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These days, there is not much good news coming from the historical land of the Good news. Saul (Later St. Paul) is still persecuting the Church. The Empire of the 21 century even doesn't care much about all the atrocities happening in Syria.

Atrocities in the world happen for two reasons. First, because of those who are ready to commit them. Second, because of those who decide to remain silent. After seven years of bloody civil war, flavored with sectarian and religious motives, only in 2016, the United States officially declared that ISIS is committing genocide against Christians and other religious minorities, and need to be removed from the Middle East. After five years of silence, those words were uttered.

Those words were uttered after the worst humanitarian crisis in our time when almost half the population of Syria have been either killed or forced to flee their homes. As a result, the vast majority of the Syrian people are left to humiliating poverty and need. Lately, I was in Damascus, and I saw people sleeping their nights on the streets. A scene that I never witnessed in my life.

According to trusted records about the Syrian crisis:

More than 500,000 people were killed.

6.3 million people are internally displaced.

4.8 million Syrian people scattered throughout the neighboring countries, making them the world's largest refugee population under the UN mandate.

2.5 million refugees under the age of 18, most of them have been out of school for months and years. Just imagine that we need

around 35,000 school buses to drive those young schooling age refugees back to Syria from the neighboring countries.

Last but not least 50% percent of the Christians Syria left Syria, either to Lebanon or the West

Only after five years of International silence, finally, ISIS, at last, is declared in 2016 as committing genocide against the Christians and other minority groups.

Many times, Silence equally does kill. The voice of the German Pastor Martin Niemoller is not heard enough by the empires of the 21st Century: He wrote: after imprisoned by the Nazi: *“Finally when they came for me—there was no one left to speak for me.”* Silence participate in the killing.

In this ugly war, the Church in Syria has learned to be a better Church in taking care of people, other than her members. The Church is finding deeper meaning in the midst of suffering and pain. Also, The Church is trying to keep her institutions and agencies ready for the aftermath. We learned to survive under distress and pressure.

Today, Syria is left to superpowers to decide its fate and destiny. Nevertheless, the Pax Romana (Peace of Rome) of our time is vicious and tragic when it is compared with the Pax Romana of the early centuries. It is why we need the Church to speak loudly about Pax Christi. To declare Christ as being crucified every day at the hand of fallen humanity.

To speak up in words and deeds that Christ crucified is a chance for the Syrians and the world at large to wake up and value the human life and dignity of God’s creation again, and learn the lesson of “never again.”

The Church must remind itself and also Islam that sacred texts, are not sacred at all unless living them is humane and bring life.

The Church must keep praying and begging God for mercy and compassion. But our prayer is always focused that our hearts are not moved by the hatred and aggression directed against us.

Abd Elrahman Elrashed the editor of the Saudi newspaper “the Middle East” stated: *((certainly not all Muslims are terrorists but the fact is that most terrorists are Muslims))*.

Indeed, Islam and Muslims are in severe distress. Apparently, they need to find a way out of this trend of political Islam. They need Reform. However, we as Protestants know from our Christian history that lasting, and trusted reformation comes only from within. It is also true for Islam today. Our helping role as Christians is only through encouraging them, neither by imposition nor by belittlement.

Friends, I come from the Protestant Reformed Church in Syria and Lebanon, which is the minority of the minorities. Frankly, Christians in that part of the world wouldn't have remained for more than 1400 years, without a reasonable space of tolerance and acceptance. This political Islam we are facing today is presenting different Islam from the Islam with which we lived hundreds of years before.

Today, diversity is a distinctive component the 21st-century society. Contemporary societies are characterized by ethnic, religious, ideological, moral and gender diversity; multiculturalism is the fact of our lives. Some who view this diversity as a source of wealth, they welcome it; others see it as a threat, they reject it. Martin Luther King once said: **“Either we live together as friends, or die together like idiots.”**

Eventually, In the Middle East and Syria in specific, we only have two options: either to learn how to live with diversity, or we continue to look for ways to suppress it. The second option would lead to clash and fuel social and religious conflict. The first option would improve that conflict; if not avoid it altogether, this is the so-called "tolerance" option.

Syria needs reconciliation and reconstruction. Every sector in Syria needs to be rehabilitated. Religious communities need help to be vessels or reconciliation. Also, religious communities need to restore their schools, Churches, nursing homes and create small projects for young people. All that with the purpose of staying in their homeland, and reduced the drifting towards immigration or seeking refuge in other countries.

*Rev. Joseph Kassab
General Secretary, National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon
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