

Christian Situation in the Holy Land

Educational Resource

Volume 1

TO THE READERS

The present day situation in the Holy Land in regards to Christians and the Church is complicated and our ability to understand it is challenged. Has it ever been otherwise? Please read these articles with an inquiring mind and continue your education as circumstances change with the sands of time. Most of all, please pray for peace in the Holy Land, for our Christian brothers and sisters and for the Church, which Christ our Savior founded.

This document was prepared and compiled by Jeffery Abood, Education Master, Cleveland Section, North Central Lieutenancy of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. The document reflects the opinions of many different authors and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Grand Master or the Presidency of the Equestrian Order. The Order cannot vouch for the accuracy or veracity of the information presented. Nevertheless, the Order congratulates Mr. Abood for his efforts to compile this information for the benefit of readers both within and outside of the Order.

H.E. Patrick D. Powers, KGCHS

Vice Governor General – North America
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*Originally titled, "Situation of the Christians in the Holy Land – 2012";
due to its' popularity has been re-titled to accommodate a second volume.*

***Copies of this booklet made possible thanks to the generous donations of the Knights
and Ladies of the Cleveland Section, North Central Lieutenancy of the Equestrian Order
of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.***



LATIN PATRIARCHATE - JERUSALEM

قِي كَرِي رَطْب نِي تِلَالِ سَدَقَا

AUXILIARY BISHOP OFFICE

November 19, 2011

Dear Knights and Ladies,

In today's modern age, there is a great deal of information available about Christians in the Holy Land. In an effort to assist in helping provide a clearer picture of their reality, we applaud the compilation of this educational packet.

Drawing together Church sources, this packet provides a clear, concise and most importantly, accurate view of who the Christians in the Holy Land are and how they are living. It also provides an excellent resource for the members of the Order.

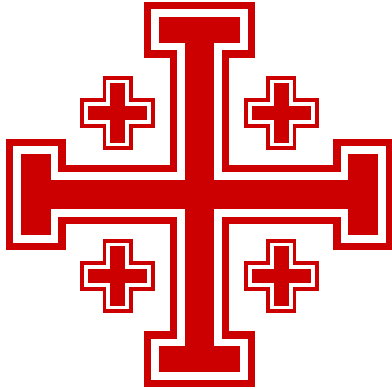
We believe this is a valuable tool in helping to strengthen the already firm commitment of the members of the Order towards our schools. We are more than ever convinced of their importance to preserve the faith of our Christian community of the Holy Land. We perform this task in an ecumenical and open interreligious environment. Our future depends, not only on the economical and political context, but also on our ability to be well integrated in the pluralistic societies of the Holy Land.

It is our hope that the Knights and Ladies of the Order may find this resource useful for the education of both its' members and for outreach to Catholics nationwide.

I renew my gratitude for the good work done by the thousands of members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

+ *William Shomali*

+William Shomali
Auxiliary Bishop
of Jerusalem



In the Holy Land, Christians have gone from around 18% of the population sixty years ago, to less than 2% today.

According to Latin Patriarch Tawal, *“the Christian presence is threatened by virtual extinction”*¹.

Never before has the work of the Order been so urgent.

One of our Order’s main goals is to *“sustain and aid...the Catholic Church in the Holy Land”*². To do so both wisely and effectively it is important to gain a clear understanding of who the Christians there are and why they are leaving.

Attached are some articles and statements to help us become better educated on what the Church has to say on this issue.

Section 1 includes official statements and interviews with Popes, Patriarchs and our late Grand Master Emeritus, Cardinal John Foley.

Section 2 includes articles showing what life is like for the Catholics in the Holy Land (focusing here on Palestine and Israel).

Respectfully submitted,
In Christ and the Order,

Jeffery M. Abood, KHS
Education Master - Cleveland Section
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1 - Conference to Address Pressures Facing Holy Land Christians – Lambeth Place, London 18-19 July 2011

2 - EOSHJ Constitution



Section 1



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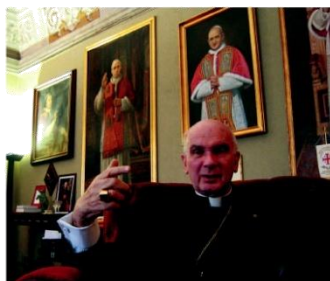
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HOLY LAND: **THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS IN JESUS' HOMELAND**

Cardinal John Foley tells how the Christians live between Muslim and Jewish fundamentalism

■ BY WLODZIMIERZ REDZIOCH - FEBRUARY 2010 "INSIDE THE VATICAN" Magazine



In your capacity as Grand Master of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher, you are particularly concerned about the Catholic Church in the Holy Land. What is the present situation of Christians in Jesus' homeland?

CARDINAL JOHN FOLEY: The paradox is that for Christians living in the Holy Land it is terribly hard to reach Bethlehem, Jesus' birthplace. Getting to Bethlehem is easier for tourists than for the local Christians: lots of permissions are needed and there are lots of check points. At Christmas, the Patriarch of Jerusalem celebrates Midnight Mass. There were many people present, though not so many as in the previous years, owing to restrictions.

How do Christians live in the Holy Land?

CARDINAL FOLEY: Let's quote some figures first of all: 60 years ago, 18% of the people who lived in the Holy Land (i.e., of Israel and Palestine) were Christians; now Christians have gone down to 2%.

A great number of Palestinians, even Christian Palestinians, have emigrated to Jordan, but most of them have gone to America and several European countries. Fortunately, Christians are looked at with favor in the countries that receive them, as they have a good education and are not regarded as extremists. Needless to say, the emigration of Christians is a great loss for the local Church.

Living conditions are worse in the Palestinian territories on account of the wall.

The wall divides the Palestinian camps and towns from Israel and even internally, and makes it difficult for the population to reach their jobs, schools, hospitals, etc. So life is hard for everybody in the Palestine region, especially for Christians. The situation is by far the worst in Gaza, an outdoor prison. But there are very few Christians there.

The struggle for the building of a Palestinian state was at first nationalistic, but now it has turned into a religious struggle: the Palestinians have embraced the cause of Islam. How does this affect the situation of Christians?

CARDINAL FOLEY: The Palestinian cause should not be seen as an Islamic cause: Palestinian society is made up of Muslims, but of Christians too, both Orthodox and Catholics. There were lots of Christian Palestinian leaders in the past; even nowadays there are some. But Christian Palestinian leaders have no connection with violent or extremist groups. An important fact must be remembered: the Palestinians are accustomed more than other Arabs to living in a multi-religious society. In the past believers of different faiths used to live together in peace. An example of this peaceful coexistence is that Catholic schools are open to Muslim students. During the Holy Father's visit to the Holy Land, the king of Jordan, the Israeli prime minister and the president of the Palestinian Authority acknowledged the great contribution of the Catholic schools to peace and coexistence.

So Christians find themselves between Muslim and Jewish radicals. Everyone knows about the difficult situation of Christians in the Palestinian territories, but very little is said about Jewish fundamentalism (Orthodox Jews who spit at Franciscans and burn the New Testament) and of the imposed restrictions on Christians by the State of Israel...

CARDINAL FOLEY: When I first visited the Holy Land way back in 1965, I passed through Mandelbaum Gate, at the time marking the Israeli-Jordanian border and entered the Orthodox district of Measharim. I was carrying a suitcase, but it was a Saturday, Orthodox Jews began to throw stones at me.

Isn't Israel now ruled by fundamentalists like those who threw stones at you?

CARDINAL FOLEY: This is a big problem facing the Netanyahu government (I would like to say the Israeli prime minister studied in my hometown of Philadelphia. I know the high school he went to and we talked about it in one of our meetings). He won the election appealing to the most extremist circles; now he presides over a government that intends to find a way out of the Palestinian conflict on the one hand and to meet the demands of the extremist parties on the other hand. Let us remember that Minister Avigdor Lieberman before the election suggested that all the Palestinians should be expelled and sent to other Arab countries.

The political context explains the difficulties confronting Catholic priests and religious since members of the Shas Jewish fundamentalist party too control the Israeli Interior Ministry. Israel is determined to cut down the length of residence permits for Catholic clergy to one year...

CARDINAL FOLEY: We would like Israel to guarantee movement for priests and seminarians. They are now afraid of leaving Israel in case they should not be allowed to return. Let's hope that Israel will be induced to right this great injustice.

Restrictions on residence permits are not only an injustice, but also violate the 1993 Fundamental Agreement between Israel and the Holy See...

CARDINAL FOLEY: In my opinion the complete disappearance of the Christian community in the Holy Land would be a tragedy even for the State of Israel. Though remaining a Jewish state, Israel would be more credible accepting and respecting believers of other religions. This brings in, not only the question of the Israeli-Palestinian border, but also the question of the rights of minorities.

Eminence, you are the Grand Master of an Order which originated in Palestine. What do the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre do for Christians in the Holy land nowadays?

CARDINAL FOLEY: Members of our Order have two goals: deepening their spiritual life, which they also do through pilgrimages to Jesus' homeland, and helping Christians in the Holy Land.

Since the year 2000, we have sent more than \$50 million for the maintenance of parishes, schools, hospitals and other institutions. In other words, our concern is to guarantee the presence of Christians, i.e., of “living stones” in the Holy Land.

Do you cooperate with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem?

CARDINAL FOLEY: We send most of our aid through the Patriarchate. They lay down a scale of requirements and projects they intend to carry out; we do our best to help them. For example, we helped the Patriarchate to enlarge its seminary, since there is an increase in vocations. It must be remembered that when Pius IX restored the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, he also restored the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre with the aforesaid purposes.

They say there will be peace in the world when there is peace in Jerusalem: what can we do to help Israel and the Palestinians to find a definite solution to their conflict?

CARDINAL FOLEY: We have no military or economic power to press the parties involved in this conflict. We make a different kind of contribution: as I said before, we have schools and social institutions to contribute to mutual understanding and reconciliation. The Holy See, on the other hand, has its' own representative in Israel, the nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Franco, who has his office in Jaffa (the international community does not recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel) and who serves as apostolic delegate in Jerusalem, one of whose tasks is to make sure that the rights of Catholics in the Holy Land are respected.

What can individual believers do?

CARDINAL FOLEY: In my opinion it is very important for Catholics to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and visit places made sacred by Jesus' presence; they should also meet local Christians and know about their problems. The organization of pilgrimages should also include encounters with the local community, i.e., the “living stones” of the Holy Land: this is a way to give them hope again.

Ten Reasons to Support the Indigenous Christians of the Holy Land

1. The indigenous Arab Christians are descendents of the first faithful. They trace their roots back to who first heard and embraced the powerful, transforming message of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 2:11).
2. They continue to live out the faith in the very land where our Savior was born and lived, died, and rose from the dead. Their presence amongst a population increasingly non-Christian in orientation maintains the 2000 year-old Christian heritage of the Holy Land.

3. They help ensure that churches and holy sites remain places of Christian worship. Without the indigenous Arab Christian presence in the Holy Land, these places would turn into cold museums, devoid of the warmth of the living body of Christ.
4. They ensure that the younger generation is raised in Christ. The primary means by which youth learn the teachings of Christ and the Church is through a solid education in the Holy Land's Christian schools. As the first means of apostolate, the schools also offer Christians a place in which to interact with each other.
5. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Though we have many different gifts and calls, we are united by the one Spirit that is given to all.
6. Our shared Christian faith will be deepened. As our eyes are opened to other cultures, perspectives, and new ways of worshiping the same Lord, our shared Christian faith is deepened. We learn to experience Christ in new ways, and to show Christ to others.
7. Christian Arabs are a bridge to peace for a troubled region. They share the Old Testament with Jews and share the same culture, language, history, and national aspirations as Muslims. They bridge the distance between those mired in the political conflict in the Holy Land and offer hope for peaceful resolution.
8. They are suffering. Living conditions in the Holy Land are dire as a result of border closures that restrict freedom of movement and curfews that confine civilians to their homes. Few can travel to work, find adequate medical care, or afford housing.
9. Emigration from the Holy Land is on the rise. Young adults have increasingly dim prospects for the future so many are leaving the Holy Land. This further reduces their minority status.
10. Our religion calls us to help those in need. Jesus ministered to the needs of the poor, the afflicted, and the oppressed. He calls us to do the same. It is our duty as Christians to help sustain our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Holy Land.

Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation
www.hcef.org

Country Profile - Israel/Palestine 2010

CNEWA (the Papal Relief Agency in the Holy Land)

Sociopolitical Situation

Israel's closure of Gaza's borders has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis there. Reports indicate that 61% of Gaza's households are now "food insecure" and a further 16% are "vulnerable to food insecurity." Israel's ban on most construction materials entering the Gaza Strip continues to hinder severely all efforts to rehabilitate homes and buildings that have been left in rubble since the war. Thousands of families are still living in houses with shattered windows. U.N. agencies have begun

building mud brick homes in response to the hundreds of families still living in makeshift tents. Lack of proper water and sanitation infrastructure in addition to electricity outages has also increased health concerns for the general population. Gaza's Ministry of Health warns that due to the border closure, there is a lack of medical equipment at Gaza hospitals and a shortage of at least 140 types of medication used to treat cancer patients and others suffering from blood-related diseases. Although a large majority of goods are still being smuggled through tunnels, the Egyptian government has intensified its counter-smuggling effort, dispatching more border patrols and constructing a 9-10 kilometer iron wall with depths of 20-30 meters along the Rafah border.

Area C of the West Bank (which is under the jurisdiction of the Israeli government and constitutes 61% of the West Bank) remains a high risk area. Israel's High Court of Justice recently ordered the state to issue demolition orders and has already demolished 180 Palestinian structures this year, displacing 319 Palestinians, including 167 children.

House demolitions and displacement of East Jerusalem Palestinians continues. In 2009, 64 structures were demolished, displacing 300 people, including 149 children. Israeli settlers and settler organizations are increasing efforts to take over Palestinian homes, particularly in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan. The U.N. reports at least 475 Palestinians are at risk for forced eviction, dispossession and displacement due to settler plans in Sheikh Jarrah alone.

Israel's access restrictions continue to fragment the West Bank and impede upon the livelihoods of West Bank Palestinians. There are some 578 closure obstacles in place in addition to the Separation Wall and permit and gate regimes. In the closed area or "Seam Zone" in the northern West Bank, Palestinians (especially farmers) are severely restricted from agricultural land, health and education services, and social networks. The Israeli government has extended this closed area strategy to the central and southern West Bank. In the Bethlehem Governate, the planned construction of the Separation Wall will reduce access to land and water resources for some 21,000 Palestinians. Israeli daily water consumption per capita is four times higher than that in the West Bank and is affecting approximately 350,000 Palestinians, most of whom live in the southern West Bank. Water is so scarce that in some Palestinian communities, residents only have access to 20 liters of water per day.

