

First Pastoral Letters  
of H.B. Msgr. MICHEL SABBAH  
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.  
IN PULCRITUDINIS PACIS  
1988

My dear Brothers and Sisters, beloved Sons in the Lord,  
Lay-persons, Religious and diocesan Priests.

1. I am addressing this first pastoral letter to you on the Feast of the Assumption. The whole Church celebrates in this day the Closing of the Marian Year which started last year on Pentecost Sunday, June 7th 1987.

We come to the close of a year of prayer, supplication, veneration of the Blessed Virgin, meditation on her mystery and her important part in the faith because of her intimate participation in the plan of salvation.

2. I assume my new responsibilities as pastor of the Church of Jerusalem, successor of venerable Patriarchs, who consecrated themselves to the service of the faithful and of the Church in the Holy Land, being themselves the successors of the Apostles. Their work bore fruit, the fruit of a living faith. As their successor in these difficult days, and during this Marian Year, I turn towards the Most Holy Virgin, daughter of this land of suffering and of salvation. I am sure to find with her help, strength and serenity in the midst of the storm.

I put this letter, the whole of my work as a pastor, and the whole diocese, under the protection of this model of virtue, of beauty and of humanity, made perfect by God Himself. She remains the model at which each faithful looks continuously, so that he may be guided by her beauty and strength towards the First Model, at the image of which all men have been created: "God created man in the image of Himself" (Gen 1:27).

#### INDICATIONS ALONG THE WAY

3. In this first pastoral letter I would like to mark certain points along our way of faith, which proves to be a difficult one. But, on the one hand, a difficult way may be more beneficial for a dignified human life and for a healthy spiritual life. On the other hand, Christ himself invites us to walk along this path: "Enter by the narrow gate... since the road that leads to perdition is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Mt 7:13-14). This is why our situation, however difficult it may be, should not lead us to despair or to abandon our responsibilities. On the contrary, it should lead us to more hope as we trust in the Word of the Master: "Have no fear, I am with you...".

#### THE WILL OF GOD

4. Faced with the present situation, we have to participate continuously in its transformation for the better. Whenever our work and efforts are of no avail, we have to stop and contemplate the will of God and his Providence, and we shall remain calm, no matter how difficult and hard the situation: because He is our Father, our Creator and our Redeemer. Our acting is an acting in

Him. Therefore we do what we can and where our own powerlessness stops us, we ask Him to complete what lacks in our doings.

## PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION

5. While showing the way and the mission, I invite all my brothers and sisters to participate in this effort, which aims at clarifying the vision and the way in which to proclaim the message of the faith according to God's Will: to carry out our mission means to serve Him and our fellowmen. It does not consist in a service to ourselves, which would be the object of egoistic quarrels and differences. Our service is a common one, in which we all take part in the love of God, who sends us, and in the love of our neighbors, to whom we are sent.

Because of our fidelity to this view of things, we can transmit the faith which was given to us, in order to be lived and to be handed down.

## POINTS TO UNDERLINE

6. Our principal mission then, the frame of all our responsibilities, consists in living our faith and to hand it down, such as it has been given to us by Jesus, the Word of God Incarnate, and such as the Holy Catholic Church defines it.

After a few reflections on the principal theme of the faith, I would like to make a few points with regard to the situation in which we live: peace, dialogue, the "small flock" or the condition of the minority, religious as the bearers of the Gospel message in the Holy Land.

## THE FAITH THAT HAS BEEN HANDED DOWN TO US

7. We, here in the Church of Jerusalem, have inherited our faith from the Apostles and their successors. This faith has been handed down to us, after it has been faced with difficulties and many various challenges. The generations of the faithful have kept it throughout the course of many centuries, through the various periods of history and the successive civilizations. Each generation has enriched it with its experience of life. Therefore, it is our turn now, we the community of the faithful, who have inherited from these first times of the faith, to carry this same faith as a light for ourselves and for others. We too have to enrich it with our experience of life and to hand it down to the generations following. "Now, before God the source of all life..., I put you to the duty of doing all that you have been told, with no faults or failures, until the Appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Tim 6:13-14).

