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## **LEBANESE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MARONITE CHURCH THROUGH THE PURIFICATION OF MEMORY**

### ***Introduction***

Lebanon is a country of 10,452 km<sup>2</sup> and has 18 religious confessions officially recognized by the Constitution. Some of these religious groups came to Lebanon searching in its mountainous landscape for a safe and peaceful refuge away from persecutions. In other words, it was the arduous landscape that has attracted all those who sought to freely live their political and religious beliefs. They preferred the harsh life in the mountains, over the comfort of city life, just to preserve and defend their religious beliefs and their cherished freedom. Over the years, and due to the religious diversity that developed in this country, Lebanon has become a "mosaic of religions": But any mosaic is fragile by definition.

The Lebanese war (1975-1990) was a multifaceted war whose antecedents trace back to the conflicts and political compromises reached after the end of Lebanon's administration by the Ottoman Empire. More than 150 000 civilians were killed and injured in those fifteen years of war<sup>2</sup>. Different elements were combined in that war: Social Crisis, regional conflicts in the Middle East, Economic tensions<sup>3</sup> etc.; those elements induced Lebanon into a Civil war. The Lebanese Civil war was interrupted by the involvement of Syrian army in the Lebanese crisis and by the invasion of Israeli Army. In

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<sup>2</sup> Based on Daily Star, April 14, 2008, the number of person killed in the Lebanese War is 250 000.

<sup>3</sup> See Georges Corm, *Liban : les guerres de l'Europe et de l'Orient 1840-1992*.

addition to the Lebanese militias more than three foreign armies occupied Lebanon: Syrian and Israeli armies, the militias of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

They have deepened the cracks within the Lebanese society.

The period of post-war brought to the open all sensitive subjects that have marked the history of Lebanon: how to avoid falling into such a crisis? Can the Lebanese Church replace the confessional belonging by the national belonging? Can the Maronite Patriarchate bring about the purification of the memory in a multi confessional country? In this paper we will consider the important challenges that must precede any serious and definitive solution to the crisis in Lebanon and how could the Lebanese Church contribute in the development of a national identity and in the building of a new state free from any kind of domination. While the intention is not to justify in this paper what happened in those 34 years since the beginning of the Lebanese war but to contribute in searching for a sustainable peace.

## ***I- The Meaning Of The Purification Of Memory In The Lebanese Context***

### ***1.1 Definition Of A Purification Of Memory In The Lebanese Context***

The purification of memory<sup>4</sup> is a dynamic process through which a person or a group identifies the errors that have been committed in the past; this detecting of errors should determine the responsibilities of every one and should lead to a firm decision to not to repeat such errors in the future.

The purification of memory in the Lebanese context aims at liberating the personal and collective conscience from all forms of resentment and violence caused by wars and conflicts- which at occasions, were partial legacy of the past- through a renewed historical and theological evaluation of such events. "This should lead – if done correctly – to a corresponding recognition of guilt and contribute to the path of reconciliation. Such a process can have a significant effect on the present, precisely because the consequences of past still make themselves felt and can persist as tensions in the present. The purification of memory is thus 'an act of courage and humility in recognizing the wrongs done...'<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> This term is used by the Pope in his "Day of Pardon" presentation in St. Peter's Basilica on March 12, 2000: 'purification of memory'. It first appeared in the Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (*Incarnationis mysterium*), dated November 29, 1998. The same term is purposefully employed again in the study *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, December, 1999.

## **1.2 The Purification Of Memory As A Solid Basis To Build The Lebanese Society**

The purification of memory does not aim to judge or condemn any one, but to learn from the errors of the past and to do everything possible not to repeat such acts in the future. And this should lead to a new pact of solidarity and coexistence in the Lebanese society. The purification of memory should minimize the chances of new conflicts. Because "one cannot remain a prisoner of the past: individuals and peoples need a sort of 'healing of memories'"<sup>6</sup>. This will require especially a correct re-reading of each other's history (at the level of education, culture ...), resisting all hasty and partisan judgments, in order to acquire a better knowledge and therefore acceptance of others.

Through this purification of memory each one, individuals and leaders alike, would recognize his part of responsibility in what happened, and would be invited to forgive others in their part of responsibility. Forgiveness couldn't be reached without identifying the errors and the limits of everyone. Only afterward things could move forward on solid basis, and the purification of memory should lead to readjusting, if needed, the social contract which should be based on re-adopting the communal living.

