

New Choices for Christians in the Middle East: Religion, Politics, Policies and Citizenship Paradigms

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Editorial Introduction by Jonas Adelin Joergensen

The following essay is authored by Ziad El-Sayegh from the Civic Influence Hub in Beirut. He is one of the original authors who conceptualized the idea of WCAL and offers in his article a condensed version of the original study document. Based on a presentation of challenges for the nexus between religion and politics in the Middle East as pointed out in the original document, the author analyses the critical situation of Christians in the Middle East and points to the idea of inclusive citizenship as a key to reform and development of Middle Eastern societies.

In his very personal and engaged contribution, El-Sayegh summarizes the insights of the original WCAL document and analyzes the critical situation for Christians in the Middle East in relation to politics and religion. In the essay he identifies fear of minorities, apathy from liberal intellectuals, and the vulnerability of socio-economic systems as main challenges. The solutions pointed out include a renewed understanding of religion, citizenship, and partnership with other faith groups. The fundamental idea presented in the essay is a shift from minority-majority perspective to a model based on inclusive citizenship and sustainable social development.

In the essay El-Sayegh points to and unfolds a number of key challenges for Christians in the Middle East. The first of these is the fear connected to being a minority, which primarily affects the minority itself. This fear imagines the worst possible outcomes and is fed by extremism, seeking internal or external protection, which ultimately leads to dependency. Secondly, this fear is also related to and fed by an inflated self-understanding of majorities, which rhetorically and occasionally also practically marginalize and exclude minority groups, imposing their traditions, their legislation, and their culture on the common society. This inflated self-understanding is just as harmful as the minority fear complex

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because it leads to politics of dominance and intimidation, crippling the ethical and spiritual life of the majority. Thirdly, the absence of liberal voices across Christian, Muslim, and Jewish camps makes it difficult to find allies across religious traditions in defense of common society.

As already mentioned, the vision in WCAL and in this essay is the mental and political paradigm shift from minority-majority perspectives to an idea of inclusive citizenship on a secular basis and a shared culture, acknowledging and respecting differences but pointing to fundamental unity and values. Only by reforming policies, as well as internal religious structures, is the shift towards such an inclusive citizenship possible. This, however, also leads to one of the unsolved problems of the wider Middle Eastern Christian communities: how to relate to Islam and Muslims and to Judaism and Jews. After the Hamas terror attack in October 2023 and the following war in Gaza, this problem has become even more pressing and prominent. There are several mentions of Islam and Muslims in the essay, but the main argument and vision – a secular civil society, democracy, respect for human rights and nationhood – remains merely an idea if it is not possible to relate the vision to Islamic and Mosaic theological perspectives on the same themes and to develop these convictions into political action for a common society.

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The “We Choose Abundant Life” document entrusts us to have a profound, open, and fearless interchange with Christians and Church authorities in the Middle East, other religious groups, secular thinkers in civil society, regional and international ecumenical institutions. This article will highlight the main points in the “We Choose Abundant Life - Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social, and Political Choices” document, and we look forward to a constructive and audacious discourse that attempts to contribute to peace-building in the Middle East based on justice and common good, and marked by inclusivity, stability, transparency, democracy and productive active citizenship.

1. Religion and Politics – Three Challenges

The problematic relationship between religion and politics is not new, in the East as in the West. The problematic relationship is dialectical. There are those who call for a complete separation between these two poles in any social contract, and there are those who see their intermingling inevitable. In both these two approaches, there is an extremism. Therefore, a

central question is: What are the limits of religion and politics in preserving the common good while purifying the public issues from the residues of exploiting influence, and disrupting the structure of common values and common interests alike? Based on the foregoing, there is a need to think deeply about the following equations:

1.1 From Being Regime Ally to Embracing the Public Order

Religion, as a spirit, dogma but also as an institution, loses its persuasive ethical message in terms of accountability and responsibility if it sticks with political regimes for the sake of protection, influence, or if it becomes dependent therefrom. Hence it is necessary to rediscover ways in which religion and religious communities increasingly can function as an ethical guarantor of public order rather than of a certain political regime. This is a first challenge.