## THE FAITH, GIVEN AND RECEIVED

8. Faith is a gift of God to a person living in a community, incarnated in a definite reality.

Faith is a gift by which man is enabled to know God through Revelation, and to know himself in the light of this same Revelation. He is enabled to know his mission, the meaning of his existence and of his life, and to behave according to this knowledge.

In the light of our Faith we know that man is created after God's image: his dignity is based on this divine resemblance. God then has exalted man and ennobled him through the Incarnation, the

Redemption and the Resurrection, which is the victory over death. In this way the new man is born.

#### NEW VISION ON MAN

9. Faith offers us a new vision on man, because the old man is buried and the new man is born by faith: "You must give up your old way of life; you must put aside your old self, which gets corrupted by following illusory desires. Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God's way, in the goodness and holiness of the truth." (Eph 4:22-24). The old man is the one who limits himself to the boundaries of this earth and its goods and encloses himself within these boundaries, in this way amputating his spirit from the view of eternity. He is the man of conflicts with his interests at variance, often ending up in so many individual or collective egoisms.

10. As to the new man, his interests go beyond the limits of this time and this earth, rising to the level of the Spirit, drawing light from Revelation and accepting his divine calling, which is situated in time, but will only find its fullness and realization in eternity. With this divine calling as his basic starting-point, the new man links this life to the one hereafter, he links time to eternity, he takes care of the things of this world, enlightened by his faith and guided by his vision in faith of God. In this way he participates in the edification of the universe, according to God's Will and the divine plan of salvation, - awaiting the new heavens, the new earth - where God will be all in all.

11. This distinctive characteristic and this responsibility pertain to all without distinction. Because all are sons, all are inheritants of the kingdom, and all build it up, united by the same love when challenged by difficulties, so that these difficulties become in this way a bridge to live and love, and not one to dominate or subject man by his brother.

#### FAITH HAS TO BEAR FRUIT

12. In the parable of the talents (Mt 25: 14-30), those who received more talents, made them more, and when the moment arrived, they handed them over to their master together with the benefit they had realized. The one who received but one talent, was irritated, went away grudgingly, buried his one talent and gave it back to his master, such as he had received it, without losing anything, but also without any benefit. He was judged for this behaviour and condemned. The only reason for his condemnation was that he did not bear fruit: the gift he had received remained sterile.

13. In fact, God does not need our multiplied quantities or fortunes, but He wants us to return to Him a greater and better personality, matured by the gifts which He granted us. Our faith is the greatest gift He has given us: in faith God reveals Himself to man. Man then has to enrich and to raise one's self by this divine manifestation. That is how he will return to God at the end of his life, be it short or long: enriched with this grace by means of which God has wanted to accompany him during his life, and strengthened by all the means of salvation and perfection which have been put at his disposal through the Incarnation and Redemption.

#### RESPONSIBLE ASSENT

14. In order to turn our faith into that talent that bears fruit, we have to give a conscientious, free and responsible assent to it. The believer should not remain a minor in matters of faith. He

has to take up responsibilities. Faith should not remain a mere inherited gift either. It has to become a personal, free, efficacious choice in private life as well as in public life.

Therefore we now stop at these following points:

a) Faith is a belonging to God.

15. Faith is not first of all a belonging to a human community; it is not above all and in the first place a social fact, but a belonging to God, an adhesion to his Word, which is realized within a visible community, which is the Church, the local Church or the Church universal. Faith then is above all a belonging to God, in order to know Him better and to grow above oneself.

16. Therefore, when the vision of God disappears from the faith, faith itself is emptied of its real contents, and becomes a mere belonging to a human community: faith is then turned into confessionalism and sectarianism, and is lost in the excesses of fanaticism and intolerance. The true believer is the one who sees that the object of his faith is God in the first place, and thanks to this clear and evident view, he sees that his faith is a welcoming of God and of man, who is the son of God and the image of God.

b) Faith is the way to freedom.