## **1.3 The Necessity Of The Purification Of Memory As A Way For Building The Culture Of Peace That Should Counter Act The Culture Of Fear**

The Lebanese society is equipped to engage the local religious community in an honest encounter and a genuine dialogue in order to promote greater understanding, mutual respect, and cooperative action aiming at serving members of different communities. Such project represents an invitation to deliver a message countering the culture of fear that is finding its way today between the different religious groups. Today we are witnessing a higher level of awareness and a more active role played by religious leaders aiming at easing tensions among the different communities, promoting a sustainable peace as a common value to all religious cultures, and promoting communal living as the prime mission of Lebanon.

The resurgence of a global "culture of war" and clash of civilizations that we are witnessing today, in the Middle East and in so many countries of the world, underline the importance and the necessity of a culture of peace. The millenary inter-religious coexistence in the Lebanese society, should serve as a strong message, addressed not only to the Middle East, but to the whole world, to abdicate the 'culture of war' and to uphold a 'culture of peace'. The recent Lebanese civil war made it clear to all Lebanese that war, any war, would never offer an equitable nor a fair solution to the problems it

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Message for World Day of Peace 1997*, n. 3.

was confronting. History teaches us that war has rarely –if ever- provided a definitive or stable solution to any problems

## ***II- The Purification Of Memory For The Foundation Of A National Reconciliation***

### ***2.1 The Role Of The Church***

The fathers of the Special Assembly of the Synod of the Catholic Church in Lebanon wrote *“The Church in Lebanon (...) was, like the other components of the country, injured in its flesh. The Church saw her sons killing each others”*. This call is also confirmed by Pope John Paul II when he wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation for Lebanon: *“The Catholic Church in Lebanon has suffered from the division of its sons, particularly during the recent years of war. It has even been torn from the inside”*<sup>8</sup>. The purification of memory would only become possible if the various Lebanese groups sincerely and actively would opt for a “culture of peace”, so that they would no longer resort to arms and tensions in order to solve their problems. The purification of memory concerns the life of the Church first. It is still legitimate however to *“hope that political leaders and people, especially those involved in tragic conflicts, fuelled by hatred and the memory of often ancient wounds, will be guided by the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation exemplified by the Church and will make every effort to resolve their differences through open and honest dialogue”*<sup>9</sup>.

The Maronite Church<sup>10</sup> along with the Church all over the world<sup>11</sup> have an active role to play, notably through their mission which is based on the messages of forgiveness and reconciliation, but even more through their actions in real life. It is the task of world governments and / or regional organizations to put in place solid structures *“capable of withstanding the uncertainties of politics, thus guaranteeing to everyone freedom and security in every circumstance”*<sup>12</sup>. All forms of mediation therefore should be encouraged and existing structures must be strengthened. In particular,

<sup>7</sup> Assemblée spéciale pour le Liban du Synode des évêques, *Lineamenta*, №. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Paul II, *Une espérance nouvelle pour le Liban*, 1997, § 10.

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, Address to the participants in the International Symposium on the Inquisition [31 October 1998], 5: *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 11 November 1998, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. Synode of Lebanon, *Instrumentum laboris*, №. 32-34. Ref. John-Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Une espérance nouvelle pour le Liban*, 1997, § 98 etc.

<sup>11</sup> Ref. in particular the Lenten Message of the Catholic Bishops of Rwanda 1992; their Pastoral Letters for Advent 1993 and Lent 1993; their Christmas and New Year Messages to Christians in 1994 and 1995; documents published in the Holy See's Report to CERD, CERD/C/338/Add. 11 [26 May 2000], pp. 79-86.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Message for World Day of Peace 1997*, n. 4.

the United Nations, which has done much in the area of maintaining and restoring peace should benefit from means better adapted to the new missions entrusted to it. Yet structures and processes are not be enough to build an everlasting peace, only the path of forgiveness will make this possible. *“Vatican II and repeated statements by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, as well as numerous declarations from Vatican officials, have called on Catholics to take up the double challenge of critically re-reading the history of Catholicism in regard to the sins and crimes Catholics have committed against others and also of entering into constructive relationships with others and also of entering traditions today”*<sup>13</sup>.

The Church is aware of the difficulty, of the “folly” of this forgiveness, but does not see it as either a sign of weakness nor cowardliness. Quite the contrary, the Church proclaims the way of pardon because of her unshakeable confidence in the infinite forgiveness of God as it is written in the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace<sup>14</sup>.

The Lebanese crisis challenged the Church inviting her to move from a passive witness to an active participant in the peaceful struggle for the liberation of the Lebanese society and help the country to complete its incorrect reading of history. The Church could encourage, for example, information campaigns, and open its archives to assist in the search for truth, or perhaps, support the campaigns that pursue this objective. The statement of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his active yet peaceful opposition to the long established apartheid policy in South Africa, could serve as a genuine Christian model to follow anywhere there is a consideration for an action to be taken against any injustice.

