

**Reflection of His Holiness Mar Awa III,  
Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East:  
"Universal Brotherhood: Uniting in a Divided World"  
(International Meeting for Peace: Paris, 22-24 September 2024)**

Your Excellences, Reverend Clergy, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very pleased to offer these brief words of reflection on the theme of universal brotherhood, and how it can unite in a world which is much divided today. On February 4, 2019, His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb signed a document titled, *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, which called upon people of diverse faiths to embrace the idea of fraternity on a human level. No doubt dogmas are distinct and particular, but when we reflect upon our human existence, and what it means to be human beings as created by the one God who is Lord and Creator of the universe, there are elements in our humanity which can be shared, and which in a real sense are 'fraternal.'

Without delving into a philosophical discourse of what it means to be human, from the faith perspective we can in fact deduce a great deal about our humanity. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, humanity is predominantly and most prominently defined as being the visible 'image and likeness of God' (cf. Gen. 1:26). As such, man becomes a 'microcosm' uniting both the spiritual and corporeal elements present in creation. Furthermore, man/humanity becomes a living and visible reflection of the unseen Creator. In Christian theology, this understanding of humanity is true for every person who is created by God and lives in the world, irrespective of religion. Having that as our springboard, the important question is this: how do we live together on the earth as brothers and sisters in humanity? And, how can we allow this shared humanity to bring us closer together, rather than distance us further apart?

It is undeniable fact that our world today is greatly divided: along religious lines, along politics, and along a host of other ideologies and philosophies. The divine in humanity today is merely cultural or linguistic anymore (as it once was). Rather, we have lost the sense of our common and shared humanity, and what it means to be the image of God our Creator in the world in which we live today. One great proof for this fact is simply the sheer number of armed conflicts existing between nations today. These conflicts, which in their unbridled violence are detrimental to the present and the future of the entire earth, are concrete signs that we are not able to discover and realize our shared humanity, and in so doing to live as brethren in the one common human race.

What unites us all is indeed our communal humanity, as coheirs and co-inhabitants of the one earth created by God. All of the elements with which our Creator has endowed us—intellect, understanding, faith and moral reasoning, compassion and mercy, a sense of justice and equality, the preservation of fundamental human rights and liberties—are all elements that unite us in our human existence. We cannot forge a more peaceful and mutual understanding among nations and peoples, if we forget this very important truth.

We cannot deny the fact that our world is indeed very divided today. It is divided along political lines, religious lines and ideological lines. Often times these stances come about through an inherited understanding of the world around us. However, we must be critical, when and where needed, of our former understanding of our religious views, in particular, and most especially when our understanding is an obstacle before each one of us to accept our fellow human being a brother or sister in our shared humanity. Such views contrary to this inclusivity ought to be reviewed and reinterpreted where necessary.

In the Christian faith, the love of neighbor is on a par with the greatest commandment, namely the love of God (cf. Luke 10:27). When Christ spoke these words, He did not limit the understanding of ‘neighbor’ to mean your co-religionist, or your compatriot. Rather, and particularly by way of the well-known ‘Parable of the Good Samaritan,’ He expanded the understanding of what ‘neighbor’ means by amplifying it to the fullest possible human extent of accepting and receiving one who is totally ‘other’ as a neighbor, and as one close to you in your shared humanity.

And today, that is precisely what we need to rediscover as human beings, irrespective of religion or creed, namely: what it means to be a ‘neighbor.’ For if we knew the answer to that question, we would surely know who our neighbor is as well. This concept of the ‘neighbor’ brings us closer to each other by diminishing the divide and gap between us. It removes barriers and obstacles by contextualizing *my* existence (and whether the ‘my’ refers to me as a religion or as an ethnicity) in relation to that of the next human being, whomever he or she may be.

The only way to discover (or rather ‘rediscover’) or shared humanity is through dialogue and constant contact between people of faith. I believe that it is heavily incumbent upon us as believers to be the harbingers of dialogue among humanity, especially in a world today where there is no sense of resolving disagreements by fraternal dialogue, but by the brute force of armed conflict. In our practice of being a neighbor, one to another, we must be accepting of each other and willing to see in the other and recognize that common humanity we share. The *Document on Human Fraternity* mentioned above states in this regard: “Dialogue, understanding and the

widespread promotion of a culture of tolerance, acceptance of others and of living together peacefully would contribute significantly to reducing many economic, social, political and environmental problems that weigh so heavily on a large part of humanity.”

And so, as we come together and gather in this year’s ‘International Meeting for Peace’, at the kind invitation of the Community of Sant’Egidio, we are all challenged to *Imagine Peace*. Such an imagination, I believe, must necessarily stem from an inner disposition of and for peace, for peace comes from within, and radiates to those outside of us. Furthermore, peace also sets the stage for a brotherhood that is both universal—in essence, that which we all share together as human beings. Let delve deep into our inner person and discover our common humanity, thus paving the way for unity in diversity. In this way, we will also be able to not only imagine peace, but by the grace of God, also discover and experience it as well. Thank you for your attention.