17. Faith is not intended for spiritual or social slavery. Christ says: "I shall not call you servants any more... I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father." (John 15:15). And Saint Paul: "When Christ freed us, He meant us to remain free... you called to liberty." (Gal 5:1.13).

18. Faith then, rightly understood, well lived, personally and consciently chosen, is the best educator towards human freedom. Man indeed, contemplating himself in God, his Creator and Saviour, who has made him after his image and has called him to participate in his own life, discovers the true roots of his dignity and freedom. By this realizing of his own divine roots, he finds himself better prepared to live up to his calling and to conquer his liberty.

c) Faith is a knowledge.

19. By faith, man remains in the presence of God, in order to look at Him and to know Him. He is the object of our faith, He, the Transcendent One, the Hidden One, the Most High, the Almighty, but the One too who is near to those who turn to Him.

Therefore, in spite of his divine Transcendence, Jesus has invited man to look up to God, to make Him the object of his contemplation, to find in Him the model to imitate: "You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48). It is then man's destiny to be near God, to participate in His perfection. In this consists his existence and the meaning of his life. Far from God, he keeps looking for Him as one who tries to find truth and knowledge without being able to reach them. But when God manifests Himself to man in faith, and when man tries to reach the perfection which is God's, then his life becomes meaningful.

d) Observances and rites.

20. Faith is knowledge and life. Therefore the rites and forms of worship in which the faithful express their faith, are so many meeting points with God, by which they renew their spiritual

strength which are also the source of each service, that is, of each part taken in building up the world and of each collaboration with their brethren. This service and this participation in building up the world are a natural consequence of the strength stored up in the soul through the rites and the acts of worship. This strength is the strength of love since God is love and all He has done is love: He has made each man so that he may walk in this same path of love, of freedom and perfection, towards the same destiny of love and eternal happiness.

e) To serve God and man.

21. The believer then has to take his part in each service within society. But in the service done out of faith, the personality of the apostle should not hide the Word of God. All belongs to Him; we are but his creatures, bearers of his message and preachers of his word. The great title which we should make known is God, God's Love, the Redemption and Salvation offered in Jesus Christ to all mankind. We, we are the servants of this Redemption who proclaim and present it to all those who want to welcome it and to make it their means of salvation: "People must think of us as Christ's servants, stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God. What is expected of stewards is that each one should be found worthy of this trust." (Luke 17:10). Hence the need of truth and humility in the one who proclaims God's message.

f) Service and conflicts.

22. In this view of things the service will be well done and will keep its nature of service. But where this view lacks, and the apostle makes God's message his own, then we touch on the source of disputes, of spiritual possessiveness and insistence on spiritual titles and rights which cannot, - exist in a healthy faith. The service then is transformed in an act of love of self: it easily becomes spiritual dictatorship or tyranny and will be at the origin of conflicts between brother and brother, between the servant and the one who is served, between believer and believer. The conflict will even spread to the interior of the soul itself, a conflict of passions which alienate the apostle from the true meaning of service.

23. How to believe and to serve?

The service of faith has to embrace all levels of human life. The person has to start by being himself a believer, making fruitful each spiritual or material gift which he has received from God for the service of his fellow-man, who is created after God's image and subject of His first commandment: "You shall love your neighbour".

## II. PEACE

### THE BELIEVER AND THE CITIZEN

24. The believer has to accomplish his task on all levels. In private as well as in public life he is responsible for himself and for his family. In his Church, he takes part in the spiritual life and also in all material and social needs of the community. In his country and society he has to take his share in the civic and national duties. Each person has his own service to render, to serve in his own way according to his activities and possibilities. Some have to take a direct part in the civic field in order to build up society and to watch over national security. Others play an indirect part by performing their own task with a sincere and total commitment and by doing well what they are called upon to realize in society. In order to fulfill his part as a citizen, the Christian is

inspired by his faith, in which he discovers the principles according to which he has to act and from which he draws the spiritual strength and the courage to remain faithful to his duty.