## **2.2 The Role of the State**

It is not the official task of the Church to propose a technical solution to problems and to guarantee justice. It is rather the mission of the Government to facilitate this operation because from a legal point of view all persons (individual or community) have the right to equitable reparation of a personal injury- be it material or moral. The duty of equitable reparation must be fulfilled in an appropriate way. Reparation should erase all the scars of the illicit action and restore things to their original status. When such a restoration is not possible, reparation, material or moral, should be made through compensation<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Leo D. Lefebure, *Catholic Theological Education in a Religiously Pluralistic Age*, *Teaching Theology and Religion*, ISSN, 1368-4868, 2006, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 88.

<sup>14</sup> The Church and Racism, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2001, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 September 2001.

<sup>15</sup> See Message of the Twelfth Plenary Assembly of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar [SECAM], dated 7 October 2000.

To promote national reconciliation, the Government can establish a national commission composed of a mosaic team of experts. Unfortunately by granting general amnesty to various officials involved in the wars in Lebanon, the Lebanese state could no longer guarantee a solid foundation for a peaceful future of the Lebanese nation. The pact on the behalf of former militia leaders through which the government provided them with immunity –thus saving them from prosecution- still hangs over public life, and does not help in erasing the collective horrible memories of the massacres committed in Lebanon in 1840 and 1860, it actually revives them. For example, we propose that former criminals be involved in revealing the truth, and help in rewriting the nation's history before being forgiven. Immunity, if ever offered, should be deserved and not granted freely. This would be part of the price in the building of a new democracy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa had the duty of crisscrossing the country collecting stories of violence and suffering committed by the ruling elite of the Apartheid. Once this was done, the TRC started analyzing the different reason that lead to such crimes. We are calling for such a commission whose mission would be to break the secrets of the past and to provide all Lebanese with a comprehensive memory by merging their parallel stories. Besides the building of a collective memory, which has failed so far in Lebanon, this commission would provide for the Lebanese, and for the first time, an equitable historic platform which could serve as a solid foundation of the nation of Lebanon after the wars.

As in South Africa, this commission would have the duty and the authority to open, so to speak, the country's archives, and its first task would be to search there for the genes of the Lebanese conflict with the aim of establishing a sustainable civil peace. To turn the page of history, it is therefore essential that, after years of forced silence, the country starts to speak openly and critically about the violence and the errors committed by all the leaders included those who where in charge of the religious committees. It would be a kind of collective psychotherapy, a historic surgery which would bring an overdue healing to a whole nation. It would be a form of "restorative justice" which aims at rebuilding rather than destroying and at helping the country to mourn the spirit of vengeance that has stained it for centuries. *"Seeking the truth to heal the country,"* says Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and he added *"this is not a court, this is not a trial. We do not enter a verdict of guilt or innocence"*.

In the aftermath of the war, the Civil Society would become more aware that religious tensions could be fatal to the existence of Lebanon and all of its citizens. Everyone would have so much to lose but nothing to win. Therefore in the past few years and following some of the tensions that started reappearing in Lebanon, a large

number of the Lebanese public started a very active role by launching awareness campaigns<sup>16</sup>.

These social organizations are acting against any kind of discrimination and intolerance by creating awareness, and by building bridges connecting the different parts of the society. One of the challenges facing the Lebanese of today is to have the courage to declare their first allegiance to the State and not to their religious belonging

And now that the present system, which is based on Confessionalism and feudalism and "blindly-follow-the-leader"ism (*al taba3ia*) had failed to guarantee stability to the country, a chance should be given to secularity to offer the possibility of generating a coherent sense of national belonging which could lead to developing a new system where the Rule of Law could offer to all citizens human dignity and equal chances, and instill in them a genuine religious faith...

## **Conclusion**

The "*purification of memory is an act of courage and humility*,"<sup>17</sup> But each one has the duty to remember and to learn from the errors of the past. The purification of memory should mark the beginning of a new era in the Lebanese post-war period. The various partners involved in building the country, helped by exceptional means established in the country and the civil society should live this time of rereading in order to irreversibly turn all the pages of fratricidal hatred. But this will require that all the active partners in Lebanese society to overcome several obstacles.

We recognize how hard it can be to discover the truth and the take actions leading to change society. The same event can have different explanations from one community to another which may mislead the whole community. In such a climate, that of the search for truth, the purification of memory is becoming a more risky adventure. Let us not forget, that citizens may become victim of media manipulation.

