

Christian Situation in the Holy Land

Educational Resource

Volume 2

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.

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PATRIARCHATUS LATINUS - JERUSALEM

بطريركية القدس للاتين

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Dear Knights and Ladies,

“Christian Situation in the Holy Land” is a strong appeal to revisit the presence of Christians in the Holy Land. The booklet’s articles highlight what is most fundamental and important to the Christian faith-presence here. Each author brings thoughtful, clear and reasoned insights into a somewhat complex and critical state of affairs of the Palestinian Christian situation.

It often happens that people do not pay attention to politics and history until these matters intrude (sometimes rudely) on their everyday lives. It is our Christian responsibility to be *au courant* with the Christian scene in the Holy Land. Dramatic events occur in our region and few will rush off to find sources of information that will explain in capsule summaries what is unfolding and why. At times, the media, glib and conflicting in their reports and polarized according to their bias, assemble facts to suit opinions. This booklet endeavors to bring an educative, informed and illumined Christian perspective from authentic Church resources on the Christian position in the Holy Land.

I know that the Knights and Ladies of the Holy Order will find this to be a helpful tool in becoming more enlightened and in fostering a loving atmosphere of dialogue and understanding . We are partners with Christ in bringing His kingdom to fulfillment. The more our intellects are formed with Godly understanding and our hearts made “strong, loving and wise”, the more effective is our ecclesial work for the glory of God.

Once again, I convey my deep-felt thanks to all members of the Order for their continued prayers, support and untiring concern for the people and needs of the Church of the Latin Patriarchate.



Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch

Grand Prior, Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem



BETHLEHEM UNIVERSITY

جامعة بيت لحم

Office of the
Vice Chancellor

مكتب نائب الرئيس الأعلى

25 February 2013

Dear Knights and Ladies of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre,

Greetings from this holy town of Bethlehem. I welcome this opportunity to affirm the wonderful work that you, the North Central Lieutenancy, are doing in the United States and most especially here in the Holy Land at Bethlehem University. In addition to the Bishop Morlino Scholarship Fund, your prayers and pilgrimage visits have been instrumental in transforming the lives of so many young Palestinians at Bethlehem University. Much of your great work and its positive impact will be documented in the pages that follow.

There is much for which we are grateful. Bethlehem University is the first Catholic university founded in the Holy Land. We now have more than 14,000 graduates! In the Fall of 2013 we will begin celebrating our 40th Anniversary! For those of you who have not yet visited and met with our students, I hope you will make it a point to do so during this 40th Anniversary year. Doing this will bring God's blessings upon you and us in a very special way! Together and by association with you, the Grand Magesterium, and Lieutenancies throughout the world, we continue to transform the future of this blessed land one young person at a time.

I believe that it is our duty as Catholics to follow the example of Jesus by being people of peace, love, and reconciliation as we address injustice and wrong-doing. There are many critical socio-political issues that negatively impact the lives of all in the Holy Land, especially the Christians. Keeping hope alive is a major challenge. However, knowing that there are people like you standing in solidarity with Christians here is a major factor in keeping hope alive. I am heartened to know of your efforts to stand in solidarity with people here, to speak the truth of what is happening here, and to help others throughout the United States have a better understanding of the complexities and the injustices of life in this Holy Land. This document, *Christian Situation in the Holy Land*, is written in this spirit of seeking peace with justice.

Although we do not know when peace will come to the Holy Land, I am encouraged by the tireless work and generous dedication of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre. Thank you for your commitment to a just and prosperous future for all here in God's land.

Blessings to you,

Br. Peter Bray FSC, EdD
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(Ed: While the "Holy Land" encompasses more than just Palestine and Israel: these are generally the 2 areas most people associate with it and as such, is the focus of this booklet)



THE PAST – A CALL TO JUSTICE

IN MULTIPLICIBUS CURIS **ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS XII**

ON PRAYERS FOR PEACE IN PALESTINE TO THE VENERABLE BRETHREN, THE PATRIARCHS, PRIMATES, ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS, AND OTHER ORDINARIES IN PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE

Among the multiple preoccupations which beset us in this period of time, so full of decisive consequences for the life of the great human family, and which make Us feel so seriously the burden of the Supreme Pontificate, Palestine occupies a particular place on account of the war which harasses it. In all truth We can tell you, Venerable Brethren, that neither joyous nor sad events diminish the sorrow which is kept alive in Our soul by the thought that, in the land in which our Lord Jesus Christ shed His blood to bring redemption and salvation to all mankind, the blood of man continues to flow; and that beneath the skies which echoed on that fateful night with the Gospel tidings of peace, men continue to fight and to increase the distress of the unfortunate and the fear of the terrorized, while thousands of refugees, homeless and driven, wander from their fatherland in search of shelter and food.

2. To make Our sorrow more grievous, there is not only the news which continually reaches Us of the destruction and damage of sacred buildings and charitable places built around the Holy Places, but there is also the fear that this inspires in Us for the fate of the Holy Places themselves scattered throughout Palestine, and more especially within the Holy City.

3. We must assure you, Venerable Brethren, that confronted with the spectacle of many evils and the forecast of worse to come, We have not withdrawn into Our sorrow, but have done all in Our power to provide a remedy. Even before the armed conflict began, speaking to a delegation of Arab dignitaries who came to pay homage to Us, We manifested our lifelong solicitude for peace in Palestine, and, condemning any recourse to violence, We declared that peace could only be realized in truth and justice; that is to say by respecting the rights of acquired traditions, especially in the religious field, as well as by the strict fulfillment of the duties and obligations of each group of inhabitants.

4. When war was declared, without abandoning the attitude of impartiality which was imposed by Our apostolic duty, which places Us above the conflicts which agitate human society, We did not fail to do Our utmost, in the measure which depended upon Us, and according to the possibilities offered to Us, for the triumph of justice and peace in Palestine and for the respect and protection of the Holy Places.

5. At the same time, although numerous and urgent appeals are received daily by the Holy See, We have sought as much as possible to come to the aid of the unhappy victims of the war, sending the means at Our disposal to Our representatives in Palestine, the Lebanon, and Egypt for this purpose, and encouraging the formation among Catholics in various countries of undertakings organized for the same purpose.

6. Convinced, however, of the insufficiency of human means for the adequate solution of a question the

complexity of which no one can fail to see, We have, above all, had constant recourse to prayer, and in Our recent Encyclical Letter, *Auspicia Quaedam*, We invited you, Venerable Brethren, to pray, and to have the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care pray, in order that, under the auspices of the Blessed Virgin, matters may be settled in justice and peace, and concord may be happily restored in Palestine. **As We said on June 2nd to members of the Sacred College of Cardinals, informing them of Our anxieties for Palestine, We do not believe that the Christian world could contemplate indifferently, or in sterile indignation, the spectacle of the sacred land (which everyone approached with the deepest respect to kiss with most ardent love) trampled over again by troops and stricken by aerial bombardments. We do not believe that it could permit the devastation of the Holy Places, the destruction of the great sepulcher of Christ.**

7. We are full of faith that the fervent prayers raised to Almighty and Merciful God by the Christians throughout the world who, together with the aspirations of so many noble hearts, are ardently inspired by truth and good, will render less arduous to the men who hold the destinies of peoples the task of making justice and peace in Palestine a beneficial reality and of creating, with the efficient co-operation of all those interested, an order that may guarantee security of existence and, at the same time, the moral and physical conditions of life conducive to spiritual and material well-being, to each of the parties at present in conflict.

8. We are full of faith that these prayers and these hopes, an indication of the value that the Holy Places have for so great a part of the human family, will strengthen the conviction in the high quarters in which the problems of peace are discussed that it would be opportune to give Jerusalem and its outskirts, where are found so many and such precious memories of the life and death of the Savior, an international character which, in the present circumstances, seems to offer a better guarantee for the protection of the sanctuaries. It would also be necessary to assure, with international guarantees, both free access to Holy Places scattered throughout Palestine, and the freedom of worship and the respect of customs and religious traditions.

9. And God grant that the day may soon dawn when Christians may resume their pilgrimages to the Holy Places, there to see more clearly revealed, as they contemplate the evidence of the love of Jesus Christ, Who gave His life for His brethren, how men and nations may live harmoniously together, at peace with their world and themselves.

10. With reliance, then, on this hope, as a pledge of heavenly favors and in token of our affection, gladly in the Lord do we impart to you, Venerable Brethren, and to your flocks, as to all who will take this appeal of Ours to heart, Our Apostolic Benediction.

Given at Castel Gandolfo, on the 24th day of October, in the year 1948, the tenth of Our Pontificate.

PIUS XII



Honor in Israel

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Edward Duff | Archived Article



In the spring of 1947 the statesmen of the world were feverishly seeking a solution to the tormenting Palestine problem. Pan-Arabism and Zionism were locked in menacing debate over their conflicting claims to what Hilaire Belloc called "The Battle Ground" of history. While the statesmen and lawyers and propagandists toiled at Lake Success, the Catholic Near East Welfare Association reminded the Secretary General

of the United Nations on May 8 of an almost forgotten factor in any just settlement of the problem. Disputing the claims of neither side, prescinding wholly from all political considerations, its statement, "The Christian Factor in the Palestine Equation," outlined the Christian stake in the Holy Land and indicated certain guarantees regarded as indispensable for the protection of Christian interests.

Events seem to have obscured memory of "The Christian Factor in the Palestine Equation." Partition was voted; a bitter war followed; shells desecrated the Holy City; the Zionists triumphed in a determined and resourceful display of arms; Israel was established as a sovereign state, fulfilling the ancient aspirations of the Jewish people. Today an armistice is being discussed and the provisions of the UN settlement are being reviewed.

It is time to assert once again that there are factors that transcend political considerations, issues that must be respected.

There is the matter of justice for the Palestinian refugees. There is the matter of honoring the commitments of the UN settlement that provided, among other things, for the internationalization of Jerusalem and the Holy Places and the freedom of religious organization.

Both Israel and the Arab States must accept the verdict of world opinion. If these reminders fall particularly on Israel, it is because victory imposes its own restraints. The public policy of the State of Israel must be subject to scrutiny without the easy retort of "Anti-Semitism!"—a slogan which stultifies discussion and betrays either an utter irresponsibility or an obtuseness to the expectations of the world community.

The Jewish attitude on the refugees was stated, in what can scarcely be less than an official answer, in a letter in the New York Times of March 15 from Mr. Harry Zinder, Press Adviser of the State of Israel Mission. "The tide of history cannot be turned back," is Mr. Zinder's ultimate verdict on the situation. Palestine, he explains, is a different country since the refugees fled over the borders. What's done, can't be undone. Let them, therefore, migrate to some other country.

The voice of the world's conscience replies to such a casual and even callous solution of the fate of nearly a million persons in other tones and in accents of growing impatience. Whatever the alleged reasons for the hurried exodus of the refugees, they have claims that cry for recognition.

They have claims, first of all, to sheer preservation. At present they are dying at the rate of a thousand a day. The UN's Disaster and Relief Committee, appointed last November, began operations February 1 with a fund of \$32 million, half of which the American Government is committed to contribute. Even if efficiently administered, the money would underwrite merely the cost of food for the refugees for less than eight months. Voluntary agencies must be employed to supplement official UN relief. On March 9, Lessing Rosenwald, president of the American Council for Judaism, wrote the leaders of all religious faiths in the United States:

To avert a major human catastrophe, elementary justice requires that in addition to adequate relief there must be early repatriation, resettlement and social rehabilitation of 750,000 refugees from the recent hostilities.

It is unfortunate that the UN Committee did not see fit to utilize adequately the voluntary agencies composing the American Appeal for Holy Land Refugees. It is particularly unfortunate that UN Reports obscured the contribution of the Catholic effort in aiding the refugees. For the Catholic effort in this humanitarian endeavor illustrates the fact that the Palestine problem is not bipartite but tripartite. There is a Christian stake in the Holy Land.

True, only 150,000 of the war sufferers are Christian, and of these only 55,000 are Catholics. On hand, however, to expend their energies in an all-encompassing charity are 2,000 priests and nuns. They came to Palestine many years ago from all parts of the Christian world. Long before governments began to assist in the present emergency, our Catholic parishes were feeding and sheltering many thousands of refugees in their parish halls, in their church yards and schools. The Catholic Church has been associated with all the problems of the Near East since the birth of Christ. The purposes of our Catholic personnel, native and missionary, are nonpolitical. That Catholic missionaries remained through the fighting, that Catholic institutions continued to care for the homeless and helpless, is proof of their nonpolitical purpose. It is proof, too, that they expect their rights to be protected and, where infringed, restored.

There is scarcely a religious house in Palestine that is not sheltering refugees. The officials at Tel Aviv know this. Someone in the office of Moshe Sharrett, Israel's Foreign Minister, might well send word to Mr. Zinder in Washington that Jewish officials are well posted on the job the missionaries are doing. They know of the tireless work of the Sisters of Charity, for example, who care for hundreds of feeble-minded children in an overcrowded home in Jerusalem.