## THE PRESENT SITUATION

25. Among the main questions facing the citizen and the believer in the diocese, the question of peace occupies the first place. This problem in fact does not only concern our diocese but the whole of the Middle East, where inhuman wars rage. This question is first of all one of suffering man, whatever his place in the conflict. And this man has been created after God's Image of his Glory and Beauty. In this very country, he has redeemed man at no other price but the one of his Blood. He too has taken upon Himself contempt, suffering and death in order to assure to each man, in the Holy Land and in the entire world, glory, dignity and "life in abundance".

## PART OF THE CHURCH

26. The Church and each of its faithful have to take up responsibility in this problem. The faithful has to choose the way of justice, because what is at stake is man, his rights, his dignity which is being scoffed at as well in the person of the strong one as in the person of the weak one, in the conquerer as well in the conquered one. Both face the same problem: the problem of human values which concerns each person and each believer. Therefore the Church cannot remain silent and the believer has no right to withdraw behind religious rites and observances. Rites are the living expression of the faith; but they cannot be such if they are reduced to the rites of times gone by, without any link with present day life with its sufferings, its wishes and its fears.

27. This problem has been a burden and continues to weigh on the life and faith of the Christian and of each believer. Therefore this dramatic situation, which we live at present, has to be on the first place among all cares of a man who believes in God and lives in his presence, praying and meditating on the greatness of God and the dignity of man..

## WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO?

28. This situation to which we want to contribute by our humble service, inspired by faith, hope and charity, is a challenge for each one of us. What can we do? What is the task of the Church of Jerusalem in this situation, made up of conflicts, sufferings and the lack of peace?

29. Hereby I wish to ask each faithful to continue this reflexion and meditation on the situation which we live at present, keeping in mind the values of justice and love and the whole of Christ's teaching, with regard to the situation. A true faith does not allow the faithful to remain a mere spectator or to live on the efforts of others and their sufferings. Saint James says: "Take the case, my brothers, of someone who has never done a single good act but claims that he has faith... If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty, without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that?" (James 2:14-16). Each one of us then has to take part according to his own place and possibilities, in order to establish the peace which is founded on truth, justice and charity.

30. The part of the Church is to show which are the superior principles, the principles of salvation and liberation; liberation of man from his own faults and external servitude. If man succeeds in freeing himself from the links by which he binds himself, he will be strong enough to

free himself from all external links, may they come from individuals or from society. In this way his interior freedom is the measure and guarantee of each exterior liberty.

31. The Church does not create political parties and does not link itself with any of the existing ones. It does not belong to its mission either to present political solutions for the problems. It pertains to the mission of the Church to present a message for each man, be he great or small, that the dignity of man be respected and all his rights be recognized. It is the duty of the Church to face each injustice and each aggression against dignity of man, whatever side they may come from. It is its task to defend the rights of man against all injustice.

The Church appeals to each man to be conscious of his own dignity and to take up his part in society, whatever the situation, be it one of peace or one of struggle.

### III. DIALOGUE

32. The dialogue is one of the characteristics of this diocese and of this country, seen the great variety of its religious and cultural communities.

Dialogue means "to see the other one", such as he is, with the whole of his identity and personality, individually and socially, with the whole of his religious and cultural context. The first condition for each dialogue is respect for the personality of the other in his totality. A second condition consists in trying to know the other one such as he knows himself and judges himself, not by prejudices and historical or individual "a priori", linked to past positions or resulting from the whole of present interests.

### DIALOGUE AND MUTUAL ENRICHMENT

33. This knowledge of the other one is a way of enrichment for oneself through the human heritage of our partner. This interest taken in the other one, does not mean lack of interest in our own patrimony, or a diminishing of its importance. Nor does it mean that we sacrifice our own faith for that of the other one. But it means that our own faith is enriched by a dimension which is a logical consequence of Christian charity. Faith in God is in fact love of God. Love of God implies love of man. And in order to love man, one has to know him, to respect him, not to ignore him nor to attack, in whatever form his person, his patrimony or his faith.