On the one hand, the practiced religions in Lebanon are not the same, but should not forget that religion and being religious is a very personal and intimate matter. A

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<sup>16</sup> Such as "**ouaa**"= **Beware and be aware**, Organized by a large number of civil group, **Kafa= enough**, mobilizing the population: schools, mothers of war victims, war handicapped, all sectors of the population alerting against the risk of a new civil war. **OS amam** (=forward) is one of the civil society organization working on fighting sectarianism by creating a massive civil awareness campaign by using media (stop sectarianism before it stop us). And finally we can nominate a newest NGO who prepared recently (April 2008) an awareness campaign for the 34 anniversary of the Lebanese civil war (1975-2008). The subject of this campaign: isn't 15 years heading in the toilettes enough? And they exposed in the Down Town of Beirut more than 500 toilettes just to choke all the visitors.

<sup>17</sup> The International Theological Commission, Memory and Reconciliation.

person, any person, should be given the freedom to believe whatever he so chooses, and should respect that same freedom in the other... It is in this mutual respect (and not only tolerance) that a nation can have a healthy society. On the other hand, religions have much in common and should mobilize their efforts for the cause of national interest and moral values (human rights, dignity, better society...). Together they can contribute to the purification of memory in order to prepare for a better future free from violence and avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Without losing its distinctive religious identity and its distinguished traditions, could Lebanon have (or be allowed to have) a democratic and civilized society without falling again in the errors of the past? Could Lebanon reach a sustainable peace without a purification of memory? Could the Civil Society groups start gaining power and mobilize the population or at least the young generations to create a national sense of identity instead of the current confessionalism?

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### **Abstract**

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#### **LEBANESE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MARONITE CHURCH THROUGH THE PURIFICATION OF MEMORY**

The post-war period in Lebanon brought to the open all sensitive subjects that have marked the history of Lebanon: how to avoid falling into such a crisis? How not repeating such war? How can the Lebanese society eradicate the reasons that may lead to any other war? The Lebanese crisis had challenged the Church inviting her to move from being a passive witness to an active participant in the peaceful struggle for the liberation of the Lebanese society and help the country to complete its incorrect reading of history. Can the Maronite Patriarchate have a positive role in this regard? Can the Maronite Patriarchate bring about the purification of the memory in a multi-confessional country? In this paper, and after defining the meaning of the purification of memory in the Lebanese context, we will consider the important challenges that must precede any serious and definitive solution to the crisis in Lebanon and how can the Lebanese Church contribute in the development of a national identity and in the building of a new state free from any kind of domination. The purpose of this paper is not to justify what has happened in the past 34 years, i.e. since the beginning of the Lebanese war, but to contribute in searching for a sustainable peace.

**Key words:** Lebanese national reconciliation, Lebanese purification of memory, Maronite Patriarchate, Lebanon, Culture of peace, Purification of memory, Confessionnalism.

**Резиме**

**Зијад Фахед**

**ЛИБАНСКО НАЦИОНАЛНО ПОМИРЕЊЕ И ДОПИНОС МАРОНИТСКЕ  
ЦРКВЕ КРОЗ ПРОЦЕС ОЧИШЋЕЊА ОД УСПОМЕНА**

Период после грађанског рата у Либану довео је до покретања свих осетљивих питања која су обележавала историју Либана – односно како се могло избећи западање у такву кризу? Како избећи да се такав рат не понови? На који начин би либанско друштво могло да отклони разлоге који би могли да изазову неки други рат? Либанска криза је представљала изазов и за цркву, јер ју је приморала да се покрене са позиције пасивног посматрача. То јест, да постане активни учесник мирољубиве борбе за ослобођење либанског друштва, као и да помогне земљи да оконча своје погрешно читање историје. Да ли Маронитска патријаршија може да одигра позитивну улогу у том смислу? Да ли Маронитска патријаршија може да утиче на ослобађање од успомена у тој мултиконфесионалној земљи? У овом чланку, после одређивања значења појма очишћење од успомена у либанском контексту, бавимо се питањима чије разматрање мора да претходи било којем озбиљнијем и коначном решавању кризе у Либану, посебно питањем како либанска црква може да допринесе развијању националног идентитета и изградњи нове државе ослобођене од било каквог облика доминације. Циљ чланка није да се оправдавају или објасне збивања у Либану у претходне 34 године, тј. од избијања грађанског рата у Либану, већ он представља допринос у потрази за миром који се може одржати.

**Кључне речи:** либанско национално помирење, либанско очишћење од успомена, Маронитска патријаршија, култура мира, очишћење од успомена, конфесионализам.