At every Mass on Laetare Sunday, March 27, American Catholics will contribute to the Bishops' Emergency Relief Fund. The whole world's anguish calls upon America for alms. Though irresistible pleas for aid were coming from the needy in Europe and Asia, the bishops last year set aside a portion of that collection for relief in Palestine. Other subsidies sent the missionaries there by generous Catholics throughout the world are being ungrudgingly siphoned off to care for 200,000 homeless and the hungry. The week after Cardinal Spellman blessed a shipment of supplies on February 8, valued at \$200,000, the National Council of Catholic Women announced that they had collected 150,000 children's garments for distribution to Holy Land sufferers without reference to race or creed. Monsignor Thomas J. Mc• Mahon, national secretary of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, has just returned from four months on the scene, supervising operations. His findings are striking evidence of the Third Factor, the Christian Stake in Palestine.

What is the future of these victims of the Palestinian struggle? With the guns muted in the land of the Prince of Peace, can Israel afford to affront the conscience of the world by sticking to a convenient official assumption that these people do not want to be repatriated? Can Israel win confidence in its political maturity if it suggests that the refugees don't want their preferences discovered in a democratic plebiscite, that the homeless would spurn payment for their land? Whatever the political claims of Jew and Arab, there are requirements of "elementary justice" involved—to use the language of Mr. Rosenwald.

There remains—as UN was reminded on May 8, 1947—a Christian factor in the Palestine Problem. Jesus Christ must not be exiled by political maneuver or military coup from the land that bears the indelible mark of His sacred footsteps, from the scenes filled with sanctuaries of His precious life and life-giving death. The Christian world had no partisan position in the partition solution voted by the General Assembly on May 29, 1947. The internationalization of Jerusalem was included in the UN settlement as a dispassionate recognition of the nonpolitical factors in the problem, as evidence of equally historical claims of Christians. While Arab and Jew haggle over the division of the Holy City across the armistice table, the Christian world repeats anew its insistent demand that the decision of the world community, working through the United Nations, be respected. There is, of course, reparation to be made for the destruction and desecration of Christian property. Essential, however, is the guarantee of the freedom of religious organization and the internationalization of the Holy City and of the Holy Places-Nazareth (in Jewish territory), for instance, and Bethlehem (in Arab hands).

America reported the disappointment the Christian world felt at the proroguing of the United Nations session at Paris last December without coming to a definite conclusion on the future of the holy places in Palestine (AM. 12/25/48, p.306). The United Nations' Special Committee on Palestine in its final report to the General Assembly recommended that an impartial system for preserving the special character of the holy places should be devised. Similar recommendations were made by the General Assembly's partition resolution of November 29, 1947, as AMERICA reminded its .readers last Fall (AM. 11/13/48, p.145). The encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI issued on October 23 evoked America's editorial judgment that the internationalization of Jerusalem is the only "feasible escape from this intolerable situation" (AM. 11/6/48, p.120).

The Christian conscience, nonpolitical in its aims, today renders with larger evidence the identical judgment on the Palestine problem expressed in the Statement of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association to UN's Secretary General: We demand adequate, factual, implemented guarantees to the effect 1) that all our sanctuaries will be respected and continuously and unconditionally accessible and 2) that the Christian majority will actually enjoy not merely the vague, frequently distorted and facetiously neutralized right of freedom of religion but also freedom of religious assemblage; freedom of religious organization in conducting schools, hospitals, orphanages and other institutions of welfare and mercy; and freedom from civil, social and economic discrimination.

Anything less will cost Israel and the Arab respect of the Christian world.



THE PRESENT – FAITH IN ACTION

Pope John Paul II Address to Refugees

Dheisheh Refugee Camp (Bethlehem)

22 March, 2000 - Dheisheh Refugee Camp is one of many camps administered by UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency for the estimated three to four million Palestinian refugees and displaced persons in the Middle East.



Dear Friends,

1. It is important to me that my pilgrimage to the birthplace of Jesus Christ, on this the two thousandth anniversary of that extraordinary event includes this visit to Dheisheh. It is deeply significant that here, close to Bethlehem, I am meeting you, refugees and displaced persons, and representatives of the organizations and agencies involved in a true mission of mercy. Throughout my pontificate I have felt close to the Palestinian people in their sufferings.

I greet each one of you, and I hope and pray that my visit will bring some comfort in your difficult situation. Please God it will help to draw attention to your continuing plight. You have been deprived of many things which represent basic needs of the human person: proper housing, health care, education and work. Above all you bear the sad memory of what you were forced to leave behind, not just material possessions, but your freedom, the closeness of relatives, and the familial surroundings and cultural traditions which nourished your personal and family life. It is true that much is being done here in Dheisheh and in other camps to respond to your needs, especially through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. I am particularly pleased at the effectiveness of the presence of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine and many other Catholic organizations. But there is still much to be done.

2. The degrading conditions in which refugees often have to live; the continuation over long periods of situations that are barely tolerable in emergencies or for a brief time of transit; the fact that displaced persons are obliged to remain for years in settlement camps: these are the measure of the urgent need for a just solution to the underlying causes of the problem. Only a resolute effort on the part of leaders in the Middle East and in the international community as a whole—inspired by a higher vision of politics as service

of the common good—can remove the causes of your present situation. My appeal is for greater international solidarity and the political will to meet this challenge. I plead with all who are sincerely working for justice and peace not to lose heart. I appeal to political leaders to implement agreements already arrived at, and to go forward towards the peace for which all reasonable men and women yearn, to the justice to which they have an inalienable right.

3. Dear young people, continue to strive through education to take your rightful place in society, despite the difficulties and handicaps that you have to face because of your refugee status. The Catholic Church is particularly happy to serve the noble cause of education through the extremely valuable work of Bethlehem University, founded as a sequel to the visit of my predecessor Pope Paul VI in 1964.

Dear refugees, do not think that your present condition makes you any less important in God's eyes! Never forget your dignity as his children! Here at Bethlehem the Divine Child was laid in a manger in a stable; shepherds from the nearby fields were the first to receive the heavenly message of peace and hope for the world. God's design was fulfilled in the midst of humility and poverty.

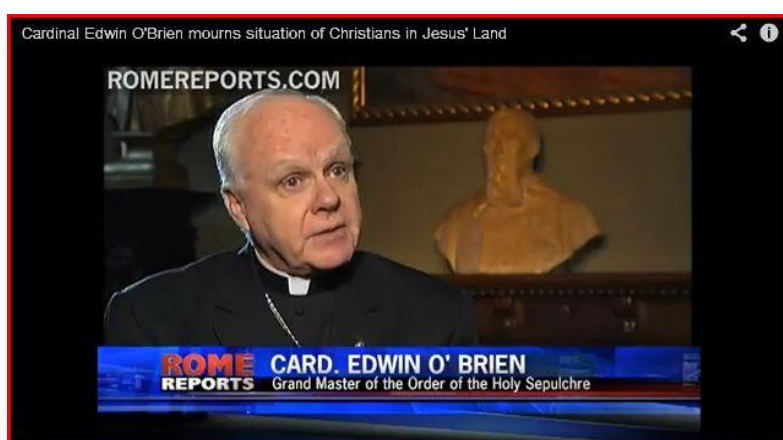
Dear aid workers and volunteers, believe in the task that you are fulfilling! Genuine and practical solidarity with those in need is not a favour conceded, it is a demand of our shared humanity and a recognition of the dignity of every human being.

Let us all turn with confidence to the Lord, asking him to inspire those in a position of responsibility to promote justice, security and peace, without delay and in an eminently practical way.

The Church, through her social and charitable organizations, will continue to be at your side and to plead your cause before the world.

Taken from: L'Osservatore Romano Weekly Edition in English 29 March 2000, page 4

Cardinal Edwin O'Brien Mourns Situation of Christians in Jesus' Land



July/ December 2012 (Romereports.com) - This time of year, when most people think about the Holy Land, they visualize the joy of Christmas and all the celebrations that come with it. But for Christians living in the Holy Land, which is about two percent of the population, the day to day reality is much more challenging.

Looking back just a few years ago, the population was much higher. **Cardinal O'Brien - Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre:** *"Thirty or forty percent, but most of the people have fled because of the pressures there. There are no jobs, they can't travel, (there is) great repression in that part of the world and it's a shame."*

He visited the Holy Land on December 1st, under his new role of Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. He says, Israel's plans to set up 30,000 new settlements will complicate things even further with Palestinians. **Cardinal O'Brien:** *"The more that that land is taken away from them and settlements, permanent settlements are built up, it's going to be virtually impossible to envision a free Palestinian state."*

Precisely to help that small, but vivid Christian community, more than 30,000 members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre dedicate their time, knowledge and resources. Their donations help fund 45 schools and more than 60 parishes and several orphanages in the Holy Land. He says one of the biggest challenges is actually having an open debate about the conflict between Israel and Palestine. **Cardinal O'Brien:** *"For some reason we can't openly debate these things in the United States where we're afraid to be accused of anti antisemitism, but the discussion in Israel among the Jewish people is much livelier."*

In the meantime, O'Brien says visits from outside pilgrims help out this Christian community, not just financially, but emotionally. **Cardinal O'Brien:** *"The midnight Mass is something that is known worldwide, that's a sign for Christians that there is still life in the Church, there is concern for them on the part of the Church Universal."* Even though challenges do exist, Cardinal O'Brien says he made sure this small community of Christians knows it's not forgotten.

From instability to fear. Christians living in the Middle East have had to deal with several challenges in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Throughout the years, restrictions have forced Christians to flee Israel. That continues to be case today. **Cardinal O'Brien:** *"The government there has put severe restrictions on travel, on labor on owning property and the good Christians of the Holy Land, feel themselves limited in so many ways."*

With the current instability, Cardinal O'Brien says that helping Christians in Israel is critical, as more and more feel limited in everyday life. **Cardinal O'Brien:** *"To gain great support for the Church and the Christians of the Holy Land. I'm learning a lot day after day as far as what is going on there."* The flight of Christians from the Holy Land has been an issue for years. Ironically, as native Israeli Christians continue to flee, thousands of Christian immigrants from other countries are arriving to the Holy Land, in hopes of finding employment.

The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism

Religious Leaders' Statement on Christian Zionism



**"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."
(Matthew 5:9)**

Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel.

The Christian Zionist program provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.

We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.

We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations with elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently imposing their unilateral preemptive borders and domination over Palestine.

This inevitably leads to unending cycles of violence that undermine the security of all peoples of the Middle East and the rest of the world.

We reject the teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these policies as they advance racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ.

Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from the ideologies of militarism and occupation. Instead, let them pursue the healing of the nations!

We call upon Christians in Churches on every continent to pray for the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are suffering as victims of occupation and militarism. These discriminative actions are turning Palestine into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusive Israeli settlements.

The establishment of the illegal settlements and the construction of the Separation Wall on confiscated Palestinian land undermine the viability of a Palestinian state as well as peace and security in the entire region. We call upon all Churches that remain silent, to break their silence and speak for reconciliation with justice in the Holy Land.

Therefore, we commit ourselves to the following principles as an alternative way:

We affirm that all people are created in the image of God. In turn they are called to honor the dignity of

every human being and to respect their inalienable rights.

We affirm that Israelis and Palestinians are capable of living together within peace, justice and security.

We affirm that Palestinians are one people, both Muslim and Christian. We reject all attempts to subvert and fragment their unity.

We call upon all people to reject the narrow world view of Christian Zionism and other ideologies that privilege one people at the expense of others.

We are committed to non-violent resistance as the most effective means to end the illegal occupation in order to attain a just and lasting peace. With urgency we warn that Christian Zionism and its alliances are justifying colonization, apartheid and empire-building.

God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but without violence.

"What does the Lord require of you: To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

This is where we take our stand. We stand for justice. We can do no other. Justice alone guarantees a peace that will lead to reconciliation with a life of security and prosperity for all the peoples of our land. By standing on the side of justice, we open ourselves to the work of peace -- and working for peace makes us children of God.

"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Patriarch Michel Sabbah
Latin Patriarchate, Jerusalem

Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad,
Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem

Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal,
Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East

Bishop Munib Younan,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Christian-Jewish Relations in the Context of Israel-Palestine



by Fr. David Neuhaus, Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrew Speaking Catholics in Israel and Coordinator of the Pastoral among Migrants. He is a member of the Society of Jesus and teaches Scripture at the Seminary of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and at Bethlehem University.

Perspectives on Christian-Jewish relations in Israel/Palestine in particular and in the Middle East in general are clearly distinguishable from perspectives that are current in Europe and North America. From the European and North American perspective, Jews and Christians have been in a fruitful and passionate dialogue for the past six decades, following a fundamental rethinking of the relationship with Jews and Judaism in the Western Churches. In fact, a deep dialogue has developed between Western Christians and their Jewish neighbors. This dialogue has been powered by two strong motors. One is the awakened sense of contrition among Christians with regard to the tragic fate of the Jews during periods when anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism dominated, culminating in the catastrophe of the Shoah (Holocaust). The other is the embrace of the Biblical and, by extension, the Jewish heritage of the Church and at its center the fact that Jesus, his disciples and the early Church are part of a Jewish world that has bequeathed to us a rich shared heritage, most importantly the Old Testament.

