

## Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Leo XIV

### A Candid Yet Uncompromising Reflection on the Sorry State of the Christians of Lebanon Facing an Existential Threat at a Historical Juncture

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Most Holy Father,

This paper seeks to be defined by objectivity and candor, and distinguished by a scientific approach—at a time when the ruling elite and the elite-controlled media propagate noise-based narratives filled with hollow “feel-good” slogans, shallow declarations, and poetic reflections from well-meaning but utopian “leaders”, all presented within disjointed and incoherent frameworks.

At this historical crossroads, as the Christians of Lebanon stand on the brink of existential peril, there is no space for emotional rhetoric. What is required is intellectual sobriety, analytical precision, and moral frankness. Societies are built only upon truth, approached through reason and evidence as forcefully affirmed by our Holy Church in *Dignitatis Humanae* : « *La vérité ne s'impose que par la force de la vérité elle-même, qui pénètre l'esprit avec autant de douceur que de puissance.* » (*Dignitatis Humanae – On Religious Freedom: The Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious*).

#### A - Preamble

##### 1. The Betrayal of the Elite

The Christian ruling elite have interests fundamentally opposed to those of the masses. Herein lies the root cause behind the unfolding tragedy: while the Christian ruling elite strives to preserve the current order under the fallacious guise of “preserving co-existence”, the people, desperate for meaning, for an indiscriminating rule-of-law and for a legitimate and rightful civilizational self-preservation, have no choice but to despair and emigrate.

The elite, whose wealth and power depend on the sect-based centralized power-sharing structure, crony capitalism, and clientelism resist any form of change. Even if they know all too well that by defending the unitary (Arabist) narrative and centralized governance model (which they label “co-existence” to preempt and silence any dissident voice), they are hastening the demographic erosion of Christians and, ultimately, the erosion of their own relevance—yet the long term remains of no concern to them.

By contrast, the Christian masses yearn for meaningful living and protection—through a trusted (and thus Christian) coercive power such as the army or police, and trusted (and thus Christian) judicial, administrative, and legislative systems. They seek self-governance, direct democracy, and localism—control over their own lives and destiny. The motive behind this yearning is not, as some suggest, a desire for isolation. Quite the contrary—it stems from the most intimate human demand for a dignified existence: the need for meaning, which can only be fulfilled when one lives in continuation of one’s forefathers’ history. Did Auguste Comte not famously claim, « *Les morts gouvernent les vivants* ». As Christian descendants of the Phoenicians, are we not entitled to define and embody our own *raison d'être*? Our Holy Church has taught us that history carries both sense and purpose; we cannot be compelled to become uprooted and estranged from ourselves and our Levantine western civilization through the denial of our right to our own national narrative.

## 2. Past Decisions and Their Consequences

Over the past century, a series of disastrous decisions have led to today's predicament:

- 1926 – Adoption of a unitarian and centralized constitution.
- 1943 – Acceptance of Lebanon's "Arab face."
- 1945 – Accession to the Arab League.
- 1958 – Failure to draw lessons from civil war.
- 1969 – Signing of the Cairo Agreement.
- 1989 – Ratification of the Taif Accord.

Responsibility for these errors lies with the ruling elites of the time—those who, at critical junctures, placed self-interest above that of the souls they were entrusted to lead. Today, we stand once more at a similar crossroads.

## B – Understanding the Problem of Lebanon

### 3. 1920 versus 1926: Conflicting Decisions

In 1920, the Maronite Church endorsed the creation of Greater Lebanon—a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic entity aligned with the Church's call for openness and constructive dialogue among civilizations. Yet, in 1926, the Lebanese legislator—predominantly Christian and Maronite—drafted a unitary, centralized constitution rather than a decentralized pluralistic governance framework.

The root cause of this conundrum lies in the ill-fated mistranslation, into the 1926 Constitution, of the Ottoman term "*millet*" (which meant *nation* in its literal, but more importantly sociological and political, sense) to "*religious community*". The intent of the legislator of the time was to espouse western modernity and frame Lebanon as a single nation-state pushing religion into the private sphere away from shaping the collective past, present and future of the novel multi-cultural republic. The belief was that by ostracizing religion and inventing a single national narrative centered around (undefined) shared values, an *homo Libanicus* would emerge. By doing so, the legislator and the new "Lebanon" stripped the various peoples/milletts from a vital dimension of their being: their organic identities. None adhered to the new "project" and all got frustrated. Distrust and hatred of all against all increased. Forcing a nation-state model upon a multi-national population, tuned out to be a disastrous idea.