1.2 From Politics Professionalism to Building Public Policies

The religious institutions' commitment to ethics as a guarantor of public order should not remain a mere slogan; it should rather engage in dialogue on public policies instead of simply watching unresponsively the politics professionalism of any authority, which often plays on demographic or confessional competition and seeks to strengthen or overtake positions of influence. It is therefore necessary to confirm the relation between the mission of religious communities, role of religion, and public policies, instead of siding with politics. This is a second challenge.

1.3 From Circumstantial Reform to a Sustainable Governance

Exaggeration in both the political and the religious arena while talking about the need for continuous reform proves that both actions are tarnished with structural defect. The structural defect is conceptual and revolves around the role of religion in politics. But it is also contextual, connected to the geographic and societal specificity of each religious community. Good sustainable governance based on sustainable public policies is the key to reformation of societies. This can be only produced by a common good mentality, as well by the conviction that the ethics can serve the building of human dignity and peace. This is a third challenge.

These three challenges, i.e., maintaining public order, building public policies, and promoting good sustainable governance links religions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (mainly Goal 16 reflecting

on justice, strong institutions and Rule of Law), that is, a return to scientific standards in measuring the impact of religions and political structures, and expanding the area of public interest in protecting public good based on a democratic process. This is where the document “We Choose Abundant Life” attempts to develop a comprehensive paradigm shift on this problematic relation, to bring back the ethics to the public space based on a contextual theology, but also based on a clear policy choice.

Engaging religion as a driver for achieving the SDGs within the public sphere requires a non-conventional theological and socio-political paradigm shift towards the development of a strategy that enhances a comprehensive framework analysis of the sustainable development components (political, social, economic, as well as environmental) in order to broaden the scope of dialogue and help the religious track to influence the policy process. Moving from simple development initiatives to sustainable policies in the Middle East requires fundamental efforts that are summarized below:

- a. Redefining the concepts of minorities and majorities in the region
- b. Moving from broadening religious common spaces to building a common vision for a civil state that strengthens and solidifies the citizenship of individual identities of various groups
- c. Connecting religious actors, development policy makers, as well as civil society organizations to foster knowledge exchange about diverse communities
- d. Building partnerships to ensure deep understanding of perceived tensions between certain SDGs and religious values and to address them
- e. Disseminating knowledge about the SDGs to local religious groups and empower them to participate in the global development discourse and mobilize local resources for achieving Agenda 2030
- f. Encouraging the local engagement of religious groups with the SDGs implementation as active partners with national governments
- g. Delineating the socio-economic interests as key factors in any peace building framework
- h. Inciting social and economic reforms based on the sustainable development pillars that support human well-being and quality of life- independent of faith or religion

- i. Reinforcing freedom of practicing religious rites, safeguarded by mutual knowledge and by overcoming prejudices
- j. Supporting the freedom of religion and belief (FoRB), expressed by the right to convey one's faith distinctively in his community through the broadening of communication of commonalities and the intellectual deliberation on issues related to faith from various perspectives; i.e. legal, political, cultural, theological and socio-economic; even admitting the right to disbelief
- k. Adopting the freedom of conscious integrity and ethics that implies accepting others and respecting their dignity
- l. Discussing common concerns and reinforcing these with collective interests to encourage interreligious dialogue with experts from multidisciplinary sectors
- m. Fostering new interreligious projects for human rights and peace building in the region
- n. Restructuring educational curricula to address the challenges the region is facing

Interreligious dialogue about shared values requires focusing on common interests related to human dignity. Obviously, the SDGs constitute a solid foundation to support religious freedom in its moral and legal dimensions with a pragmatic approach where inclusive, active and productive citizenship is the cornerstone. In this context, the mental and ideological framework of minorities and majorities in the Middle East must be refuted. It is imperative to recognize the significance of inclusive citizenship as a legal structure as well as a shared culture based on the development of shared values and common interests.