Religious Situation

Israeli authorities assured Christian leaders in early December that Gaza's Christians would be issued permits to exit Gaza and visit Bethlehem for 24 hours. According to a human rights group investigation, Gaza Christians between the ages of 15 and 35 from both sexes were denied a permit for no apparent reason, resulting in a total of at least 550 Christians being denied travel permits to Bethlehem. Of the 450 permits that were actually issued, 70% were children under the age of 15. Many of those under 15 who were granted travel permits could not in fact travel because their parents were denied a permit. The issuance of visas for Christian clergy is still problematic as many are unable to receive a visa for an extended period. The problem is being shoved under the table as many Christian groups have stopped applying for visas, knowing that such requests will be denied. This has given the impression that the problem has eased.

There are difficulties within the Palestinian Greek Orthodox community. The day before the Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem there was a fight in Manger Square between groups opposing and supporting the patriarch. The Palestinian authority had to intervene and agreed to minimize public participation in the Christmas celebrations. The criticism of the Patriarch Theophilos III stems from his not delivering on his promises made over disputed Greek Orthodox property and other issues when elected patriarch.

Jewish extremist settlers in the Old City attacked young Armenian seminarians in the Armenian Quarter in early September, deliberately insulting the seminarians and their faith.

The Jerusalem municipality has undisclosed plans—dubbed Plan 2020—that will eventually make the Old City of Jerusalem a “tourist museum.” This plan initially calls for the reduction of Christian and Muslim residents as much as possible by 2020. It is reported that over 250 Palestinian-owned shops have already closed, either to seek work elsewhere or to avoid high taxes. House demolition orders were issued against four Christian families in the Old City of Jerusalem in late June. Churches are also facing difficulty obtaining the necessary renovation permits and expansion rights for properties in the Old City.

Country Profile - Palestine



Bethlehem University

CNEWA - Sept. 2010

Palestine is among the oldest continuously inhabited regions in the world and has been coveted or dominated by almost every civilization of the eastern Mediterranean.

Modern Palestine now denotes the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank. According to the original terms of the 1947 U.N. partition plan of Mandate Palestine, the territories were to constitute a unified, independent Arab state. But neighboring Arab countries fiercely opposed the terms of the partition plan and attacked the nascent Jewish State of Israel. Over the years, some positive initiatives have advanced, but little real progress toward peace with justice has been made.

Demographics.

Generally, accurate population statistics throughout most of the Middle East are difficult to ascertain due to the lack of census data. In Palestine, the movement of peoples — despite security efforts to the contrary — makes it more difficult. Here are some reasonable estimates gleaned from a variety of sources: Palestine’s total population is around four million people. Gaza’s 1.5 million people are almost entirely Arab Sunni Muslims, but around 4,000 Christians remain. The West Bank is more diverse. Three-quarters of its 2.5 million inhabitants are Arab Sunni Muslims. Jewish settlers, who dominate strategic areas of the West Bank, account for 17 percent of the population. At most, 50,000 Arab Christians — less than 2 percent — live there, principally in and around Bethlehem and Ramallah.

Sociopolitical situation.

The Palestinian territories do not enjoy statehood, though there are some elements of self-governance. The Palestine Liberation Organization is recognized as the representative authority of the Palestinian people and has observer status at the United Nations. The Oslo Accords in 1993 established the Palestinian Authority as the territories' governing body, vesting it with some degree of control over internal security and civilian-related matters. Currently, the Palestinian Authority "controls" only the West Bank.

Israeli-imposed restrictions on right of entry and exit, as well as movement within the West Bank, have isolated and fragmented Palestinian society. Israeli authorities exercise full civil and military control of 61 percent of the West Bank and the 150,000 Palestinians who live in that area. Classified as a high-risk area by international humanitarian organizations, it lacks safe drinking water and basic sanitation facilities and is afflicted by high poverty and unemployment rates. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 10 percent of the West Bank will fall on the Israeli side of the separation barrier once it is complete.

After winning the parliamentary elections in January 2006, Hamas assumed complete control of Gaza. Conflict between Hamas and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in June 2007 effectively severed ties between the two Palestinian territories.

Much of Gaza's infrastructure was destroyed in January 2009 during the conflict between Hamas and Israel. The territory continues to lack a functioning sewage system (open sewage is commonplace) and basic necessities, such as food, medical supplies, construction materials and fuel. At present, Gaza's sole power plant does not operate at full capacity, shutting down between 8 and 12 hours a day.

Egypt has lifted its side of the blockade to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza. (Israel has not.) Still, residents depend on goods smuggled from Egypt via tunnels. Hamas authorities tax small businesses on the smuggled goods they purchase and charge tunnel operators an administrative fee.

Notwithstanding the current situation, education institutions in Gaza and the West Bank continue to operate. Public education is universal from grades one through 12. By regional and global standards, the territories' enrollment and literacy rates are high.

Many Palestinians do not have access to affordable, quality health care. In Gaza, clinics and hospitals lack basic supplies, medications and equipment. Most health care facilities in both territories depend heavily on international assistance, such as aid and church organizations, to help cover operating costs.

Economic situation.

Israel's blockade of Gaza, which began in 2007, has devastated its economy. Two out of every three banks have closed. Half of Gaza's residents are unemployed. More than three-quarters of the population live at or below the poverty line and more than half rely on international aid for survival. Since the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000, the West Bank's economy has struggled. Real GDP growth dropped substantially between 2000 and 2002, making modest recoveries in 2003 and 2004. It then contracted in 2005 and 2006. Unemployment rose in that period, exceeding a staggering 30 percent.

Since 2007, the West Bank's economy has shown signs of recovery. The tourism industry, in particular, has experienced a relative boom.

Religious situation.

Christian emigration is most dramatic in Palestine — despite the Palestinian Authority's efforts to discourage it. Since 1967, Gaza and the West Bank combined have lost more than 35 percent of their Christian population to emigration. The most affected are the Christian communities of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour and Ramallah, where they once dominated the population.

Church leaders worry that, if the last remaining Christians emigrate, the Palestinian church — which is an integral part of the church of Jerusalem — will be reduced to empty shrines and charitable works of mercy alone.

Jerusalem remains the center of religious life for Palestinian Christians, who for more than 1,600 years entered its gates to venerate the sites associated with Jesus. Yet in the last two years, Israeli authorities in Jerusalem have tightened security measures during the Easter liturgies, allowing far fewer Palestinian Christians access to the Old City's holy sites, particularly the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This year, no more than a few hundred Palestinian Christians participated in the Holy Fire celebration, which once attracted thousands. This has fueled tensions between the Greek Orthodox patriarchate and the local Orthodox community, who perceive the patriarchate as endorsing Israeli security.

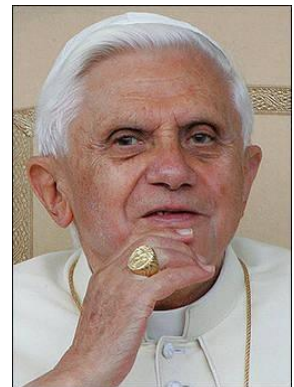
Gaza's beleaguered Christians continue their social service outreach to the community. Christians provide health care, education and rehabilitative and social services.

Pope Benedict XVI's Arrival Speech in Palestinian Territories

Wednesday, 13 May 2009 20:30

Mr President, Dear Friends,

I greet all of you from my heart, and I warmly thank the President, Mr Mahmoud Abbas, for his words of welcome. My pilgrimage to the lands of the Bible would not be complete without a visit to Bethlehem, the City of David and the birthplace of Jesus Christ. Nor could I come to the Holy Land without accepting the kind invitation of President Abbas to visit these Territories and to greet the Palestinian people. I know how much you have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of the turmoil that has afflicted this land for decades. My heart goes out to all the families who have been left homeless.



My heart goes out to all the families who have been left homeless. This afternoon I will pay a visit to the order to express my solidarity with the people who have lost so much. To those among you who mourn members and loved ones in the hostilities, particularly the recent conflict in Gaza, I offer an assurance frequent remembrance in prayer. Indeed, I keep all of you in my daily prayers, and I earnestly beg the Lord for peace and lasting peace, in the Palestinian Territories and throughout the region.

Mr President, the Holy See supports the right of your people to a sovereign Palestinian homeland in the secure and at peace with its neighbors, within internationally recognized borders. Even if at present this is not being realized, I urge you and all your people to keep alive the flame of hope, hope that a way can be found to realize the legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians for peace and stability. In the words of the late Pope John Paul II can be "no peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness" (Message for the 2002 World Day of Prayer for the Unity of Christians). I call on the parties to this long-standing conflict to put aside whatever grievances and divisions still stand in the way and to reach out with generosity and compassion to all alike, without discrimination. Just and peaceful relations between the peoples of the Middle East can only be achieved through a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect, in which the dignity of all are acknowledged and upheld. I ask all of you, I ask your leaders, to make a renewed commitment to these goals. In particular I call on the international community to bring its influence to bear in favor of a just peace that through honest and persevering dialogue, with full respect for the demands of justice, lasting peace can be attained in these lands.

It is my earnest hope that the serious concerns involving security in Israel and the Palestinian Territories will be resolved sufficiently to allow greater freedom of movement, especially with regard to contact between family members and access to holy places. Palestinians, like any other people, have a natural right to marry, to raise families, and to receive education and health care. I pray too that, with the assistance of the international community, reconstruction will proceed swiftly wherever homes, schools or hospitals have been damaged or destroyed, especially during the recent conflict. This is essential if the people of this land are to live in conditions conducive to lasting peace and prosperity. Improved infrastructure will provide your young people with better opportunities to acquire valuable skills and to become productive, enabling them to play their part in building up the life of your communities. I make this appeal to the people of the Palestinian Territories today: do not allow the loss of life and the destruction that you have experienced to breed bitterness or resentment in your hearts. Have the courage to resist any temptation you may feel to resort to violence or terrorism. Instead, let what you have experienced renew your determination to build peace. Let it fill you with hope and make a lasting contribution to the future of Palestine, so that it can take its rightful place on the world stage. I invoke sentiments of compassion for all who suffer, zeal for reconciliation, and a firm belief in the possibility of a just and lasting peace.

Mr President, dear friends gathered here in Bethlehem, I invoke upon all the Palestinian people the blessing of our heavenly Father, and I pray fervently that the song which the angels sang here in this place will be heard throughout the earth, good will among men. Thank you. And may God be with you.

+ Benedict XVI

Source: Vatican Radio

Pope John Paul II Address to Delegation of Palestinian Christians

VATICAN CITY, NOV. 10, 2003



Distinguished Guests,

I am pleased to welcome your delegation and I ask you kindly to convey my greetings and good wishes to President Arafat and to all the Palestinian people. I am confident that this visit of prominent Palestinian Christians to the Holy See will lead to a better understanding of the situation of Christians in the Palestinian territories and the significant role which they can play in promoting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Despite the recent setbacks on the road to peace and fresh outbreaks of violence and injustice, we must continue to affirm that peace is possible and that the resolution of differences can only come about through the patient dialogue and persevering commitment of people of good will on both sides. Terrorism must be condemned in all its forms, for it is not only a betrayal of our common humanity, but is absolutely incapable of laying the necessary political, moral and spiritual foundations for a people's freedom and authentic self determination.

I once again call upon all parties to respectfully the resolutions of the United Nations and the commitments made in the acceptance of the peace process, with engagement in a common quest for reconciliation, justice and the building of a secure and harmonious coexistence in the Holy Land. I likewise voice my hope that the national Constitution presently being drafted will give expression to the highest aspirations and the most cherished values of all the Palestinian people, with due recognition of all religious communities and adequate legal protection of their freedom of worship and expression.

Dear friends, through you I send warm greetings to the Christians of the Holy Land, who have an altogether special place in my heart. Upon you and all the Palestinian people I invoke God's blessings of wisdom, strength and peace.

Living Stones of the Holy Land



Drew Christiansen, S.J., an associate editor of America, conducted this interview during Patriarch Michel Sabbah's visit to the Washington, D.C., area in October, 2002.

“Beatitude, the al-Aqsa intifada has gone on now for more than two years. In September you declared it has been “a catastrophe” for the Palestinian people. What did you mean?

The conditions of life imposed by the Israeli military are simply inhuman. The whole population, more than three million people, is under siege. There is no movement between cities or from village to village. Normal routine is impossible. Ordinary economic activity has come to a stop. Unemployment is rampant. Worse still, curfews keep people in their homes for days on end. It is forbidden to go to work, to school, even to the hospital. How can you describe the suppression of an entire people except as inhuman?

The confrontation has pushed the Palestinian people to despair. The Israelis take any expression of resistance, violent or not, as a pretext to kill and destroy as much as they can. Neither side deals with the other as if they were human beings. Each side kills and humiliates the other.

The 40-day siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem last April seems to have been a great blow to Palestinian Christians and particularly to Christian-Muslim relations. How did it affect the morale of Christians in Palestine?

In one word, we felt abandoned. Though various people interceded, no one was able to intercede effectively for us. Today there are no Christian powers to protect us as in the 19th and 20th centuries. There are Christian people in the West, of course, but no Christian nations. People waited for an effective intervention. When it did not come, they felt abandoned.

The siege actually strengthened Christian-Muslim relations, because Muslims found refuge in a Christian shrine. We share everything, as we share the sufferings of daily life. Life is terrible for everyone. Until last month, there was a complete curfew. [Ed. A siege remains in place around the whole West Bank. A curfew was re-imposed on Bethlehem on Nov. 21.] Some

people have found the situation too much to bear and have emigrated. Most remain, living in harsh conditions and feeling abandoned by the world.

Does the experience of abandonment extend to the churches as well?

No. There is strong solidarity between the churches of Jerusalem and those abroad, especially in the United States. They give great attention to what is happening in the Holy Land. Their statements and actions regarding U.S. and Israeli policy are most welcome. There is much solidarity and friendship with the church in the United States, especially the U.S. Catholic Conference of Catholic Bishops. This type of advocacy is not often repeated elsewhere, though the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has become very active in the last few years too. Some parishes and dioceses have even begun to twin with ours. There are even efforts at direct action to conciliate the two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians. This is a special contribution to peace of the American church.

This support has been ecumenical with help from the Holy See, the World Council of Churches and direct contacts on the part of the world church with the churches in the Holy Land. U.S. Protestant groups, especially World Vision and the Presbyterian Church, have been notable in their support of the Latin Patriarchate along with the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation, a group founded to assist the churches in the Holy Land.

How do you assess the prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority?

It is not pessimistic to say the prospects for peace are poor. The situation is very difficult. The fundamental facts are demographic. Those resisting occupation are young, unmarried, without fear and with conviction in their souls. They are committed to struggle for the freedom of their people and their land. Half the population is young. They are ready to go on resisting for years and years. The resistance of the young is the basic dynamic Israel must understand.

