

“We Choose Abundant Life”

3/2024

An ecumenical group of Middle Eastern Christians published in 2021 the document “We Choose Abundant Life”, and the document is today available in Arabic, English, French, German, and Danish translations. The group of Arabic-speaking Christian women and men from different Churches and with different professional background met monthly for several years in preparation of the document. The document sums up their theological, social, and political analysis of the situation of Christians in the Middle East today. Especially themes such as citizenship, ecology, youth, corruption, and the societal role of Churches are discussed. The document is characterized by its contextual method as well as its dialogical qualities, and thus stimulates and inspires a critical and ecumenical conversation across Middle Eastern churches and beyond.

Middle Eastern Christians face several pressing challenges. Changed religious demography, migration and streams of refugees caused by conflicts and wars as well as by lacking ability of weak states to protect citizens and maintain religious diversity have all contributed to empty the Middle East of Christians.

Historically, the document “We Choose Abundant Life” argues, the Middle East has been characterized by diversity – ethnically, religiously, and culturally. This diversity has been a source for inspiration and exchange as well as conflict and war. In the last half century, religious sectarianism and fundamentalism has contributed to conflict and war. This has changed the political rhetoric and societal understanding of majority and minority relations. The result has been an eroding of freedom rights, democracy, and social justice.

During the Arab Spring uprisings in 2010–2011, the question about citizenship and its relation to other identities – gender, religious, ethnic, and cultural – became much debated. Today protesting voices and reform movement have been suppressed and no political change happened. But the ideas have spread and continue to be discussed, also in Middle Eastern Christian theology. In contrast to contemporary politicized and Islamized Arabism, the document identifies 19th Century Arabism to constitute a more inclusive cultural and political identity allowing for a renewed understanding of Middle Eastern Christian identity and ecclesiology. Rather than viewing oneself as a “Christian segment” and the churches as “Christian sects”, the Christians of the Middle East should view themselves as citizens contributing to the common good of ethnically and religiously diverse societies, the document argues.

The coming issue of RES aims to explore and reflect on the contemporary Middle Eastern Christian contextual and societal theology presented in the document. RES invites for contributions on the themes of the document as well as articles engaging in discussion with the analysis of the document.

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Contributions will be published in German or English and are to follow editorial guidelines:

<http://www.res.ecum.ro/guidelines/>