The adoption of a participatory methodology is vital for encouraging interreligious dialogue that ensures mutual respect and builds trust among diverse groups. To embrace cultural diversity and religious differences in the Middle East region, a paradigm shift from the Minorities-Majorities framework towards the Inclusive Citizenship's model is needed; this is a central conceptual idea of the document. When approached through the citizenship framework, the above-listed efforts towards sustainable policies would pave the way for sharing common values and creating harmony among individuals and communities in the Middle East.

2. Christians in the Middle East: Critical Situation

It is imperative that Christians in the Middle East dig deeper into their faith jointly with co-citizens of other religions due to the diverse compositions of their societies. This approach is nothing but an attempt to reflect on the philosophy and prospects of these options, in connection with the national identity, as well as challenges to freedom of religion and belief that posed dilemmas for the Christian presence and existence in this area so rife with conflict.

2.1 Minoritism Phobia and Bloated Majority

The most dangerous thing in any society is for a religious or ethnic group to feel that it is a minority. Minoritism is mostly a mental disease an ideological structure taking precedence over demographic, religious, or ethnic reality. Appealing to the mentality of the minority plays on the strings of extremism, and lures internal or external protections, which results in dependence, fear and intimidation. Thus, minoritism in any modern identity becomes an unhealthy illusion for the minority as well for the majority. What we are experiencing today is an attempt by some political regimes, as well as some majority social and religious groups, to play on fears and intimidation, a tense and pathological behavior that is killing the civil space and diverse communities in our societies. Minoritism is related to numerical reasoning, and Christians live a demographic concern. The document “We Choose Abundant Life” made a precise reference to this subject:

The number of Christians in the Middle East, relative to the population as a whole, has steadily decreased since the end of the 19th century.¹ In contrast, there is a growing Christian presence in the countries of the Arab Gulf. The primary reasons for this decrease are the recurrent wars that provoked the emigration of millions of people, as well as economic hardship, social injustice and unemployment, especially among the youth who are forced today to search for work opportunities abroad. In addition, the Middle East is witnessing an absence of democracy on all levels, a lack of respect for human rights, and political, economic and social instability, all of which generates a feeling of despair, frustration and shattered hopes in large segments of society, including Christians. (Article 44)

¹ All emphases in the following quotations are taken from the original.

The reasons pointed to in this passage include pull factors (emigration) as well as push factors (economic factors, injustice, unemployment among youth), all well-known and historical trends in the Middle East, pointing to the dilemma that what is good for the individual is not necessarily good for a society. Later in the document it says:

Christians in the Middle East are dealing today with a complex reality in witnessing to their faith in the public sphere and the effectiveness of this witness in taking part in governance. This reality exposes them to two main traps that they need to avoid: the first concerns their demographic decrease both numerically and geographically, which prompts them to adhere to totalitarian ideologies, authoritarian regimes, power surpluses, and alliances with other minorities with whom they have intersecting interests. The second lies in thinking that if they are able to occupy positions of influence, and acquire benefits and authoritarian protections, this can ensure the continuity and the value of their presence in the Middle East, even if this runs against their fundamental historical principles in defending freedom, human rights, and coexistence based on the logic of citizenship and the kind of solidarity this requires with the faithful of other religions and those professing secular values. (Article 56)

Here the document points out the most dangerous thing in any society is for a religious or ethnic group to become a bloated majority because this will impose the risk of an elimination, oppression, or exclusion to other social, political or religious groups, that is, to slip into asserting the right to rule alone, impose its traditions, monopolize the sources of legislation, or exclude other groups from sharing the responsibility of preserving pluralism. Here it is correct to talk about a charter of living together between the various groups under one identity. Even if ballots reproduce majorities, the soundness of the steps and the firmness of the vision of such a majority must emanate from their conviction that the other is an essential part of any existential choice, otherwise this will result in gradual suicide. This approach is, politically speaking, not about distorted consensual democracy, but rather about an acknowledgment of democracy that takes into account the existence of opposition, differences and distinctions. The bulge of the majority is dangerous for majorities per se if exercised in a spirit of domination, exclusion, or intimidating subjugation.

