The death of His Holiness Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim

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Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim

Bose, Wednesday 5 December 2012

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Another pneumatophore, whose wise paternity, sincere friendship, and great passion for Christian unity and for dialogue among men we had experienced and appreciated more than on one occasion, this morning returned to the Father's house, full of years, but also shattered by the enormous sufferings that the people of his Syria continue to suffer.

His Holiness Ignatius IV, Greek-Orthodox patriarch of Antioch and all the East, to whom all Churches are in debt for is teaching and his ecumenical courage, granted us the gift of his visit to Bose in 2001. We already knew the depth of his Christian thought, contained in his writings, and it is for this that we had invited him to visit us. That meeting, however, revealed to us also his profound humanity, sincere and affectionate, and his passion for dialogue.

From this was born a friendship that grew with the years, thanks to constant contacts and reciprocal visits. Enzo and other brothers have been his guests in the patriarchal residence of Damascus and at the Theological Faculty of Balamand, and the Patriarch continued to send us signs of his affection, in particular on the occasion of our ecumenical conferences, at which his messages and also various members of his Church have always enriched our encounter with the "Antiochene" church tradition of which the Patriarch was and remains one of the major heirs and inspirers.

A man capable of profound friendships, but at the same time discreet, Patriarch Ignatius gave in to our insistence and agreed to answer our questions about his long and rich experience of a Christian in dialogue and of a patriarch of a Church always expert in diversity. The fruit of those conversations, realized by some of our brothers and sisters, became a book-interview (Ignazio IV, *Un amore senza finzioni*, Qiqajon 2006), a real look at his life and his passion for God and for men.

Patriarch Ignatius was born on 4 April 1920 in Meharde, a Christian village in northern Syria, nor far from Hama. He studied in Beirut, in the Greek-Orthodox seminary and at the Antiochene University. In 1946 he moved to Paris to continue his theological studies at the St Sergius Institute and from there went to England. After his return to Lebanon he was tireless in re-infusing vigor into a Church that risked turning in upon itself. He knew how to respond to the expectations of the new generations and was one of the promoters of the Movement of Orthodox Youth. After he was ordained bishop, to the astonishment of all he asked to be sent to Balamand, a magnificent monastery of Cistercian origins, but by then totally abandoned. Patriarch Ignatius had a dream: to see the ancient school of Antioch arise again there. Whoever visits that enchanting place sees for himself how the dream has come true beyond all expectations. In 1966 he was called to the see of Lattaqiya, where he remained until 1979, the year of his election to the patriarchate. It was as metropolitan of Lattaqiya that in 1968 he gave one of his most memorable addresses, on the occasion of the General assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala.

It is impossible to summarize in a few lines what was dear to the heart of a man like Patriarch Ignatius, who lived a long and intense life, but there is one word that came often to his lips and that he seemed to pronounce with a certain satisfaction, almost tasting it. This word was "the other"… His passion for this "other" in all its expressions and for an other who remains such and as "other" is loved is perhaps the greatest inheritance that he leaves as a gift, as a footprint that is to be followed.

The prior and the community in this hour are closer than ever to the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch with fraternal love and faithful prayer and are certain of his efficacious intercession in heaven!

Text of the appeal addressed by His Holiness Ignatius IV, patriarch of Antioch, to all the sides in conflict in Syria, within and outside its border (25 July 2012):

Appeal that all hostile actions cease, whatever their provenance

We are addressing an invitation to all sides involved in the conflict, in this Syria torn by war and outside of her, that all hostile actions cease, of whatever provenance. An incalculable number of Muslim and Christian Arabs, men, women, and children, fall victims of the bombs every day. The hospitals are filled with the wounded, and human moans have become permanent, uninterrupted. We Arabs in Syria, independently of our religion, have the right to live in peace in our country. In these fifteen months we have lost an incalculable number of persons; many are those who have emigrated, leaving their homeland and seeking refuge in other countries. Under the ruins of the fighting our Christians have lost their villages, their towns, their properties, their holy churches, and their families. We invite all Syrians, in the name of the one and true God, to find an accord to live together in our blessed Syria. We hope that international organizations may understand the particular character of our country and may guarantee us peace, stability, ad reconciliation.

Ignatius IV of Antioch, Primate of the Greek-Orthodox Church of Antioch and all the East

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Spirit of peace

Eastern Christians are called upon to operate actively so that peace may be established in their regions. They are children of evangelical humility and love, their Church calls upon them to be faithful to this particular vocation of theirs. For this reason the Church rejects the violence exercised generally in the Arab world, which leads to massacres, the displacement and exodus of populations, destruction, multiple disorders, and the kidnapping of persons. History has proved that violence, whatever its provenance, is not a way that resolves problems, but, on the contrary, contributes to greater tension in situations of division among the children of the same homeland and determines an increase of conflicts and wars.

(From the communiqué of the Holy Synod of the Greek-Orthodox Church of Antioch, Balamand, 2–4 October 2012)

Prayer to the Holy Spirit of Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch and all the East

Without Him God is distant,
Christ remains in the past,
the Gospel is a dead letter,
the Church is simply an organization,
authority is domination,
mission is propaganda,
worship is evocative,
and Christian action is a slave morality.

But in Him the cosmos rises and sighs
with the pangs of birth,
the risen Christ is present,
the Gospel is the power of life,
the Church is a Trinitarian community,
authority is a liberating service,
mission is Pentecost,
the liturgy is anticipation,
human activity renders us similar to God.

His Holiness Ignatius IV, Greek-Orthodox patriarch of Antioch and all the East, on the occasion of the International Ecumenical Conferences of Orthodox spirituality:

20th International Ecumenical Conference

19th International Ecumenical Conference

17th International Ecumenical Conference