

**Sixth Pastoral Letters of  
H.B. Msgr. MICHEL SABBAAH**

**Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.**

**“SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT” (Ps 34:14)**

“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”. (Mt 5:6,9)

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON JUSTICE AND PEACE IN  
OUR HOLY LAND** 15 September 1998

**Presentation**

Dear brothers and sisters, grace and peace to you. With Jesus Christ risen in glory, who has renewed in us hope and courage and called us to a new life, we say to you: “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:19,21).

**1.** Already by our pastoral letter of 1990 “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”, we wanted to help you live through the very difficult period we were passing through ( the Intifada) in the light of the Gospel of Christ. Today we are facing a new situation and a new phase in the search for justice and peace in our Holy Land. After the Intifada, the Madrid Conference ( in 1991) and the Oslo Agreement ( in 1993) took place. Following these events, there were different agreements signed that continue to have their impact on the reality which we are now living: the discussions between the Holy See and the State of Israel and the fundamental agreement resulting from them, the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, and the arrival of the Palestinian National Authority in July 1994. Despite all of these, the general situation today still remains very sad and tense. Justice and the peace process are blocked, and some even say the process is dead. Peace still seems quite a long way

off.

In this situation, some are holding firm and saying “We must continue the search for justice and peace.” Others are discouraged. They say “We have no other option but to return to violence in order to regain the few rights we can still salvage.” Others say: “It’s all useless. We have to leave, so we can enjoy life or take advantage of every opportunity without having to think about our dignity or our rights.” This is why many people, including leaders, give in to corruption, and profit as much as they can from every situation without concerning themselves either with the sufferings of others or with the uprightness without which our life cannot find stability.

Faced with this reality, the faithful have raised a number of questions which they ask of the pastors God has given to guide his flock. It is these questions we would like to try to answer in the light of the faith.

**2.** We address this text to all our faithful, and we trust also to all the inhabitants of this Holy Land who for so many years have sought justice and peace with many different and even contradictory visions. By giving brief and as far as possible, clear answers to questions we all ask at every moment of our daily lives, we desire to help our faithful develop a Christian vision of justice and peace in face of the conflict continually occupying our hearts and minds.

**3.** Our basic vision is this: God is the Creator of all persons and of all peoples. The dignity of each person is God-given. We are all equal in this dignity. From this we have the equality of persons and peoples in their rights and duties as well as the necessity for each of us to recognize and respect the rights of others and not to hinder the fulfillment of their duties nor the demand for their rights. Every person and every people have the right and the duty to defend their rights when violated and to enjoy complete freedom in exercising

their duties and in defending their rights. Every person and every people must be aided in this pursuit of justice, because justice guarantees peace for all. Without justice, that is, whenever rights are being violated, the way of peace remains closed.

Another principle in our basic vision is: only the ways of peace can lead to peace. Through violence a war or a battle may be won. A state can be created by force and impose itself as a *fait accompli*. But peace will only be the fruit of peace. The reality we are now living proves it. With force and violence, Israel won its battles and created a state. But it still continues to search for peace or tries in vain to impose it by force. The same is true for Palestinians: conflicts between Arabs and Jews lasting now for more than a century, have only brought losses and not achieved peace. Dialogue between the parties involved is the way, provided the resulting agreements do not remain mere signatures on paper. Justice must be won for all. Only when justice is achieved can education for peace in human hearts begin.

**4.** We hope these reflections will help enable our faithful to define their positions in the current phase of the search for justice and peace where conflict has not yet found a definitive solution. In order to revive our hope and to know how to act in these difficult times as believers, we must try to discover the mystery of God in events. Inspired by the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, we are called to assume our responsibilities in this moment of our history. The present moment in Palestinian society is one of the most difficult in terms of the worsening situation as well as the general political, economic, and social instability. It is in such difficult times that the Christian needs all the support of his or her faith and hope in order to persevere in daily trials.

**5.** The heads of the Churches of Jerusalem have been criticized more than once by the authorities under the pretext of unduly interfering in politics and of taking sides. These pages answer that religious leaders have the right as well as the duty to intervene in

political situations which produce general instability in daily life and are the cause of injustices which limit freedoms and provoke frustration leading to the violence none desire. At the same time, injustices only serve to perpetuate and deepen the violence in hearts. The Church does not speak in order to support or to incite one party against another, but rather to do her duty in denouncing injustice and defending the oppressed in demanding their rights. By the same token, she invites the oppressor to also free himself from the oppression he exercises over others. If oppression were to end, and every person and every people enjoyed all their rights, violence would disappear and security and peace reign.

