

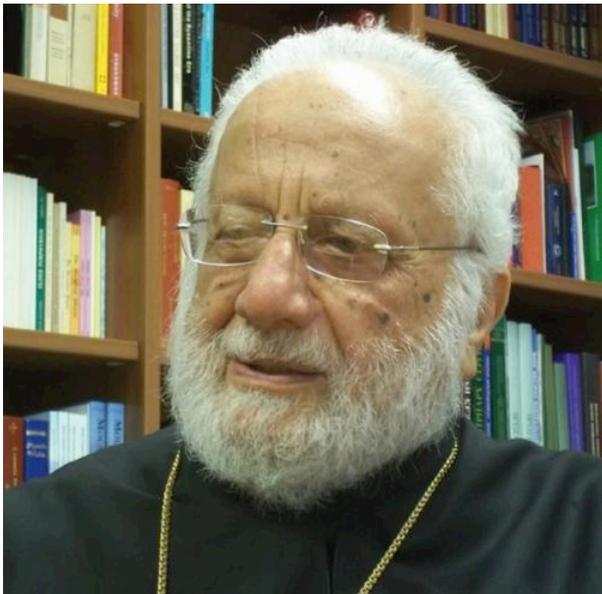
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## A Call to Christians

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Metropolitan Georges [Khodr] of Lebanon

You are bearers of a great vocation, you are a leaven of salvation. This is so on account of the One whose name you bear, and in whom you have been baptized. You are mistaken, however, in thinking that without him you can maintain some usefulness. You also make the mistake of thinking that others can make no progress, as if labels had some meaning in themselves; as if Christ could not, with or without the aid of water, baptize in God anyone to whom he would grant his grace. Certainly, all comes from the Savior whom you worship: all truth, all purity, all greatness, all that is ideal. There is nothing good in this world that is not in some manner upheld by Christ. But the Lord acts wherever he pleases and you have no say in limiting his work. He promised to shower you with his

gifts, but he never told you that you would be the sole beneficiaries. I admonish you: do not be more regal than your King, him who can "from mere stones, raise up children for Abraham" (Mt.3:9).

You are not the end-all of this world! The world was not created to serve you; rather, it is you who are called to be servants. For, the servant listens attentively to the will of his master, and strives to realize his plans. All notions of domination are alien to your faith; such ideas are replaced by the ideal of service. All responsible persons among you find legitimacy in your authority only in its abnegation. And this authority wanes to the extent that its bearer allows himself to revel in it; it loses its reason for being, often long before it vanishes in reality. Neither the Lord in whom you believe, neither those for whom you are responsible can tolerate an authority that is not founded on service. Moreover, the cultural dominance in which you see your advantage, and by which you wish to justify a manner of superiority, is in process of becoming a myth, if it has not become such already. Learning is no longer your exclusive property, and knowledge—in its character of openness to the good, of refinement, the sense of taste and discernment, spreads more and more among peoples. If civilization is largely connected to women, who form half the human population, and who are its inspiration and teachers, it is clear that non-Christians, as well as Christians, share equally in all the gifts of nature.

Nothing else is as dear to the heart of Christ as this development. Since, Christ's desire is for all; he is not, in any event, the property of any one. He responds to the needs of all as, during his earthly ministry, he acted independently of the beliefs of any one individual. All the progress achieved by the faithful of other religions, gives him as much joy as that of his own disciples. He is the

Savior of the world, not merely of his followers. He grants salvation to all by diverse paths, among them: culture, technology, and legitimate social struggles. Why do we not rejoice with Him in the success of others?

I would go so far as to say that the Lord is connected with ethical, artistic and scientific revolutions currently taking place in the world; in one or another manner they reveal his presence in the universe. Contemporary Christian thinking takes this position and begins to discover that God's presence is not restricted to attitudes of humility, of good works or charity. If manifesting his presence God desires the good of all, it is a given that he will vary the means of expression. The spiritual life, with all that it can bring of inspiration and personal transformation, cannot exhaust the spiritual energy in the world.

Of course, the world is transformed by holiness. When the world was yet small, without great complexity, and still free of the confrontation with problems of a universal order, holiness had a simpler face. But in a world open and in process of unification, more and more complex in globalization and its attendant problems, there is no doubt that holiness has also to find new forms. And these forms should not exclude the exploration of objective and technical solutions to the difficulties of mankind. The creativity, by which today's man succeeds and surpasses himself, bears a presence of Christ hidden from the world. The day will come when this presence is revealed, but for now it must remain concealed. Their duty of love towards the world imposes on Christ's disciples the responsibility to participate in its development and radical transformation. Their love can no longer remain on an individual level; it must show itself on the level of community action and historical change.

Christians must achieve this transformation of the world with others, for the good of all. This can no longer be the business of one group or one country, whatever its advantages. No, it is no longer tenable for this transformation to occur as a result of action in one direction; it must be the result of an exchange, of *participation*. For, every assistance provided by an entity with power towards another less developed one, exposes the powerful to the risk of subordinating the weaker one, of imposing its needs and thus ending in a politic of supremacy. The believer must give not only with generosity, but he must learn to receive with the same simplicity and the same humility, as do those who are recipients of his gift.

If that is the Christian vision today, then you who are Christians, wherever you are, must be at the same time

ready to give and to receive, that is to say, in a state of *participation*. Ready to give because you have been given by Christ; ready to receive not because of any reward, but because therein lies also a grace given you by Christ through others.

The contribution of our nation on the world stage can be the inauguration of this idea of *participation* that the great powers seem not to have yet discovered. It happens, moreover, that an awakening is engendered by those who seem insignificant. But that which ought to concern you more directly, that which is more important, is that the true life of man lies in his abandonment of himself, that it is through this abandonment and in the encounter with the other in truth, that a human being ends up in finding himself. Until now you have not known the other in the Lord. You have only seen his ugliness. Naturally, aside from his weaknesses and contradictions, no man is exempt from childishness, artificiality, and egocentricity. But the ugliness of the creature cannot overwhelm in him the imprint of his Creator. Every human being, by virtue of his vocation, by the charisms given him by God, and by his aspirations towards infinite horizons, participates in Christ. It is only in this light that you must see the other; in doing so you will help that person bring to life in himself that divine personality he is called to become. More importantly, you must also realize that you will not simply remain neutral, that you will in fact become strangers to Christ if you refuse to regard the other in this way.

Thus, what is the point of striving to affirm some sort of superiority, and desiring at all costs that it should be acknowledged by others? Christ makes himself present only in love; if you are not replete with it yourselves, you will contribute nothing to the edification of your country and to the well-being of humanity. It is in love that you will find meaning within yourself and in your life; it must therefore be everything for you. Without it you battle with the void and return to a primitive barbarism.

Essentially, you are the core that is called to die so that others may live. You hold the secret of life because someone has taught you to accept death. All your success lies in this self-effacement, in this perpetual élan that opens to you the boundaries of the Church towards new horizons of your sacrificial witness. It is precisely in not advertising this secret that you confirm your identity. Your entire particularity rests in the fact that you neither try to define it, nor impose it. You will only be saved to the measure that you are not preoccupied with your own salvation. On the contrary, you ought to plunge into the mêlée, into the very heart of the world's problems. You won't seek to dominate for: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials

exercise authority over them. It must not be so with you" (Mt.20:25,26). You, you are not of this world. Each time you take pride in the fact that you hold certain power according to the world's reasoning, or gain honors according to common convention, you cease to have an active spiritual presence. For, "God chose the lowly things of this world and the things despised—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are" (1 Cor.1:28).

Do you believe in all this?