### 4. Sect as Identity, Not Merely Faith

Identity is essential for human freedom. As Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, and William Kymlicka remind us: "*Cultural identity is the matrix of choice and the infrastructure necessary for liberty and human dignity.*" Religion, therefore, is not only faith—it is national and civilizational belonging. A sect is an identity, not merely a confession of faith. And herein lies the endless passionate and heated debate around identity in Lebanon. Civilization, identity and hence history is not about the past as some would think, it is about the future and, for us Christians, the path to salvation. From an empirical perspective, history is about the past only insofar as it is a depiction of experimented politics (As Joseph de Maistre wrote: "*History is the experimental science of politics.*") and for the rest it is all about the future.

The ruling elite deliberately misrepresent Lebanon's ethno-religious diversity as mere "religious faith," concealing its profound identity dimension. They trivialize it as sectarian stubbornness—a relic of the dark ages. This is a deliberate distortion. "Sect" signifies identity, not fanaticism. One may be agnostic or even atheist, yet uphold all the civilizational values (Christian or Muslim) that shape the governance model in which one feels fulfilled in freedom and human dignity.

### 5. The Pivotal Question

In Lebanon each group lives according to its own sociological and anthropological reality, which shapes its concept of the state. How can groups with fundamentally different conceptions of governance coexist within one centralized system? Before addressing this question, key distinctions must be clarified.

## 6. Intellectual Rigor Around Country, State, and Nation

A country is a geographical construct. Lebanon may represent a *unifying geography* (*une géographie unificatrice*), but it remains geography nonetheless. A state is a legal construct, distinct from both *country* and *nation*. A nation is a political/historical construct—the fusion of a people around shared values and beliefs, between which a social contract emerges.

In Lebanon, Christians, Shiites, Druzes, and Sunnis are distinct nations, each with its own idea of homeland. That they came to all call their homeland “Lebanon” (anciently for some and very recently for others) is a linguistic coincidence or a political maneuver. By attaching each nation’s name to this same geography, each is attempting to ascertain a historical claim over that country. Truthfully, Lebanon is neither a single nation nor a single homeland (*ni patrie ni nation*). In reality, there exist four “Lebanons” for four peoples. The framers of the 1926 Constitution tried—and failed—to give Lebanon a unified national dimension. Confusing *country* with *nation* was a fatal mistake, one we must avoid if Lebanon is ever to be rebuilt.

## 7. Dual Identities

The sociological reality is that every Lebanese carries a dual identity:

- An organic identity (*identité organique*) — stemming from communal, historical, sociological, ethnological belonging (*millet*); and
- A contractual identity (*identité contractuelle*) — derived from the legal status of being “Lebanese.”

In the Levant, the nations are the organic identities, Lebanon being our cherished and shared geography. Our organic nation (Maronite/Christian) is our path to salvation, ideally within a Lebanese federation. Pope Jean Paul II claimed relentlessly in “Memory and Identity” what can be summarized as « *c’est à travers sa nation que l’homme accède à l’universalité* ».

## C – “And the Truth Shall Set You Free”

## 8. The Truth About Lebanon

Lebanon’s geography encompasses multiple peoples with divergent historical narratives. It is therefore multi-national, multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-civilizational, resulting in inherently different concepts of sovereignty, friendship, enmity, and governance.

## 9. The Truth About Good Governance: *Cuius Regio, Eius Religio*

History demonstrates that stable governance can exist only within a single civilizational/cultural framework. Attempts to merge distinct cultures under one centralized system backfired and produced sub-par outcomes. Evidence showed an increase in hatred, poverty, and distrust among the various populations all along sectarian or cultural divide.

Scholarly studies have repeatedly demonstrated the long-lasting devastating effects of forced cultural blending on public good. Uncontested publications from scholars such as Putnam, Alesina, Peter Thisted Dinesen, Jasper Van Assche, James Odonnell; and many others repeatedly confirmed the systematic decline in social cohesion, trust and cooperation in multi-cultural societies when forced under a common governance regime.