To the political leaders who hold in their hands peoples' destinies and the solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and the Arab World, we offer our message as a humble contribution towards a true and lasting peace based on justice and dignity for all.

+ *Michel Sabbah, Patriarch Jerusalem, 15 September 1998***1.**

## **THE PEACE EVERYONE DESIRES**

### **1. What is peace?**

Peace is not the pure absence of war, nor is it limited only to assuring the balance of opposing forces, nor can it be created by despotic domination or a military occupation. Peace is the fruit of an order inscribed in human society by its Divine Founder (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 78). It is above all the work of justice; then the fruit of truth, of freedom and of love, going well beyond what justice can bring.

It presupposes the safeguarding of everyone's goods, of peoples and persons, and mutually respecting freedom for all, for their rights, for their borders, and for their sovereignty.

### **2. Is peace related to faith in God?**

Peace is directly related to God who in himself is the fullness of love and peace. He created everyone to participate in his life of happiness. He sent his Word and only Son to gather into the one family of God his children whom sin had dispersed and set against one another (cf. Jn 11:52). Jesus Christ, the Word of God, is himself our peace and our reconciliation, and in his flesh destroyed hate (cf. Ep 2:14).

This is what the Angels sang about on the day of his birth in Bethlehem: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Lk 2:14).

After having conquered evil and death, the resurrected Jesus can proclaim real peace to his disciples and give it to all who believe in him. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid”. (Jn 14:27).

Peace is first of all a gift which comes to us from God. True peace among men, based on justice and love, is the image and effect of God’s peace.

On the other hand, peace is also a task God has entrusted to us as a good to be continually sought and defended. Peace is never achieved once and for all; it must be worked for constantly. It is the fruit of a permanent struggle.

To work for peace is to fulfill God’s will in the history we are making and living. To worship God, to love God means to love all his creatures and together to build peace.

Therefore, peace is at the same time the gift of God and involves all men and women of good will. Pope John XXIII said in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (n. 168): “Peace is an

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undertaking too high and too sublime to be realized by the power of men left to their own resources even though they may be driven by the most praiseworthy intentions.”

### **3. What kind of peace do we desire for ourselves and for the peoples of the Holy Land and the region?**

We desire true peace for all, a peace based on justice and love as Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount. We ask God for peace which insures the rights of all the parties to the conflict. We desire a peace capable of guaranteeing security for Palestinians, Israelis, and for all the countries of the region; a peace which respects the dignity, freedom, sovereignty and rights of each person and people in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and in all the countries of the region; a peace which allows no country to behave in such a way as to threaten any other, its territory or its rights.

### **4. Does peace ask us to give up our rights or to accept injustice?**

No one has the power under any pretext to ask the oppressed to be silent or not defend their rights, because peace cannot be based on the violation or the relinquishing of rights, itself an injustice. Accepting injustice and giving up one's legitimate rights does not insure peace. The imposition of an unjust peace would lead to a false peace more destructive than war, because injustice cannot last, and rights would again be demanded.

## **2. THE CONFLICT PREVENTING PEACE IN OUR COUNTRIES**

### **5. What is the nature of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians?**

The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is a political and economic one. Even though both peoples are semitic, it is also a conflict between two cultures. Religion has a great influence because all societies in the East are based on religion. It is a political conflict between two peoples belonging to three religions:

Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

## **6. What is the main source of conflict?**

The main source of conflict is the dispute between two peoples, Jews and Palestinians, over the same land. The two peoples lived together in peace for centuries. When the demographic ratio between the two was reversed, following massive Jewish immigration from the beginning of this century, the Palestinian people began to feel themselves in danger of losing their land and freedom; peace ended and conflict began. The proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948 brought on the occupation of a large number of Palestinian towns and villages through force as well as the expropriation of a large part of their lands and properties. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees. Since 1948, the Jewish people have enjoyed their own state with its sovereignty and freedom. In contrast, the Palestinian people are still under Israeli military occupation on the little land which remains theirs, even though this is somewhat mitigated by the Palestinian National Authority recently established on part of the Palestinian territories. Nevertheless, they still demand their security, their freedom, the right to self-determination and complete independence in their own state.

