



You may have seen this Arabic letter posted on people's social media such as Facebook. It is the 14th letter of the Arabic alphabet, the equivalent of our letter «N». It is the first letter of the word «Nazarenes» - a derogatory way of referring to Christians. Many around the world have posted the letter in solidarity with the Christians whose homes have been marked with that letter. As the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Babylon (His Beatitude Luis Raphael Sako) said: «The Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL) has issued a statement calling on Christians openly to convert to Islam, or either pay *Jizya* (a heavy tax penalty) or leave their city and homes with the clothes on their backs, no luggage allowed; and ISIS has also pronounced a «*fatwa*» that Christian homes will become the property of the Islamic State. They have marked the letter «N» **Nun** (ن), on the homes of Christians «Nazarenes»!

PRAYER FOR PEACE IN IRAQ

By the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch

Lord, the plight of our country is deep
and the suffering of Christians is severe
and frightening. We, therefore, ask you,
O Lord, spare our lives, and grant us patience
and courage to continue our witness of
Christian values with trust and hope.
Lord, peace is the foundation that will
enable us to live with each other without
fear and anxiety, and with dignity and joy.
Glory be to You forever. Amen.

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Another fitting prayer of support is the *Troparion* that we sang on both the feast and the Leave-taking of the Exaltation of the Holy and Life-giving Cross:

Save Your people, O Lord, and bless Your inheritance.
Grant victory to Your Church over evil,
and protect Your people by Your Cross!

Below is the full translation of the interview granted by **the Syrian (Syriac) Catholic Patriarch of Antioch**, Ignace Joseph III Younan, to Sergio Cenofanti of Vatican Radio. [Translation by Carmen McMaire]

Ignace Joseph III Younan – The latest news is disastrous. We repeat, with great affliction, that which we have always said: religion must not be mixed up with human or political relations, etc. If enmities exist between Shiites, Sunnis, or whoever else it may be, this must not be in any way a reason for attacking innocent Christians and other minorities in Mosul and elsewhere. Nor is it a reason for destroying places of worship, churches, Episcopal residences, parishes – in the name of a so-called terrorist organization which neither cares about nor heeds religion, having no regard for international conscience. We declare, with great distress, that our bishopric in Mosul has been completely burned down: manuscripts, libraries, etc. But they have already announced that all Christians must convert to Islam or else they will be executed. It is a terrible thing! And this puts the international community to shame!

Sergio Cenofanti – Are there still Christians in Mosul?

IJY – There are none left! There are none left! There were about ten families forced to flee yesterday, but they stripped them of everything. They wanted to go to Kurdistan, but were left alone at the frontier of the city, and only after being robbed of everything. They insulted those Christians and just left them in the middle of the desert. Unfortunately, that's the way it is.

SC – What is the current situation of these dispersed Christians?

IJY – They have taken refuge in Kurdistan, where they were received. But we have also heard that the Prime Minister of Kurdistan says that Kurdistan can no longer receive refugees, because not only Christian minorities have taken flight to Kurdistan, but also other minorities such as Shiites, Yazidi, etc. It is terrible!

SC – How can these Islamic fundamentalists be stopped?

IJY – They must stop being financed. Where do they get their weapons and all the rest? From these fundamentalist nations of the Gulf, with the “*placet*” [vote or expression of assent, approval; Latin, *it pleases*] of Western politics, because they need their oil! Unfortunately that's the way it is. It really is a shame!

SC – What appeal do you make?

IJY – We ask the international community to be faithful to the principles regarding human rights, religious freedom, freedom of conscience. We are present in Iraq, in Syria, in Lebanon: Christians were not imported. We have been here for millennia, and so we have the right to be treated like human beings and citizens of these nations! Look, in the name of their religion they persecute us, and not only do they threaten, but they carry out their threats: they burn and they kill.

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Returning to the use of color in Byzantine iconography we look this week at the colors YELLOW and GOLD: On the level of radiance, yellow should be considered like red, even though it is brighter; hence a relative similarity which is rather difficult to circumscribe. Although a pure yellow represents truth, a dull or pale yellow symbolizes pride, adultery, betrayal; all of them disagreeable odors of infernal brimstone, a synonym for sulphur, which is yellow.

Gold is far more interesting for our present study. Numerous ancient tribes were devoted to a solar cult. For the Egyptians, the sun itself, the gods, and pharaohs were believed to be made of gold. The golden Buddhas remind us of illumination; and in history, the expression “the Golden Age” stresses a particular era of perfection. Let us not forget that the gold seen on cupolas and in Byzantine mosaics symbolizes the world beyond, a world where the sun never sets.

Gold is unalterable, representing thus for Christians eternal life, faith and above all Christ Himself: Sun of Justice, Light of the World, Splendor of the rising sun. Yet even here we encounter ambivalence, because gold itself, while symbolic of the sun’s radiance, can unfortunately also become symbolic of perversion and greed: a status symbol today in collections of gold jewelry and coins.

Again, gold is itself not a color seen in everyday nature, so that the golden background of the icon creates a “space” where bodies no longer need to conform to the elements of either scenery or architecture. Liberated from all that is terrestrial, they are spiritualized—transfigured in the golden light of eternity.

If, in one way, the metallic reflection of gold imitates the shining sun and the brightness of candle flames, in another way it intensifies the different color tones in an icon by contrasts that result in a wondrous harmony.

The Hebrew word *aour*, meaning light, is similar to the Latin word *aurum*, meaning gold, which in India is considered a mineral of light. Also, the Latin noun *oratio*, meaning word, refers to the French word *or* meaning gold, and surprisingly enough, this French word is even used in the English language to designate the

heraldic color *gold*! In fact, the ancient Greeks said of someone who excelled as an orator that he had a golden mouth. Gold symbolizes the divine light. If gold symbolizes light, we can see the consequences of this in the way gold is used in iconography, be it in the background or applied to persons or objects.

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ON A LIGHTER SIDE:

**Some people are kind, polite, and sweet-spirited...
until you try to sit in their pews.**

Many folks want to serve God, BUT only as advisors.

When you get to your wit's end, you'll find God lives there.

**People are funny;
they want the front of the bus,
the middle of the road,
and the back of the church.**

**Quit griping about your church!
If it was perfect, you couldn't belong!**

**God Himself doesn't propose to judge a man until he is dead.
So why should you?**

Peace starts with a smile.

**I don't know why some people change churches.
What difference does it make which one you stay home from?**