Israel's survival depends on being surrounded by friends, not enemies. Israeli repression of the Palestinian people creates hostility in the whole neighborhood of the Middle East. All Muslims and Arabs are hostile to Israel because of its occupation. One day all Israel's strength will not be enough to resist their anger. It will crumble from fatigue. Making peace with the Palestinians is Israel's only hope of lasting security. When relations with Palestine become normal, then the hostility of other Arab neighbors will vanish. When there is friendship with the Palestinians, there will be friendship in the region.

As you visit the United States, there is a great deal of talk about impending war with Iraq. What effect would war with Iraq have on the situation in Palestine and Israel?

We fear an eventual war with Iraq. It will inevitably have a direct, negative influence on the situation on the West Bank and in Gaza. Israel's security measures will doubtless be increased with the result that repression of the Palestinian people will worsen. There is real risk of "transfer," that is, the mass deportation of Palestinians and Arab Israelis into exile. The fear is palpable.

So far, the talk of war has deepened Palestinians' sense of abandonment. Europeans offer economic help, when the Israelis permit them to, but they cannot offer political support. Without strong U.S. involvement, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has a free hand.

More and more, events move toward an East-West clash. Opposition to the West will grow in the streets, if not with the regimes. The regimes are committed to the West. The people are not. They also think of things Western as "Christian," and for that reason local Christians in Arab countries are less accepted. In the Middle East, feelings of resentment are beginning to affect daily relations between Christians and Muslims.

People on the Arab street do not understand that there are no longer any Christian states in the West. Christians as such no longer control the levers of power. There are secular states with Christian populations. It is for those Christian populations to dissuade their governments from taking the path to war. It is for them to curb the extremists who favor war.

The Holy Land is a place of pilgrimage. How have these last two years of conflict affected the visits of pilgrims there?

There are a few hardy pilgrims who continue to come, especially from Europe, and we are pleased to receive them. They are people of conviction. People think of the situation as dangerous, but there is little actual danger for pilgrims if they restrict themselves to Galilee, Jerusalem and, when it is possible, Bethlehem. With a little advance planning, they can avoid hot spots.

Pilgrims are an essential feature of the Holy Land. Before the 20th century, pilgrims endured a great deal of hardship on the road and in crossing the sea. They frequently had to pass through hostile territory and to move through armies at war. Today's pilgrims, who come in this time of trouble, are more like their predecessors in times past. We need a new type of pilgrim, less like a tourist, one who comes out of conviction, who is fearless, who supports the churches in the land, whose presence is a sign of hope for the three religions.

We urge your readers to join the ranks of these new pilgrims and live out their solidarity with us, the living stones of the Holy Land. It would be wonderful for them to join us in Bethlehem this Christmas to experience our commemoration of the Nativity under occupation. It would add to our hope for peace and freedom.

Editor's note: Born in 1933 near Nazareth, in Galilee, Michel Sabbah is the first Palestinian to serve as Latin (Roman Catholic) patriarch of Jerusalem. (Patriarchates are churches founded by Apostles. James, the brother of the Lord, is reckoned the founder of the Church of Jerusalem.) Patriarch Sabbah is president of Pax Christi International.

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Patriarch's Plea on Behalf of the Holy Land

Monday, September 14, 2009, published by ACN (Aid to the Church in Need)



The most senior Catholic leader in the Middle East has said that the future of the Church in the Holy Land is now in doubt unless fellow Christians around the world step up efforts to help them.

Speaking to Catholic charity, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), Patriarch Fouad Twal, stressed that emigration had drastically reduced the numbers of Christians in both Israel and Palestine. The Patriarch said that the faithful in Jerusalem were expected to fall from 10,000 today to little more than 5,000 in 2016. He also said that in the Holy Land as a whole, Christians had declined from 10 percent to two percent within 60 years although other evidence shows the decline to be even more severe.

Stressing that until now the Pope's May pilgrimage to the Holy Land had brought no respite to the oppression of minorities, the Patriarch said that "ongoing discrimination within Israel threatens Christians and Muslims alike." He continued, "From limiting movement and ignoring housing needs to taxation burdens and infringing on residency rights, Palestinian Christians do not know where to turn."

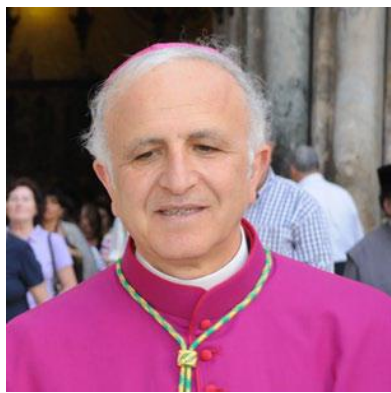
He spoke out in particular against the wall erected by Israel around the West Bank. Patriarch Twal said that as well as hampering freedom of movement the wall "has enclosed many Palestinians in ghetto-like areas where access to work, medical care, schooling and other basic services have been badly affected." He went on: "We have a new generation of Christians who cannot visit the Holy Places of their faith that are only a few kilometers from their place of residence."

Patriarch Twal paid tribute to the work of ACN, which is supporting seminarians and religious Sisters in Bethlehem, families who make olive wood devotional items and initiatives promoting inter-faith cooperation. He said, "I would like to thank Aid to the Church in Need. We count on your love and your support. Without you, what is our future?"

The Patriarch stressed the importance of five 'P's prayer, pilgrimage, pressure (lobbying and other political activism), projects all leading towards peace. Speaking of the need to achieve a lasting settlement in the region, Patriarch Twal said, "If in 61 years we have not been able to find peace, this means that the methods we used were the wrong ones."

He added, "It seems that politicians are more afraid of peace than of war and they prefer to manage the conflict rather than solve it."

The Problems Holy Land Inhabitants Face Daily.



By H.E. William Shomali, Auxiliary Bishop of Jerusalem
Speech given at HCEF International Conference, Oct. 2011

Introduction

Historical Palestine is a small country, only 25000 km², but rich in history. It is the religious cradle of the Judeo-Christian world and a center of Islam. There, live two peoples, with two languages, and practicing three monotheistic religions. This small geographic area continues to handle a serious conflict for nearly one century. This conflict explodes every 10 or 12 years, and we cannot expect that it will be resolved in a short time, because of other major problems (Israeli settlements, return of refugees, the borders of the future Palestinian state and especially the question of Jerusalem). We live in a tense situation which causes both Israelis and Palestinians much frustration and bitterness. Sometimes, both become more reasonable. The exchange of prisoners last week was a good signal sent by both sides meaning that it is still possible to achieve something positive.

We also know that same causes lead to the same effects. Violence can explode at any time, and it can include the Holy Land and the entire Middle East. An example is the current tension between Turkey and Israel after the massacre of nine Turks on board a ship on the coast of Gaza. Tension can unleash a war. Another example: every time Fundamentalist Jews congregate and come up to the esplanade of the Temple Mount, it leads to a lot of tension that may one day ignite the entire region. The second Intifada began there. The Temple Mount remains a “casus belli”(cause of war) between Muslims and Jews, something that is difficult to resolve through negotiations.

In this part of the world lives a vibrant Christian minority, but its number continues to shrink.

Two important questions arise:

How can this Christian minority live or survive?

What hope have they for the future?

For reasons of methodology and time I will limit my talk mainly to Palestinian Christians.

I- Economy

The Palestinian Territories is a poor country. If we compare its situation with other neighboring countries in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and taking into account purchasing power parity (PPP) per capita, we will have the following results from the World Bank:

Country	Year	GDP or PPP per capita	Classification of 192
Qatar	2011	\$179,000	1
USA	2011	\$47, 200	11
France	2011	\$33,000	39
Italy	2011	\$30,500	42
Israel	2011	\$29,800	45
Jordan	2011	\$5,400	142
Palestinian Territories	2011	\$2,900	168\226

Gaza is a bit apart from other Palestinian territories, because of the blockade and restrictions imposed that make humanitarian conditions deplorable and prevent the improvement in the situation. Restrictions affect the importation of raw materials. Poverty remains very high in the Palestinian territories: 26% of Palestinians live in poverty. The World Food Program (WFP) indicates that 33% of Palestinians are currently in a state of food deficiency.

A- Resources:

In addition to foreign aid, particularly European and American aid which reached one billion dollars a year, there are five main resources of the Palestinian economy:

1. Stone industry: The industry provides the Palestinian economy \$700 million a year. A fifth of the product is consumed in Palestine; the rest is mainly exported to Israel.

2. Religious tourism: Religious tourism has a strong potential for the future. The holy places are sacred to the three religions and can attract millions of pilgrims if there was peace and especially if Muslim pilgrims could obtain visas. In this case, the numbers could triple for hotels, restaurants, and buses because the number of pilgrims would rise from 3 million pilgrims a year today to 10 million as we dream. In addition to guides, hotels and restaurants who profit from the tourism industry, are the artisans. They make sacred objects from olive wood and mother of pearl. This craft industry brought into the country in the 14th century by the Franciscan friars now provides jobs for hundreds of Christians.

3. The third resource is from **professions and jobs** in the public and private sectors. Wages are generally low. An employee normally receives between 300 and 1,000 Euros a month. The great advantage of being an employee is the health insurance coverage which only 20% of the population has access, and others must arrange for coverage as they can. If the need to undergo surgery arises, they literally must beg to pay the cost.

4. Taxes and foreign aid: Palestinian Authority's annual budget is \$3.7 billion. Part of it is constituted by the taxes that Israel collects from Palestinians import and gives back to Palestinians. Since Oslo peace accords signed between Israel and the Palestinians in 1994,

Israel has been collecting taxes on behalf of the PNA every month. Israel usually transfers 100 million U.S. dollars every month into the PNA budget. The PNA uses the money to pay salaries of 148, 000 security and civil employees. Only \$400 million are yearly collected in income and sales taxes within the West Bank and Gaza. The total income from taxes amounts to 1 billion 600 million dollars. Why are domestic tax receipts so low? The economy is in constant recession and "operates well below its potential," according to the World Bank.

What debilitates and cripples the Palestinian economy is Israel's heavy, systematic restrictions on movement within the occupied territories – hundreds of roadblocks and military checkpoints that delay, prolong and sabotage normal economic activity and, hence, potential tax revenues. Even with all those revenues coming from taxes, there is still more than two billion shortfall in the Authority's budget that should be filled by foreign help. In fact, 1 billion 800 million come as help from Europe, USA and Arab countries.

5. There is also a light industry: textiles, furniture, paper, paints, plastic manufacturing, medicine, food such as bread and pastries; and building materials. Bethlehem also produces araq and wine. Cremisan wine is famous throughout the region.

B- Some difficulties:

1. Walls and barriers: Israel seems to have invalidated the border issue by building a wall 700 kilometers long, apparently for safety and security, which is partly true, but it is above all to create the new border between Israelis and Palestinians. This wall swallowed almost half of the Palestinian territories and includes illegal settlements which were built after 1967. The walls and barriers are a nightmare for everyone. It is not easy to get a permit to enter Israel. Exceptions are made as in cases of illness, or pilgrimage during major feasts. Even with a permit, workers going to Israel are faced with the difficulty of crossing the checkpoint, losing so much time for passage. Some would get up at 2 o'clock in the morning to line up at the checkpoint to be the first to cross when it opens at 6:00 A.M.

Many Christian and Moslems are willing to go to pray in Jerusalem, the holiest city for Christians and one of the three holiest in Islam. Christian worshippers need a permit to enter the Holy City. It is given at random. But people are happy if they obtain one which lasts one month. During their feasts, Moslems are allowed just for one day. Generally those who are above 45 years are allowed to enter without permits.

2. Travel: Furthermore, the Palestinian territories do not have their own airport and Palestinians cannot travel from Tel Aviv, but from the Amman airport in Jordan. Trips become longer and more expensive with difficulties in obtaining visa for the host country. What a waste of time to prepare for a trip. It's heroic! The most surprising thing is that you get used to the abnormal that becomes normal.

3. Real Estate construction: This problem is unique to Jerusalem and Israel. The total population of Jerusalem is approximately 800,000 inhabitants, of which 36% are Palestinians and 2% are Christians. Normally, the Palestinians should get a third of the building permits from the municipality. But in reality, they only get 8%. This has made house rentals more expensive and the price of land for construction has escalated. An apartment of 100m² would cost in the same neighborhood of Jerusalem about 400,000 dollars. That is why many Jerusalemite families will live in Bethlehem or Ramallah to find reasonably priced housing

accommodation at the risk of losing their social security and health insurance, and even their Jerusalem identity card. Many give up on marriage because of housing shortage.

Despite segregation in the housing sector which caused a serious crisis on the Palestinian side, the Latin Patriarchate, after years of hard work, received from the municipality of Jerusalem, permission to build 72 apartments in the south area of the city in Beit Safafa, two kilometers from the Bethlehem checkpoint. This project will assist young couples and families. The success of this project has encouraged others to duplicate this undertaking. Without such projects, young people of Jerusalem will be forced to emigrate.

4. Family reunification: This is a serious problem. If the wife is Jordanian and the husband is Palestinian, the wife cannot come and live in the Palestinian territories without permission to enter Palestine. The same is true for a Palestinian woman whose husband is in Jerusalem or Israel. Thousands of such cases exist. Moreover, all Palestinians, who were outside of Palestine during the 1967 war and who have not been registered by the Israelis have lost their and their children's right of residence in their country of origin. Among them are thousands of Christians

5. Hatred and ignorance of each other: Because of wars, violence and retaliation between the two peoples; because of the barriers and walls that have enclosed the Palestinians in a large ghetto; because of the large number of prisoners in Israeli prisons and suicidal actions committed by Palestinians in Israeli cities, hatred and ignorance of the other reign in the Holy Land. If a Palestinian child is asked what he knows about the Holocaust, he will deny it or say that the Jewish people well deserved it. If an Israeli child is asked what the word "Nakba" means, he can say he knows nothing. Everyone has his own memory of the past and retains only his own sufferings, being unwilling to open up to the suffering of others.

6. Emigration: All the foregoing reasons, including unemployment, insecurity and being a minority living with two large majorities have pushed many of our Christians to emigrate to the West. In the English census of Palestine in 1922, the Christians of Jerusalem were 14.700 while Muslims were 13.400. In 1948, Christians were 29.000, and Muslims 40.000. The Nakba of 1948 decimated the Christian population of Jerusalem, that the 1967 census showed the number of Christians down to 12.646. Today there are approximately 10,000 to 12,000 inhabitants in a total population of 800,000. The number of Palestinian Christians of the diaspora is half a million, while those who remained in Palestine are 50000. In Israel there are 180,000.

