

Henry BOULAD

I am not a religious figure (*Monseigneur*). I was born in Syria. I came to Egypt at the age of eight. I had a second nationality, Lebanese. I had an Italian grandmother, with a Greek Catholic background. I am Mediterranean. I always lived in Egypt, for most of my life. My studies took me to Lebanon, to Europe, to the United States. The title of my speech is “East-West, the same fight, the same destiny”. We are all in the same boat. If you sink, we sink. If we sink, you sink.

The world at the moment is completely horrified as to what is happening in the Middle East, and this leads to an interesting question: why has the West waited until a number of Europeans were beheaded on camera, to wake up to the situation? Why, all of a sudden now, and not when thousands of Christians, Yezidis and other minorities were suffering the same fate? Why did they not speak out with indignation when the daughters and wives of these victims were sold as slaves in the markets in Mosul, for just a few Euros? Why did they wait for hundreds of European Jihadists to start participating in these barbaric acts before they acted and reacted? All of a sudden, people are realising that there is a problem. Why? Because there are Westerners involved, and if they are not involved, well...

Let's look at the situation of the Christians in the East because that is the focus of our meeting. I would first of all like to welcome this initiative from the EPP and thank the AID to the Church in Need for putting together this meeting. Thank you very much.

As everybody knows, our region was entirely Christian up until the 7th century; Iraq, Iran, all the way to the Atlantic. In Northern Africa, there were 680 dioceses, it's not just churches, I am talking about dioceses here. In just a few years, the Arab invasion changed all of that. It was all swept aside. Christians were reduced to a few isolated communities in the Middle East, in Egypt, but Northern Africa was emptied of Christians.

When we talk about Islam, you need to look at the history. What is happening today in the Middle East is not something new; it simply comes out of Pandora's Box. We had the Byzantine Empire and the Sassanid Empire and they collapsed in just a few years. Who would have believed it?

Today, we are seeing similar problems in Europe. Who knows you won't collapse in just a few years? Oh, well that's not possible. Europe is a big force, it's united, but this can all disappear in such a way in just a few years if you are not vigilant, and I am here to tell you this today.

Mrs Khalid was talking about the Egyptian revolution and its symbolic meaning. Egypt is central, not at the centre of the world, but central to what is happening around it. What happens in Egypt has repercussions all around the world. Cairo is the centre for Islam. 30 million Egyptians called for Morsi to go. The Muslims, as a majority in Egypt, and a majority of young people who are also Muslims, wanted to see an end to this oppressive system, that we call political Islam.

Over these last few years, I have been Director of the District Cultural Centre in Alexandria. We have around 60% of Muslims and the rest are Christians. We are doing the same thing as the Upper Egypt Society in our cultural centre. We are looking to provide values, dialogue,

human rights... it is about culture, this is a cultural centre, a culture which is dying in Egypt or already dead.

I am saying this because I am concerned about Europe. I have an article here from a Muslim, from the [Gulf Ahmad Sharaf]. It says that one day we will miss Europe. One day, we will miss Europe because he feels that Europe is sinking. It's sinking because it refuses to see the real problems. It won't listen to those in the East who are speaking and who have something to say. These people who are not invited and I'm going to come back to this point later.

The Arab Christians are living as Dhimmis. That means a sort of second-class citizens. There are calmer periods and periods of oppression that alternate. How long will Christians in the Middle East be able to survive? The figures speak for themselves. In the 7th century: 100% Christians; 1914: 20% of Christians; 2014: 2% of Christians and this trend is continuing. We see the flow of refugees. [Our presence in Alexandria is already 2/3 gone. People are scared. The future is uncertain.