The dialogue contains no danger whatever for the partner, since it is based on the integral respect of the personality of the other one. On the contrary, it enriches the personality, develops it and allows the partner to serve better and to have a greater respect for the other one.

### DIALOGUE AND IDENTITY

34. The dialogue imposes a not so easy duty on the faithful. It presupposes that the person willing to dialogue, first of all knows himself, so as to clarify his own ideas and to know his own personality, to delimit his part and service towards society. If he does not know himself, he risks to be confounded by the personality of the partner, to take up each color or identity presented to him. He himself will have but an instable identity, not capable of a real dialogue. Hence the duty to know oneself, to know one's heritage and one's faith defining the spiritual, individual and social personality of the believer.

## DIALOGUE AND FANATISM

35. Dialogue is based on an open and positive understanding and intelligence. Intellectual capacities are powers or potential ones, which can be used in a positive way: this will result in a true and enriched knowledge. But they can also be used in a negative, unhealthy way. On the religious level this would end up in a blindness with regard to the other and the fanatic one will only harden himself in his ignorance. The possible issues of faith and charity will be transformed into hatred and aggression. The believer will be in the illusion of giving glory to God when he attacks his neighbor who does not share his faith or his point of view on things and matters. Jesus says: "Indeed the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy duty for God."(John 6:2). Today this can befall each one of us, if our vision is not wide enough to see first, God and his glory. In acting like this, the believer turns God's glory into human interests or ambition. This can indeed happen and then the so called faith becomes the starting-point of many injustices of a physical, moral or spiritual nature.

36. The dialogue can offer to the believer protection against this danger of exploiting religion in order to justify the attack of one's neighbour. The dialogue leads the partaker to leave the complex of the small or large group, the complex of wanting to affirm oneself at whatever cost and against whoever and it also prevents the religious belonging to a church and the fidelity to one IS faith, from becoming confessionalism or sectarianism or whatever deformation.

## DIALOGUE AND DAILY LIFE

37. The dialogue deals with the principles and values which form mentalities. If the dialogue orientates these in the right direction, practical life will be orientated in this same direction, which will lead to finding principles of solution for the problems of daily life, exactly there where many discussions and fights find their source, among persons belonging to various churches and of different spiritual personalities. The common background in each culture and each religious patrimony consist in the faith in God and the service to man. Therefore one has to acquire a true vision of God and a true idea of man, so that room is created for respect and mutual love, the only foundation of justice and peace, the ever wavering foundations-stones of our land.

## DIALOGUE: A NECESSITY IN OUR COUNTRY

38. A country like ours, which has been known throughout the centuries for its pluralism, has to respect this characteristic if it wishes to remain faithful to itself. Fidelity to pluralism is expressed in dialogue. If not, all parties interested would do nothing but running into suicide and killing their one mother, that is the land which nourishes them and is keeper of the heritage of them all.

## IV. THE SMALL FLOCK

39. Another characteristic of our Church is that it is a "small flock". We are a minority. But we, know that the greatness or the quality of the mission does not depend on the small or the large number of those who fulfill this mission. The mission is the same, irrespective of the numbers of those carrying it out. On the other hand, however, the responsibility of those fulfilling this mission, becomes greater if they are but few. If there is plenty of salt, only a small quantity is needed to season the food. But if there is little of it, all is needed. Hence the earnestness of the task and mission to be fulfilled by a community of faithful



which is not numerous, because the temptation to resign is great. Each one has to take up his responsibility and to play his part. Each one has to know his faith and to transform it from a faith which is inherited to a faith to which he gives his free assent as the result of a personal, mature and accepted choice, renewing his assent to each moment and in the face of challenge. His faith is a living power acting and reacting in the midst of new events contributing by a permanent effort to build up human society.

#### THE DUTY TO EDUCATE ONSELF

40. There is an earnest duty of continued education in all things concerning the faith. This is the duty of the pastors and of all those who work in the field of education. This responsibility is a serious one and at the same time a noble one, which requires a faithful and continuous effort of all. To neglect this duty means to betray the faith, the faithful and society.