7. Water: There is severe water shortage in the Holy Land. The rainy season lasts three months. The result is an average of 500mll per year. Fortunately there is groundwater which is totally controlled by the Israelis, and the Palestinians are entitled only to a limited portion of this groundwater. It is a paradox, and yet true: what was returned to the Palestinians in Area A and B is the land while the air and what is underground belong to the Israelis who have the right to fly over all of Palestine and control groundwater. The water shortage is a recurring crisis each year during the summer.

II- Politics

Speaking of the economy and the difficulties of daily life, we inevitably hit the political problem. But we want to explore the merits of this problem in its several dimensions.

Why is this conflict so difficult to resolve?

It is difficult because the nature of the dispute, before being political and military, it is ideological with a religious background. Nothing is worse than a politically related religious ideology. The issue revolves around this question: Who owns the Holy Land? There are two answers, two visions of the history of this country, and therefore two possible solutions.

I will limit myself to two points:

1- The territorial issue

The Israelis believe that all Palestine is Jewish by God's promise to Abraham and his descendants. They assume that all Jews living in the Holy Land or in the Diaspora are genealogically descendants of Abraham. We will not discuss the theological problem. We will only talk about the consequences of this ideology. If the Holy Land belongs to the Jews, the term "occupation", used by the United Nations to describe the effects of the 1967 war is wrong. Therefore, Israelis replace it with the word "liberation". They officially call the occupied territories the "disputed territories".

Obama's speech last May recognized the borders of June 4, 1967, but he is not prepared to put his words into practice and to recognize the right of Palestinians to an independent state at the Security Council. On the contrary, he threatens to oppose by the U.S. veto.

2- The Jerusalem Issue:

It is a territorial issue. For Palestinians, Jerusalem is an integral part of the occupied territories. For the Israelis, it is the exclusive and indivisible capital of Israel forever. The idea of making Jerusalem a capital of two states is not accepted by the Israelis. The issue of Jerusalem is one of the greatest problems of the world. The hardest part of the problem is the conflict between Muslims and Jews for the possession of the Temple Mount, now under Muslim control, which they call al-Aqsa or Al Haram Al Sharif. This holy place is a flash point of the ongoing tensions between the two communities. In part there is also an apprehension that some Jews wish to build the Third Temple.

III- Religion:

The Message to the People of God and the 44 Recommendations of the Synod of Bishops of the Middle East are a Charter for us. The Synod did not claim to find a solution for all problems of Christians but it provided a necessary light to look at the reality through the eyes of God. An example may illustrate this: to make Christians stay in the Holy Land, we must persuade them that their permanence and cohabitation with Moslems in Palestine is a true vocation to live and to witness of our faith in the land of Jesus.

Freedom of religion and freedom of conscience: Religious freedom exists in the Holy Land. We do not suffer from any problems. We can build schools, churches and display religious symbols in Palestine, Israel and Jordan. Furthermore, freedom of conscience is missing. Someone who changes his faith is scorned by the community. A Muslim who converts to Christianity may risk his life. A young Christian woman who flees home to marry a Muslim is abandoned by her family, never to be seen again, cast to oblivion and considered dead. When this happens, it is a real tragedy for the family. It is the talk of the whole village, putting blame on the parents who failed to properly educate their daughter.

Relations with Muslims: Comparing our situation in Jordan and Palestine with what is happening in Egypt, Iraq or Saudi Arabia, our relations with Muslims are really good. Although there is occasionally little tension, it is wrong to talk about anti-Christian persecution. What we expect from the dialogue with Islam are: to dispel prejudices; foster mutual knowledge and esteem, friendship; dialogue on secondary issues such as the environment and climate change; highlighting common values such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage. Together we have a common history and a common language. There are places of daily dialogue in our schools, our hospitals, at the university in addition to annual conferences. We must not underestimate the interactions of life, such as dialogue in the street, good neighborhood, invitations to a Ramadan Iftar and exchange of visits during the holidays. But what happened in Egypt in the last days is appalling. The religious freedom for Copts in building churches is limited. They suffered when they saw their church put to fire in a small village of the upper Egypt, 440 miles north of Aswan city, nearest big town. They went to the street to protest. What happened was unexpected. The clashes with the army left 25 dead and 200 wounded. The solution is that Egypt changes the rules and follows one standard in the construction of mosques and churches.

Relations with Jews: We have no serious problems in interreligious dialogue with Judaism. What we have in common, such as the Bible, the Jewish origins of our liturgy and the first church give us a solid platform for a serious dialogue based on mutual respect. But we must highlight that political issues often poison interreligious dialogue. It is disconcerting that most of the time dialogues do not happen between local Christians and Jews in Israel but in other countries between foreign Christians and Jews of the Diaspora.

Let me conclude that –

Despite the continuing conflict that does not seem to have a promising solution in the near future, we must “hope against all hope” (Rom.4:18), and pray that the Lord transforms this death situation into a life situation where all the inhabitants of the country, Christians, Muslims and Jews can live harmoniously. The fate of this community and its survival depends on the evolution of the peace process but also on the ability of our Christians to live as free and equal citizens in the midst of two majority blocks: Islam and Judaism. It also depends on their ability to find within their faith a force to remain Christians, to be proud of it and to offer a beautiful testimony to others of their faith. We pray every day for peace, knowing that the Lord is the master of history and that peace is a gift from Him and not the result of diplomatic efforts that have altogether failed. The Lord knows to surprise us and generously gives more than our expectations. In fact, Jerusalem is the city of great surprises. This is where the Lord has risen on the third day when nobody believed. Relying on this, let us together continue to pray and hope.



Statement Regarding the Separation Wall from The Patriarchs and Head of Churches in Jerusalem

We the head of Churches in Jerusalem affirm our determination to do all in our power to work for Peace in the Holy Land - a Peace that is concerned with the well-being of every resident of this Land, be they Israeli or Palestinian, to give them security, justice, freedom, independence and personal dignity.

Let no-one doubt our abhorrence of violence, whoever the perpetrator. Peace will only be established when all violence is eradicated from both sides. If the present Road Map for Peace is to bring positive results, we believe the Separation Wall constitutes a grave obstacle. For both nations the Wall will result in a feeling of isolation. Moreover from many Palestinians it means the deprivation of land, (some 10% more than that of the Occupation in 1967) livelihood, statehood and family life.

Occupation remains the root cause of the conflict and of the continuing suffering in the Holy Land.

Take for example the proposed Separation Wall around Bethlehem, for us Christians, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. The consequences will be devastating to the Christian Community; not least the psychological impact on daily life. The community will be isolated following the deprivation of access to land and freedom of movement. Visits of pilgrims will be further discouraged.

We appeal to both Authorities - Israeli and Palestinian - and to all Peace-loving peoples around the world, (who should make urgent contact with their leaders, both Political and Religious), in an effort to remove this impediment to a comprehensive and lasting Peace.

Jerusalem 26th August 2003

+Patriarch Michel Sabbah
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

+Patriarch Torkom II
Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem

Fr. Giovanni Battistelli, O.F.M.
Custos of the Holy Land

+Anba Abraham
Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of Jerusalem

+Swerios Malki Murad
Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Jerusalem

+Abba Cuostos
Ethiopian Orthodox Archbishop of Jerusalem

+Riah Abu El-Assal
Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem

+Munib A. Younan
Lutheran Evangelical Bishop of Jerusalem

Archmindrite Mtanious Haddad
Greek Catholic Patriarchal Exarch. Jerusalem

+Butros Malki
*Syrian Catholic Bishop in Jerusalem

***The Patriarchs and Head of Churches
in Jerusalem***

emphasis added – Ed.

Peace is possible in Middle East, Pope says

at Synod's closing Mass

Oct.25, 2010 - Cindy Wooden - Catholic News Service - Vatican City

Closing the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East, Pope Benedict XVI said, "We must never resign ourselves to the absence of peace." "Peace is possible. Peace is urgent," the Pope said Oct. 24 during his homily at the Mass closing the two-week synod.

Peace is what will stop Christians from emigrating, he said. Pope Benedict also urged Christians to promote respect for freedom of religion and conscience, "one of the fundamental human rights that each state should always respect."

Synod members released a message Oct. 23 to their own faithful, their government leaders, Catholics around the world, the international community and to all people of goodwill. The Vatican also released the 44 propositions adopted by synod members as recommendations for Pope Benedict to consider in writing his post-synodal apostolic exhortation.

Although the bishops said the main point of the synod was to find pastoral responses to the challenges facing their people, they said the biggest challenges are caused by political and social injustice and war and conflict.

"We have taken account of the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the whole region, especially on the Palestinians who are suffering the consequences of the Israeli occupation: the lack of freedom of movement, the wall of separation and the military checkpoints, the political prisoners, the demolition of homes, the disturbance of socio-economic life and the thousands of refugees," they said in one of the strongest sentences in the message.

They called for continued Catholic-Jewish dialogue, condemned anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism and affirmed Israel's right to live at peace within its "internationally recognized borders."

Although relations between Christians and Jews in the region often are colored by Israeli-Palestinian tensions, the bishops said the Catholic Church affirms the Old Testament -- the Hebrew Scriptures -- is the word of God and that God's promises to the Jewish people, beginning with Abraham, are still valid.

However, they said, "recourse to theological and biblical positions which use the word of God to wrongly justify injustices is not acceptable. On the contrary, recourse to religion must lead every person to see the face of God in others."

Addressing the synod's final news conference Oct. 23, Melkite Bishop Cyrille S. Bustros of Newton, Mass., said, "For us Christians, you can no longer speak of a land promised to the Jewish people," because Christ's coming into the world demonstrated that God's chosen people are all men and women and that their promised land would be the kingdom of God established throughout the world.

The bishops' point in criticizing some people's use of Scripture was intended to say "one cannot use the theme of the Promised Land to justify the return of Jews to Israel and the expatriation of Palestinians," Bishop Bustros said.

In their message, the bishops expressed particular concern over the future of Jerusalem, particularly given Israeli "unilateral initiatives" that threaten the composition and demographic profile of the city.

Much of the synod's discussion focused on the fact that many Christians are emigrating because of ongoing conflicts, a lack of security and equality and a lack of economic opportunities at home. They praised those who have remained despite hardship and thanked them for their contributions to church and society.

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UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Resolution on the Israeli-Palestinian Crisis

A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, June 15, 2001

During the last nine months we have watched with sorrow and dismay as opportunities for peace in the Middle East have been lost in a spiral of violence. This violence is clearly seen in the destruction of so many homes, in the growing number of wounded and disabled, and most of all in the number of Palestinians and Israelis who have lost their lives, including many children and youth. This cycle of violence has exacerbated an already dangerous situation and dimmed prospects for peace. In this time of darkness, we make our own the prayer of Pope John Paul II:

The terms of the Middle East drama are well known: The Jewish people, after tragic experiences connected with the extermination of so many sons and daughters, driven by the desire for security, set up the State of Israel. At the same time the painful condition of the Palestinian people was created, a large part of whom are excluded from their land.... Gathered here today, we present to the One God, to the Living God, to the Father of all, the problems of peace in the Middle East and also the problem, which is so dear to us, of the rapport and real dialogue with those with whom we are united--in spite of the differences--by faith in one God, the faith inherited from Abraham. May the spirit of unity, mutual respect, and understanding prove to be more powerful than what divides and sets in opposition." (Homily at Otranto, Italy,

Oct. 5, 1980) In this spirit, we reiterate our strong call of November 2000: "The only acceptable option is an end to the violence, respect for the basic human rights of all, and a return to the path of peace." (U.S. Catholic Conference, November 15, 2000.) A way must be found to return quickly to genuine negotiations, embracing, as far as possible, the gains made in the last rounds of final status talks. We deeply regret that the negotiations last summer and fall did not achieve a lasting settlement. Despite that failure and recent, terrible events, it is not too late to embrace nonviolence, dialogue and negotiation as the only road forward.

The steps toward a just and lasting peace remain the same: real security for the State of Israel, a viable state for Palestinians, just resolution of the refugee problem, an agreement on Jerusalem which protects religious freedom and other basic rights,¹ an equitable sharing of resources, especially water, and implementation of relevant UN resolutions and other provisions of international law.² These steps will pave the way to a future of cooperation and accommodation rather than occupation and conflict.

As supporters of the State of Israel and a state for Palestinians, we recognize that each side in this conflict has deep, long-standing and legitimate grievances that must be addressed if there is to be a just and lasting peace.

It is necessary for all to recognize that Palestinians rightly insist on an end to Israel's three-decade-long occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and to the continued establishment and expansion of settlements. Palestinians see this occupation, maintained by force and marked by daily indignities, abuse and violence, as a central underlying cause of the present crisis. Israel has a fundamental right to security, but security will not be won by ongoing annexation of Palestinian land, blockades, air strikes on cities, destruction of crops and homes, and other excessive uses of force.

It is also necessary for all to recognize that Israelis rightly see the failure of Palestinians to demonstrate full respect for Israel's right to exist and flourish within secure borders as a fundamental cause of the conflict. Palestinian leaders must clearly renounce violence and terrorist acts against innocent civilians, take effective steps to stop them, and bring to justice those responsible. The violence undermines the trust required to make peace and weakens the Palestinian search for justice. The Palestinian Authority must show the Israeli people that it is fully committed to prepare its people to live in peace with Israel.

These times call for new attitudes on the part of all the parties to the conflict. "We all know," the Holy Father said during his recent visit to Syria, "that real peace can only be achieved if there is a new attitude of understanding and respect between the peoples of the region, between the followers of the three Abrahamic religions.... [I]t is important that there be an evolution in the way the peoples of the region see one another and that at every level of society the principles of peaceful coexistence be taught and promoted." (Remarks upon arrival in Damascus, Syria, May 5, 2001.)

In the same spirit, this is a moment that requires that more Palestinian leaders and supporters of the Palestinian cause not simply advocate a Palestinian state, but also be unambiguously clear about Israel's right to peace and security, and the imperative to end all violence. This moment equally requires that more Israeli leaders and supporters of the State of Israel not only defend Israel and her people, but also advocate for the legitimate aspiration of Palestinians to live in their own homeland with dignity. At the same time, each community must refrain from inciting hatred against the other. We pray that the voices urging respect for the rights and

aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians will be heeded by their leaders and people. The just claims of both peoples should also enjoy the active support of Christians throughout the world. Civic, educational and religious leaders should be challenged to refrain from fanning the flames of ethnic and religious prejudice and be encouraged to promote a process of reconciliation without which peace will never be a reality.

While peace will ultimately spring from new attitudes and new ways of acting on the part of Palestinians and Israelis, our government, as well as the entire international community, must be actively engaged, in appropriate and significant ways, in working for a just and comprehensive solution to this conflict. We expect that they will do so in a way that responds respectfully to the legitimate claims and expectations of both parties, and does not acquiesce in unilateral actions which undermine negotiations.