2.2 The Slackness of the Liberals

It is easy to get carried away in considering that any failure to build an individual, community, national or even federative identity facilitated by geography, language and the economy of exchange of interests is due to the “Minoritism Phobia” alone, or the “Bloated Majority” alone, or both, for this is a major fallacy. Another fallacy would be seeking to generalize phobia at all levels, and to play on the strings of religious affiliations, Christians for example, to face an existential danger, especially at this stage. To redress these two fallacies structurally in thought and performance, one needs to acknowledge the slackness of the liberal intelligentsia of Christians, Muslims, Jewish, other religions, and even the latter’s failure to produce options for an open identity, or a revival of liberalism in any identity in which the specific religious intersects with the universal human identity. There is a need to reach out to the liberals in order to bridge differences and build a peaceful social cohesion respecting diversity. Specifically in the Middle East and the Arab world, it is urgent to reconsider the components of monotheistic religions in the sense of their positioning in the contexts of human fraternity, without prejudice to the accuracy and sensitivity of this term. The central question in all of the above can be summed up in the astonishing absence of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, other religions as well as the humanist liberals from the experience of building a peaceful identity, despite the complexities of its pluralistic structure.

The youth may have an answer, provided it acknowledges the necessity of awaking this liberal movement from its numbness, and then has the resolve to rebuild it as a structural society need. In this context, and in the forefront of forming policies that support the principles of sustainable development, it is necessary to reproduce the cultural identity bond between the people of this region.

The document “We Choose Abundant Life” states the following on this:

The cultural challenge faced by Christians in the Middle East, to which we need to respond together with our brothers and sisters from all faiths and intellectual backgrounds – the Muslims in particular – lies in reinventing Arabism as a cultural space and an inclusive cultural concept, away from a forced, ideological Arabization that contradicts the spirit of cultural openness. (Article 62)

2.3 The Fragility of Socio-Economic Justice

Two priorities have spurred the Arab Spring transformations since 2011 before these transformations went off track as a result of choices and interventions causing multiple complications. These priorities are first social and political freedom, i.e. democracy and human rights, in consideration of legal human identity. The second of these priorities is daily bread in the economic and developmental sense, namely the sovereign right to a decent life. Therefore, the fragile socio-economic justice inflicts disruption upon the united societal identities and pushes towards the polarization of extremism and instability. The document “We Choose Abundant Life” clearly specifies:

During the past ten years, societies in the Middle East have seen profound changes linked to the uprisings of the Arab Spring. These changes have generated theological, cultural, social and political challenges appealing to the conscience of our peoples and Churches and prompting us to reflect on their implications. **What we see today is a reshaping of this region; while the past, proving unable to respond to social and political challenges, led to an explosion, the new has yet to form its shape.** (Article 53)

Certainly, authoritarian regimes, tribal mentalities, sectarianism, and family feudalism have negatively affected our societies and their institutions. Regardless of its political success or failure, the Arab Spring challenged the institutions – especially religious ones – seen as building-blocks of society by introducing a new narrative, radically different from what was known during the last century. Note also a deep willingness, mainly among the youth, who were very much part of these uprisings, to hold to account the authoritarian structures, especially those patriarchal masculinized structures that controlled our communities and religious organizations for centuries and to a large extent still do so.