In 1994, a French researcher, Jean-Pierre Valogne, wrote a book called "The Life and Death of the Christians of the East". You understand that the wording is important: The life and death of the Christians of the East. What we are talking about is the extinction of Christians in this area in the future. We can try to be optimistic but I wonder what will remain of Christians in this region. This was the cradle of Christianity originally. The East and the West have the same destiny. This is the same fight, but it seems that the West doesn't want anything to do with Christianity: you are a Christian, you wear a cross. Yes, you can criticise the Pope, the Church, it is fine. But if you criticise Islam at all, you're an islamophobe, you are not allowed to say anything at all, you don't have the right to speak if you say these things.

Last year, I was invited by the Swiss government to Bern to talk to Swiss diplomats from all over the world on a topic, which was the freedom of opinion, the freedom of expression. I have the speech with me today. This speech went down very badly because diplomats don't like to hear the truth. Sorry to those of you who are diplomats here. Diplomacy is about what is politically correct.

The hegemonic project that we have seen in the Middle East is actually targeting the rest of the world as well. I have a text, and I made copies of that, on Islamists in English, French and German. So, please feel free to take a copy when you leave. It's quite a hard text. I speak the truth in this document, and the truth today does not seem to be acceptable, as it wasn't in Switzerland last year.

Switzerland is... a country of freedom, Europe a continent for freedom, but you can't speak the truth anymore. Trying to engage in dialogue is full of traps, the trap of political correctness and the new weapon that Islamists have in Europe. Well, the weapon for us is violence, but for you in Europe, it's being [brought to court for your book].

Europe has three facets: immigration, birth rate and conversion. We'll see Europe becoming Muslim in 20-30-40 years. What is going to happen next? I don't want to see Sharia. Sharia is against human rights, against the Charter of Human Rights from 1948. Don't say that everybody has their own way of seeing things. When we are in a pluralistic world, multi-

ethnic, multi-religious, you do not have the right to impose your view of things. That is an international charter; there are rights, which everybody should have. There are freedoms that everybody should have. There is equality. Sharia is discriminatory. There are Muslims and non-Muslims. There are men and there are women. This is nothing new, but who dares to say this anymore?

I say no to this system. We have had this for centuries in the Middle East. My family was in Damascus in 1401, and when Tamerlan conquered Damascus, the leaders of my family, the Boulad family, were taken to Samarkand in Mongolia. In 1860, my grandfather Selim, my father's father, narrowly escaped a massacre of 20,000 Christians in Damascus.

What is happening with Daesh or the IS, all these current movements, is nothing new. People are acting surprised all of a sudden: oh, this exists, because it has affected you! Well, it has always existed.

There are two types of verses in the Quran: the verses written in Medina and those verses written in Mecca. The verses written in Mecca speak of tolerance, they are mystical; spiritual. I have read the Quran in Arabic from the first to the last page. I have added different colours, I have highlighted the text. I noted the most beautiful verses of the Quran because I want to understand the positive side of others. And then, there are also the verses from Medina.

In 622, when Mahomed left Mecca, there was a division in Islam, and the spiritual leader became more of a war leader. Now, we have these two types of verses, which co-exist and it was difficult for the Muslims to know which ones to choose. During the 9th or 10th century, there were a lot of disputes around this, with the current of the Mantazilites on one side, and the rationalists, the philosophers, the liberals on the other. Ahmad Ibn Hanbal¹ is the father of fundamentalism in Islam (9th century, 830).

The Caliph Mamun² opened his doors to the rationalists, the philosophers, asking them to speak, to express themselves, to reform Islam, and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal was thrown into prison. The second successor of Mamun freed Ibn Hanbal from prison, who was acclaimed by the crowd, and that is the beginning of the fundamental interpretation of the Quran. Ibn Hanbal, 9th century.

Then there was Ibn Taymiyyah, and his successor Ibn Saud who founded a society based on Sharia in Saudia Arabia in the 18th century and then his successor Hassan al Banna in the 20th century (1928). All these currents we see now are not new. You can see how this is reflected today, but it's not new. These roots go back a long way. It is very ancient.