As Catholics in the United States, we have a special concern for the toll the Israeli-Palestinian struggle is taking on the Christian communities in the area. The native-born Christian presence in Israel and the occupied territories, less than two per-cent of the total, risks shrinking into insignificance, in no small part due to the present troubles and their human and economic consequences. Other developments, such as the concerns of Christians about the Nazareth mosque, only exacerbate a sense of marginalization. As a result of these and other factors, the future of a living Christian presence in the Holy Land is in doubt. The Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, himself a Palestinian from Nazareth, has pleaded with families to remain as faithful witnesses to the Gospel in the Holy Land. Regrettably, many families have already emigrated and many more are tempted to do so. Partnerships with Catholic parishes in the Holy Land are one way to encourage the Christian presence there.

Mindful of our historic debt to the Church in the Holy Land and our duties of solidarity to a sister church in severe need, we ask Catholics in the United States to join in strengthening the Church there during the present crisis and supporting its work for a just peace. We urge Catholics to be much more conscious of and give much greater attention to the crisis in the Middle East, and do what they can to support a living Christian presence in the land of Jesus' birth. We urge them to be unflagging in pressing our government to play an active and constructive role in the search for a just peace. We urge them to reach out in dialogue and joint action with Jews, Muslims and other Christians in this country. Finally, we urge them to support generously the urgent relief and development work of Catholic Relief Services, the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of the Holy Land, and other worthy initiatives. The efforts of these and other organizations would be severely undermined if the U.S. government were to cut off humanitarian aid for the occupied territories, as some are proposing.

We pray that the God of peace, who has called us to be ambassadors of reconciliation, will achieve what human means alone cannot. Confident in God's blessings, we ask U.S. Catholics to join us through their prayers, their fasting and their good works in assisting Palestinians and Israelis, Jews, Muslims and Christians, in securing justice and peace in the Holy Land.

¹ The question of Jerusalem involves two aspects. Territorial sovereignty is a bilateral question for Israelis and the Palestinian Authority to resolve equitably and by negotiations according to UN Resolutions. The religious dimension of Jerusalem, especially the "Old City," involves the need to preserve its unique and sacred character, both the Holy Places and the living communities of believers there. In order to safeguard the religious and human dimensions of Jerusalem, the Holy See has long advocated a

special statute, internationally guaranteed. This statute would secure: (1) freedom of religion and conscience for all; (2) the juridical equality of the three monotheistic religions; (3) respect for the identity and sacred character of the City; (4) protection of and freedom of access for all to the Holy Places; (5) the regime of "status quo" in Holy Places where it applies. This statute, to be negotiated by the two parties in consultation with the three religious communities, could be guaranteed by the UN, the sponsors of the peace process, or another entity, but, in any case, should be sanctioned by the United Nations.

² ***Among the pertinent UN Resolutions are nos. 242, 338, and 194.***

Catholic Teaching on the Holy Land

❖ State for Palestinians

U.S. Bishops

"the establishment of an internationally recognized Palestinian state" [2000]; "a viable state for Palestinians"; "as supporters of the state of Israel and a state for Palestinians"; "the Palestinian people have a right to a free and sovereign homeland" (Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, permanent observer of the Holy See to the U.N. office in Geneva [August 11, 2006] and Pope Benedict XVI [July 24, 2006])

❖ Israel's Right to Exist

U.S. Bishops

It is also necessary for all to recognize that Israelis rightly see the failure of Palestinians to demonstrate full respect for Israel's right to exist and flourish within secure borders as a fundamental cause of the conflict. [2001]

❖ Mutually Just Claims

U.S. Bishops

"The just claims of both peoples should also enjoy the active support of Christians throughout the world." [2001]

❖ A Just & Comprehensive Solution

U.S. Bishops

A negotiated peace in the Holy Land should be part of a comprehensive and lasting negotiated settlement for peace in the Middle East. [2001] For example, the 2002 Saudi Peace Plan proposes that all Arab countries will recognize Israel if it withdraws to the 1967 Green Line.

❖ Supports Key U.N. Resolutions

Vatican

Respect for the U.N. Resolutions by all sides. (*ibid.*)

Resolution 194 states, among other things, that the Palestinian refugees created by the Arab conflict with the nascent State of Israel are allowed to return to their homes. **Resolution 242** emphasizes, among other things, that acquisition by Israel of territory by the 1967 War must be relinquished.

❖ End Israel's Military Occupation

U.S. Bishops

"It is necessary for all to recognize that Palestinians rightly insist on an end to Israel's three-decade-long occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and [stop settlements] to the continued establishment and expansion of settlements. [2001]

❖ Preserve Israel's Right to Security

U.S. Bishops

Israel has a fundamental right to security, but security will not be won by ongoing annexation of Palestinian land, blockades, air strikes on cities, destruction of crops and homes, and other excessive uses of force. [2001]

❖ Negotiations, not Unilateral Actions

U.S. Bishops

"Does not acquiesce in unilateral actions which undermine negotiations" [2001]; "President Bush's recent announcement of support for the unilateral Israeli policy toward Gaza and the West Bank is deeply troubling. The President's acquiescence in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's unilateral approach risks undermining the Road Map for Peace and prospects for a negotiated

settlement of this conflict. U.S. leadership is put at risk if it accepts the view of Prime Minister Sharon that unilateral actions will delay negotiating an Israeli-Palestinian peace for a generation. A just peace cannot be imposed by one side. We urge the Bush administration to return to the traditional U.S. role of 'honest broker' ... in accord with international law and existing U.N. Resolutions." [April 26, 2004]

❖ Condemns Any Terrorism

Vatican

Unequivocal condemnation of terrorism, from whatever side it may come² be it movement terrorism (Palestinian) or state-sponsored (Israeli).

❖ Condemns Injustice and Disregard for Human Rights

U.S. Bishops

Disapproval of the conditions of injustice and humiliation imposed on the Palestinian people as well as reprisals and retaliation, which only make the sense of frustration and hatred grow. There should be a "scrupulous respect for human rights and humanitarian law." (*ibid.*) "Israel said ... it was shocked and distressed by a senior Vatican cardinal's likening of Gaza under Israel's military offensive to a concentration camp."

❖ Proportionate Response for Self-Defense

Vatican

Nine Israeli human rights groups accused the army of endangering Gazan civilians and called for a war crimes investigation: The groups wrote to Israeli leaders that the Gaza campaign has left civilians nowhere to flee.³ "The level of harm to the civilian population is unprecedented" while "military forces are making wanton use of lethal force."⁴

❖ Protect Holy Places

Vatican

The duty for the parties in conflict to protect the holy places, which are of the greatest importance to the three monotheistic religions and a patrimony of all humanity. (*ibid.*) By the end of the 1945-1949 conflict, Vatican priorities shifted from shrines to the believers: "I would prefer that all of the shrines be destroyed rather than the Christian population be eliminated."

❖ Duty of Solidarity of Mother Church

U.S. Bishops

"Mindful of our historic debt to the Church in the Holy Land and our duties of solidarity to a sister church in severe need, we ask Catholics in the United States to join in strengthening the church there during the present crisis. [2001]

❖ Opposes Jewish and Islamic Extremist Ideologies

Vatican

"Zionism is not the embodiment of Israel as it is described in the Bible. Zionism is a contemporary phenomenon which undergirds the modern state [of Israel], which is philosophically and politically secular."⁵ Political Zionism is a secular Jewish movement intended to grant the Jewish people sovereignty over what was once Palestine.



www.TerraSanctaPilgrimages.org

¹ NCCB, "Resolution on the Israeli-Palestinian Crisis," *Origins*, July 5, 2001, vol. 31, 141-142.

² Msgr. Boccardi, "Five-Point Vatican Position on the Holy Land Conflict," *Origins*, April 25, 2002, vol. 31, 753.

³ *Detroit Free Press*, January 15, 2009, 4A.

⁴ *Jewish Voice for Peace*, January 16, 2009.

⁵ *L'Osservatore Romano*, May 28, 1948.



Section 2



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Christian High Holy Days

by Sami El-Yousef, a native of Jerusalem. Sami is CNEWA's regional director for Palestine and Israel.



*Police limit access to the courtyard of the Holy Sepulchre, where thousands typically greet the procession.
(photo: CNEWA, Jerusalem)*

Childhood dreams. I was 14 years old when my father decided I was ready to participate in the Holy Fire celebration on Holy Saturday, according to the Greek Orthodox tradition.

I belong to one of the 13 oldest Christian families in Jerusalem. Hundreds of years ago, locals commemorated these early Christians by placing in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre 13 banners, each named after one of these families. The only privilege the families' descendants enjoy is that once a year, on Holy Saturday, a representative from each family carries the banner in a procession that marches around Christ's tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre three times.

After the procession, the Greek Orthodox patriarch enters the sealed tomb where the Miracle of the Holy Fire occurs, symbolizing the flame of the Resurrection. The fire is then passed out to the waiting crowds through a small window in the outer chamber of the edicule, which enshrines the tomb. Within seconds, the whole church lights up. This must be the most amazing surge of faith I experience throughout year. At that precise moment, I feel renewed as a Christian and prepared to face the many challenges we Arab Christians confront daily in the Holy Land. Since my first experience, I have never missed this amazing celebration except when I was out of the country.

Recent trends. Every year, as Easter approaches, we begin discussing who will represent our family on Holy Saturday. Though I must admit that, in recent years, with so many of us emigrating from the Holy Land, selecting our representative has become less of a problem. The number of adults still around who can carry the heavy banner has dwindled to a handful. As a matter of fact, about half of those 13 families have no one left in the Holy Land. For the last few years, three of my relatives have joined me in carrying the banners representing these families — an honor we deeply cherish.

These days, the discussion has shifted in my family from “who will carry the banner” to “who can even access the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.” For the past few years, Israeli authorities have closed the Old

City and the area around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during Holy Week, preventing local Christian and pilgrims from attending the Holy Fire celebration.

My 88-year-old father remembers when Jordan controlled East Jerusalem. During Holy Week, fleets of buses packed with pilgrims from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iraq would park along the road to Jericho. The crowds of pilgrims would walk to the celebration in the Old City. Their numbers far exceeded today's turnout at Easter time, yet the Old City never closed its gates and the streets inside were never blocked. Access was open to all.

A couple of years ago, Israeli authorities attempted to impose a permit system limiting the number of people who could attend the Holy Fire celebration. Incensed, local Christians demanded the government respect the church's centuries-old Status Quo, which prohibits any restrictions on the faithful visiting the church. After all, pilgrims naturally want to get as close as possible to Christianity's birthplace, especially during Holy Week.

Detained at St. Jacob's. This year, despite outcry from church leaders, members of civil society and the Christian community at large, Israeli authorities made it next to impossible to enter the Old City on Holy Saturday. In the early morning hours, police set up roadblocks at all the Old City's gates and dozens of manned checkpoints along the streets and alleyways leading to the church. Authorities cooperated with church leaders only to the extent of allowing a limited number of local Christians access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, provided that police escort them. Israeli authorities also detained a small group of locals at Saint Jacob's Orthodox Church from early morning until just 15 minutes before the Holy Fire celebration began.

Since I live in the Old City, it was very strange to be escorted by Israeli police officers to my church. I felt ashamed to have capitulated to such treatment, but regretfully that was the only way to get to my destination. It was even stranger to witness St. Jacob's Church — my parish — transformed into a holding cell, a detention center if you will, for hours.

Though the group detained in the church numbered no more than 70, many panicked when they realized that its two doors were locked shut from the outside by Israeli police. Despite our loud cries from inside and numerous phone calls, the police refused to let us out. My frightened cousin asked a church elder and trustee what would happen if a fire broke out. Not sure himself, the wise man could only tell us to keep our faith.

Finally, St. Jacob's priest and the mukhtar were released, then the rest of us. We hurriedly made our way to the Christian Quarter to catch up with a troop of Boy Scouts and prominent members of the local community, who were waiting for us to begin the procession to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Traditionally, the city allows 30 minutes for the Holy Saturday procession to march from the Christian Quarter to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This year it was reduced to 15 minutes. Who knows what next year will bring given recent trends.

Surprises. When the Boy Scouts, who led the procession, started playing the drums, the eager crowd began pushing and prodding one another along, in their usual way, from the Christian Quarter to the Holy Sepulchre. The Status Quo calls for us to be at the church's main entrance at precisely 12:30 p.m. For close to 30 years of my life, I participated in this celebration, and we never missed the deadline.

When we arrived in the church's courtyard, to our surprise, no one was there to welcome us but a long line of Israeli police officers. Normally, thousands of locals and pilgrims greet us in the courtyard. Our procession's leader alerted us that our scheduled time was fast approaching, and we had to advance to the church entrance to make room for similar processions from other Christian communities arriving in the courtyard behind us.

Once inside the church, we were surprised a second time to be welcomed by only a few worshipers. For as long as I can remember, the church was always filled to capacity, packed with hundreds if not thousands of pilgrims and tourists on Holy Saturday. This year, Israeli authorities prohibited entry to pilgrims so police could access it freely and easily. Has the formula changed? Is the church for worshipers or for the 1,500 police officers (according to Israeli police spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby) on the premises that day?



Police barricade the roof of the Holy Sepulchre, where thousands typically gather to receive the Holy Fire. (photo: CNEWA, Jerusalem)

What a strange world we live in. Instead of faithful pilgrims, armed police officers, with guns in plain sight on their waists, welcomed us inside the church on Holy Saturday. Where else on earth do hundreds of armed police officers patrol the inside of a church other than here in the Old City — the holiest of places for Christianity? What an ugly sight indeed.

Once the last of the procession cleared the threshold of the church's entrance, participants took their designated places, right outside the tomb adjacent to the small window, through which the Holy Fire would be handed to them about an hour later. For our part, the representatives of the 13 families rushed to the storage area to bring out the banners. As each of us held our respective banners, we proudly lined up and readied to lead the small procession around Christ's tomb. Upon the patriarch's signal, the 13 of us carrying the banners began to proceed around the tomb, followed by the choir from St. Jacob's Church, clergy and, lastly, the patriarch.

After the procession finished its third turn around the tomb, all lights in the church were shut off and the patriarch entered the sealed tomb. A few minutes later, he emerged holding the Holy Fire.

The mystified worshipers passed the fire from one to the other. In those moments, it seemed as though the skies opened up. It was a breathtaking experience. The church's bells were rung to announce the arrival of the Holy Fire. The participants chanted as they passed the fire and hurriedly carried it to the roof of the Holy Sepulchre, which is the site of a Greek Orthodox monastery.

We encountered our third harsh surprise when we reached the church's roof. For centuries, thousands of Christians from Jerusalem, the Galilee, the West Bank and Gaza gathered on the roof to witness and receive the Holy Fire. They then would march through the streets and alleyways in the Christian Quarter

with the fire in hand. This year, there was no enthusiastic crowd of faithful to greet us. In fact, the vast roof was all but empty apart from police barricades and police officers, who directed us immediately off the roof and out of the Greek Orthodox Convent.