## **7. What is the significance of Jerusalem in this conflict?**

Jerusalem is at the center of the conflict because of its place in the religious and historical memories of two peoples, Palestinians and Jews, and of the three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Once the question of Jerusalem is resolved, the heart of the conflict will be resolved. As long as the question of Jerusalem remains unresolved, the conflict will stay heated, and every other agreement will be only partial and cannot bring the peace the region desires. Since Jerusalem is at the heart of the conflict, and since the majority of holy places, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim are found there, this adds a religious dimension to the conflict.

Therefore, believers have an important role to play. They have the obligation to work for justice and reconciliation. Jerusalem is a holy city. The permanence of the conflict with its continual injustices and inequalities is contradictory to this holiness and to all religious values. True believers are suffering from what is happening today in Jerusalem. However, sorrow is not enough. It is up to every sincere believer of whatever religion to assume his or her responsibilities and to work towards ending all oppression so that justice and reconciliation may be established.

8. The sufferings of the Palestinians in Jerusalem are many: the near impossibility of obtaining building permits and the demolition of houses already built; the confiscation of identity cards from Jerusalem residents, denying them the right to live there because of absence from the city for employment, housing or other reasons; discrimination in municipal services; the imposition of a fiscal system applicable to the economic situation of Israeli society, but inappropriate in the Palestinian sector where the economic situation is insufficiently developed and where taxes become the cause of ruin for some, etc.

In regard to all these sufferings, the Church addresses responsible political, municipal, and national authorities to take the necessary measures to put an end to this situation. The demolition of houses is a violation of human rights; the same with denying someone the right to live in his own country. We say to those responsible that the peace of Jerusalem cannot come from silencing or ignoring the voices of the oppressed, but rather by listening to them and by effectively addressing their just demands.

### **3. JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

#### **9. What is justice?**

Justice consists of recognizing and respecting the dignity and rights of every person and of every people, consequently giving

them what is rightfully theirs. It is not easy to recognize which rights are ours and which belong to others. This is why to achieve justice requires more than diplomatic or military efforts; it is a spiritual battle.

### **10. What does religion have to say regarding the struggle for justice?**

Working for justice is not only permitted, it is required by faith in God.

1) Because God is the source and giver of every person's rights, it is the duty of all to protect their rights and to respect the rights of others.

2) Secondly, every religion invites us to recognize and act upon the truth. Recognizing and acting upon the truth is to recognize and work for justice. It is the duty of everyone to acknowledge and accept the whole truth about oneself and others even if they are party to the conflict.

Therefore, the struggle for justice is the duty of every believer. This means using various legitimate ways of seeing to it that justice alone is not enough. It must be completed by love and mercy which leads, once justice is achieved, to forgiveness and reconciliation.

### **11. What are the legitimate means of fighting for justice and human rights?**

To fight against injustice, we must use "intelligent" means which actually lead to ending injustice rather than to an even greater harm to the oppressed themselves.

Among legitimate means are: negotiations at the level of political leaders, dialogue between religious leaders, meetings and common action between peacemakers of both sides. Once again, violence

cannot solve the present conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Other nonviolent means may be used such as demonstrations, objective information for local and international public opinion, diplomatic action, local and international lobbying, etc.

## **12. What are the necessary conditions for justice?**

To achieve justice it is necessary:

- That human hearts be purified of the spirit of pride and domination, and not imprisoned by selfish interests whether individual or national;
- That they be freed from the constraint of fear; - That they have a reciprocal trust and know that the fear of God is the source of all justice.

Finally, the principle of dialogue rather than violence must be accepted as the way towards justice.

## **13. What does justice between Israelis and Palestinians mean?**

Israelis at present strongly insist on “Security”. Palestinians demand security, the right of return, and the complete freedom to create their own independent state as well. Therefore, for Israelis as well as for Palestinians, justice means the mutual recognition of each other’s human dignity and political, civil, and religious rights.

## **4. VIOLENCE 14. What are the different forms of violence?**

By violence we understand every action which causes serious bodily and moral harm to the human person or community. It can take many different forms: war, military occupation of another country, confiscation of lands, armed resistance, collective punishments, etc. The closures on the Palestinian territories which are so disruptive, making daily life difficult for people (work, food, education, hospitalization, family relations, freedom of movement) is

also a form of violence. Other forms of violence exercised in the present conflict are: humiliating gestures or words - for example, at checkpoints, forcing men to their knees or to stand facing a wall or beating them; demolishing houses for the most diverse reasons; inciting or educating for violence by government directives to its soldiers or citizens, or by members of extremist groups; bombing the civilian population in order to hit or demoralize the military or its fighters; organizing assassinations; lying, slander, giving false information to demonize the other side. All this is violence.