Clearly, the context, and thus the perspectives in Israel/Palestine and in the Middle East are quite different. In the Middle East today, Jews are not generally perceived as victims of marginalization and persecution but rather as the face of a problematic political reality in the Middle East in the form of the State of Israel and its occupation of Palestinian lands. Arab Christians, and Palestinian Christians in particular, challenge those engaged in the European and North American Jewish-Christian dialogue, asking whether a sense of guilt for the iniquity of anti-Semitism has not promoted an unhealthy dialogue where some Christians seek to assuage this sense of guilt by naively approving anything Jews say or do. This is particularly dramatic when Christians side with the political claims of the State of Israel and ignore Palestinians, their suffering and their legitimate demands for justice. Furthermore, the Old Testament, rather than being held up as “a shared heritage”, provokes concern, particularly with regard to texts about election, promise and land. Many Middle East Christians fear fundamentalist exploitation of these texts in the conflict between Arabs and Jews over Israel/Palestine.

I would like to underline five characteristics of the particular context for Christian-Jewish relations in Israel/Palestine and by extension in the Middle East in contrast to the European context:

Not part of the Christian world

Contemporary dialogue between Jews and Christians has focused almost exclusively on historical relations between Jews and Christians in the lands where Christians are the majority and where they have defined culture, society and power relations. In relation to these lands, Christians have realized that certain modalities of thought, action and political practice marginalized and even excluded Jews, often accused of being outsiders because of their refusal of the Christian faith and their adherence to religious practice other than Christianity. Middle Eastern society and politics are not derived from this same Christian tradition. On

the contrary, the modern Middle East is formed in the shadow of the creation of a Jewish state with a Jewish majority in 1948, perceived by many Middle Easterners and by Palestinians in particular as the last remnant of a colonial domination that ignores the aspirations of the indigenous population.

The presence of Islam

Islam is the dominant religion in historical Palestine and the Middle East and Muslims are the majority in all of the countries in the Middle East today (except for Israel). The Christian Arab and the Muslim Arab, whatever their religious differences might be, live in one society, speak one language, share one culture and experience one socio-political reality. Thus, dialogue with Muslims is a priority for Middle East Christians in a way that is not self-evident in interreligious dialogue in Europe. Dialogue with Jews, in fact, almost always becomes a triologue within the Middle East context because Muslims cannot be ignored.

The reversal of power relations

The teaching of many Western Churches, profoundly cognizant of the European and North American context, is extremely sensitive to the marginalized and vulnerable status of the Jews in the history of the West. However, Middle East Christians reflect on Christian-Jewish relations from the experience of the sovereignty of a powerful Jewish polity - Israel. Never before in history have Christians experienced Jewish sovereignty (this having been established in 1948 with the creation of the State of Israel). For many Middle East Christians, the Jew is often, first and foremost, a soldier, a policeman or a settler. Whereas Western Christians engage with Jews as a minority, marginalized and often traumatized, Palestinian Christians are in a situation where power relations are reversed. They do not feel responsible for the fate of Jews in Europe; on the contrary they often sense that they themselves are the victims of that very same history, having lost their homeland when the State of Israel was established.

The Israel-Palestine conflict as definitive

Whereas from the European and North American perspective, the watershed in Christian-Jewish relations was the Shoah, which provoked an awakening to a certain teaching of contempt for Jews in Christian circles, from the Middle East perspective, the question of Palestine is at the center of relations with Jews. Whereas dialogue from the Western perspective often includes a focus on the struggle against anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, the focus on justice and peace is an essential element of any prospective dialogue between Christians and Jews within the Middle East context.

The place of the Bible

The shared Biblical heritage is a fundamental principle in the decades of Christian-Jewish dialogue that has flourished over the past century. However, the experience of the shared Biblical heritage within the context of Israel/Palestine is not without its ambiguities. The Bible has been used as a foundational text when it comes to establishing a contemporary Jewish claim to the land that Palestinians see as theirs. Zionism, the ideology of Jewish nationalism, often reads the Bible as a legal, historical or even divinely revealed title deed to the land. For many Middle East Christians, a major problem is the use of the Bible to dispossess Palestinians and legitimate injustice. This is particularly evident in certain forms of Christian Zionism that offer Biblical justifications for the dispossession of the Palestinians and hostility towards Muslims.

Conclusion

Whereas Christians and Jews frequent one another in Europe and North America, Jews are no longer present in the majority of the Middle East countries, where they had once constituted vibrant communities before 1948. Only in Israel/Palestine are there substantial communities of both Christians and Jews today. Here we might suggest some practical initiatives to promote dialogue between Jews and Christians within the context of Israel/Palestine:

1. Encourage a dialogue of daily life focused on the concrete conditions of life in this land called holy. Jews and Christians together with Muslims are called to develop a shared commitment to justice and peace for all

inhabitants of the Holy Land. They do come together in the NGOs that promote shared values but often the religious and spiritual elements of the relationships established are ignored. Justice, peace, freedom, reconciliation, pardon, respect for human life and human rights are all concepts that can and must be rooted in the spiritual traditions that are rooted in the Holy Land. Religious discourse should not be left to fanatics and fundamentalists.

2. Jews and Christians must begin to study their shared textual heritage, the literature of the Old Testament, together. Joint study can throw light on the meaning of the religious text and its consequences in the here and now. Challenging violent, exclusivist and discriminatory interpretations of sacred texts is an important part of educating for justice and peace.

3. Jews, Christians and Muslims are invited to recover a memory of a time when Jews lived integrated in the Middle East. In fact, before 1948, Jewish Arabs were as significant a part of the Middle East as Christian Arabs. Traces of this Jewish presence include the contributions of prominent Jewish figures within Arab culture whether in the medieval period (eg. Saad bin Yusuf al-Fayoumi known as Saadia Gaon, great biblical commentator and translator of the Bible into Arabic) or the philosopher Moussa bin Maymoun (Maimonides) or in modern times (eg. musicians like Leyla Mourad, Daoud Housni and Feirouz al-Halabiyah). Sadly, the once illustrious Jewish communities of Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon have all but disappeared whereas those of Iran, Turkey and Yemen have been dramatically reduced, yet another victim of the conflict that has plagued the Middle East since 1948.

4. Religious people are called to lives of faith and hope. What more hopeful sign can there be than religious people in understanding and acceptance, speaking a language of mutual respect and esteem rather than the language of contempt that dominates much of the political discourse in Israel/Palestine today. Prophetic discourse must be appropriated afresh so that "God-talk" reminds all human creatures of their fundamental duty to honor one another as created in the image and likeness of God. This prophetic discourse must point out the iniquity of human sinfulness in the dispossession, repression, discrimination and violence that surrounds us and open up the human imagination to the possibility of a society where men and women recognize one another as belonging to one family.

Situation Overview of Christians in the Holy Land



*DUDERSTADT, Germany)
September 4, 2012*

Father Firas Aridah is pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Jifna, Palestine.

I want to thank you for the honor of being able to speak with you this morning at this vibrant gathering here in Duderstadt about the situation of the Christian community in the Holy Land.

My name is Father Firas Aridah from Jordan. I am a Roman Catholic priest of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which serves the Christian community in Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories and Cyprus.

It is a land sacred to Christians, Jews and Muslims; all three faith communities have existed there for centuries. Historically it was home to many nations, and now, in the modern context, it is a home to Israelis and Palestinians. One land, two peoples, three faiths; each rooted in conviction and vigor for Jerusalem, each who need to be reminded that there can be no exclusive claim which will be accepted.

What I had in mind when I came to serve in Jerusalem, was to focus all my energy in performing the 'normal duties' of a parish priest—tending to the needs of the Christian faithful and the community at large while being able to attract the youth as you are doing here. It was there, in the midst of my 'normal duties', where I became unwillingly drawn into this on-going conflict. It was never my intention to get involved in politics – and I am still resolute to leave the politics to the politicians – but my focus is the people. And in my service to the people, I dealt with the occupation. With the occupation came the confiscation of lands and the demolition of homes. With the confiscation of lands and demolition of homes came the building of walls of separation in the name of security inside the west bank, losing 8 % from our land not the borders of 1967. With the building of walls of separation came the destruction of olive orchards and stealing our own water. These 'normal duties' of a parish priest have been particularly painful in Palestine.

Olive trees are a main source of livelihood for Palestinians. They are used to derive products such as: olive oil, soap and wood crafts. These trees and this livelihood are thousands of years old, handed down from one generation to the next. The groves are a lifeline with great significance and value in our culture. In the aftermath of the 26 foot high wall that now surrounds most of the West Bank and with new border enforcement, people can no longer get to their farms. Families have been divided; many have lost their jobs or have become deprived of advanced medical care at hospitals which are no longer accessible. As a priest, a pastor of souls, my conscience and my calling drive me to be “a voice for those who have no voice and to defend the weak and the oppressed.” (Patr. Sabbah. Seek Peace and Pursue it. 1998) How then can I say nothing as this tragedy befalls the people who I am serving? How can I remain silent when the Christian community I am serving is disappearing because of this occupation.

The current situation we face is this: Today, we have fewer Christians in the Holy Land than we had in 1947 going from 8% to 1.6% in 2000. When at one point we numbered 27,000 Christians in Jerusalem, now we are only 9,000 Christians. Our people are emigrating, our presence is threatened and if the trend continues, our future is moving towards extinction. This is impacted by the fact that there are over 550,000 Israeli settlers living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Many of our villages are under military control, with restrictions on movement from one village to the next, meaning that we have immediate family who have become separated from each other. Our lands are still being confiscated all around us to build more Israeli settlements or to expand settlements that already exist. Recently Israel has confiscated around three thousand acres from 59 Christian families in Beit Jala to continue expansion of the Gilo settlement and the separation wall where we lost more than 9 % from the land of west bank.

The recent development of clashes between settlers and Israeli civil authorities is proof that settlements are a phenomenon which has grown far beyond Israel's grasp. They violate the laws which have been put in place to protect them and they unquestionably threaten peace and stability in the region. As the book of Proverbs says: “Where there is no hope, the people perish” – an entire generation of Israelis and Palestinians have grown up witnessing and experiencing violence, occupation, separation, and hatred. There continue to be fewer and fewer opportunities to interact. There is heightened suspicion and apprehension on both sides and so, our people deeply feel a sense of hopelessness and despair.

In the midst of this unfortunate reality it falls on us to speak out and remind everyone of the objective truth that is Jesus Christ. In the words of our Patriarch Fouad Twal: “ultimately, Israelis and Palestinians ... must work out their differences in a just and righteous manner, in ways that require painful compromises.” No, we the Christian community of the Holy Land, the people of Calvary, will not allow our hope to die. We today live the Gospel – we live the hope it promises.

We are walking towards our Lord with conviction and with faith not allowing the huge obstacle of war, violence and occupation to hinder our path. Be assured friends we are walking towards Jesus Christ and nothing will keep us from him.

It is amazing to see that even in Gaza where our small Christian community not only suffers from the occupation and economic sanctions imposed by most of the free world – they also suffer from extremism and fanaticism caused by a lack of education. And with all this they are determined to stay, determined to live where Christianity has existed for two thousand years – no friends nothing will stand between us and the Lord. We will not allow others to use our voice. We will not stand for a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible which seeks to legitimize the infringement of Palestinian rights, nor will we stand for Islamic extremism.

We have a unified Christian message which we are able and willing to give to the world. This message can be found in the Kairos Palestine document. “We are thinkers, we are theologians, we are philosophers, we are teachers, we are believers in the Bible and in Jesus Christ who “interpreted to the disciples of Emmaus the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Lk. 24:27) and we are rolling up our sleeves and are making a difference by shedding light in a bleak situation because nothing will stand between us and the Lord.

The Church in fact has found ways to give people hope and an opportunity for a better future. As an example, the Catholic Church is the largest private educator in the area which we serve, with some 70,000 children in the over 100 schools run by various institutions of the church.

We run 14 hospitals in the area with 3 Universities. We serve the poorest of the poor through our orphanages, nursing homes, centres for children with special needs and centres for the pastoral needs of families and young adults.

We run youth groups, scouts and we provide a safe place for children to come and play. We are doing our part in providing educational opportunities for our youth who are the future, we believe that if Christian, Muslim and Jewish children play together, they will become friends – then and only then will we have a prospect for lasting peace.

Sadly, in the midst of this conflict, few are looking to serve humanity; few are seeing the human faces of children, mothers, fathers and the elderly which are violated by oppression and violence. But we are in need of your help, we are in need of your support, we are in need for you to walk with us towards the empty tomb so that one day we can hear together the good news and reap the good reward: ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with little; I will put you in charge of much. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ (Matthew 25:23)

So you will say, what can we here in Germany do for you in the Holy Land? Let me tell you. Local governments and international intervention has failed for too long to do what is necessary. It is vital that administrations realize that time is no longer on our side and that actions to secure peace which is one sided (or in one’s own vested interests) will bring us nowhere.

Prolonging the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis will serve only the extremists on both sides and will weaken the supporters of peace on both sides. If you intervene you can save the prospect of peace, before it

is extinguished by extremism and violence.

In our schools children learn and experience humanity, after all that is what Jesus taught: to love our enemies, to forgive those who do us harm, to be peacemakers, and promote dialogue and foster reconciliation.