Indeed, this year's Holy Fire celebration proved a strange one. First, roadblocks prohibited pilgrims from accessing the Old City and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Then, our procession arrived at an empty courtyard, entered a nearly empty church and, finally, ascended onto an empty roof. What was gained in making it so difficult for us Christians in the Holy Land to practice our faith?

Happy ending? There was, however, a happy ending. Once we arrived in the Christian Quarter, carrying the Holy Fire, the Israeli police withdrew and left us alone. At that moment, a festive feeling came over all of us there.

But what about the thousands of local Christians from the Galilee, West Bank, Gaza and even Jerusalem whom Israeli authorities impeded from joining us in this most holy celebration? I am sure they nonetheless celebrated Holy Saturday in their churches and within their communities. I am also sure it was not the same for them — unable to celebrate in Jerusalem as they have for generations — and to share with us the high point of the Easter holiday. It certainly was not the same for us. We missed them and truly hope they will be with us next year. The celebration will never be the same without our sisters and brothers in the faith.

Lessons to learn. The various authorities responsible for this year's excessive security measures have many lessons to learn.

Let the pilgrims back in the Old City on Holy Saturday. Rather than 1,500 police officers inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, let the pilgrims who come from near and far return to pray and witness the mystery of the Resurrection.

Instead of empty space in the church that marks the site of Jesus' death and resurrection, let it fill up to capacity again. Instead of an empty courtyard and roof, let the thousands of local Christians welcome us there again.

Facilitate their access, do not hinder it. Remove roadblocks and checkpoints and remember: Thousands upon thousands of local Christians and pilgrims have celebrated Holy Week in the Old City for centuries and we have always managed.

I fully understand concerns about crowd control, public safety and maintaining law and order, but there are other ways to do the job without infringing on the rights of Christians and, more important, treating us with dignity. After all, we come to pray.

Final thoughts. Did I feel renewed as a Christian this year, despite all the difficulties, and prepared to face the challenges I confront as an Arab Christian in the Holy Land on a daily basis? You bet I did. Otherwise, I would not be a true Christian. My only hope is that all the others did as well.

Finally, I look forward to the day when my youngest son, Michael, grows strong enough to carry the banner, and I can pass onto him the honor of carrying it on Holy Saturday. My father passed the honor onto me, and I have already passed it onto my eldest son, Rami. When the days come that I no longer carry the banner, but my sons do so in my place, I will know I have done what I could to keep the tradition and faith alive. Maybe peace will have prevailed in the Holy Land and the celebration will return to how it should be — free.

A Life Under Occupation

ONE magazine's interview with Maher Turjman, Regional Director for the Pontifical Mission for Palestine



Maher Turjman, Pontifical Mission's regional director for Palestine and Israel, has spent his entire life under occupation. A Palestinian Christian, Mr. Turjman's childhood unfolded against the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars and he came into adulthood during the first intifada. Now, as he and his wife, Selina, rear two young children in Jerusalem, the possibility of living free of oppression and violence seems bleak. Here, Mr. Turjman shares his story of life as a Palestinian under Israeli military occupation.

Where did you grow up?

I was born in 1966 in the Old City of Jerusalem, which the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan controlled until 1967. My mother was born into a Greek Orthodox family from Ramleh, a town just south of modern Tel Aviv. She and her family fled to Amman, Jordan's capital, during the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. My father, who is Coptic Orthodox, fled West Jerusalem when in 1948 it became a part of the new state of Israel. He and his family settled in the Old City. He worked with delinquent children for the Social Welfare Department, which the Jordanians administered until the Israelis took over after the 1967 war. Now it is in the hands of the Palestinian Authority.

Can you remember any of the 1967 war?

I was young, just over a year old. My family sought refuge in a shelter in a flower shop in Ramallah during the fighting. Later, my mother told me she was expecting another child, my younger brother, Nabil.

I can better recall the 1973 war. We had painted the windows of our house black, so light from the house couldn't be spotted by bombers. Still, I was young then. I remember not knowing at all who the enemy was.

What was it like growing up in this atmosphere?

The Israeli Defense Forces were a constant presence; the soldiers were like boogiemens: 'If you don't finish your meal,' our parents would say, 'the Israeli army will get you.' Growing up like this, too young to know about the history of anti-Semitism, World War II and the Holocaust, you thought of Jews as the bad guys. And we were too young to make a distinction between Jews and Israelis.

Was it different being a Christian, a minority?

At the time, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah had significant numbers of Christians, but religion wasn't that big of an issue. Politics then was largely secular; you had a lot of secular leftist groups, including Fatah. There were many Christians who held important posts in the various Palestinian political parties. So, while you generally knew who was a Christian and who was a Muslim, it wasn't that important.

Did you know any Israelis?

No, I only had contact with Israeli soldiers, who patrolled the streets. There weren't checkpoints at the time — they didn't appear until after the first Gulf War in 1991.

We were foolish. As children, we would throw stones at the soldiers and then run. It was a cat-and-mouse game, but we didn't realize how dangerous it was, because sometimes they'd shoot back in response. Though just a boy, I was arrested several times for throwing stones at Israeli military vehicles, and each time I was quite scared.

Why were you throwing stones?

Part of it was just being a kid and impressing your friends. It was a game. But we also came to know the political aspect of it. Though Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian resistance leaders were in exile, many of us felt that something should be done at home.

But our resistance to the occupation was not only about throwing stones. It included also "throwing" revolutionary songs. Though we had the same feelings that most teenagers would have, it was not customary for Palestinian teenagers to sing love songs. We could not see the beauty of life; we faced injustices and hardships daily. These early experiences helped us to mature early, but they deprived us from growing up normally.

Where did you go to college?

In 1985 I entered Bethlehem University to study business administration. It was a relatively quiet time. Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (P.L.O.) had been kicked out of Lebanon a few years earlier. That was when I first got involved in following the politics of our situation. During the latter half of Lebanon's civil war (1975-1990), I was glued to Radio Monte Carlo, a French radio station that broadcast uncensored news in Arabic.

Though the university was a Catholic institution administered by the De La Salle Brothers of the Christian Schools, religious identity was not the issue it is today — it was still a nonsectarian environment. Occasionally, you'd see a few Muslim women on campus wearing the *hijab*, but that was rare.

My first few years at university were not unlike those of any student in any university. I played the guitar in a band called Al Baraem. We became quite popular, performing at Palestinian weddings and parties all over the occupied West Bank. Reportedly, we were even popular with Israelis. Some friends told me they heard our songs playing from Israeli military jeeps.

Did the campus atmosphere change?

Yes. Even before the intifada, which in Arabic means uprising, Israeli soldiers shot and killed a student at a demonstration on campus. Two months later, the intifada broke out and everything changed. The Israeli Defense Forces shut down the university. But to continue our education we had to gather in secret in houses, monasteries and hotels. In a way, it really made you appreciate your education, because you were literally risking your life to study.

It was much the same during the first Gulf War [during which Arafat declared his support for Iraq], when we were put under curfew for 40 days. We spent much of this time in our rooms, which were completely

sealed. We were equipped with gas masks, in case Iraq attacked Israel with chemical weapons, but they were only given to us after a long legal struggle with the Israeli Defense Forces.

Do you recall how you felt about the Oslo Accords that ended the intifada?

The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993, brought a lot of hope. Finally, we thought, the nightmare of occupation is going to be over. When Egyptian President Anwar Sadat came to Jerusalem in 1977, we thought he was a traitor. But now, most Palestinians are ready for peace. With Oslo, our economy started booming and Palestinian émigrés were returning to invest here. The Palestinian Authority received significant international financial support and started building.

My band participated in the first anniversary celebrations of the accords, held in Norway's capital city of Oslo, performing in front of 20,000 people, including Arafat and Shimon Peres. It was our first opportunity to play alongside Israeli musicians. One of the more touching moments was seeing Israeli, Palestinian and Norwegian children sing together for peace.

Is this when you joined CNEWA?

Yes, in 1993 I was hired as projects coordinator for CNEWA's operating agency in the Middle East, the Pontifical Mission. My job, based in the Old City of Jerusalem, allowed me to see more broadly just what the needs of the Palestinian community were. And, for the first time of my life, I was challenged to contribute to long-term development and relief work.

How has the situation changed since?

Well, a lot has changed. In 2000, you had Camp David and the beginning of the second intifada. For Palestinians, there was frustration at the failure of the peace process to secure rights, such as Palestine's borders, the status of Jerusalem, settlements and the right of return for refugees. We had the Palestinian Authority, but our lives weren't improving.

What is the situation for Palestinians like you?

It's getting worse. The frustrations continue to grow daily. It's difficult to move around even in Palestinian areas. The West Bank has been separated from Jerusalem by the separation wall, and Jerusalem is where many Palestinian services are located. Why should I, whose family has lived in the area for generations, be checked by Israeli soldiers who have just arrived from Ethiopia or Russia? Last Christmas, I had to argue for one hour with a young Israeli soldier to allow my wife and me to go to Bethlehem to visit the Church of the Nativity. We cannot drive more than 30 minutes without hitting one of the hundreds of checkpoints, which paralyze traffic.

Traveling internationally is also humiliating. We are singled out and routinely checked. Once I had to remove my underclothes. My children are also searched thoroughly.

But aren't such measures useful in preventing acts of terrorism?

It's a good excuse to punish the larger Palestinian population for the misdeeds of the few. There will always be ways for people to carry out attacks, as long as the motive remains. Of course, Israel has a right to protect itself, but if you live here as a Palestinian you know firsthand that what you are being subjected to is not intended solely for protecting Israel. These measures not only humiliate ordinary Palestinians, they dehumanize us.

As the situation deteriorates, can Christians play a special role?

Well, let's face it: This conflict is evolving into an interfaith clash, pitting Muslims against Jews. Of course Christian Palestinians are Palestinians — we also seek a Palestinian state — but if there's some special role it would be as mediators, to help Muslims and Jews come together, to dialogue and to listen. Last year, I visited a synagogue for the first time. I was invited by some Jewish friends and it was an eye-

opening experience. Until then, I never had understood how Judaism is a major source of our Christian faith. Conflict makes people blind to the good things in others.

Were you, as a child, better off than your children are now?

My wife, Selina, and I often discuss this. Thank God, we live relatively well compared to the rest of the population, who are poorer, generally, than they were just 10 years ago. Unemployment or underemployment affects most of the population. And for those who are lucky enough to earn an income, they lack the freedom to enjoy it.

When I was a child, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza were not divided, literally and figuratively. Of course this is not the case today. Because of walls, checkpoints and political divorce, we are a divided lot. We used to have access to Israel, where many Palestinians worked. As Christians, we once knew where we stood. But now, those of us who are left feel confused and isolated, as if we have been excluded from the game.

Why do you stay?

Selina and our boys, 4-year-old Fouad and 2-year-old Faris, are citizens of the United States. So we could settle there. But this is our country. Palestine is home. Our families live here. Many of our friends live here. Yet, we are very concerned about this growing climate of violence. What will happen when they are old enough to get involved?

If we emigrate, we may rear our children in a better place, but it will never be their home. We will also risk our right to return, even as tourists. In a way, our departure from Jerusalem — our home — would be final. Honestly, I do not blame my friends for leaving and settling elsewhere, for looking for a better life. Making that decision is painful and it consumes a lot of people a lot of the time.

Are you optimistic?

No, I'm sad to say. As a people, we are in a state of shock. There's no vision for our future. My sons are the third generation of my family to live under occupation. Every time we see a light in this dark tunnel, we discover that it was only a mirage.

And if this is how I feel, remember that I have a good job and a relatively good life. Imagine how some unemployed Palestinian living in a refugee camp feels. For now, there doesn't seem to be any hope.

Separated at Christmas

December 2005



By Fr. Firas Aridah

As a parish priest in the West Bank village of Aboud, my Christmas preparations include recording the identity card numbers of my parishioners to request permits from the Israeli authorities to allow us travel to Bethlehem. Some may be denied permits and prevented from worshipping there. While decorating our church for the joyous birth of Our Lord, we also prepare banners for the next protest against the wall that Israel began to build on our village's land one month ago.

Aboud is nestled among terraced olive groves in the West Bank west of the city of Ramallah. The village has 2,200 residents. Nine hundred of them are Christian. Within the village are seven ancient churches. The oldest dates to the third century. We believe that Jesus passed through Aboud on the Roman road from the Galilee to Jerusalem.

The wall that Israel is building through Aboud is not for the security of Israel. It is for the security of illegal Israeli settlements.

The Israeli government continues to falsely claim that it is building the wall on Israeli land, but Aboud lies 3.75 miles inside the Green Line, the pre-1967 border between Israel and the West Bank. The wall will cut off 1,100 acres of our land for two illegal Israeli settlements.

Sometimes the Israelis give special treatment to Christians. Sometimes they give Christians permits to go through checkpoints while they stop Muslims. They do this to try to separate us, but in reality we Muslims and Christians are brothers.

Our church organist Yousef told me, "Some foreigners believe that Islam is the greatest danger for Palestinian Christians rather than Israel's occupation. This is Israeli propaganda. Israel wants to tell the world that it protects us from the Muslims, but it is not true. In Aboud, we Muslims and Christians live a normal, peaceful life together.

"Last week our village celebrated the Feast of Saint Barbara for our patron saint whose shrine outside our village was damaged by the Israeli military in 2002. We invited the Muslims to share the traditional feast of Saint Barbara. They also invite us to share their traditional Ramadan evening meal. We have good relations. Muslims are peaceful people."

With signs, songs and prayers, our village has been protesting against Israel's apartheid wall every week. Through peaceful demonstrations and the planting of olive trees, we want to tell the Israelis and the

international community that we are against Israel taking our lands. We are working for peace here, but still the Israeli soldiers have attacked our peaceful protests with clubs, sound bombs, tear gas and rubber-coated steel bullets.

On Dec. 11, we were honored with a visit to Aboud by the highest Roman Catholic official in the Holy Land, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah. Patriarch Sabbah, a Palestinian, planted an olive tree on the planned route of the wall, and told 1,000 peaceful protesters, "The wall doesn't benefit the security of either Israel or anybody else. Our prayers are for the removal of this physical wall currently under construction and the return of our lands."

"Our hearts are filled with love, and no hatred for anybody. With our faith and love, we demand the removal of this wall. We affirm that it is a mistake and an attack against our lands and our properties, and an attack against friendly relationships between the two people."

"In your faith and your love you shall find a guide for your political action and your resistance against every oppression. You may say that love is an unknown language to politics, but love is possible in spite of all the evil we experience. We shall make it possible!"

