15/03/2024

Statement of the Holy Synod of Antioch



The Holy Antiochian Synod, presided by His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X (Yazigi), held its eighteenth extraordinary session in Balamand from March 13 to March 14, 2024, in the presence of Their Eminences:

Elias (Archdiocese of Beirut and dependencies); Elias (Archdiocese of Tyre, Sidon and dependencies); Saba (Archdiocese of New York and All North America); Silouan (Archdiocese of Byblos, Botrys and dependencies); Basilios (Archdiocese of Akkar and dependencies); Ephrem (Archdiocese of Tripoli, Koura and dependencies); Ignatius (Archdiocese of France, Western and Southern Europe); Isaac (Archdiocese of Germany and Central Europe); Ghattas (Archdiocese of Baghdad, Kuwait and dependencies); Antonios (Archdiocese of Zahleh, Baalbek and dependencies); Nicolas (Archdiocese of Hama and dependencies); Basilios (Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines); Athanasius (Archdiocese of Lattakia and dependencies); Ephrem (Archdiocese of Aleppo, Alexandretta, and dependencies); Nifon Saikali (Metropolitan of Philippopolis and Representative of the Patriarch of Antioch to the Patriarch of Moscow); Gregorios (Archdiocese of Homs and dependencies); Antonios (Archdiocese of Bosra Hauran and Jabal Al-

Arab). Also present was His Grace Bishop Romanos El-Hannat, Patriarchal Vicar and Secretary of the Holy Synod.

The Metropolitans who apologized for being unable to attend are as follows: Damaskinos (Archdiocese of São Paulo and All Brazil); Silouan (Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland); Ignatius (Archdiocese of Mexico, Venezuela, Central America and the Caribbean Islands); and Jacques (Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and All Argentina). Despite his physical absence caused by his kidnapping, Metropolitan Boulos Yazigi is always present in the prayers and invocations of the Synod Fathers.

At the dawn of Great Lent, the Synod Fathers offer their sincere prayers for the faithful of the Church of Antioch, asking the Lord that this period may be a time of intimacy with God, a consolation to hearts, and a victory in adversity.

The Fathers draw attention once again to the case of the Archbishops of Aleppo, Boulos Yazigi and Youhanna Ibrahim, who have been kidnapped since April 2013. They affirm that the case of the kidnapped bishops embodies a stab of deceit driven into the heart of justice. This justice has been crucified by interests, neglect, insensibleness, and exploitation of the fate of Eastern Christians and minorities. This East is tormented by afflictions but seeks with all its religious spectrum the mercy of God.

The Fathers lift up their prayers for the peace of the whole world and for the people of Gaza, who are suffering from the scourge of war and the injustice of decision-makers in the international community that seems to have lost its humanity. In addition, the Fathers offer their prayers for Syria and Lebanon. They appeal to the whole world to stop the killing machine in Gaza, lift the blockade, and bring about peace. They also plead all to work for preventing this war’s impact on the region, and especially on Lebanon. The Fathers extend their best wishes to the Muslim community at the beginning of this blessed holy month of mercy and charity, invoking the mercies of the Father of Lights upon them. The Synod Fathers call their faithful children during this blessed period to intensify their prayers for the whole Orthodox Church and Her unity, and for the confessing Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This Church’s faithful are suffering from the cruel brunt of war, organized violence, and danger of extinction through unjust laws that aim at closing their parishes and transferring their churches’ ownership to other religious groups.

The Holy Synod was informed of the results of the Synodal Committee formed by the Patriarch regarding the events surrounding the resignation of Metropolitan Joseph Zehlaoui, formerly Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of North America.

To the dismay of the Synod Fathers, following his retirement, retired Metropolitan Joseph Zehlaoui wrongfully claimed rights over Archdiocesan property; through his attorneys, he demanded from the Archdiocese a large sum of money and threatened legal action and public conflict with the Church, reflecting through his

demands an improper attitude as a bishop with regard to monetary matters; and he ultimately filed a lawsuit against the Archdiocese in U.S. civil court. These actions contravene Holy Scripture and the Holy Canons. Therefore, the Holy Synod found retired Metropolitan Joseph Zehlaoui guilty of canonical violations related to:

– Improper actions as clergyman (retired Metropolitan) with respect to church property and monetary matters, and

– Initiating a legal proceeding against the Church in a civil court.

Consequently, the Holy Synod defrocked the retired Metropolitan Joseph Zehlaoui from the holy episcopacy and returned him to the rank of layman. He is no longer entitled to the privileges and benefits associated with a bishop of the Orthodox Church. The Synod prays that he will spend the remainder of his life in peace and repentance.

The Synod also directs the Archdiocese of North America to take the necessary measures to preserve all the rights, interests, and property of the Archdiocese.

The Fathers deliberated on the request of Archimandrite Dimitri Mansour, elected in the last Synodal session as a bishop, to be exempted from accepting the episcopal rank, for personal reasons. He expressed this in writing through a letter sent to the Patriarch. The Fathers decided to accept his request.

The Holy Synod Fathers turn to their children in the Archdiocese of New York and All North America, embracing them in a paternal spirit and praying for their steadfastness. They address them with the words of Christ: “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33), and with the words of the Apostle Paul: “All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). The Synod Fathers are proud of you, of your faith and your love for the Church. They are at your side in everything that leads to the good, prosperity, and growth of your Archdiocese.

The Fathers send blessings and prayers to their children wherever they are present. They join the faithful in supplicating the Lord God to embrace His world with the spirit of His sweet peace, and to give comfort to the hearts of the bereaved and suffering people, for every blessing, comfort and light comes down from God’s bosom.

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