The Christians in Palestine are small in number, but we are doing our part to work for a better future for both Palestinians and Israelis. Time and time again we have seen the youth who graduate from our schools and universities or those who benefit from the work of our institutions – they leave with a changed mindset. Despite the despair and the violence in society, they still believe in the ability to change the world and so they become leaders for justice, peace and tolerance instead of pupils of death and destruction.

I, like those who are hopeful, truly believe Israelis and Palestinians can live together, but in order for it to be a reality, each side must recognize the dignity of the other and be willing to unconditionally accept each other, for the sake of humanity. With great fervour and courage, we must make a renewed and genuine effort to promote peace and extend our hand to all faiths and peoples who share in the pursuit of peace, justice and liberty.

The occupation must end because it is a sin against God Himself. Violence and terrorism must stop. There must be no more settlements built on Palestinian land. Our Christian presence must be supported and nurtured. You must support the efforts of institutions who are working to serve humanity. Use your voice and your influence to bring the prospect of peace back. If you don't who will? Give us the chance to one day stand with you and say: Two Nations under God with Peace, Liberty and Justice for all!

I promise you when we walk towards Jesus we will never lose. I invite you to come to the Holy Land as pilgrims, to be present in our lives and to pray for us and with us, and to support our projects, so that we can arrive together one day to the goal in which we are all interested – Peace.

May God bless you all, and bless every step you take to support the dignity of human life in this world.

*The Assembly
of Catholic Ordinaries
of the Holy Land*



مجلس رؤساء الكنائس الكاثوليكية
في الأرض المقدسة

Latins, Melkites, Maronites, Syrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Custody of the Holy Land

Jerusalem, September 4, 2012

Declaration of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land

Why are Christians Again the Target?

The Christian community awoke this morning, Tuesday, September 4, 2012, to discover with horror that once again it is the target of forces of hatred within Israeli society. In the early hours of the morning, the door of the Cistercian (Trappist) monastery in Latroun was burned and anti-Christian graffiti was sprayed on the walls.

The monks of Latroun have dedicated their lives to prayer and hard work. The monastery is visited by hundreds of Jewish Israelis each week and they are received with love and warmth by the monks. A number of the monks have learned Hebrew and promote mutual understanding and reconciliation between Jews and Christians, according to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Sadly, what happened in Latroun is only another in a long series of attacks against Christians and their places of worship. What is going on in Israeli society today that permits Christians to be scapegoat and targeted by these acts of violence? Those who sprayed their hateful slogans, expressed their anger at the dismantlement of the illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank. But why do they vent this anger against Christians and Christian places of worship? What kind of “teaching of contempt” for Christians is being communicated in their schools and in their homes? And why are the culprits not found and brought to justice?

This morning, the Christians in Israel are asking many questions as they grieve and seek consolation and assurances. The time has come for the authorities to act to put an end to this senseless violence and to ensure a “teaching of respect” in schools for all those who call this land home.

“Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?

Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.”(Psalm 34:12-14)

Signatures

+ Fouad TWAL

Patriarch of Jerusalem for
Latin, President, A.C.O.H.L.

+ Giorgio LINGUA

Apostolic Nuncio for Jordan

Rt Rev. Waldemar S. SOMMERTAG

Chargé d’Affaires of the
Apostolic Nunciature for Israel

+ Michel SABBAH

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem
Emeritus

+ Elias CHACOUR

Melkite Catholic Archbishop of
Akka, Vice president, ACOHL

+ Yaser Al-AYYASH

Melkite Catholic Archbishop of
Petra and Philadelphia

+ Mussa El-HAGE

Maronite Archbishop of Haifa
and the Holy Land; Maronite
Patriarchal Vicar for Jerusalem

+ Joseph SOUEIF

Maronite Archbishop of
Cyprus

+ Boutros MOUALLEM

Melkite Catholic Archbishop of
Akka Emeritus

+ Gregoire Pierre MELKI

Syrian Catholic Exarch of
Jerusalem

+ Joseph Jules ZEREY

Melkite Patriarchal Vicar of
Jerusalem

+ Maroun LAHHAM

Latin Patriarchal Vicar for
Jordan

+ Giacinto-Boulos MARCUSO

Latin Patriarchal Vicar for
Israel

+ William SHOMALI

Latin Patriarchal Vicar for
Jerusalem and Palestine

+ Kamal-Hanna BATHISH

Latin Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus

+ Selim SAYEGH

Latin Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus

Msgr. Joseph KELEKIAN

Armenian Catholic Exarch of
Jerusalem

Very Rev. Pierbattista

PIZZABALLA, O.F.M.
Custos of the Holy Land

Rev. David NEUHAUS, S.J.

Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrew
speaking Vicariate

Rev. Evencio HERRERA DIAZ, O.F.M.

Latin Patriarchal Vicar for
Cyprus

Rev. Raymond MOUSSALLI

Patriarchal Vicar in Jordan for
Chaldeans

Rev. Pietro FELET, SCJ

Secretary

Bethlehem Nuns in West Bank Barrier Battle

By Yolande Knell BBC News, Jerusalem (from BBC News at bbc.co.uk/new)



Cremisan convent and school

The barrier Israel has been building in and around the West Bank is set to deprive a Christian community of its land, and appears to have caused an unholy row between some monks and nuns - who could now end up on opposite sides.

In the green Cremisan valley, west of Bethlehem, a goatherd leans against a rock while his flocks graze under the olive and fig trees.

Nearby, a narrow road winds along the hillside to a 19th Century convent and a secluded monastery where monks run the only Palestinian winery.

For the mainly Christian town of Beit Jala, this is the local beauty spot. Residents come here to take a stroll or for a weekend barbecue. Many own small plots of agricultural land. They also send their children to the convent school and visit the monastery to sell grapes or buy its wine.

That is why an Israeli government plan to build a wall through the valley, cutting off their access to most of it, is causing great alarm.



Red line is the proposed path of the Wall. Yellow is the Convent / School and the Monastery (Google)

In an unusual move, priests like Father Ibrahim Shomali are speaking out.

"When people suffer the Church must be near them. This is not politics. This is human rights and this is

Christians who must be defended," he says. "Here, 57 Christian families will lose their land. Losing the land means losing their hope."

Every week, Father Ibrahim invites members of the community to join an outdoor mass as a form of peaceful protest.



Part of the wall around Bethlehem

Large parts of Israel's West Bank barrier have already been built. From the Cremisan valley, the high concrete wall separating Palestinian Bethlehem from Jerusalem is clearly visible in the distance. When it is extended here, the purpose will be to divide Beit Jala from two Jewish settlements - Har Gilo and Gilo - which sit on opposite hilltops.

While both are considered illegal under international law, Israel disputes this.

Palestinians see the barrier as a land grab and believe this valley is wanted for settlement expansion. Israeli officials argue that security is their main concern.

"The route of the security barrier is based on the specific security considerations of the area. In the Beit Jala region, it is there solely to keep terror out of Jerusalem," says Israeli Defence Ministry spokesman, Joshua Hantman.

West Bank barrier

Total length is 708 km (440 miles), more than twice the length of the 1949 Armistice Line (Green Line) between Israel and West Bank

About 61.8% of the barrier is complete; a further 8.2% is under construction and 30% is planned but not yet constructed

When completed, only about 15% of the barrier will be constructed on the Green Line or in Israel, isolating 9.4% of the West Bank

Source: UN 2011

He adds that 10 years ago, during the second Palestinian uprising or intifada, there were regular attempts to shoot at Gilo from Beit Jala.

Local Palestinians have launched legal action to prevent them from being blocked off from the Cremisan land.

This is one of dozens of cases that have ensured that work on the barrier, begun in 2002, remains only two-thirds complete.

What makes this case different is the presence of the convent and monastery. Two years ago, the Salesian Sisters of Cremisan joined the challenge to the route in an Israeli court.

"We want to build bridges, not walls," their director, Sister Fides says through lawyers, emphasising the importance to the convent of its primary school for West Bank children.

The Salesian Sisters worry that the barrier could close down their school for Palestinian children.



Schoolchildren at the Cremisan

"We are committed towards education for justice, peaceful living and peace between all people without distinction."

The latest proposals for the barrier would see it looping round the convent, keeping it on the Palestinian side, but splitting it from the neighbouring monastery.

Children would still be allowed to attend the school, though they would have to pass by soldiers at an Israeli checkpoint to do so. Landowners would be given limited access via an agricultural gate, at the time of the olive harvest, for example.

For now, the barrier stops half-way up a hill behind the monastery. For a long time the monks remained silent about the developments, earning criticism from others in the Christian community.

"It is of vital importance to have all the interested parties together against this wall because together we are strong," says Samia Khalilieh, who is involved in the court case.

"The monastery being with us is an important factor. It is part of our heritage."

In December, the monks published a carefully worded condemnation of the barrier route. It said they never asked to "pass on the Israeli side" and that "the entire route of the wall was established independently by the Israeli authorities".

The monastery also tried to join the legal appeal but the court would not allow it. Nuns and residents are due in court again in September.

Ministering to the Elderly



**Marie, an elderly resident of the Home of Our Lady of Sorrows in East Jerusalem.
Photo: Georgi Lazarevski**

Our Lady of Sorrows is a Catholic-run nursing home primarily serving elderly Palestinians of various faiths, many who are poor and disabled. The facility is run by a small group of nuns and a staff of 18, whose work provides the residents with the bare necessities. The majority of residents — and staff — come from the West Bank, and most of their families continue to live there. The state of Israel first put up a security barrier across from Our Lady of Sorrows in 2002. The wall has made daily life more difficult for the staff and residents of the home, as anyone coming from the West Bank must obtain permits and go through a series of checkpoints. The access issues have also made the delivery of supplies and transportation of the home's residents to medical facilities more complicated. Below is a letter from the Homes' Directress.

I would like to inform you about what is happening in our neighborhood and around our house concerning the construction of the new wall of separation, 9 meters high (30 feet), which began on January 11, 2004. It replaces a much lower wall that allowed people to climb over it once they were no longer permitted to go from Bethany and Abu Dis to Jerusalem. This first so-called security wall was built in August 2002. It disorganized and deeply affected the life of the population as well as our own.

Separating Jerusalem from the West Bank and running along the road leading to our house, it passes in front of the main entrance to our property.

Thousands of people have climbed over this first wall: children, students, mothers with their babies, elderly people, etc. Many people have fallen; some have even died from their fall. Two months ago, we had to call the ambulance for a man about 65 years old who fell on his head and lost consciousness. It took the ambulance more than a half-hour to get here. As it reached the Bethany intersection on its way to the hospital, the army searched the ambulance and forced the wife of the injured person to get out, thereby further delaying arrival at the hospital. The things that happen in front of this wall have become intolerable!

Hundreds of persons have passed through our property on a daily basis over a period of many months, climbing over our fences in order to escape military control, because many of them work in Jerusalem but do not have the required permits.

The people around us live in fear: fear of being arrested, fear of being tear-gassed, and fear of being mistreated, as so often happens. Tension is constant for the entire population whose living conditions have become more and more miserable.

It's a daily struggle for these people who are constantly humiliated and assaulted. We really feel alone and helpless in the face of generalized inertia.

We want to be spokespersons for these voiceless people who, each day for more than two years, have had to fight their way to reach their workplaces, schools, etc., to say nothing of all the sick who die for want of medical treatment.

In trying to accomplish our own mission, we too meet up with many difficulties when it comes to hospitalizing elderly people from the West Bank because Palestinian ambulances do not have the right to enter Israel. We must therefore find a way of getting these people to the other side of the wall without crossing any checkpoints so that their families can then bring them to the hospital.

The same problem arises when someone dies. The families must shift for themselves to bring the bodies back to the other side. Life has become very complicated these last two years, and things are about to get worse with the construction of this new wall.

Elderly people who are still able to get around have not been able to run their errands for the last several months because all the shops are on the other side of the wall. Very often, they have been obliged to call merchants to the front of the wall and place their orders through an opening between two cement blocks.

Many of our elderly patients from the West Bank are very lonely because their families can no longer come to visit them.

Since the construction of the wall, we have had to be more vigilant than ever about the security of our elderly people.

We have had to change suppliers. This represents an increase in the cost of our overhead because life is more expensive in Jerusalem.

Today, we do not really know what will happen if the construction of this wall is completed because the majority of our elderly people and of our personnel come from the West Bank. Of our 18 employees, only three have a Jerusalem ID card. For two years, they have had to climb over the wall and constantly change their route in order to avoid the checkpoints because, even with a laissez-passer, the soldiers do not always let them come to our house.

This wall of 9 meters (30 feet) will oblige us to:

- 1. Hire new personnel from Jerusalem and, at the same time, fire the majority of our present personnel.**
- 2. Stop receiving elderly people from the West Bank, i.e. to say, the poorest among them.**

We are worried. Also, thousands of people are anguished as they see the wall being built without anyone resisting or protesting on the construction site itself.

We were not apprised of the government's plans, and our house is now more isolated than ever because of the condition of the road. Everyday we must pick up our personnel at various places because the neighbourhood has become a military zone. Purchasing supplies has become extremely complicated, and we spend our time trying to manage the unforeseen. Given the terrible condition of the road giving access to our property, we hope that we won't have to hospitalize any of our elderly persons during the current rainy season.

