

LEBANON

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Being Pope is no soft option. Leo XIV must have realised this during his first apostolic journey, and not only because of his busy schedule. While everything went smoothly for Prevost with the Orthodox patriarchs, the Catholic patriarchs he met privately at the Apostolic Nunciature in Beirut provided him with some food for thought. One of them in particular was eager for the meeting: His Beatitude Ignace Youssif III Younan, the Syriac Catholic Patriarch of Antioch.

The Syriac Catholic Church has experienced a real internal upheaval for years, hidden from the public, but which we can now reveal. The 81-year-old patriarch no longer enjoys the confidence of the majority of his bishops. This power struggle has been ongoing since 2021 and is a cause for concern in Rome. Younan would have liked to see his candidate elected as bishop, but the Syriac Catholic Synod firmly opposed this. Amid intrigue and coercion, the situation has come to the attention of the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches and the Pope himself. Despite his impressive title of 'His Beatitude', the Patriarch is merely a *primus inter pares* and cannot act against the majority of his colleagues. Anticipating a confrontation with them, Younan postponed the convocation of the Synod twice until Pope Francis intervened and ordered him to hold it in Rome in July 2025. Despite resistance, Leo XIV confirmed his predecessor's decision. As expected, the Synod proved fatal for the elderly patriarch: almost all of the Synod Fathers called for his resignation. This was intended as a sign of respect so as to avoid making the situation public, but the person concerned did not consent. This was followed by the painful decision to dismiss him in front of Vatican Prefect Claudio Gugerotti. This was a step back demanded in the name of synodality by Leo XIV during a private audience, which Younan did not take well. The calm but resolute Prévost rejected his interlocutor's request to remain in office for another year, granting only a period of six months.

Since then, the disheartened Patriarch, who returned to Lebanon without concluding the Synod's work, has tried to win over the other Eastern Patriarchs, hoping that their fear of being 'dismissed' for age-related reasons will unite them in supporting him. This topic was discussed behind closed doors at the nunciature, but it is highly unlikely that Leo XIV will change his mind. Perhaps it is no coincidence that he seems to have devoted little time to this item on the agenda. Conversely, the Pope did not request Younan's resignation due to his advanced age (Francis' *motu proprio* of 2023 stated that individuals over 80 could no longer vote in Synods, yet did not address

patriarchs), but rather in response to the desires of the majority of Syriac Catholic bishops.