In spite of all efforts already made we are faced with superficiality and a grave ignorance regarding the faith in a rather large number of our faithful. They have no real knowledge of their faith; they ignore their identity and their real place in Church and society. They have no roots and lack the feeling of belonging to the Church. Therefore they easily give up the fight (exactly then when life becomes a real struggle) emigrating, or remaining as mere spectators, hoping for salvation from something indefinite and distant or foreign.

#### MISSION OF THE MINORITY

41. The minority has the mission to live and hand down the faith and all the values, human and divine ones, contained in it, values of redemption, which may contribute to building up society. The mission of the minority consists on the one hand in bearing witness to Christ, to the Redemption worked by Him and to the patrimony created round faith in Him, which is an integral and important part of the patrimony of this Holy Land. On the other hand it consists in a constructive service and collaboration. The faithful can not run away, take to flight or beg for help when nobody is in a position to help. First of all faith has to lead to knowledge of oneself. By means of this knowledge, faith will show the means of helping oneself, of coordinating all resources so that in this way it can be a nourishment offered to a living person who is capable of assimilating this food, and not some scraps offered to a dying man.

#### PRESSURES AND DIFFICULTIES

42. The minority is confronted with pressures of all kinds. This is normal. In order to eliminate these pressures it cannot depend on its numerical strength, but on its spiritual dimension. And this spiritual dimension depends on the measure in which the minority realizes itself, living up to its calling, remaining faithful to its spiritual personality, and by this very fact to its history and its faith.

43. Each one has to commit oneself as the servants who have received several talents, even if in fact, because of our small number, we have a greater resemblance with the servant who received only one talent. It has deemed good to our heavenly Father to turn us into a small flock, put at the service of the faith. Each one therefore has to struggle and to double his efforts, so that the gifts, received from God, may bear fruit and be returned to Him one day, meriting praise and reward. On

the other hand, each reward starts already on this earth; and each man and each of the faithful, with God's grace, earns and prepares his own reward by the work of his hands and his own efforts.

#### THE HOLY LAND, A DIFFICULT LIFE

44. The faith in God and the meaning of life at the light of this faith consist in serving and this in difficult circumstances. Therefore the believer should not say: we are but a few; or: we have no influence; or: life is difficult; or: the problems of my society do not touch me, it is the problem of the majority. Let him rather listen to Christ who says: "Have no fear, little flock... you are the salt of the earth...". Faith is like a small seed: it has to grow and will grow, not 'necessarily in numbers, but in making the believer himself, even if he belongs to a minority, strong and courageous.

45. Difficulties are there to be borne, on the one hand, in the spirit of taking part in Christ's sacrifice, and on the other hand in the spirit and desire of collaboration in the service of society. When the believer accomplishes his part of the service, and sees himself as a useful member of and for society, he remains there and feels at home there and is happy about the service he gives; society itself acknowledges him, and this acceptance is a source of stability and courage.

46. When Christ said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted", it does not mean that the faith consists first of all and exclusively in being persecuted and in supporting various suppressions, but it does mean that one has to persevere and to take up responsibilities even if the circumstances are difficult. And difficult circumstances bring with them their own merit and reward, whereas merit and reward may be lost in easy circumstances. The Christian in the Holy Land is not called to lead on easy life, he is called to a difficult one; and in our faith we find enough inspiration to be enabled to meet difficulties with with security, inner strength, without isolating ourselves from society or life in general.

#### FAITH AND PATRIMONY

47. We have to remain closely linked to our faith and to our patrimony, because we have handed down the faith from generation to generation throughout the centuries and the successive civilizations. We are an integral part of this land and its culture. Therefore we have a responsibility with regard to our faith and our culture. By them we enrich our society and in them we find the strength to serve. In this acceptance of the faith and of the service following from it, we survive and our identity precises itself and imposes itself on us and on others.