This week many journalists and photographers have visited the neighborhood to see this land of desolation and humiliation. We all hope that the interviews they've conducted for the various newspapers, radio stations and TV networks will alert public opinion and stir the consciences of politicians.

We hope that you in turn will become our spokesperson and call for the destruction of this wall of shame. We count on your prayers so that a dialogue can resume between the responsible parties involved on both sides. Also, we count on your taking action, thanking you in advance for diffusing this information.

Sr. Marie Dominique Croyal

Dispute over Water Bill could affect Holy Sepulchre

Text by Judith Sudilovsky, Catholic News Service



JERUSALEM (CNS) – A dispute over an unpaid water bill reportedly running to \$2.3 million could threaten the daily functioning of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of Christendom’s most holy sites.

A well-informed source who did not want to be named said the dispute stems from a unilateral cancellation of a long-term agreement – dating to Turkish rule – which exempted the Church of the Holy Sepulchre from paying for the water it used. The church has a copy of a signed 1969 letter outlining the agreement, he said, and has made copies available to the municipality.

He said negotiations over payment of the bill had been going on for some two years but in late October the municipal water company, Hagihon, froze the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate’s bank account and, according to a report in the Israeli Maariv newspaper, the patriarchate was threatening to close its doors. CNS’s source said that water in the church is used for cleaning and is “very heavily” used not only by pilgrims coming to the church but also by tourists to the Old City, who come to use the church facilities and drink water because there are no other public toilets in the area. He said the providing of public toilets was “too much of a burden” on the church but it provided the free use of their facilities as a courtesy.

An official at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate told the British news agency Reuters that the patriarchate was willing to pay water bills from now on but that the accumulated debt “would be problematic.” In the meantime, the patriarchate is unable to pay salaries for its employees or pay for food, toll road charges or their electric and phone bills.

“It doesn’t make sense to us to be asking to pay a retroactive bill that the municipality has a written commitment (not to charge),” said the source.

He said the payment was not the issue but rather the unilateral cancellation of the traditional agreement. He said demanding payment was tantamount to breaking the historic Status Quo agreement, which determines the details of how the church is run.

He said Christian church leaders have been having “extensive meetings” among themselves to determine what steps they should be taken next.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is traditionally believed to be the place of Jesus’ crucifixion, burial and resurrection, and sovereignty over it are shared by the Greek Orthodox Church; the Catholic Church, represented by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land; and the Armenian Orthodox Church. The Coptic, Assyrian and Ethiopian Orthodox churches also have smaller claims to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

A spokesman for Hagihon said it has held talks and meetings with representatives of the churches “for years” and had suggested the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate turn to the Ministry of Interior with its concerns, since

the law does not allow the company to make exceptions.

He said the church was being charged retroactively only since 2004, when the company was formed.

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Franciscan Convent on Mount Zion Desecrated, ACOHL Dismayed

Posted on Oct 2, 2012 in Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries, Dialogue, Press releases, Publications



JERUSALEM – The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land is distressed at the discovery of graffiti in Hebrew on the gate of the Franciscan Convent (Ad Caenaculum) on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The convent is adjacent to the Cenacle complex.

The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land posted on its website (custodia.org) the painful discovery this morning, October 2, 2012, with a one-line announcement prefaced by “ONCE AGAIN....” This is reminiscent of the graffiti sprayed in the Abbey of Latroun one month ago. Jesus is once again profaned and signed “price tag,” a characteristic mark of Israeli extremists.

The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land (ACOHL) expresses consternation at such acts. The Assembly conveys its full fraternal support and prayer to the Franciscans and the Christian community in the Holy Land.

Once again, the Assembly expresses grave concern about the education of the young in some schools where contempt and intolerance are taught. The ACOHL is hoping that the Israeli authorities find and apprehend the perpetrators – the “price tag” group and bring them before the courts of law. More than anything, the Assembly again asks, that radical changes be made in the educational system, otherwise the same causes will produce the same effects over and over. This act of violence is one of several expressions of prejudice against Christians in the Holy Land and throughout the world.

Residency Laws Separate Families

15 Mar 2012 – text by Judith Sudilovsky



Palestinian Joseph Hazboun, 46, poses at the piano with his daughters, Layal, 16, Yazan, 14, and son, Lene, 12, in their apartment in East Jerusalem 28 Feb. For 17 years Hazboun, who is from Bethlehem, West Bank, has been living with his family in Jerusalem without a permanent Israeli residency permit. (photo: CNS/Bob Roller)

JERUSALEM - Joseph Hazboun remembers when he could hop into his car in Jerusalem and drive the few miles to the nearby West Bank city of Bethlehem to see his family. It was easy enough, even passing through mandatory checkpoints, that he and his Jerusalem-born wife and children would make the trip at least twice a month.

It has been years, though, since the Hazbouns, who are Catholic, could make the 25-minute drive on their own. Now the family must take light rail, two taxis and walk across a checkpoint to get from their home in East Jerusalem to Bethlehem. The venture takes at least 90 minutes. The result: The Hazbouns have curtailed their visits to once every several months.

Israeli laws on the book since 2003 strictly limit who can obtain permanent residency status and thus enjoy the related benefits, including driving privileges. The Supreme Court recently upheld the law. Although he is the spouse of a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem who holds an Israeli permanent resident ID, Hazboun is prohibited from becoming a permanent resident of Israel because he is from Bethlehem. Only those with permanent residency can enjoy benefits of Israeli society, including coverage under the health care system and social security benefits.

Every year the couples keep close track of their rent receipts, utility bills, school tuition payments and vaccination records. They trek to the Ministry of Interior and then to the Civil Administration in the West Bank to get the piece of paper that allows them to live together legally as a family.

They are among thousands of Palestinian couples who continue living in a state of limbo and uncertainty because they must apply for a temporary residence permit annually.

“That puts us at their mercy as, at any given moment, they can rebuke our residency permit and tell us to go away somewhere. But I have nowhere else to go. Here is where my work is, here is where we have our home,” said Hazboun, 46, who has worked in the Jerusalem office of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine for 18 years. He has lived in the city since he married his Jerusalem-born wife, Rima, 17 years ago.

“I can’t understand what the security threat is to Israel if we drive,” Hazboun said. “This is just another prohibition to make our life in Israel difficult. It is a demographic war. (They think) that if they make it difficult for us we will say, Why live such a life in Jerusalem when we can move about freely in the West Bank?”

Hazboun’s wife is allowed to drive, but she has a driving phobia. She declined to be interviewed.

Hazboun said he is looking forward to next year when the couple's oldest daughter will be eligible for a driver's license. Under the law, their children have been registered under their Jerusalemite parents' Israeli identity card. The couple's hopes for the system to be eased were dashed because of the Supreme Court ruling.

Under the law, the residency application status of couples like the Habouns has been frozen, although couples who had applied for family reunification before the statute was passed in 2003 may still apply for a temporary residency permit every year. Couples who married after the law was passed may not even do that. The end result is that they live in fear that the spouse from the West Bank will be expelled from Israel. Since the beginning of 2012, the Society of St. Yves, a Catholic human and civil rights legal aid center, has taken on 89 family reunification cases like that of the Hazbouns, said director Raffoul Rofa. In the past, he said, the agency sometimes has been successful in upgrading a spouse's status to resident status with full rights if the family reunification application was submitted in the 1990s.

Rofa estimated that more than 100 Christian couples are affected by the law, though no official statistics exist. The center's staff estimates that thousands of couples remain dependent on the Israeli Ministry of Interior for the renewal of their temporary residency permits each year.

Elias, 39, is from Jerusalem and has an Israeli-issued permanent residency card but his wife, Abeer, 34, is from Bethlehem and lives in Jerusalem with only a temporary resident permit. The Catholic couple asked that their real names not be used because they fear their public comments will lead to difficulties with Israeli authorities.

The driving prohibition cuts into even the most mundane details of family life during the winter months. When it rains, as it has often since November, Abeer must either hire a taxi to take her children to afternoon activities or she must walk with them herself, even though the family car sits unused in the apartment building parking lot.

"It is a small prison here," Abeer said, sitting in her neat two-bedroom apartment in a Palestinian neighborhood of East Jerusalem.

Israel's citizenship and entry laws also affects young couples who are dating, Rofa said. Before beginning a relationship, many young people first learn where their prospective partner is from in an effort to avoid getting caught in the web of family reunification, he explained. None of these complications figured into the plans of Elias and Abeer when they fell in love and married almost a decade ago.

Abeer said that if she and Elias had thought about the ramifications of their marriage, they might not have married. For now, they see that only solution to their predicament is to move abroad but they do not want to leave their family, friends and the place where they grew up.

"It is part of our cross," Elias said. "The West thinks Israel is the only democratic state in the Middle East, but having to go through all this system is very humiliating. Every day you have to prove you are not a liar and that you don't forge documents. It makes me nervous to lose a bill or an invoice."

Hazboun expressed similar sentiments: "We would have still gotten married and lived in Jerusalem, but after what we have gone through, my wife tells our children not to even think about getting married to someone from the West Bank. It is difficult because we know what awaits them if they do."

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Challenges for Christian Students and Bethlehem University

Bethlehem University (2005): Thousands of Christian pilgrims came to Jerusalem for the Holy Days of Easter. It has been widely reported across the international media that thousands of pilgrims from around the world flocked to Jerusalem for this year's Holy Week and Easter celebrations. While this unique graced opportunity must have been wonderful for them, Christians living only 5 miles away in Bethlehem were denied this opportunity to practice their faith by the Israeli military authorities.



No, not everyone who wanted to come to Jerusalem was permitted to do so. Father Jamal Khader, Chairperson of the Religious Studies Department at Bethlehem University, the only Catholic Christian university in the Holy Land, reports that despite being “promised” that Bethlehem Christians – including students from the Vatican-sponsored Bethlehem University – would be given permits to travel into Jerusalem during the two week Easter season, these “permissions” were denied by the Israeli authorities.

Anticipating the opportunity to bring Christian university students from Bethlehem to Jerusalem (only 5 miles away) for Easter, Father Jamal and other Bethlehem University faculty members prepared two projects for two groups of Christian students.

Jewish Weekend Denied

First, as part of their academic course on Judaism, a “Jewish weekend” was planned for one group. This was to include a Sabbath prayer in a Synagogue, a meeting with students of the Hebrew University, a presentation by a Jew about his faith (something we can not do at Bethlehem because the Israeli authorities do not permit Israeli Jews to come to Bethlehem), a visit to Yad Vashem, and to conclude with the Christian Palm Sunday procession. Permission denied!

Galilee Retreat Denied

The second group of students were those majoring in Religious Studies at Bethlehem University and those involved in the Christian Youth Group (Al-Shabibeh). For this group, a pilgrimage and retreat to the Galilee was planned since most of the Bethlehem University students have never been to Nazareth or other Holy Places in the Galilee region. Permission denied!

Father Jamal requested permits for 65 students and received permits for only 6 students – and these 6 were for only one day, a day not requested! No reasons were given for the denial of the 59 other applications for permits. No reason was given as to why these 6 students received only a one-day permission – and that being for the wrong day! Attempts were made to have the applications reconsidered – but to no avail.

Yes, it was a wonderful Holy Week and Easter celebration in Jerusalem for thousands of pilgrims from around the world who gathered in the town next door to Bethlehem. But not so for the Christians of Bethlehem. Suffering due to the Israeli military occupation continues to be a daily experience. Since “permission” for Bethlehem Christians to practice their faith in Jerusalem was denied, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus were commemorated here in Bethlehem. For the thousands of Christians from around

the world who were granted permission by the Israeli authorities to come to Jerusalem, it was a wonderful graced celebration. One day, maybe the Bethlehem Christians might also be counted among those so “permitted.”

Israeli Authorities Repeatedly Deny Christians

When asked if this was the first time that Bethlehem Christians were prevented from practicing their religion by the Israeli authorities, Father Jamal told of the 3 times during the recent Fall 2005 academic semester when requests from Bethlehem University students for permission to go to the Galilee for a pilgrimage retreat were denied by the Israeli authorities – with no explanation.

The travel permission application is an involved and time-consuming process whereby Father Jamal gathers student names, ID numbers, letters of recommendation from the University or from the Latin Patriarch (Roman Catholic Diocesan Bishop) – in addition to making plans for the retreat program and reservations for the pilgrim housing. Each time that permits are requested, there is a time of waiting and great uncertainty involved. Sometimes it is up to the last moment that one must wait for a reply. In June 2005, for instance, a pilgrimage retreat for the high school religion teachers completing their two-year teacher upgrading program was planned. While the permission to travel was granted, it was granted at 8am on the very day of the pilgrimage retreat – but only for two-thirds of the students – and the permits were only for 1 day, not for the 3 days requested and planned.

Pope Calls for Patient and Persevering Dialogue

After praying for peace in Iraq during his Easter homily in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI continued, "I also pray sincerely that those caught up in the conflict in the Holy Land may find peace, and I invite all to patient and persevering dialogue, so as to remove both ancient and new obstacles. May the international community, which reaffirms Israel's just right to exist in peace, assist the Palestinian people to overcome the precarious conditions in which they live and to build their future, moving toward the constitution of a state which is truly their own."