What is now empirically demonstrated used to be common sense before virtue signaling and woke ideology took control of rationality in public speech and political discourse. In Islam, it is said that “*a Muslim is ruled only by a Muslim*.” Christianity, viewed sociologically, used to uphold a similar principle: ruler and ruled must share the same faith (*Cuius Regio, Eius Religio*). This was the foundation of the Peace of Augsburg (1555), the peace which ended Europe’s religious wars. Thus, Henry IV’s conversion to Catholicism to rule France (“*Paris vaut bien une messe*”) finds its echo in Prince Chéhab’s conversion to Maronitism to rule Mount Lebanon.

Multiple culture can (and must) coexist in peace and harmony in a single unified (and not unitarian) geography/country provided the governance model is conducive thereto.

#### **10. Cult, Culture and Policies**

Religion and culture are inseparable (*pas de culture sans culte*). As André Malraux observed, “*The nature of a civilization is what aggregates around a religion.*” Pope John Paul II extended and completed this statement to become in substance “*pas de culture sans culte et pas de culte sans culture*”. John P. Hittinger, in John Paul II’s Core teachings on Culture, affirmed that culture forms the infrastructure of faith. R. Jared Staudt in “Culture in the Magisterium of Pope John Paul II: Evangelization through Dialogue and the Renewal of Society” claims that Christianity flourishes only within its own civilizational context; outside it, it declines.

Both, cult and culture shape public policies. Hence the quote attributed to Richard Neuhaus “Culture is the root of politics, and religion is the root of culture”. Consequently, the efforts to Arabize the Christians breed estranging public policies that ultimately undermine cultural cohesion and weaken the moral and social foundations of faith. Sacrificing (our) human dignity on the altar of social engineering and cultural fusion experimentation is neither ethical nor sustainable.

### **D – The Foundations of Solutions**

#### **11. Pluralism in Lebanon**

The question before us is: *How can Lebanon preserve its mosaic of cultures, religions, and nations?* What governance model can ensure peaceful conflict resolution and harmonious coexistence?

#### **12. The Constitution and the Spirit of the Law**

As Montesquieu wrote in *L’Esprit des Lois*: “*Constitutions, like clothes, must be tailored to the people they are meant to serve.*” Lebanon’s 1926 Constitution (as amended, still valid and in full force today) is a collection of dogmatic statements divorced from social reality. In practice, it is a set of legal instruments selectively applied and routinely weaponized by whichever group temporarily controls the central government, to suppress others.

Some argue that the system is sound but that the politicians are corrupt. Such a claim is baseless and collapses under empirical scrutiny after more than a century of repeated failures. It is implausible that every generation of politicians over that period was uniformly corrupt. More often than not, this assertion comes from those who directly benefit from the existing order—hardly impartial voices. What credibility can be granted to a defense of the status quo when it originates from those enriched and empowered by it? In truth, systems shape behavior: a sound governance framework curbs corruption, while a defective one perpetuates and rewards it.

#### **13. The Principle of Subsidiarity**

For us Christians—and particularly for our Maronite Church and the Christian ruling elite—any governance system genuinely concerned with the common good and human dignity must embody the social teaching of the Catholic Church. As articulated in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, and most notably through the Principle of Subsidiarity, such a system must ensure that authority flows from the bottom up. It is therefore incumbent upon the Church to advocate, with the utmost vigor, for a governance model that enables the people—especially Christians—to determine how they wish to organize their collective life. The empowerment of local communities to shape their own destiny is the cornerstone of a dignified human existence. Yet, regrettably, this remains in stark contrast with the stance of the current Christian ruling elite.

#### **14. The Imperative of Solidarity**

Solidarity is indispensable to shared prosperity; no community can flourish while those around it languish in despair. Yet, as the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church reminds us, genuine solidarity is impossible without subsidiarity. The two are inseparable: subsidiarity safeguards

freedom and responsibility, while solidarity binds these freedoms to the service of the common good. By denying subsidiarity (i.e. by refusing to allow the Christians (and others as well) people to choose their own governance system), the ruling elite—including the Maronite hierarchy—undermine the very foundation of solidarity, driving society into a spiral of mistrust and fear.

As Pope Pius XI affirmed in *Quadragesimo Anno*, “it is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.” When subsidiarity is ignored, solidarity degenerates into coercion—an obligation to share without the freedom to choose. Pope Benedict XVI later warned in *Caritas in Veritate* that solidarity detached from subsidiarity becomes paternalism and, ultimately, a form of tyranny. The result is a zero-sum order that privileges the elite and drives the population away from the Church and the Levant.