#### V. TO THE RELIGIOUS

48. I start by expressing my gratitude and appreciation to all the religious who have fulfilled their mission in the diocese and do not stop fulfilling it. I appreciate their efforts and sacrifices, made by the Institutes and the persons who have consecrated their lives to God for the service of man in this diocese.

The number of religious institutions is - thank God - very high. Some of them have been here for a very long time, like the Venerable Custody of the Holy Land. Others have come later and have been welcomed in the diocese to participate in the mission in the Land of Jesus.

## ONE HEART

49. All together, we share a great riches and we have great possibilities to bear witness and to serve the Church and society. In order to fulfill to the best of our abilities this task of witnessing and serving~ we have to know that we are first of all Church, before we are an Institute; and in this way we form one body, have one faith only and take upon ourselves the same responsibilities. Therefore there is a need of coordination, of an orientation in this sense, which has to arise from the interior itself of each community, in order to cross the individual borders and to enter the horizon of the Church.

Workers in the same harvest, workers for God and for man, we have to know one another, to pray together, to remain together before God, our one Father, with serenity and strong in the love of our Saviour, who unites us all as brothers and sisters.

## A DIFFICULT MISSION

50. We all, we are at the service of the Holy Land. And we know that the service in the Holy Land is a difficult one. It requires God's special grace, who has willed to sanctify this land and has willed that its building up be a difficult mission. Because, since this country has received the mystery of God, it has become the object of desires and wishes from all mankind. Therefore it has been and continues to be a country of conflicts.

## AT THE SERVICE OF THE BELIEVER

51. The Holy Land derives its beauty from the mystery of God in it and from the faithful living there, who have remained as a symbol of suffering man throughout the centuries, since their country has become the object of desires, covetousness and ambitious. The believer of the Holy Land has remained a faithful witness to his faith throughout the centuries in spite of all struggles and difficulties, during the darkest days, faced with all kinds of calamities. Therefore this faithful witness to the faith and the Holy Places, draws from this very faithfulness, dignity and greatness. And he is the first object of our service.

52. In our service to the Holy Land we have to see the man and the believer in an objective and realistic way, in his real situation. Looking on the Holy land as the place where our faith originated, we might forget or put on the second place this man with his own personality. He really risks to be submerged or even deformed under the pressure of the universal wishes of all faithful of the world looking at the Holy Places.

53. The Holy Land and the Church of Jerusalem have a universal nature, since the proclamation of the faith started from here throughout the whole world. But this note of universality has not to suffocate the person who remains faithful to his faith and to the land in spite of suffering and sacrifice.

The Church universal owes to this man as to his land a particular service, on a spiritual and human level, so that he himself may realize his dignity and as a believer, may continue to bring the faith to his land, to all its guests, residents or pilgrims passing through it, who have come to study and to pray.

## THE PRESENT CONFLICT

54. As to the present conflict, which does nothing else than repeating the drama of the country, each minister of the Word, while supporting each man in his legitimate rights, has to raise above the conflict in order to bring a message of peace. Because the minister of the Word cannot side with any party except with justice, charity and the legitimate rights of any person without discrimination.

## CONCLUSION

55. In this letter I wanted to dwell, on various subjects, which are so many lines of thoughts, dealing with the general situation in which we live. There is a need for. more and deeper reflexion.

I call on each one, that he may take up his responsibility: the lay-people to deepen their Christian identity and to fulfill their part in society, because their salvation is to be found there, in a total integration in the situation and in their service of liberation as founded on their faith to which they give their assent and which they live well; the clergy, the religious from their side have to support the lay-people in the realization of their Christian personality, and to contribute more light and more hope in the difficult situation which we live, by their own reflexion and their various services.

56. May Our Lady, whose Assumption we celebrate today, and the crowning of her life on earth in the glory of heaven, accompany us with her protection, in this land which she has known before us, and obtain for us the graces which we need so that we remain faithful to the sanctity of the Land in which we have been called to live and to serve.

Jerusalem 15 August 1988.

+ MICHEL SABBAH