Latin Patriarch Calls for a New Beginning

Reflecting on the reality of suffering, death and injustice in the Holy Land, in his Easter message, Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah said, "We must believe in our capacity to love, all of us, Israelis and Palestinians. We are capable of loving and of making justice for ourselves and for others. We need a new beginning based on new principles and a new perspective on life in this Holy Land. We are capable of freeing ourselves from the death that has been imposed on us until now. We, Israelis and Palestinians, are capable of freeing ourselves from the fear that comes from violence and terrorism, from the occupation imposed by the law of the strongest, and by the logic of death and hate."

Faith in the Resurrection

Many say that the whole issue of seeking permits is absurd. Christians from Bethlehem need permits from the Israeli military authorities in order to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or to visit the Holy Sites in the Galilee. Most students graduate from Bethlehem University without ever visiting Jerusalem or Nazareth because they do not receive “permission” from the Israeli authorities. The Christian students who are majoring in Religious Studies at Bethlehem University take a course about the Holy Land without visiting the Holy Land beyond Bethlehem! They have a course about Judaism without meeting any Jew (other than soldiers and settlers). Why? Because of the Israeli travel restrictions and the injustices of the on-going occupation. Yes, all of this is absurd – but so is the cross to those without faith in the resurrection. We know the “whole” story: not only is there the passion and death, but there is also the resurrection!

Source of Hope

In his Easter message to the friends of Bethlehem University, Brother Daniel Casey, Vice Chancellor, reminded us that “many of our crosses are opportunities to be sources of hope, of joy, of discovery, of healing, of life—for ourselves and others. The challenge Jesus calls us to take up is to transform our crosses, as he did. These crosses, when taken up in a spirit of humble compassion with which Jesus took up his, are the first light of Easter dawn.” Let us live in the light of Easter dawn, with hope for a better tomorrow!

Jerusalem Church Chiefs Protest Against New Israeli Tax Move

By Arthur Hagopian - 13 Apr 2011 <http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk>



Good Shepherd Parish as it sits in front of the Mount of Temptation, Jericho, Palestine.

The heads of Christian Churches in Jerusalem have expressed grave concern over renewed moves by the Israeli authorities to tax church buildings and properties.

While previous such moves have ended in failure, the Israelis have not tried hard to mask their intention to persist in their efforts to impose an arnona (property tax) on properties owned by the various churches, including those which have been vacant for some time.

In a statement issued on 13 April 2011, the Heads of Churches of the Holy City of Jerusalem, a loose conglomeration of the 13 Christian churches officially recognised by the Israeli state, warned of dire consequences that would ensue should Israel carry out its plans.

“Such imposition would constitute a radical departure from the consistent practice of every previous State to have governed any part of the Holy Land, including the Ottoman empire, the British Mandate, the Hashemite Kingdom and the State of Israel itself,” the church leaders said.

“It would represent a significant worsening of the conditions of the Churches in the Holy Land. It would also be in direct contradiction of the mandate of the United Nations Organisation in General Assembly resolution

181, of 29 November, 1947, as it applied not only to Jerusalem but also to the two national states that it authorises to be established in the Holy Land," they warned.

The churches argued the Israeli move would be in contravention of the so-called "status quo" agreements promulgated in the 19th Century, which have governed relations between the churches and governments since Ottoman times. Under the terms of the status quo, the Ottomans pledged to exempt church properties from taxation, recognised their rights and granted them special privileges, in documents termed 'firmans'.

One Ottoman ruler, Sultan Chakmak, even went so far as to damn any "accursed [person] or son of accursed" who dared impugn on the rights and privileges of the Armenian church, in an edict engraved in a marble plaque that hangs at the entrance to the Convent of St James, seat of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Subsequent administrators of the Holy Land, like the Jordanians, expressed their support of the status quo and adhered to its tenets.

The churches warned that "any erosion of the understanding of the status quo agreements between the State of Israel and Christian churches threatens the well-being of the Christian churches and their ability to continue the various ministries of pastoral care, education and health care which they provide."

They also complained that an arnona on Church properties would "contradict the solemn promises given to the Churches by successive Israeli governments, most notably confirmed in the wake of the June 1967 war" that saw Israel overrun Jerusalem and most of the West Bank.

The church statement minced no words in describing the Israeli move as "aggressive," expressing astonishment at the timing, in a hint at the unpredictable political disturbances spreading across the region. "The Heads of Churches cannot understand how it could be in the interest of the State to take such aggressive action with regard to the Churches, especially at this time," it said.

It urged official relations to remain on a correct and friendly basis, confident that "such will indeed turn out to be the continuing choice of the government of Israel."

"The Heads of Churches believe this respect is essential for the ongoing health of the relationship between the three Abrahamic faiths which exist in Israel as well as the relationship each has with the government of Israel," the statement said.

The churches are particularly concerned that the "abrupt imposition of unprecedented new taxation on the Christian Churches could only come at the expense of their ability to maintain their presence in the Holy Land and to continue their ministries of pastoral care, education, welfare and health.



THE FUTURE – A HOPE FOR PEACE

Five Key Points of the Holy See



INTERVENTION BY MSGR. LEO BOCCARDI AT THE 387th SESSION OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE) - Thursday, 11 April 2002

Mr. Chairman,

My Delegation wishes to stress, in this important forum, the Holy See's recently reconfirmed position, regarding the continuing conflict in the Holy Land. This position is articulated in the five following points:

- 1. Unequivocal condemnation of terrorism, from whatever side it may come.**
- 2. 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.**
- 3. Respect for the United Nations Resolutions by all sides.**
- 4. Proportionality in the use of legitimate means of defense.**
- 5. 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 of humanity.**

The Holy See is in close contact, among others, with the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and the religious communities of Bethlehem, and has conveyed to them the Holy Father's complete solidarity in this sorrowful moment. Acts of solidarity will bring the return to negotiation. After recalling that nothing can be resolved by conflict and that it only brings greater suffering and death, Pope John Paul II stressed that no political or religious leader can remain silent and inactive. Denunciation must be followed by practical acts of solidarity that will help everyone to rediscover mutual respect and return to frank negotiation. In this spirit and convinced that, when the merciless logic of arms prevails, only God can bring hearts to peaceful thoughts, Pope John Paul II asked the Catholic Church to pray more intensely on Sunday, April 7 last, for the people suffering from this terrible violence. Commitment to peace initiatives.

Mr. Chairman,

The protection and the promotion of peace has always been high in the Agenda of our Organisation. Many

Religions proclaim that peace is a gift from God. This was also the experience of the recent meeting of Assisi. At that time, my Delegation informed the Permanent Council of the meaning of that event and the purpose of the "Commitment for peace" signed by the Religious leaders present at Assisi and subsequently sent to the Head of States and Governments. The Holy See hopes that the aforementioned initiatives will effectively encourage those who have the responsibility and the possibility to take the necessary action, however difficult it might be, to demand scrupulous respect for human rights and humanitarian law and to urge the parties in conflict towards agreements which are fair and honorable for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Conference to Address Pressures Facing Holy Land Christians

Lambeth Place, London, 18-19 July 2011

Your Eminence, Excellencies, dear friends of the Holy Land, dear lovers of peace,



I express my gratitude to Archbishop Williams and Archbishop Nichols for jointly hosting this two-day conference and for organizing this forum that will focus on the situation of our Christians in the Holy Land. I thank all of you for your presence here today. I recognize and appreciate your concern for our 'living stones' and your solidarity with the Churches in the Holy Land; for taking to heart our dream and desire for lasting peace; for your

prayers and hopes that someday a peaceful situation can be attained; that all the people of the Holy Land can co-exist and live a normal life without fear.

The Current Reality

We live in an ancient and historic land, a holy place for the followers of the world's three great monotheistic faiths. As Christians, it is a powerful and moving experience to be where Jesus was born and grew to manhood, where he lived and taught. It is the land of his passion, agony and resurrection. We stand just steps away from the site of his crucifixion and burial and from where he rose from the dead. But it is also heart-wrenching and painful, because we are still in the midst of an ongoing modern geopolitical conflict in this very same land.

The buzz and familiar words of this land are occupation, terrorism, settlements, rocket attacks, home demolitions and security walls. All these are powerfully resonant, alarming, hotly debated, and politically-charged.

But beyond the buzz words, are the people and their lives in this Land called Holy. Two national narratives, three great religions are well-represented in this gathering. For too long, the people of this land have been mired in conflict. Many innocent people especially the youth have suffered and continue to suffer. Sadly, the conflict seems more entrenched than ever, and more complicated. Most of the trend lines are in the wrong direction:

- more than 550.000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.
- the demography of Jerusalem is changing rapidly, and a judicious and sensible balance of sacred space is being threatened,
- some groups of Israelis and Palestinians refuse to mutually recognize the right of the other to exist, and
- let us never forget the human tragedy taking place in Gaza.

And perhaps, the most complicating and alarming of all, is the fact that hope is being shattered. “Where there is no hope, the people perish.” (Proverbs 29:18) An entire generation of Israelis and Palestinians grew up witnessing and experiencing violence, occupation, separation, and hatred. There have been fewer and less opportunities to interact, and a heightened suspicion and apprehension on both sides persist.

- it is more and more difficult to envision a future of coexistence,
- it is easier to demonize the other,
- It is harder to forgive, and strenuous to start a constructive dialogue.

Why is this conflict not resolved?

There are many reasons, and the past is replete with missed opportunities and a lack of good political determination. And of course, much of the blame must rest with the political leadership and authorities. Yet you, dear friends, are external influential forces who bear a responsibility as well.

Ultimately, the Israelis and Palestinians who live in the Holy Land must work out their differences in a just and righteous manner, and in ways that may require painful compromises. I would point out that both sides must abandon maximalist claims to a life in the land without the other, and reconcile themselves to the belief, that we live in a world, where proximate justice is the best we can hope for.

While we can agree that it is up to Israelis and Palestinians to find a solution, we must also realize that they are not able to do this without external intervention for a number of reasons:

- it is an asymmetrical power relationship,
- the lack of trust in the political alliances existing on both sides
- the vested nature of the conflict, in which interests exist within the political power structures to continue the conflict , and
- the fusion of political, historical and religious dimensions.

The International Community does not simply have a role to play but a responsibility and self-interest, based on:

- the way in which this conflict is used and perpetuated by a variety of outside powers and interests,
- the universal nature of Jerusalem as a sacred city to billions of Jews, Christians and Muslims from around the world, and
- the way in which this conflict reverberates throughout the region and beyond.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is rather unique in Europe and America. It is a foreign policy issue, with crucial foreign policy and national security implications, but it functions more like a domestic political issue.

We understand that the only solution to the conflict is the recognition of the inherent and fundamental right to live in dignity for all people in the Holy Land –Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Christians and Muslims, which supposes a two State solution. Our desire is to help faith-based people of the world to understand that the only authentic pro-Israel position, is one that is also pro-Palestine and pro-peace. And this is as well, the only authentically pro-American and pro-European stance.

Two important issues are often absent from discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the human face of the conflict (the mothers, the children, the young and elderly longing just for a normal life), and the international and the whole Middle East interest in resolving it.

This is a crucial time because:

- the possibilities for a just resolution are rapidly decreasing,
- the forces of extremism are growing and gaining followers and supporters,
- there is a regional context conducive to peace. The Arab Peace initiative remains on the table, and there is a recognition by many Arab governments that regional threats to their security come from somewhere other than Israel.
- the U.S. Administration, along with the European Union and the United Nations, all agree on the urgency to bring about an end to the conflict,
- the recent uprising Arab Spring of the young generations in the region is spreading across sooner or later, with violence or peacefully. It is coming, and no regime is immune from these events, not even Israel.

If now is an important time to act, what can we do?

1. Connect, and be in communion with the Christians living in the Holy Land, share in their joys and suffering, bear their burdens with them, reflect and consider your responsibility towards your Mother Church.

- Talk about your observations, and your reactions, your admiration your surprises, good and bad, what you have seen, the people you have met during your pilgrimages and support the Christian institutions in the Holy Land. After all, these are the institutions that provide decent employment opportunities for our Christian youth, and these are the institutions that provide quality services in education, health and social services to the whole population, mostly a non-Christian population. This solidifies the presence of the living stones

2. Inform your communities that:

- There are historic Christian communities in the Holy Land, with antecedents in the time of Christ.
- The Christian presence is threatened by virtual extinction, and the land of Jesus cannot become an equivalent of a spiritual Disneyland with beautiful buildings, historic sites and museums on display.
- All people - Jews, Christians and Muslims suffer the consequences of the conflict. Occupation is a terrible image for any democratic State, as it is horrible for the people of the occupied areas, where hatred and aversion are fostered and nurtured. We are aware of the persecution and suffering of our Christians in some Muslim countries in the region, but this is not an excuse to forget the dire reality of our situation in the Holy Land.
- The silent majority of both Israelis and Palestinians want peace and support a two-state solution.
- Encourage and persuade people to “come and see.” There is no substitute for a real and tangible experience of encountering the people, to speak with them, to eat with them and to affirm their dignity, and make them feel that they are never forgotten. Visit the Christian institutions and see the Christian witness at its best.
- The Jews of this land have a narrative that is authentic and should be respected, but so do the Muslims, and the Christians too. There is an Israeli story that must be respected, and there is also a Palestinian story to be told and respected as well.
- To remind our people that every man, woman and child who lives in the Holy Land today is created in the image of God, is endowed with inherent dignity, and is worthy of respect and esteem.
- To ignore the dignity of the other - whether the other be Christian, Muslim or Jew, is to live in violation of God’s will for us.