Just after Patriarch Sabbah left, an Israeli protesting with us was arrested by Israeli soldiers as he planted an olive tree. We have good Israeli friends. We do not say that every Israeli soldier is bad, because they are just soldiers following orders.

Yes, there are Palestinian Christians here in Aboud, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Ramallah and Gaza. We are the Salt of the Earth.

My religion tells me that I have to love everybody and accept everybody without conditions. We have here good Jewish people, good Muslims and good Christians. We can live together. This is the Holy Land. If we in Aboud can send a message to the world this Christmas, it is that Jews, Christians and Muslims have to live together in peace.

Fr. Firas serves in the Roman Catholic Holy Mary Mother of Sorrows Church in the Occupied West Bank.

An Interview With Msgr. Robert Stern of CNEWA

More than a million Palestinians live in conditions of absolute misery in refugee camps. It is one of the principal destabilizing elements in the Middle East. We talked about it with Msgr. Robert L. Stern, who presides over the Pontifical Mission for Palestine (The Papal Relief Agency in the Holy Land)

Interview with Msgr. Robert L. Stern by Giovanni Cubeddu. Extract from No. 5 - 2006
Appointed by the Pope, Monsignor Robert L. Stern, archimandrite of the Greek-Catholic Patriarchy of Jerusalem, has presided since 1987 over this special agency of the Holy See which has its headquarters in New York, and offices in the Vatican, Jerusalem, Beirut, Amman, and currently performs charitable and pastoral activity in Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. He tells us about his work, and about the Pope's charity for the Palestinians.

“The entreaties of many, many refugees still reach us, of every age and condition, forced by the recent war to live in exile, scattered through concentration camps, exposed to hunger, epidemics and dangers of all kinds”. In his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Nostri* of Good Friday of 1949 Pope Pius XII thus described the situation of the Palestinians after the first Arab-Israeli conflict following on the birth of the State of Israel, on 14 May 1948. The Pontifical Mission for Palestine was thus instituted on the 18 June 1949, in the aim of directing and coordinating all the Catholic associations and organizations involved in aid to the Holy Land. In 1974, to mark the twenty five years of activity of the Pontifical Mission, Pope Paul VI spoke of it as «one of the clearest signs of the concern of the Holy See for the fate of the Palestinians, particularly dear to us because they are a people of the Holy Land, they number faithful followers of Christ and they have been and are even now so tragically tried”.

Which Palestine does the Pontifical Mission help?

ROBERT L. STERN: Since 1967, when Israel took over political control of Palestine, there has been an entire population living under military occupation by another country. And the Palestine National Authority is not a real government. The Pontifical Mission is offering help in a situation where the governing institutions to which people usually turn are inadequate. And where public institutions, even if they exist, don't function as they normally should. So, necessarily, other than the support of the Churches and the Christian Communities present in the Holy Land, we try to do something good for the people.



Can you give us recent examples of your help?

STERN: Our Mission has operated in the areas of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, and also north of Jerusalem, in Ramallah, where there was a Christian presence. But our service is not only for the Christians. For example, whereas the local church encourages the construction of new housing the Pontifical Mission has for years been repairing ruined houses, especially in the area of the old city of Jerusalem where a section of indigenous Palestinian population survives. The tension between Israelis and Palestinians has brought about much poverty and so today we back initiatives apt to create jobs, especially funding works that require many workers and therefore feed more families...

Doesn't repairing houses go beyond the original activity of your Mission in a certain sense?

STERN: But it's absolutely necessary to help these poor people. When our Mission was founded, the primary purpose was the mobilization of aid in the international Catholic world for the Holy Land, and the coordination in the Holy Land of all the sectors of the Church – the patriarchs, the bishops, the male and female religious, the lay associations... In 1949, nobody took care of this coordination, today we are many more.

Who are the principal beneficiaries of your activity?

STERN: All those who find themselves in need. Statistically they are not Jews, for whom a very numerous series of aid bodies exist. Whereas the overwhelming majority of Muslims – given that the Christians are few in number – are hit by poverty, even if a great many Muslim charitable institutions do exist. So... the criterion adopted by our Mission is to bring help to the areas where there are still

Christians, but without ever excluding others, such as the Muslims, from aid. The pertinent example is the University of Bethlehem – founded by an agreement between the Congregation for the Eastern Churches and the Brothers of the Christian Schools – known here as the Vatican University. About 35% of the students are Christian, the others are all Muslim. We say that “not belief but need guides the charity we exercise in the name of the Pope in the Holy Land”.

How would you describe the poverty in Palestine?

STERN: In Gaza a large part of the population still lives in refugee camps, administered by the United Nations. The camps are like a completely disorganized old village. The people live in cramped houses made of blocks of cement, there are no proper streets, but pathways more or less uneven, and they all live crammed together. Up to twelve people even may live in one room, because the children are numerous. Freedom of movement is limited. They live off the contributions of the United Nations. There is no work. When one of these numerous children becomes an adult and wants to marry, he must first have a place to go, and a wage. But there is neither the one nor the other for those who live in the camps. Only one extra room, brick-built can be added on to the original house. A room that will again look out on to the usual dirty streets, and the camps that have no easy access to drinkable water and where there is never order. It is sad to live like that.

Two years ago we built a small play park for the children of Gaza. You should have seen their curiosity, their looks. It was the first time in their lives that someone had given them something to play with. They who are used to receiving the minimum for survival, used to living in the worst conditions. Words fail me to explain the difficulty of life in Gaza. And allow me to add something else that matters to me. Please.

There are people who ask the rhetorical question as to why young Palestinian boys and girls accept blowing themselves up as martyrs. They can't study, they can't travel, they can't work, they can't have a family, they live in the absurd, they have no other hope except to annihilate themselves in a moment of glory for their religion.



I am neither a politician nor an economist, but I can at least imagine that the day when we can offer work to these young Muslim, we will have disrupted the plans of the terrorists: with an honest weekly wage and the possibility of going out with one's girlfriend.

I'm convinced, despite their very negative rhetoric, that the Hamas leaders understand this situation perfectly. They want a future for their people, as do all of those who run politics. And the positive aspect of their politics is the amount of social services and of well-being that they have tried to give their people. This remains true, despite the words they use and the slogans that, according to Arab rhetoric, they yell.

Do you consider it a mistake to interrupt the flow of international economic aid to Palestine as a form of pressure on the Hamas government?

STERN: I repeat that I don't intend to formulate a political judgment. My impression is that precisely by doing this the people – and the youth – are presented with yet another form of despair that can be exploited by the terrorists. The proclaimed objective of those who want the aid embargo is, in the short term, to force the current government to a change of political direction, leaving as a long term goal that of achieving peace... it's a total mistake. First, the blocking of funds is a punishment for the people, never for the leadership, and the people are already suffering too much. Second, for the Arab mentality,

we are offending their honor, their sense of dignity, with all the consequences that derive from that. The embargo is a hundred per cent counter-productive. I am convinced, and certainly hope, that through mutual collaboration the result of gaining Hamas consent can be achieved.

You have also brought help to the refugee camps in Lebanon. What is the situation?

STERN: It is different but equally painful. The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon all live in camps run by the United Nations. The difficulties also come from the traditional and by now deteriorating balance of constitutional powers in Lebanon between Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims, based on the respective numbers of the population. Now, none of these three groups wants a numerous Palestinian component to enter the picture, and all are agreed in saying that the only prospect for these refugees is that of returning to their own countries. But this is now practically impossible. Thus the refugee camp is the only thing left for these poor people, to live in prison that is. I dream of the day when there is a universally recognized Palestinian State, and perhaps all of these poor people can have a Palestinian passport, so as to obtain a residence visa to work in Lebanon. Because, things being as they are, Lebanon will never accept these people as proper citizens. Today more than two hundred thousand Palestine Muslims are refugees in the camps, armed, in complete isolation, prevented from going to Palestine. It is an unbearable way of life, that has made them nasty, with reason. The Palestinians are also now leaving Iraq. The Palestinians leaving Iraq are not however as numerous as the Iraqis who currently migrate toward Jordan, Syria and Lebanon in ever increasing numbers. And, in proportion, it is constantly more Christians who flee. The director of our office in Amman, which deals with Jordan and Iraq, told me that there is the concrete possibility, even though official data are still lacking, that Iraqi refugees in Jordan will reach millions, on top of a Jordanian population of about five million. Our Pontifical Mission attempts to do everything possible to support the local church and give a hand to these refugees. Normally we help whoever wants to leave Iraq and go to Europe, North or South America, or Australia...

In the charitable work in Palestine you represent the Pope. Is there something in particular that you recall?

STERN: Pope John Paul II came to the Holy Land in 2000. And in cases such as these small privileges also are due to the President of the Pontifical Mission, such as participating from close up in what is taking place. I remember in particular the open air mass that Pope Wojtyla celebrated in Bethlehem, in front of the Basilica standing where Jesus was born. At a certain point, as happens every day, the voice of the muezzin who calls people to prayer could be heard from the nearby mosque. The voice was strong, broadcast by loudspeakers. The Pope, at that moment stopped, he didn't raise his voice to counter the loudspeakers, but waited. Until the end of the Muslim prayer. Then he resumed the liturgy. It was as if the Pope himself had told us, in that way, that the Palestinian Christian community must understand and respect the Muslims, who are brothers, and hope and pray that understanding will also come from their side.

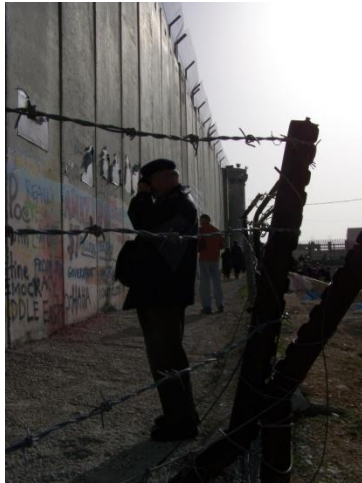
The respectful silence of the Pope was the image of the coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Palestine.

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Writing on the Wall

Israel's security barrier foreshadows further misery for Palestinians caught on the wrong side

text by Marilyn Raschka - Additional photos - Jeff Abood



The Wall around Bethlehem

As hard as the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was some 2,000 years ago, if Mary and Joseph were to do it today, the journey might be impossible.

In June 2002, the Israeli government decided to erect a barrier to separate Israel, where Nazareth is located, from the West Bank, where Bethlehem lies.

The barrier, now partially constructed, is a combination of electronic and barbed wire fencing, military roads and concrete walls, stretches of which reach 26 feet in height.

The barrier does not run along the pre-1967 boundary between Israel and the West Bank. It is being built, for the most part, on West Bank land taken without compensation. Israel has occupied the West Bank since the conclusion of the Six Day War in 1967.

The barrier, which the Israeli government says is necessary to prevent terror attacks within Israel, snakes through the West Bank, separating farm from farmer, student from school, grandchildren from grandparents, one side of town from the other. By making movement difficult, it is keeping people from living their lives and earning their livelihoods with dignity.

Lamia is a nurse at Muslim Muqassad Hospital on the Mount of Olives. She is a resident of Bethany, the hometown of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead.

The Israelis had annexed Bethany, an Arab village, to Jerusalem, which means Lamia has an Israeli-issued Jerusalem permit allowing her to travel freely. But her status is about to change.

The barrier will put Bethany outside Jerusalem and make Lamia and her family West Bankers. Israeli law forbids West Bank residents to work in or travel to Jerusalem without a special permit. Lamia is about to be handed a pink slip.

But the hospital counts on Lamia. Duty and financial need have now forced her to do what many Palestinians do, use a route that skirts the not yet completed wall and the Israeli border guards. Backyards, convent gardens and even cemeteries are commonly used alternate routes.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows live and work next door to Bethany in Abu Dis. The sisters run a home for the elderly, which has received CNEWA assistance for years and provides seniors with a clean environment, good meals and companionship.

The neighborhood was a haven of peace and quiet. Then the wall came.

The wall was routed right outside the home's front gate. The space between the gate and the wall is just big enough for a car or ambulance to pass.

The sisters and their elderly charges now live in a construction zone.

Buildings shake as the bulldozers roll by. The home's walls have cracked from the pounding. Dust covers the gardens and filters into the buildings. At the beginning of the construction work, the sisters and their residents were without water and electricity.



It took a demonstration by foreign volunteers to draw attention to the home's predicament and get the responsible authorities to make repairs.

The long-term effect of the wall has the sisters worried. Although the home will remain on the Jerusalem side, many of their workers come from the West Bank. So do a number of the families of the residents.

The sisters may have to fire loyal staff because the workers will not be able to get to work. As for the elderly, their children's visits are the best medicine – and “medicine” should be taken on a regular basis.

And when a death occurs, how will the family come for the body?

Even pilgrims feel the pinch of the barrier. The traditional Palm Sunday procession from Bethany to the Mount of Olives will have to change its course.

The present crossing point in the Bethany section of the wall is a crowded, noisy, dusty and generally unpleasant place, wide enough for an Israeli border guard and one pedestrian.

Pilgrims and tourists constitute a small percentage of the people using the crossing. Most are students, housewives, merchants, office workers and delivery boys with coffee cups on trays.

Cars cannot pass. Instead of taking one bus or taxi from Bethany to Jerusalem, the commuter or shopper or student or sister must get out on one side of the wall, line up, pass the scrutiny of the border guards and then take another car from the other side.

Making life easy or difficult for the Palestinians trying to cross the wall falls to the discretion of the guards.

A French friend in Bethany called with the warning: "If you come to visit today, you will have to dirty your clothes."

At the crossing point it was clear what she meant. The guards had obstructed the crossing with huge cement blocks.

No one could say why.

The guards stood on top of the blocks and watched as young males scampered their way up. The women struggled, hoisting themselves and their children, waving their identification cards in their hands, then swinging their legs over and descending to the other side. Everyone got their clothes dirty.

The next day the blocks were gone, as were the guards. People moved freely back and forth as if there were no wall at all.

El Ram, another Arab town near Jerusalem, will become part of the West Bank once the wall is built. El Ram's wall story is full of questions, mostly rhetorical ones. How will the children get to their schools in Jerusalem? How will workers get to their jobs?

For town officials, two more issues will have to be solved: El Ram has no landfill and no cemetery. El Ram's agreements on these two services with other Jerusalem- area towns will soon be obsolete.



Ironically, the town's new status will affect Jewish wholesalers who have done business for years with El Ram shopkeepers. Jewish and Palestinian shoppers find El Ram a great place to shop on Saturdays when Jewish-owned shops are closed for Shabbat.

Life is not easier outside Jerusalem.

The Emmanuel Sisters in Bethlehem are a contemplative order. Their simple lives became complicated when the road leading to their convent became part of the barrier project.

To compensate, the Israeli government took land from their neighbor's front yard and built the sisters a new road. The neighbor now has a road and a 26-foot-high wall outside his home where a view across the valley once greeted him and his family each day.