### **15. The Social Cost of the Elite Resignation from Responsibility**

Danton’s admonition to the National Convention on March 10, 1793—*«Il faut être terrible pour dispenser le peuple de l’être»*—was a prophetic insight into the consequences of failed governance: when those in authority abandon their moral and civic duty, the people are driven to assume it themselves, often through harsh and destructive means. By renouncing their obligations (denying the people the freedom through subsidiarity), the elites deprive the people of their natural benevolence and compassion, forcing them to act bellicosely with other communities in conflict rather than cooperation. Thriving on division, the elite denies the masses freedom ..... including, and most importantly, the freedom to love, to care, and to build solidarity. In rejecting subsidiarity, they ultimately extinguish solidarity itself.

### **16. Sovereignty**

Each community must enjoy sovereignty over its own moral and social order. Respect for cultural divergence is not merely moral; it is political. A truly respectful system allows each community to enact and enforce its own laws over its territory. Lebanon’s current framework denies this flexibility, forcing all communities into perpetual competition for control of the central state.

## **E - The War of Semantics and Taxonomy**

### **17. Democracy in a Multi-Cultural Society**

“Democracy”: Those who incessantly invoke “democracy”, “coexistence” and “secularism” are not truth-tellers but guardians of a myth. These words have become empty slogans—buzzwords wielded by entrenched elites to perpetuate their domination. As Alexis de Tocqueville cautioned, democracy is “the tyranny of the majority.” In multicultural societies, this danger is amplified: majorities often coalesce not around the merit of ideas, the soundness of governance, or the efficiency of policies, but around identity—religious, ethnic, or sectarian. Thus, what masquerades as democracy too often becomes the arithmetic of tribes rather than the deliberation of citizens. Elections become rituals of identity affirmation rather than instruments of accountability. Secularism, stripped of its philosophical depth, is reduced to a convenient façade concealing communal monopolies. In such a context, democracy ceases to be a mechanism for reconciling differences through law and reason; it becomes a marketplace of fears where groups vote for protection rather than vision. In Lebanon, the claim for “democracy” under centralized government is merely a tool for legal enslavement of minorities.

“Coexistence”: Nowhere is this paradox more visible than in Lebanon and the broader Middle East, where “coexistence” has been exalted as an ideal but emptied of substance. The ruling classes manipulate democratic language to cloak systems of sectarian patronage and dependency. True coexistence cannot be decreed by slogans or imposed by elites—it must emerge from structural justice, from subsidiarity and local empowerment, where communities govern themselves freely and cooperate voluntarily under a framework of mutual respect. Only then can pluralism regain its moral and political meaning.

“Secularism”: Moreover, faith and identity are even more intertwined in Islam than in Christianity. It is no coincidence that political Islam promotes “secularism” only in Christian circles—and never within its own. This selective advocacy exposes a hegemonic and colonial intent, and the complicity of the submissive Christian political elite who lend legitimacy to it.

### **18. Predatory Dynamics and Game Theory**

In Lebanon’s tripartite game—Christian, Sunni, Shia—the two stronger players often behave as predators, while the third becomes the prey. Appeals to “*democracy*” “*secularism*” and “*citizenship*” by stronger blocs are tactical tools for dominance, not equity. Reducing politics to a relationship between individual and state eliminates the community as a political actor, leaving minorities defenseless.

By weakening the communal safety net—the foundation of Christian survival in the Levant—advocates of “citizenship” and “secularism” seek to dismantle the very structure that has sustained our Christian existence since the 7th century. The well-meaning advocates of these virtuous principles ambition to build the modern secular centralized state.... yet again -an endeavor which has repeatedly failed in the Levant- yet by doing so, they will dismantle, disband and dislocate the very communities for which such state was initially designed. The tragedies of the Christians of Iraq and Syria stand as testimony.

Furthermore, the duplicity of stronger communities is revealed in the chasm between rhetoric and reality. Behind their virtuous discourse — “democracy”, “secularism”, “citizenship” and “coexistence” — lies a will to dominate. These same concepts, passionately promoted to Christians, are never advocated to - and overwhelmingly rejected by - the overwhelming majority of the other constituencies.

### **19. Conclusion**

This is the unspoken truth about the sorry state of the Christians of Lebanon in 2025—a truth which shall be neither shown nor told to Your Holiness.

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