Once again, I express my gratitude to Archbishop Rowan for launching a “Holy Land Appeal” for funds to help alleviate suffering Christians in the Holy Land, and support development and job creation initiatives, especially in the West Bank’s community. Our heartfelt gratitude for your most noble collaboration as we all work together to uphold the dignity of every human being in the land of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

+Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

Gaza Student Completes Her Bachelors Degree from Bethlehem University

www.Bethlehem.edu



11 January 2010: Bethlehem, Palestine - Bethlehem University officials traveled to Gaza on Sunday, 10 January to mark the occasion of Ms. Berlanty Azzam completing her semester courses, to encourage other students from Gaza who seek to pursue their education at Bethlehem University or other Palestinian universities in the West Bank, and to recognize the more than 430 other graduates of Bethlehem University from Gaza.

Brother Peter Bray, Vice Chancellor, the Papal Nuncio H.E. Archbishop Antonio Franco, Chancellor, Brother Joe, Vice Chancellor Emeritus, and Trappist Abbott Thomas traveled to Gaza for the 10am Mass at the Holy Family Church where they met Ms. Berlanty Azzam and her family and friends among the parishioners, as well as some of the other Bethlehem University students who await permission from the Israeli military authorities to come to Bethlehem to pursue their education at the Vatican-sponsored Bethlehem University.

"I never imagined that my graduation ceremony would be held in a Church in Gaza with no one from my classmates attending," said the exuberant 22-year-old Berlanty Azzam, "but I am so happy and grateful to my teachers and all of the friends of Bethlehem University who came forward to help me. I really worked hard and prayed for this moment and will do my best to help others who seek to study at my university!" Arriving in Gaza to present Berlanty with her certificate, Vice-Chancellor of the Bethlehem University Brother Peter Bray said "the University has a commitment to help Berlanty – and all our students in good academic standing – to graduate and succeed in life."

H.E. Archbishop Antonio Franco, Papal Nuncio and the highest ranking representative of the Pope to Israeli and Palesine, also traveled all the way to Gaza to award Berlanty her degree in Business Administration and to celebrate Mass at Holy Family Church in Gaza.

Brother Joe, Vice-Chancellor Emeritus and Trappist Abbott Thomas Davis accompanied Brother Peter to Gaza for meetings with some of the more than 400 graduates of Bethlehem University from Gaza as well as some of the current Bethlehem University students who continue to await for permission from the Israeli military to study at Bethlehem University.

As reported in the Washington Post, CNN, BBC, America Magazine, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Maan News and other media, Berlanty's case drew high-level attention: including inquiries from the State Department of the United States, members of the US Congress, members of Parliaments and Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Ireland, the UK, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Australia, as well as Vatican officials, Cardinals, and Bishops Conferences in Canada, the UK, the United States, and Germany.

The Israeli human rights legal group Gisha took on Berlanty's case, seeking a ruling from the Israeli High Court to overturn the Israeli army's decision to not allow Berlanty the right to return to Bethlehem for the final two months needed to complete her bachelors degree. All attempts to seek justice, however, resulted in the Israeli High Court refusing to instruct the Army to allow Berlanty to return to the West Bank. Noting that the 22-year old female student had no security or other charges against her, and that she had been living in Bethlehem and dutifully pursuing her education at Bethlehem University for nearly four years without incident, dismay was expressed by many, including the Gisha lawyers who brought her case to the

Israeli High Court.

"I really wanted to be among my colleagues on such a day," Berlanty said as she lit a candle and kneeled after the homily and the readings as peace overwhelmed the church. "I still don't know why I was taken from Bethlehem and moved to Gaza while being handcuffed and blindfolded." She continued, "I am sad because I was not able to graduate with my colleagues in Bethlehem, but I was able to challenge the occupation and today I am graduating from Bethlehem University," her eyes filled with tears of joy.

Timeline of Events for Berlanty Azzam and the Israeli military's interference in her education: Sept 2005: Berlanty enrolls at Bethlehem University as a first year student 28 Oct 2009: Berlanty blindfolded, handcuffed, and taken from Bethlehem to Gaza by Israeli military:

12 Nov 2009: Israeli High Court Hearing, Court orders Israeli Military to hold due process hearing

18 Nov 2009: Israeli Military Conducts an Administrative Hearing with Berlanty at Erez Crossing

30 Nov 2009: Israeli High Court Hearing, Court orders Israeli Military to submit 2005 permission

9 Dec 2009: Israeli High Court issues ruling: Berlanty cannot return to Bethlehem

10 Jan 2010: Berlanty Graduates in Gaza at Holy Family Church

Other students from Gaza have been accepted at Bethlehem University and still await permission from the Israeli military to come to Bethlehem for their university education. Pray for them and help to support our "Gaza Student Initiative" efforts. Please send your gift check made payable to "Bethlehem University" noting support for the "Gaza Student Initiative" to:

Brother Dominic Smith, FSC Bethlehem University - USA Development Office Hecker Center, Suite 330 3025 Fourth Street, NE Washington, DC 20017 - 1102 A tax receipt will be issued for all donations. Tax ID # 22-2997011 - Phone: 202-526-6097 - Email: dominicsmithfsc@yahoo.com

Bishops tell Christians of Gaza "You Are Not Alone"



Bishops from Europe and North America celebrated mass with the Catholic community in Gaza on the Feast of the Lord's Baptism, 8 January, 2012 as they started this year's Holy Land Coordination in support of the local Church.

The Christian community of Gaza is made up of 2,500 people, of whom Catholics number around 300, in a total population of 1.5 million. Religious sisters run a home for the elderly, a centre for the disabled and a kindergarten and with the parish of the Holy Family are also involved in the running of the Catholic schools for the community.

Greeted by a band of 40 scouts, the Bishops brought messages of support from their Dioceses and respective Bishops' Conferences. After mass, there was an open meeting, during which the parishioners shared their experiences of living in Gaza, where the economic blockade and security situation make work and freedom of movement extremely difficult.

Bishop William Kenney, Auxiliary Bishop in Birmingham told the parishioners: "What I want to say to you is 'you are not forgotten'."

Bishop Michel Dubost, Bishop of Evry, Paris, said: "Today everyone in my Diocese is praying for you as they know we are making this visit. Last week, I asked prisoners in the largest prison in Europe [in Evry] to pray for you."

The Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Franco said in his homily that in celebrating the feast of the Baptism of our Lord, there was a call to act as Christians at all times as we share this Baptism.

"This is a faith that should always inspire us to act in love. Jesus inspires us to overcome difficulties in life and this shared celebration is a signal of hope. The Universal Church, led by the Holy Father shares its faith with you in this Church in Gaza and is united with you as you go through particularly difficult times.

"You are not alone and with faith in the Lord we can together overcome difficulties. This mass is a renewal of our faith and we ask for Mary's blessings that we should always be Christian in the way we act and the way we live."

Since 1998, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has organised the annual meeting of the Coordination of Episcopal Conferences in Support of the Church of the Holy Land and at the invitation of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land. It is often more simply called the Holy Land Co-ordination.

Mandated by the Holy See, the Holy Land Co-ordination meets every January in the Holy Land, focusing on prayer, pilgrimage and persuasion with the aim of acting in solidarity with the Christian community there and sharing in the pastoral life of the local Church as it experiences intense political and social-economic pressure.

With the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, the opening session of the Coordination will take place on Monday 9 January. During the four days of the meeting, there will be addresses from His Beatitude Patriarch Fouad Twal and the Apostolic Nuncio, presentations from academics and a view from both Israelis and Palestinians about the impact of the "Arab Spring" and the socio-political changes in the region.

In addition to the prayers, liturgies and formal visits to other Catholic rites and Christian denominations, on Tuesday 10 January, there will be a visit to Haifa, during which there will be an inter-religious exchange with Jews, Muslims, Druze and Bahai. Political meetings will take place with both Israeli and Palestinian ministers and other politicians.

Bethlehem University Alumna Elected First Female Mayor of Bethlehem



"I found hope at the heart of where my educational journey had begun at Bethlehem University, the beginning of my career and what would become a great stepping stone for my future."

Every Christmas, international focus is on Bethlehem, the place of Jesus' birth. This winter, Bethlehem is again in the spotlight, this time for electing its first female mayor, Ms. Vera Baboun. A graduate of Bethlehem University (class of '85), Ms. Vera has invested deeply in Bethlehem University – not only as a graduate but also as faculty.

As a former English faculty member at Bethlehem University, Ms. Vera's lectures were inspiring and memorable for her former students. Until her recent mayoral election victory, she continued her work in education, serving as the principal at a Catholic High School in neighboring Beit Sahour. Though she is now assuming mayoral duties, she continues to work toward her PhD. Highly regarded by students and colleagues alike, Ms. Vera is a great triumph for all Palestinian women and is indeed a positive role model for future generations, though she is unpretentious and unassuming.

"An optimistic character radiates hope and promise for many others to follow," Ms. Vera said. However, her success did not come without challenge, and she encountered a bumpy road and many detours to her success. Through her strong will and resilience, she managed to overcome what would have been impossible for many.

"My husband was imprisoned by the Israeli Authorities," Ms. Vera said. "I was left with five kids to look after, having just graduated from Bethlehem University and in a desperate state to feed my family, Ms. Vera Baboun found hope at the heart of where my educational journey had begun at Bethlehem University, the beginning of my career and what would become a great stepping stone for my future."

It was here at Bethlehem University, in the summer of 1985, when a young, ambitious Ms. Vera marched with confidence across the auditorium to collect her hard-earned degree in English literature. At the time, Dr. Violet Fasheh was the Dean of the newly established Faculty of Education, while Br. Thomas Scanlon was the Vice Chancellor of Bethlehem University. Then, in the early '90s, Ms. Vera returned to Bethlehem University, this time as an English lecturer. In addition to teaching the standard course material for English, Ms. Vera recognized the importance of integrating relevant and related topics, such as gender equality and human rights.

"If you want to create change, you have to start with yourself from within in order to create the change in others," Ms. Vera said.

No stranger to creating change in one of the world's oldest religious cities, Ms. Vera will certainly face challenges, particularly during a time of political instability and a weak economy in Palestine. It will be a tough challenge for the new Mayor, but Ms. Vera and her team at Bethlehem Municipality will work persistently as this Holy City continues to shine.

A Graduation in Gaza

by Sami El-Yousef – CNEWA's regional director for Palestine and Israel. ONE magazine



The Holy Family School celebrates its 12th commencement ceremony. (photo: Sami El-Yousef)

In many reports and blogs on Gaza, the tone is often negative, reflecting the very difficult circumstances in Gaza — for instance, the gas shortage or the usual challenges associated with the blockade. But this time, I want to write about a very joyous celebration: the 12th commencement ceremony at the Holy Family School in Gaza. I was privileged to attend this along with his Beatitude Patriarch Fouad Twal.

This was no ordinary ceremony, as the 17 graduates — including three Christians — started their schooling in 2000, just as the second intifada was beginning. There has not been a stretch of quiet since they started their studies; they've had to contend with closures, travel restrictions, a blockade, a full-fledged war, violence and counter-violence, and swift and forceful Israeli air strikes. In short, these young men and women have not had a normal childhood or education. Yet, sitting there for the celebration, I couldn't help but marvel: it was a grand, festive event with speeches full of hope and big dreams, just like any other commencement ceremony anywhere else in the world. Despite the bleak political situation, the valedictorian was full of energy and hope that tomorrow will be a better day.

Between each speech, there was a performance by the school's Dabkeh team, featuring traditional Palestinian dance. It was the largest I have ever seen, with some 50 members of all ages. The team was fully synchronized and disciplined. It was a great joy to watch. These students were proud to be performing for us all — as if they were passing on a message that, despite all the difficulties of these past 12 years, they learned how to have fun and how to keep the culture alive.

Congratulations to the class of 2012! May the future be kinder to you than the past.

Place of Divine Encounter - The Holy See's Hopes for Jerusalem

AUGUST 13, 2007 - America magazine



Drew Christiansen, S.J. served for 13 years as the U.S. Bishops' adviser on Mideast affairs.

The late John Paul II's pilgrimage to the Holy Land for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 came as the culmination of the pope's two- and-a-half decades of religious peacemaking. The personal importance of the visit for John Paul himself was made clear when, following the closing banquet, the late pope requested an unscheduled visit to the Holy Sepulcher for private prayer. Israeli security agents spent 45 minutes closing down the narrow route through the Old City and reactivating the special vehicle they had constructed to maneuver its uneven streets. Once there, an already impaired Pope John Paul climbed the steep stairs to the Calvary altar unassisted and prayed alone for 45 minutes.

The Achievement of a Failed Dialogue

The most celebrated event of that visit was Pope John Paul's prayer at the Western (or Wailing) Wall, where like other, mostly Jewish pilgrims, he left a slip of paper with his own prayer in a crack between the stones. Another, less known event, nearly derailed the whole trip. It was an interreligious ceremony organized at the pope's explicit request and the one sour note in what otherwise appeared to be the sweet melody of the pilgrimage.