One of the most prominent components of this willingness is the striking female presence in the Arab Spring uprisings and their active contribution. The document later adds:

The tendency to discredit social structures and institutions by young people was accompanied by a noticeable increase in religious indifference and criticism of religious authority. That led in some cases to atheism, even though this atheism currently is not linked to a philosophical ideology that expresses itself politically, as was the case with Marxism in the last century until the fall of the Soviet Union (1989). The increase in these phenomena among some young people

in our region, without any direct political motivation, exposes the shallowness of the current religious discourse in general and the distrust of a large number of young people in the institution of religion as well as the way it responds to public affairs. These new trends, along with the uprisings, should not be met with disapproval and marginalization but should prompt a renewal of religious language and provoke a paradigm shift in how we see the linkage between religion and public affairs and the traditional patterns adopted for managing them. (Article 54)

In any case, reviewing the foregoing should lead to research not only in avoiding dangerous repercussions, but also in deeply examining the problematic construction and commitment to any socio-political identity based on the valuable contribution of religions, the basis of citizenship as a civilized model for its expression, and the framework of the civil state as an incubating context for equality. What about the crisis of identity and religions - values? What about citizenship as a model of an identity that is reconciled with itself and with those who are different from it? What about the civil state as an incubating context? Here, one must question the use of Christian endowments in a way that secures the steadfastness for Christians. Based on the foregoing and to rebuild a Christian presence guided towards sustainable development, it is necessary to define the concept of religions and human fraternity on the one hand, and the civic state and citizenship on the other hand.

3. Christians in the Middle East: Analysis of Contextual Key Challenges

3.1 Religion and Human Fraternity

Religions are human values with eschatological dimensions reflecting the foundations of revelation and inspiration of each individual, community, or society. When we speak of religions, we mean monotheistic religions and other nontheistic religions. However, even in religions with a human, mystical or natural absolute dimension, the preservation of human dignity, social peace, the generalization of justice and freedom and the promotion of a culture of human fraternity are maintained. This is the depth of religions, but some ideologies have offended religions, and have distorted the readings thereof, by tending to monopolize the truth, and excluding the other to the point of atonement, which is an attack on religions themselves in their name. Hence, it is necessary not only to purify

religious identity from the impurities of arrogance, the claim of possessing the truth, and the atonement of the other, but also from anyone tarnishing their purity and seeking goals that have nothing to do with their apostleship. In both approaches, it is crucial to benefit from the truth of religions as a value dimension to exploit the dimensions of dialogue for peace, pluralism for cultural richness, justice for equality and human dignity. Hence, religions become a valuable contributor to the identity of every human being. Even an atheist, becomes, in the religion of man, linked to the human fraternity. The document “We Choose Abundant Life” states the following:

The ministry of Christians in the Middle East is inspired by biblical principles, above all by the idea of human brotherhood/sisterhood, which is echoed in many passages in the Old and New Testaments. From the question of God to Cain: “The Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother” (Genesis 4:9), to Christ’s call to us to love the neighbour, especially the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned, and to make this a norm for our love of Christ (Matthew 25:31-46), **the meaning of our Christian presence and mission lies in building a culture of community and unconditional love among human beings. In this way, we become a sign and instrument of God’s communion with creation** and specified too: “In the Christian life this culture of love is rooted in our baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, who washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-11) and gave himself for the life of the world. Christians are therefore required to wash the feet of others and give themselves for their sake, in the image of their Master and Saviour, who is their example and their ideal. Christians receive through baptism the gift of the Holy Spirit, which bestows on them all the spirit of priesthood and prophecy and makes them responsible for the world through witness and service. Thus, **Christians in the Middle East, together with believers of other religions, especially Muslims, and with those of good will, whatever their belief and intellectual orientation, are invited to live as brothers and sisters and uphold human dignity and freedom.** (Articles 70, 71)