Military law does not allow him to plant or landscape the remaining land. It is too close to the wall. He also had to reconfigure his driveway.

The family is prohibited from using the roof of their house, where his wife would hang the laundry and where summer breezes would cool the family on hot nights.

Wherever the wall is in place, there is also graffiti. Popular are political slogans criticizing the Israeli and U.S. governments, as well as colorful pleas for peace and calls to halt the wall's construction.

Construction of the barrier has left the land scarred by bulldozers busy uprooting the natural environment to make room for concrete and metal. The stone retaining walls of some convents and monasteries on the Mount of Olives have been so damaged by the construction that one good rain may spell collapse.

Whatever biblical image pilgrims have of the Mount of Olives is erased by the most incongruous combination of dusty olive trees and concrete wall segments awaiting assembly.

Everywhere in the West Bank, sections of the wall stand in the distance, but with each day they move closer along their projected path.

And then the day comes when the homeowner, the farmer or the mother superior of a convent is notified that their land is being taken for the barrier.

In Bethlehem, one landowner found a notice nailed to one of his olive trees. Three or four strikes with a hammer and the land was no longer his.

After the bulldozers have finished uprooting the olive trees, farmers sneak back onto the property and haul away any survivors for replanting.

Aware that mature olive trees fetch good money inside Israel, construction crews often illegally take the trees away for resale.

The specter of the wall also features prominently in meetings of humanitarian groups, health care facilities and other nongovernmental organizations. Their staff spends hours planning for the barrier's impact on their work.

The mobility problem – employees living on the “wrong side” of the wall – is the greatest.

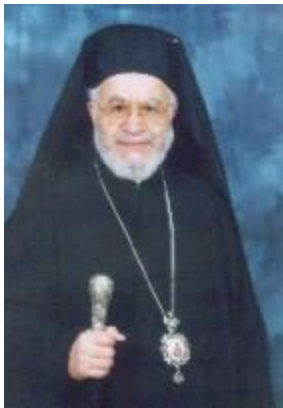


The Jerusalem-area family home of Maher Turjman, CNEWA's Regional Director for Palestine and Israel, will be surrounded by two walls by the end of the year, making his daily trip to the office in the Old City a near impossibility.

Rather than lose valuable hours navigating a circuitous route to work, Mr. Turjman and his young family have taken an apartment at St. Joseph Hospital.

"The wall will do little to serve peace," he said. "Anything that breaks up families, makes work more difficult and threatens the free flow of people will only harden divisions that have already cost both Israelis and Palestinians so much suffering."

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	<p>Peace for the Holy Land:</p> <p>The Promised Land and the Chosen People</p> <p>The Two-State solution</p> <p>By Archbishop Cyril Salim Bustros</p>
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From 10 through 24 October 2010 a special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops took place at the Vatican with the title: "The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness: Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). Participating in this Assembly, gathered around His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, were the Patriarchs and the Bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches of the Middle East, cardinals and archbishops who are heads of the various offices in the Roman Curia, presidents of Catholic episcopal conferences around the world, who are concerned with the issues of the Middle East, representatives from the Orthodox Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and Jewish and Muslim guests.

In its final message the Synod developed the issue of "Communion and Witness" first through history, then in the present time within the Catholic Churches of the Middle East, and with the Orthodox and Protestant Communities in the Middle East. After that, it addressed the issue of the cooperation and dialogue with our fellow-citizens the Jews and the Muslims.

In paragraph 8 of the final message concerning the Jews, after explaining what Christianity and Judaism have in common—the Old Testament, "all that God revealed there, since he called Abraham, our common father in the faith, Father of Jews, of Christians and of Muslims"—the Synod stressed the necessity to continue "the dialogue which is taking place between the Church and the representatives of Judaism." The statement then goes on:

"We hope that this dialogue can bring us to work together to press those in authority to put an end to the political conflict which results in separating us and disrupting everyday life in our countries. It is time for us to commit ourselves together to a sincere, just and permanent peace. Both Christians and Jews are called to this task by the Word of God. Both are invited to listen to the voice of God "who speaks of peace: "Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his holy ones" (Ps 85:9)

Then adds: "Recourse to theological and biblical positions which use the Word of God to wrongly justify injustices is not acceptable. On the contrary recourse to religion must lead every person to see the face of God in others and to treat them according to the attributes of God and his commandments, namely, according to God's bountiful goodness, mercy, justice and love for us."

The Promised Land

During the press conference which was held at the end of the Synod, I presented this message in my role as president of the commission that drafted the message. I was then asked by a journalist: "What do you mean by this sentence: 'Recourse to theological and biblical positions which use the Word of God to wrongly justify injustices is not acceptable'?" I answered: "Israel cannot use the Biblical concept of a promised land to justify its occupation of Palestinian territory and the expulsion of Palestinians who have been living there for centuries. We Christians cannot now speak about the Promised Land for the Jewish people. With Christ the Promised Land became the Kingdom of God": Jesus referred to this land in His Sermon on the Mount and gave it a spiritual interpretation: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God... Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land." (Mt. 5:3.5)

In my answer I was thinking in particular of Jewish settlers who claim their right to build on Palestinian territory by saying it forms part of biblical Israel, the land promised by God to the Jews according to the Old Testament. I also warned against the risk of Israel becoming an exclusively Jewish state, with a consequent threat to the 1.2 million Muslim and Christian Arabs living in Israel. The Synod is acknowledging the separation between religion and politics, in stating that recourse to the Bible cannot be used to justify political events: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." (Mt. 22:21)

As a Christian, and especially as a Middle-Eastern Christian—and this is the unanimous opinion of the Middle-Eastern Christians, Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants—I see that the concept of the Promised Land cannot be used for the justification of the return of Jews to Israel and the displacement of Palestinians. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948—after the resolution of the UN in 1947 regarding the partition of Palestine which was under the British mandate between Arab and Jews—is a political issue not a religious one. It is a fact of history like other facts: Jews who were persecuted in Europe and suffered the horrors of the shoah decided to come to Palestine and build, with the Jews who were there,

a country for their own. They could have chosen another place. But they chose Palestine, some of them relying on the theme of the Promised Land, and others only because of the memory of the Jews who lived there 2000 years ago. So they came in great numbers; a war arose between them and the Arabs living there, and they won the war; hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and flee to the surrounding Arabic countries: Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. If some of the Jews based their return on the Old Testament theme of the Promised Land, this does not mean that God is behind their return and their victory against the Arabs. It is a religious interpretation of an historical event.

We find this same religious interpretation of historical events in the Old Testament: A religious people believing in God wins a war, they interpret their war as God's war and their victory as God's victory. The idea of a "Warrior God" which we find in the Old Testament, a God who fights with his chosen people and condemns to death all his enemies cannot be accepted in Christianity. We have to read the Old Testament in the Spirit of Jesus Christ and in the light of His teachings. Jesus did not allow Peter to draw even a sword to fight for Him (Cf. John 18:10-11). According to Jesus' teachings, God is a God of love, peace, justice and mercy. How can we figure Him at the head of an army fighting with a particular people against other peoples? This idea may have infiltrated Christian thought during the first centuries and the Middle Ages; it can be found today in some extremist Muslims groups, who still say that the land of Palestine is a Muslim land given to Muslims by God who was fighting with them during the Arab conquests, and that they will oppose God's will if they give up a part of it to the Israelis. But, as Christians, we cannot today accept such an idea. It is against the image of God revealed to us by Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

The Chosen People

As for the idea of the chosen people, it is clear, according to Christian theology and especially to St. Paul, that after Christ there is no longer one particular chosen people! With Christ and in Him, all men and women of all countries are called to become children of God and unite in one body, the Body of Christ.

Being the chosen people was not a privilege, it was a mission: Israel was chosen by God in the Old Testament to live in holiness, to proclaim His name among the nations, and to prepare the coming of the Messiah. St Paul does not deny the role of the Jewish people in the history of salvation. He writes to the Romans: "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen." (Rom. 9:1-5)

But in his letter to the Ephesians, he declares that Jesus has united all the peoples in one people and one body:

"Therefore, remember that at one time you, Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those called 'the circumcision', which is done in the flesh by human hands, remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the community of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commands and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through

the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father." (Eph 2:11-18)

In his letter to the Galatians also, Paul affirms this unity of all peoples in Christ: "So through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:26-29)

And St Peter, in his first letter, applies the concept of chosen people to all who became Christians, Jews and non-Jews: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own, so that you may announce the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were 'no people', but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Pet. 2:9-10)

So in the New Testament the concept of "chosen people" has been extended to all those who believe in Jesus and become through him God's people. So we ask with St. Paul: "Has God rejected his people?" and we answer also with St. Paul: "Of course not!... God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." (Rom. 11:1-2) This we can call the inclusive theology of St. Paul: the Jews are included in this people of God. They still remain the people God has chosen, but they are no more the only chosen people. This is clear when St. Paul says: "you are all children of God in Christ Jesus."

Sometimes in our limited human thought we think when a favor was given to a special group then extended to other groups, it ceases to be a favor; in the same manner some think that when the grace of "chosen people" and "God's people" was given to the Jews, and then extended to all peoples, it ceases to be a grace to the Jews. But the grace still remains a grace, even if it is extended to all peoples. In this sense we can understand Jesus' saying: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17) The Old Covenant with the Jewish people, according to which they are God's chosen people, is not abolished, but it is fulfilled with the entrance of all peoples in this chosen people.

In its Message the Synod says to the Jews: "The same Scriptures unite us. The Old Testament, the Word of God is for both you and us. We believe all that God revealed there, since He called Abraham, our common father in the faith, father of Jews, of Christians and of Muslims. We believe in the promises of God and his covenant given to Abraham and to you. We believe that the Word of God is eternal." (paragraph 8)

So there is nothing offending to the Jews to say that they are no more the only "chosen people" of God and that "God's mercy" has been extended to all peoples. They must be proud, as was St. Paul, to be the people that God has chosen to be the first people God has chosen to be holy and to proclaim his name among all the nations of the earth. But at the same time they must also be humble, as St. Paul also was, to see that to be God's chosen people is a grace, and finally they must glorify God, as it pleased to St. Paul and St. Peter to do, that this grace has been extended to all peoples.

The Two-State Solution

After this theological issue we come now to the political issue, and these two levels must be clearly distinguished. Now in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, besides the moderates among both the Palestinians and the Jews, we are in presence of two opposed religious extremist ideologies: from one part extremist Jews who say that Palestine is the Promised Land given to them by God, and that they cannot give up any part of it to the Arabs; and from the other part extremist Muslims who say that Palestine is a Muslim land given to them by God during the Arabic conquests, and that they cannot give up a part of it to the Israelis. With these two opposed religious ideologies it is impossible to find a compromise in order to reach a lasting peace.

The message of the Synod for the Middle East takes a moderate position and clearly advocates, regarding the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the two-State-solution:

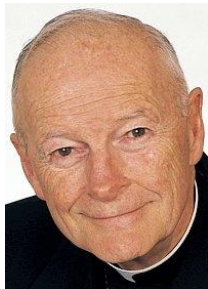
"The citizens of the countries of the Middle East call upon the international community, particularly the United Nations, conscientiously to work to find a peaceful, just and definitive solution in the region, through the application of the Security Council's resolution and taking the necessary legal steps to put an end to the occupation of the different Arabic countries. The Palestinian people will thus have an independent and sovereign homeland where they can live with dignity and security. The State of Israel will be able to enjoy peace and security within their international recognized borders. The Holy City of Jerusalem will be able to acquire its proper status, which respects its particular character, its holiness and the religious patrimony of the three religions: Jewish, Christian and Muslim. We hope that the two-State-solution might become a reality and not remain a dream only." (Paragraph 11)

Then the message explicitly condemns all kinds of violence and religious extremism: "We condemn violence and terrorism from wherever it may proceed as well as all religious extremism. We condemn all forms of racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Christianism and Islamophobia and we call upon the religions to assume their responsibility to promote dialogue between cultures and civilizations in our region and in the entire world."

By dialogue only – a dialogue which requires compromises from both sides, not by war, and especially not by a war based on religious assumptions – can the Holy Land reach a just and lasting peace.

+ Archbishop Cyril S. Bustros - Eparch of Newton

Christian Leaders: Pilgrimages must change **to help Holy Land Peace**



Cardinal McCarrick

Catholic News Service - Simon Caldwell

Catholic and Anglican leaders have challenged Christians to find new ways to establish lasting peace in the Holy Land, including changing the nature of pilgrimages.

International Christian, Jewish and Muslim delegates at the two-day Conference on Christians in the Holy Land, at Lambeth Palace in July, considered concrete steps that might be taken by ordinary people to help to resolve enduring tensions that have forced millions of Palestinian Christians to flee their homeland in the past 50 years.

Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury, leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, told a July 19 news conference at the palace, his London residence, that the delegates had looked for a "bit of a step change in Christian involvement here with the situation of Christians in the Holy Land, a step change that will allow us to identify and support specific projects more effectively."

"As this is not just for the churches in the Holy Land but for the communities those churches are embedded in, we don't see this as an exclusively Christian project," he said.

He added that the "approach to pilgrimages" needed to change beyond a "tourist venture" to allowing visitors "to engage with the reality on the ground."

More than prayer

Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, told the news conference that British parishes would be encouraged to work for peace and forgiveness, rooted in justice, for all the people of the region.

The plan includes charitable relief work, contact with people in the region and in the Palestinian diaspora, and the lobbying of politicians to work for change. He said he would like to see such work extend to the wider community in the United Kingdom to include leaders of other faiths.

The conference, organized by the Church of England and the Catholic Church in England and Wales, was attended by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The cardinal called for renewed dialogue among followers of the Abrahamic faiths in the region, but he also made a specific plea for the rights of the minority Christians in the Holy Land to be guaranteed and respected.

He said Christian communities were not founded by missionaries sent from Rome or Constantinople but by the apostles and were a gift to their societies because “they bring cultural openness, a sense of the dignity of the human person and particularly of women; a conception of freedom which harmonizes rights and privileges, and a conception of political society which can lead to democracy.”

Among the delegates were Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson, Ariz., who is of Lebanese descent, and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington, who has worked for 10 years with the U.S.-based National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East.

Peace dissipates problems

In an interview with Catholic News Service, Cardinal McCarrick said the major obstacle for progress in the Holy Land and the plight of Christians there was the absence of peace.

“Once you have peace there, many of the other problems will disappear,” he said. “I think one of the reasons Christians are leaving is that they don’t find peace there. . . . I think [the conference] will let people know they are not alone in striving for peace in the Holy Land.

“The main thing is that we keep trying and, in good times and in bad, we keep the search for peace going on. This is the Lord’s land, and we must all work together to find a solution that is just and which is going to bring peace with justice and security in the Holy Land,” he said.

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