restrictive than conciliatory. As for political Islam, he is victorious, but wounded. It is also a stranger to Islam's Koran and Arabic sources. These are the Kurds, the Seljuks, Mongols, Mamelukes and Turks who are competing for hegemony.

The rivalries and differences between Islam and Christianity exacerbate minds is why the status of *Dhimmi* is radicalized and the Eastern Christians seem to pay for their mistakes and those of others.

History repeats itself as the ^{third} century:

"Pluvia haesit, Christiani sunt ²⁴.

IV. The Ottoman Empire and Christianity

In 1453, Constantinople, the city / state, preparing to celebrate the 1125th anniversary of its founding when Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror, with its title, presents with his Janissaries to its doors. The majestic capital of the Christian Empire of the East, after 11 centuries of glorious omnipotence, collapses.

The Basilica of Ajia-Sophia is transformed into a mosque. But the Sultan, as formidable as cunning, granting freedom of worship to all subjects of the Empire and the Greek Church retains his patriarchal seat, to the surprise of the West.

The Ottoman Empire organize them with great ingenuity:

Three institutions relate to Christians, it is

Milliyet, Dhimmitude and Janissaries.

- **Milliyet:** that word of Arabic origin (Millat) means faith, community, nation, ritual, etc.. It is an institution more or less independently. It has its own ²⁵ and his own status regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption. ...

As a general rule, when there is a dispute between two people is the status of the injured is applied. But when one of them is Muslim, it is always **the Islamic Sharia** decides.

At one time, the Ottomans concede - against the heart - to the Western powers as protector of Christian minorities, which facilitates the work of missionaries, whose proselytizing can see the first Catholic Patriarchs and the first Protestant Churches ²⁶ in the Middle East.

Thanks to hospitals and educational institutions of the Missionaries, as well as educational and cultural centers of local churches, Christians are able to develop their knowledge and to claim some important positions in state institutions and social.

- **Dhimmis:** The Christians of the Empire are subject to Dhimmitude. The Turks have rarely resorted to forced conversions, but the economic pressure - *Djizyat / Kharaj* ²⁷ - and fear the imposition of Janissaries are prompting many families to declare their Islam or emigrate.

Depending on the mood of some **Walis** (governors), Christians spend the greater tolerance to the most atrocious suffering ²⁸.

The rivalry between Greeks and Latins is used up by the Ottomans. Custody of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem was entrusted to the Franciscans. But following disputes between communities, it is shared in 1747 between Latins and Greeks, under the good offices of the French and Russians, and a Muslim family buys the custody of the gates, against a *royalty* concordée

Before concluding this capacity, he is obliged to recall with gratitude those who fought against the Turkization of the East and were the pioneers of cultural renaissance and national Muslim-Christian East in Arabic ^{XIX}. Thanks to the monasteries perched on the heights of Mount Lebanon or scattered in the Syrian desert, who have jealously kept in the darkness of their basements and on the shelves of their old libraries, manuscripts and cultural treasures and scientific value invaluable.

- **Janissaries:** The term Janissary, Inkichari in Arabic, is the elite corps of the Ottoman army. This institution was founded in the fourteenth ^{century} as an instrument of war, repression and defense. At certain times, their number has surpassed the 100,000.

The Janissaries were recruited among prisoners of war or circumscribed in the villages. These are often children - mostly Christians, ages 6 to 14 years, removed by force families.

The training of troops includes intensive Islamization and Turkization. Once completed these courses:

- Some are reserved for Harem as eunuchs;
- Others are sold as slaves for life;
- Only the beautiful boys and the brightest are assigned to the Sublime Porte as pages, guardians or companions;
- The very young are sent to the countryside to get accustomed to the harshness of the barracks and prepare for the martial art of Janissaries ²⁹

Since the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans had not ceased to expand their territory. It took 80 years to see them humiliated army in 1532 and 1682, before the walls of Vienna, symbol of the Christian West.

In the eighteenth ^{century}, the Ottoman dynasty falls ill

- **The Russians captured the Crimea in 1782**
- **Napoleon landed in Egypt in 1798**
- **The French occupied Algiers in 1830**
- **Moscow controls the Church of Armenia in 1836**

The Sultan is very busy ... But when he realizes the challenges of the West, as retaliation, he allowed his vassals to organize the appalling massacre of ³⁰ Christians, committed in 1840, 1860 and 1894. These killings have prompted tens of thousands of Christians to emigrate to the Americas.

It should be recalled here that **the Prince Abdul-Kader Algerian Jazairi** - exiled by the French occupying forces - has just moved to Damascus to 1852. During the great riots of 1860 - in Lebanon and Syria - his successful intervention saves the massacre thousands of Christians ...

- The First World War put an end to the agony of the seriously ill.
- The Empire was dismembered and the Caliphate disappeared after 623 years of existence.
- The territories inhabited by Christians of the East are entrusted to France and England, as the famous agreements Sykes-Picot ³¹.
- Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923 founded the modern Turkish Republic.

V. The surviving Christians of the East

Along history, the Middle East has undoubtedly been the scene of the most important. The twentieth ^{century} witnessed: I leave aside the wars, revolutions and empires disappeared and appeared to speak only of genocide and their disastrous consequences upon the Christians of the East.