In the 9th-10th century, because there were these two types of verses that contradicted each other, the Muslims at the time went for the Medina verses as opposed to the Mecca verses. These more radical Medina verses have taken priority over the Mecca verses, which are more spiritual and more open. From that moment, Islam had chosen its path and it is stuck in a trap now, it is forced into this position by the decision that was taken. This decision cannot be

¹ http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Ibn_Hanbal

² <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/361008/al-Mamun>

abrogated since the door of *ijtihad*³ was closed at that time, in the 10th century. The door of *ijtihad* is the right to think for yourself. It's over. You can't think for yourself anymore. The people, ten centuries ago, thought for you already. So the majority of Muslims (85% of them), who are moderates, face this wall, because radicals talk about the most ancient, pure tradition, that of Sunni Muslims, that has the majority and that sets the pace.

I don't know who was commenting earlier, Dina (Raouf Khalil) perhaps. She was talking about the hate speech against Christians. A few months ago, on Egyptian television, a Muslim had a textbook which he had highlighted in yellow some parts, saying: "look, what they are teaching 16-year old students: how to stone a woman, how to cut off hands and feet."

Today the textbooks are filled with this hate speech. What you hear in Mosques, we have been hearing this for years and years. We know what they are talking about, and suddenly we are surprised there is all this fanaticism. I am rebelling against this and as you can see, I have a lot of capacity to rebel, and when I do, I'm called a racist or an islamophobe. That's what is happening in Europe. You don't have the right to tell the truth anymore. Jesus told us that the truth would set you free. If we don't have a dialogue based on truth, it's a false dialogue. You need to have the courage to speak out and others need to accept to listen to what you are saying.

I heard what the Rabbi had to say. I think it was the first line in his speech that was calling for dialogue, tolerance and openness, which I would agree with, and the second part of this speech was about being silent in the face of evil. What do we do in the face of fanatics? When we try to stand up to them, we are called islamophobes, we're called racists. I am happy to have a dialogue, but it must be a real dialogue. What we are having in the Western world and in the Catholic Church at the moment is not a real dialogue. It's based on compromise, on things that aren't properly said, and this leads to a lot of misunderstandings. We should put all our cards on the table. We need to discuss these thorny issues.

I have put some texts on the table of the 6 different forms of Islam: 1) the liberal, open, moderate Islam going through mystic Islam, which is wonderful; 2) Sufism, that's even more beautiful than Christian mysticism; and then you have 3) popular Islam, 4) official Islam, the institutions, the Muftis, the Imams, and then you have 5) political Islam and then 6) radical Islam.

I know Islam. I know that there is variety in Islam but who is in charge at the moment? It's the radicals, the Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood. It is not the body that's important, it's the head. It might be a small head, but the head is in charge and you can see when you look through history, it's the minorities rather than the majorities that are leading. The majorities will follow.

We need to be very clear, I think, and I am just going to conclude, because I don't want to go over my allotted time.

You'll have seen that throughout my speech, I have mixed together the East and the West all the time, because I am convinced that this is the same fight that we have. Are we fighting for

³ <http://www.islamicvoice.com/june.98/islamic.htm>

Christianity, for Islam? We are fighting for what is right, we are fighting for justice, for truth, for liberty, for democracy, for civilisation. This is a fight for human rights, as defined by the Universal Charter of 1948. These are values which are non-negotiable.

Humanity is humanity, whether you are Chinese, Indian, Muslim, Jewish or Christian. A person is a person, and these rights as they were defined are non-negotiable. Sharia is in clear contradiction with these rights.

We are fighting for humanity itself. That is what is at stake here. I am not defending Christianity or the Church. I am not trying to attack Islam. I am trying to fight for humanity itself here, above all the divisions we have between East and West, between Islam and Christianity, left and right. I don't believe in these categories of left and right. It's a joke. What we're talking about is saving humanity, its values, its freedom, its dignity. I will end with the message that I put in a Swiss journal some years ago, "Europe: do not lose your soul, your soul depends on the fate of the Christians in the East." Thank you.