3.2 Identity and Citizenship

We are all human beings, we are all citizens, we are all partners in the responsibility to build a safe, just, and joyful world. The human being is a legal identity where citizenship should prevail. Citizenship does not mean religious, national or societal fanaticism. Rather, it means the abil-

ity to enrich civilization with specificities and comprehensiveness alike. Here, it must be emphasized that in any identity, there is no conflict between the specific community attachment and the public sphere. As Lebanese, for example, we care about the bliss and pain of occupied Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Jordan, as well as of all parts of the world. The philosophy of the Clash of Civilizations by Samuel Huntington, the End of History by Francis Fukuyama, and the Communicative Dynamism of Jürgen Habermas, only concern me insofar as they each contribute to opening the horizons of human advancement in terms of peace and not in terms of conflict. We do not care about the left because of its opposition to the right, nor the right because of its opposition to the left, but to the extent that the values of the right and the left correct the citizen's choices in the public sphere to preserve the common good. Liberalism does not concern us in opposition to socialism or vice versa, but rather the ability to draw inspiration from liberalism and socialism to build a socio-economic context for equal citizens. We do not care about limiting the sources of legislation as a comparison, except to the extent that this or that source is given precedence in good governance and State of Law to protect the citizen. Citizenship is the model for any just identity, otherwise we would be prisoners of fatal fanaticism. Here I personally disagree with the equation saying that we are built with killer identities, as identity is openness and peace, not closure and clash.

What we live in these days are anxious identities in what British historian Eric Hobsbawm called the "Age of Extremism". Citizenship is a legal identity found in any stable society. The document "We Choose Abundant Life" states the following:

Citizenship, both as a concept and as a value, spearheaded the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and, later on, in Iraq and Lebanon. Popular movements showed that the citizens' rights had been violated and infringed for decades, until this deviant situation turned into the norm, often based on arguments such as religion, confession, race, and region. Hence, the uprisings challenged the concepts of minority and majority in the name of a citizenship based on individual rights, and called for citizenship to be at the centre of political practice and a beacon for political and social reform ... (Article 21)

The Arab Spring uprisings carried a considerable potential for change, even though, in some countries, they were accused of not being able to develop a comprehensive nationwide project for modernization. Yet their potential may have been one of the main reasons that drove dominant

political forces, the usual beneficiaries of the *status quo*, to try to circumvent these popular movements, demonize them, and hold them responsible for the accompanying unrest, sometimes also seeking to enmesh them in traditional political conflict. However, these uprisings, despite the attempts to paralyze and neutralize them, were the starting point for new ways of looking at the relationship between citizenship and other elements of identity such as religion, confession, race, and colour, based on citizenship as an umbrella that acknowledges, embraces, and respects differences (cf. para. 12). In this framework, meaningful terms were evoked such as “unity in diversity” (Egypt) or “management of diversity” (Lebanon). These intellectual dynamics stirred up waters that had been stagnant for many years and challenged the tendency in our region to restrict the concept of citizenship to the benefit of narrow identities. (Article 23)

3.3 Palestine as an Existential Cause / Relations with Jews

The Palestinian Cause has been unresolved since 1948. In response to the terror attacks of Hamas in October 7, 2023, Israel has been committing the worst crimes against Palestine and its people since 1948, systematically undermining international resolutions and initiatives aimed at justice for the Palestinian people. Since that time, Palestine has been bleeding in front of the world. Thousands have been killed and wounded, with hundreds of thousands displaced, while places of worship, schools, hospitals, and even United Nations and its agencies, Red Cross and Red Crescent, have been targeted, in contradiction to international law and humanitarian law. The international scene is fraught with tension, with a rising demand for linking any peace with justice, coupled with pressure for ceasefire in Gaza, where the spark of war has spread to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen in a dangerously complex geopolitical situation. All of the above call for deep reflection on the consequences of war and the prospects for solutions thereafter. What are the scenarios for these solutions? What role do the relevant states and civil society play in framing these scenarios towards achieving justice and peace? What about the reference to international law and humanitarian law? What is expected from the United Nations, the Arab League, and the International Court of Justice? In the face of all forms of extremism, how can the militarization of religions be stopped ideologically, and how can religions be dedicated as active elements in building justice and peace? What are the risks of sustaining the conflict or remaining in the square of patchwork solutions? These are all pressing questions that must be addressed in pur-

suit of human dignity after decades of deadly violations, which will be illuminated by the proposed regional-international workshop with experts in the geopolitical dimensions of the conflict and the just peace awaiting for 76 years.