In 1909, the party of the ruling Young Turks accused the Armenians of Cilicia (Adana) to organize to demand the establishment of an independent state. They were pursued and persecuted: 40 to 50,000 people lose their lives, we are told on.

Six years later, in April 1915, suspected of being in the pay of the Allies, Armenians and Syrians are routinely arrested and tortured to confess that they were plotting against the Caliphate. Eyewitnesses - personally known ³² - describe the plight of deportees dumped at sea or sent to the desert to be beheaded or delivered to the Kurds and the bandits who burned some and selling others as slaves, not to mention rape. .. The more fortunate were abandoned to their fate in the desert to die of hunger and thirst ³³.

This second genocide was planned and perpetrated under the reign of Abdul Hamid, Sultan Red. It cost the lives of nearly 1,500,000 Armenians, and nearly 300,000 members of the Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac and pontic.

Historians tell us that in 1915, Turkey had nearly 15 million people, including 5 million Christians. Nowadays, these Christians are a minority in decline.

In 1933, waves of Christians from Mosul, Dahuk and Zakho in Iraq, flow into Syria fleeing Kurds and Bedouins who plunder villages, rape women, beat children and massacred in cold blood in adults ³⁴.

In the Syriac monastery of Deir Zaafaran near Mardin, the monks have reserved a place of honor at the portrait of a Muslim religious leader Sheikh Fathallah, in recognition of his good offices during the persecutions. This gesture reminds us that Christians all Turks and Kurds all should not be hated or blamed for the genocide committed by their

Ancestors politicians.

In 1920, the League of Nations entrusted the mandate in Syria to France. It sells to Turkey in 1939, the Syrian Sanjak Alexandretta. The Christian population fled to Aleppo fear of persecution.

In 1945, the Assyrians are pursued and killed in Azerbaijan. The survivors migrate to more hospitable countries.

Around 1950, Christians of the East feel more vulnerable than ever:

- The more anxious are desperate: they migrate and ghettoise in the streets of major cities worldwide. Whole families disappear from the Registry of Civil Status ³⁵.
- Some survive, indifferent or unconscious, on their ancestral land.
- Only optimists and pragmatists live in full their nationality, their religion and their attachment to ancestral land.
- The Christians of Lebanon are part of the latter, favored by their numbers: 55% of the population and especially by their cultural level ... But the fratricidal war 1975-1990 decimating its youth either by fighting or by despair and the 'emigration.

Iraq, the center of Syriac churches, saw its population decimated by the princes of the war. Since the beginning of this conflict of the twenty first ^{century}, looting, rape, destruction and massacres in cold blood, and the kidnapping of Christian clergymen cons ransom millionaires have forced Christians to flee to neighboring countries ...

Nothing in Syria and Lebanon are talking 250 to 300,000 refugees.

Currently, the Christians in Lebanon residents are almost 27% ³⁶, while in Syria and Egypt, they are about 10 to 15% in other countries in the Middle East, even to Jerusalem, they are estimated 1 to 2%, then they have disappeared elsewhere, for more than one reason ³⁷.

CONCLUSION

While the West in its radical lay spirituality and his rational pragmatism, the East is hiding in his religious values and fatalism negative ... That's why we live in a fractured millennium ³⁸. In order that this divide will become eternal, he is time that the West makes the missionary - like Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles - but in reverse ...

Towards the East ... to the East ...

This initiative will be welcomed, especially since the majority of Orientals is awaiting a dialog builder and repairer, and a fair and impartial act, after 14 centuries of misunderstanding and conflict to rebuild bridges and demolish the walls between all faiths.

In reality, Islam the Koran is not as radical as people think ... The mass media have made it the pariah of the Globe, some scholars and commentators have offered their personal opinions as revealed and have their fanatical Fatwas extremists and fundamentalists ... It is true that Islam Quran denies the most important tenets of Christianity, but the opposite is also true ... Koranic Islam **respects *people of the Book*** and honor the Mother of Christ and His son Jesus that they refer to as the Soul, the Word and God's Messiah. Two large suras are

devoted to the Virgin Mary, his family and his Son ... Listen to this verse from the Quran:

"Remember the one who guarded her chastity and in whom we have blown our minds, making her and her son a miracle Universe³⁹.

As for the Christians of the East, to avoid the pathetic spectacle of a community immersed in the dormant and awaiting the messianic miracle, they must forget their divisions so that the denial of their existence becomes the condition - a sine qua no - the existence of others. Their survival is of primary importance for the future of the Arab world that can not fly without two wings: the Christians and Muslims.

Because they are Arabs as Muslims and Christians and Europeans, it is for them to participate, in agreement with the West, construction of bridges and the demolition of walls between East and West.

This is a sacred duty very often mentioned and even desired by the Muslims of the East, to reconnect with Europe.

I wish that Syria would not say more as the seventh^{century}:

Rather than the Arabic Greek

And that Byzantium no longer repeats, as in the fifteenth^{century}:

Rather the Turk's cap as the Tiara of Latin.

In the hope that the Clash of Civilizations is buried forever with the death of the late Samuel Huntington and intensify efforts related to the Dialogue of Civilizations: Dialogue constructive, conciliatory and tolerant

Thank you for your presence. Thank you to the Chapel of the Resurrection which allowed the presentation of this statement to be completed, dated 21.4.2009, by:

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