Local church officials and the pope's own nuncio had warned how difficult such a Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue would be to bring off, but the pope insisted. To provide musical interludes between the speeches, choirs were invited to sing, but a Muslim choir could not be arranged, so a Muslim boys chorus was hurriedly assembled from the Catholic schools they attended. The grand mufti refused to participate, so President Arafat ordered a lesser judge from the Islamic courts, Sheik Taiseer Tamimi, to speak in his place. The fireworks began when the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau announced during his address that by his presence the pope had acknowledged Israeli sovereignty over the whole city of Jerusalem. In fact, Vatican policy was that the future of the city should be settled by negotiation in accord with international law. Then Sheik Tamimi arose to speak and delivered a political tirade about driving the infidels from the land and establishing an Islamic state under a new Saladin—Yasir Arafat. The Israeli diplomats seated behind me stood up, shouting in righteous protest. This, I thought, must be what a Friday sermon is like in the militant mosques in Gaza. Then, by pre-arrangement, the sheik left, so as not to be forced to shake the rabbi's hand.

After the pope spoke, the program called for the three men to plant and water three olive trees. Rabbi Lau stood aside, as the already infirm pope, alone, planted the three trees and, in turn, watered them unassisted. What the pope had dreamed of as a moment of religious unity in the midst of political conflict seemed to have become the very vision of disunity. But the next morning, the Israeli press saw it quite differently. In a region where religious leaders were too often embroiled in politics, they editorialized, the frail Pope John Paul showed by example how a man of God should lead and so be a force for peace.

Six Phases of Policy History

That attempt at interreligious dialogue can serve as an image of the Holy See's efforts over the last 40 years to shape international policy toward Jerusalem. The principals have often talked past one another; there has been controversy; one side or another has tried to score points, but in the end the Holy See has shown how a city sacred to three religions and two nations might become a symbol of peace for humanity.

John Paul genuinely yearned to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Beginning with his 1984 apostolic letter *Redemptiois Anno*, in which he voiced his desire to visit Jerusalem, through the Basic Agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization in February 2000, weeks before the trip, his pontificate made significant contributions to the evolution of Vatican policy on the future of Jerusalem. Of the six stages in the development of that policy, four took place under John Paul.

Prior to John Paul's papacy, the Holy See's policy fell into two phases: (1) following the U.N. vote for partition of Mandate Palestine in 1947, the Holy See accepted the recommendation of the U.N. Partition Plan, which made Jerusalem a separate political entity (a *corpus separatum*) under international rule; (2) following the 1967 Israeli capture of East Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI called for a special internationally guaranteed statute to govern the city. In the minds of most people, including many diplomats and most journalists, the qualifier "internationally guaranteed" implied that the Holy See sought an international regime for the city, as envisioned under the earlier U.N. plan, what was frequently called "internationalization" of the city. That was not the case. It meant what it said: a special statute (a treaty) relating to the historic and religious aspects of the city guaranteed by the international community, not just by the country or countries that controlled the territory or access to it.

History had taught that control by one party or another meant exclusion for others. In particular, Jews had been excluded from their holy sites until 1967 by Jordan and afterward many Arabs, including local Palestinian Christians, were later excluded by Israel from Jerusalem.

The development of Vatican policy in the pontificate of Pope John Paul falls into four partially overlapping stages: (1) in 1984 the articulation of the universal religious significance of Jerusalem; (2) from the late 80s through the 90s defense of the rights of all the citizens of the city; (3) in the mid-90s, as final status talks approached, the expansion of the concept of universal interests in Jerusalem, and (4) in 2000, backing for Palestinian aspirations for the city.

City of Divine-Human Encounter

In 1984, Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic exhortation, *Redemptiois Anno*, articulating a Catholic theological vision of the Holy Land. Unlike that of evangelicals and particularly of Christian Zionists, Catholic respect for the ties of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and for the memory of the biblical promise of the land to Abraham and his descendants is not decisive in determining the church's position on the land. Rather, the position of the Holy See has been rooted in international law, which has its own theological warrants in the Catholic tradition, and the requirements of justice for territory claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians. Prevented under the Lateran Treaty, which established the Vatican City State, from entering explicitly into territorial disputes, the Holy See still reserves the right to comment on the morality of the situation. Hence it has shown a willingness to speak up for both Israeli and Palestinian rights.

The contribution of *Redemptiois Anno* is that it provides a universalistic religious perspective from which to regard a land sacred to three religions and to two peoples. It is universal in two senses. First, it is sacred to the adherents of the three great monotheistic religions; second, it has significance for the whole human community as a site of humanity's encounter with God. Thus John Paul wrote of Jerusalem: Insofar as she is the homeland of the hearts of all the spiritual descendants of Abraham, who hold her very dear, and the place where, according to faith, the created things of earth encounter the infinite transcendence of God, Jerusalem stands out as a symbol of coming together, of union, and of peace for the human family.

The pope went on to stipulate the need “to do everything possible to preserve the unique and sacred character of the city.” He explained this meant “not only the monuments or sacred places but the whole historical Jerusalem and the existence of religious communities, their situation and future....” This last clause hints at two unfolding developments in Vatican policy: insistence on the rights of all in the city, beginning with the living religious communities there, and on a broader concept of what is to be physically preserved and protected.

From Rights of Access to Human and Civil Rights

When governments spoke in the past of rights in Jerusalem, they referred specifically to the right to worship and the right of believers of the three traditions to have “access” to their holy places. As elsewhere in its approach to religious liberty, the Holy See with regard to the Holy Land has come to promote the right to religious liberty broadly understood, rather than simply the freedom to worship. For that reason, for example, the 1993 Fundamental Agreement with Israel stipulated several rights, including rights of the church to its own means of communication, the right to establish educational institutions and operate charitable organizations.

Of course, even to exercise the right to worship in its narrow sense, people must be permitted to gather. In the Holy Land that means worshiping at holy places, like the Holy Sepulcher, the Mount of Olives and the Church of the Nativity. With growing difficulties over the implementation of the Oslo Accords during the 1990s and the struggle for territory that followed it, the Holy See insisted on the rights of movement of local Palestinian Christians to go to the holy places, access that was often denied because of security concerns. In this connection, the Vatican frequently reminded its interlocutors that the Jerusalem with which it was concerned was not just the holy places but the local communities of people who worshiped there and for whom the holy places were the historic center of religious life. To underscore the same connection, the local Christians spoke of themselves as “living stones,” in contrast to the bare “stones” of the ancient monuments.

But living as a community takes more than religious rights, no matter how broadly conceived. It also requires that members of the community enjoy basic human and civil rights as well. As the implementation of the Oslo Accords stalled mid-decade and tensions grew, Vatican policy emphasized the need for equal rights for all the residents of Jerusalem. It recognized the unequal conditions that had developed since 1967, the growth of Israeli security concerns after the first intifada (uprising) in 1987-93 and the gradual collapse of the Oslo peace agreements from the mid-90s on.

Advocating for Palestinian Christians

This expanded focus on rights also coincided with the efforts of the Holy See to support the Christian communities in the Holy Land, the vast majority of whom were Palestinians. The first intifada had prompted a growth of pride and self-identification on the part of Palestinian Christians. In 1986 Michel Sabbah, a native Palestinian from the Nazareth area, was appointed Latin (Roman Catholic) Patriarch of Jerusalem. Not long after that the three patriarchs and heads of other churches periodically published joint statements on issues that concerned them in the Holy Land. These statements were significant because the various churches were putting aside ancient rivalries, which were often exploited by the authorities, to make common cause on behalf of the faithful of the Holy Land. In 1994 the church leaders published a memorandum on Jerusalem, affirming the rights of all believers dwelling in the city and supporting an internationally guaranteed special statute for Jerusalem. Common backing of the statute placed the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the Vatican on the same side of the issue of the future status of the city.

In 1996, with a view to the opening of final status talks, the Vatican Secretariat of State issued a special note, titled Jerusalem: Considerations of the Secretariat of State. Along with the customary proposals for the safeguarding and, where necessary, “restoring” of historic and religious aspects of Jerusalem, the memorandum added, “There must be equality of rights and treatment for those belonging to the

communities of the three religions found in the city, in the context of the freedom of spiritual, cultural, civic and economic activities.”

Annexation and Human Rights

Tensions also rose over the preservation of historic Jerusalem with respect to annexation and confiscation of Palestinian and Palestinian-Israeli property—confiscations that frequently affected the political geography of Jerusalem. So the Holy See began to speak out directly for broader protections for Jerusalem, embracing its historical, cultural and even ecological heritage.

The last seemed, in part, a response to the sprawl created by the growing ring of settlements surrounding Jerusalem that destroyed the urban-rural nexus, which as late as 1990 still gave one the sense of the biblical landscape. The open land, for example, that once divided Jerusalem and Bethlehem began to be gobbled up with the Har Homa settlement (called Abu Ghoneim by the Palestinians). Lest they suffer more confiscations, the Palestinians then began building to the edge of the area they controlled. As a result, the historic area known as Shepherds’ Fields fell victim to competitive sprawl. Preserving Jerusalem as a common heritage became an increasingly distant hope.

The 1996 statement from the Vatican Secretariat of State took on the issue of annexation and confiscation of land in the most forthright way: “The part of the city militarily occupied in 1967 and subsequently annexed and declared the capital of the state of Israel is occupied territory, and all Israeli measures which exceed the power of a belligerent occupant under international law are therefore null and void.”

Finally, in February 2000, just before Pope John Paul’s pilgrimage, the Holy See signed an agreement with the P.L.O. (for the Palestinian Authority). In most respects the treaty paralleled the one signed seven years before with Israel. It made explicit, however, a common commitment to uphold the “Status Quo,” the Ottoman regulations stipulating how Orthodox, Latins, Armenians and others share the principal holy places. This was especially important to the Greek Orthodox, who feared that the Vatican’s agreements with Israel and the P.L.O. would undermine their historic rights. But the explosive news in the agreement was the preface, particularly its statement on Jerusalem.

Though the preface to the Basic Agreement with the P.L.O. was not legally binding, Vatican backing for Palestinian hopes for the city stirred great anxiety in Israel and in the world Jewish community. Really an application of the principle that Jerusalem is valued by two peoples as well as three faiths, the preface supported “the inalienable national legitimate rights and aspirations” of the Palestinians and rejected “unilateral decisions and actions [by the Israelis] affecting the specific character and status of Jerusalem.” This stirred up a hornet’s nest, because the Palestinians claimed the city they call al Quds for their capital, even as the Israelis solemnly proclaimed Jerusalem their “one, eternal” capital. The pope’s jubilee pilgrimage, however, was imminent, and the controversy soon passed. It will be recalled, if at all, as one of those exercises in competitive victimhood that regularly mark the Israeli-Palestinian rivalry.

Camp David and the Second Intifada

During the Camp David negotiations in the late summer of 2000, the local church took the lead in responding to proposals of negotiators. Just before the talks collapsed, Christian leaders in Jerusalem received word that President Arafat had ceded the Armenian quarter, already a depopulated neighborhood with many Jewish renters and lessees, to the Israelis. The patriarchs and heads of churches in emergency session issued a statement declaring the Armenian Quarter an integral part of Christian Jerusalem. In private communications, Mr. Arafat pulled back and promised in the future he would consult the Christian leaders on issues affecting their interests.

Within hours, however, the Camp David talks collapsed. A few days later Ariel Sharon, guarded by more than 1,000 Israeli soldiers and police, made his visit to the Temple Mount. Young Muslim men rioted in protest,

igniting the second or Al-Aqsa intifada. Prospects for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement faded and with them hopes that Jerusalem would be a symbol of peace and interreligious harmony for humanity.

According to an old saying, Vatican policy is formulated in terms of centuries. Sub specie aeternitatis, the Holy See's policy on Jerusalem, like Pope John Paul's planting of the three olive trees during the tumultuous interreligious dialogue, continues to represent a standard by which to measure the achievement of tomorrow's diplomats and religious leaders.

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*"I am grateful to Jeffrey M. Abood, KHS, for his educational resources on the **"Christian Situation in the Holy Land."** From many different sources he has compiled important and helpful material on the Holy Land. Where else would I have ready access to a BBC story on "Bethlehem Nuns in West Bank Barrier Battle" to a statement in 1948 of Pope Pius XII on Palestine? Topics range from a Graduation in Gaza to Ministering to the Elderly to Five Key Points of the Holy See delivered by Msgr. Leo Boccardi at the 387th Session of the Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. **Thank you to the North Central Lieutenancy! You have provided a great service to all of us!"***

Fr. Jeremy Harrington, O.F.M.

Commissary and Guardian of the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land,

Editor of the Holy Land Review, Washington, DC



*"The **Christian Situation in the Holy Land** is a rich compilation of church statements, news articles and releases from local church bodies to give a fine-grained picture of the difficult life Christians lead in the Holy Land. With materials found nowhere else, The Christian Situation will enlighten scholars and pilgrims, as well as, veteran advocates of peace in the Holy Land."*

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