



PRAYER LETTER 60

ACO-France, one of six partners of ACO Fellowship, is suggesting this prayer. It considers its mission as being a bridge between French Protestant Churches, especially the ones which had allowed the birth of ACO in Alsace-Lorraine one century ago, and its sister and brother churches in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. In the name of the Gospel which unites us as a big family, ACO tries to be a tool for testimony, communion and solidarity.

Introduction to the prayer

In April France remembered the tenth anniversary of the passing of the law opening up same-sex marriage. This measure met with opposition from conservative Catholicism, which organized spectacular demonstrations...often joined by others. Some protestants wished the term marriage not to be used, without however refusing same-sex couples to have same rights as heterosexual couples.

Ten years later, marriage "for all" has entered the mores and no longer shocks French society, which has largely accepted this new form of conjugality. Studies have shown that throughout humanity and always, a part of the population is homosexual. But in terms of cultures, this situation is being managed very differently!

During those ten years debate was lively within the Protestant Churches. The sister Churches of Africa and the East have could often not understand that one can publicly evoke such intimate subjects. The debate in the Churches started when homosexual couples requested the blessing of their union, which awoke curiosity in the medias, and they somewhat exacerbated the debates.

In the two largest historic Protestant churches in France, the EUdF - United Protestant Church of France- and the UEPAL - Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine-, the possibility of a blessing for a same-sex couple was finally accepted after extensive Bible study and long discussions. The possibility for a pastor to assert a conscience clause and for a parish not to accept such celebrations in its church was maintained. The unity of the churches was kept, despite opinions that remain divergent. Thus, the Protestant Churches have shown that it is possible to be of different convictions in mutual respect. Perhaps they might have shown how a democracy should work...

Indeed, many Christians are more than concerned for the future of Western democracy, abused by increasingly virulent extremist discourse.

Prayer

Lord, you created human beings - all human beings - for happiness and life.

Lord God, you make no difference between humans. You offer your alliance, made of forgiveness and tenderness, to all those who turn to you.

Lord Jesus, you rejected no one. You clearly said that no human being who claims to be yours has the right to reject anyone. And especially not the people most exposed to contempt or rejection. Your Word invites us to openness, to accept the other and not to judge and condemn. Help us to remember this.

Our world offers a very different show: blind thirst for power, rejection of the other seems to be the solution to many problems, injustice reigns and many people are trampled on without regard. We need the support of your Spirit to be able to continue our mission in this world.

Lord God thrice holy, we pray to you:

- make of us witnesses of your unconditional love
- preserve us from the temptation to withdraw into the group of those who are like us
- raise up peacemakers who show that respect for those who are different is possible by their words as well as by their actions
- protects those who fight for the reconciliation of people.

Show your love to the whole world, so that it finds in You the source of its hope.

Amen.

Authors: Jean-Robert Riedinger, vice-president of ACO France, and Rev. Thomas Wild, retired minister and former director of ACO-France (2007-2018).