In 2010, the debate between the Holy See and Israel in the call that followed the high-ceilinged synod of Christians in the Middle East was not simple, as the Bishops of the Synod expressed that: “Israel cannot exploit the idea of the promised land in the Bible, nor the idea of the chosen people to justify settlements in Jerusalem or the occupation of the Lands”. This means that it is not possible to accept the invocation of religion as a basis for injustice, and that peace can only be made by justice. Time has come for the establishment of the State of Palestine, the return of refugees, the cessation of settlements, and the condemnation of the separation wall. The Holy See was victorious, and in a decisive stage, for Palestine. This is nothing new, except for those who insist on implicating the Christians of the East in defamation forums. Christians are spearheading the defense of Palestine, a cause of justice and truth, not a mount of exploitation and a bargaining chip, as some try to describe. Palestine is a Christian-Islamic-Jewish-human concern. There is no enlightened Jew attacking Zionist racism which is mainly an offense to Judaism itself. The problem lies in the efforts of some countries to reproduce the Eastern cause, portraying Christians as minorities and marketing the possibility of their protection. This serves the Judaism of Israel, and the document “We Choose Abundant Life” delved lengthily on the Palestinian issue, from the perspective of the relationship between Middle Eastern Christians and the Jews:

Christians are invited to develop a theological and intellectual approach that allows us to open a new page in relations with Jews, who have always been an integral part of the Middle Eastern tapestry and its pluralistic identity. Christians are invited to engage them in a serious dialogue based on the values of justice, peace, the dignity of creation and humanity, by taking **an opposite direction to the dialogue pursued by some Western Christians who are biased towards Zionism**, whether because of the Jewish Holocaust complex, or out of guilt feelings stemming from centuries of antisemitism, or even to please the Zionist lobby. Such dialogue would push for justice for the Palestinian people, calling to account the policy of occupation and invasive settlement, seeking to establish true peace, and refuting the concept of the religious state, which impedes the rise of the civil state. (Article 92)

3.4. Partnership with Muslims

Muslims are brothers in humanity, Arabism, and citizenship, and we built the first Arab renaissance with them. We will build the second Arab renaissance with them through our partnership in protecting the values of love and mercy on the basis of equal citizenship. The Azhar and Najaf are continuously called upon to stand as voices of reason against some Islamist extremist views and to preach qualitative development in their civilizational commitment to the document Human Fraternity. The Holy See, the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Orthodox Church, the Eastern Orthodox, Evangelical and the Protestant Churches are called upon to play a leading role in motivating Christians to continue this partnership, and to reject calls for isolation and exclusion.

In the dialogue with Muslims, the document “We Choose Abundant Life” indicated the following:

As for the dialogue with the Muslims, we should abandon doublespeak, dissembling courtesy, and an elitist attitude. This will lay conceptual and pragmatic foundations for the role that must be assumed by both religions in safeguarding freedom of conscience and building local, regional and global peace. This is of crucial importance in our region, which hosted the beginnings of the faith in one God and, throughout history, and despite complexities related to diversity, wove honourable patterns of brotherhood /sisterhood and collaboration. (Article 93)

4. Concluding Reflection: Horizon of Thinking

Christians in the Middle East, who are at the heart of the fabric of national identities, need to renew their theological discourse, reform their ecclesiastical institutional performance, and free their geo-political choices from illusion and isolation, and thus move forward in engaging with the public sphere for public and common good. In other terms, involvement in politics is built on integrated public policies on all political, legal, educational, economic, social, cultural, health and environmental levels, serving the philosophy of the Human Security. Here lies the key way forward to sustainable development that preserves human dignity, peace, and stability on the path towards social justice and equity.