### **15. What is terrorism?**

Terrorism is:

- Violence against a third party in order to apply pressure on them, for example, taking hostage persons who bear no direct responsibility in the conflict:
- Violence exercised by the state or by groups against persons not engaged in the conflict, even though belonging to a people at war, such as children, civilians, collective punishment, blind retaliation, torture, kidnapping, punishment against parents and relatives in place of the accused, assassinations within the ranks of the opposing party, assassinations on the streets and in public places, etc.

Terrorism is illogical, irrational and unacceptable as a means of resolving conflict. In the case of terrorism, there are two guilty parties: first, those who carry out such action, those who plan and support them, and secondly, those who create situations of injustice which provoke terrorism.

### **16. Is violence ever justified?**

Violence must be the last resort after all other means have been tried to no avail. According to the teaching of the Church, the resorting to armed struggle is an extreme case of the ultimate

remedy to end a “clear and prolonged tyranny” which otherwise seriously harms the common good.

### **17. What is the principle of legitimate defense?**

Love for oneself remains a principle of morality. God is the foundation of human dignity and human rights. Therefore it is legitimate and necessary to enforce respect for these rights. The same goes for defending the weak and the poor, victims of oppression and of violence.

When life is endangered, whoever defends his life is not guilty of murder if he is forced to take the life of his aggressor. The criteria of resorting to violence is measured by the gravity of the life-threatening danger. On the other hand, it is not legitimate to exercise violence greater than necessary, even in the case of legitimate defense.

### **18. Can violence be adopted as a principle of action?**

Aside from the case of legitimate defense, violence can by no means be adopted as a normal principle of action. “For peace to reign in your hearts, you must especially renounce every

form of hatred and violence. Violence only breeds violence. Whenever violence continues to answer violence, no one can stop the explosion” (John Paul II in Lesotho, Africa, 15/9/88).

### **19. What is the red line which even a legitimate armed uprising must never cross?**

The red line is everything we have defined as terrorism, (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2297).

“We can never accept, neither in the case of a constituted authority nor for insurgent groups, resorting to criminal means such as retaliation against populations, torture, the methods of terrorism” (Instructions on Christian Freedom and Liberation, n. 79). As

stated above, resorting to violence can only be permitted in extreme cases in order to remove a clear and permanent injustice which seriously harms the common good.

## **5. THE ROLE OF RELIGION 20. What role does religion play in the conflict and in peace?**

Religion is first of all faith in one God, Creator of the universe, and secondly, love of all God's creatures. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (cf. Lk 10:27; Lv 18:19). It is true that this love must be harmonized with the right of self-defense and the defense of the dignity of every human being's dignity by refusing every form of oppression and injustice.

Religion is the memory of the past for people and for believers. It is also prophecy as a light for the present and the future. The true believer overcomes the difficulties of the present and faces them through the strength of his or her relationship with God. Prophecy enlightens the believer's heart, rendering him capable of sensing the mystery and will of God beyond present events and filling him with the hope that he can overcome the difficulties of the moment, its injustices, its frustrations, and everything that appears impossible. In the case of conflict, religion is a source of hope based on the light of God.

## **21. How does religion manifest itself in the conflict?**

In the East, religion penetrates and influences all actions both private and public. Everything is placed under the name of God. Everything begins and ends in the name of God. War begins in the name of God, and peace agreements as well. That is why the voice and directives of religious leaders can have a decisive influence on the faithful of one side as well as the other. They can incite the people to war and to violence, or invite them to peace.

Religion is sometimes turned into religious extremism and a call to

violence, even terrorism, in the defense of culture or national identity. It sometimes happens that politicians exploit one particular aspect of religion for their own ends. Thus, in the name of the most merciful God and Lover of humankind, acts of violence are committed which sometimes cause death in the name of God, the source of life.

## **22. Why are we witnessing the radicalization of religious positions?**

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Religion is an appeal above human positions and limitations. Many find in it an instrument and means of facing an illegitimate domination and an unjustly imposed force which causes humiliation and frustration. Religion is seen as the unique means of gaining freedom or at least of taking revenge against the oppressor.

The causes, as seen from one side, are the on-going injustice against peoples or persons, the relationship which the use of force establishes between the strong and the weak, the materialism of technology, and the real or apparent subjection of spiritual values to the “interests” of the state.

Religious extremism is seen in all of this as an ultimate recourse when other means such as armed or peaceful struggle, negotiations, etc. have been exhausted or proven ineffective.

Other contributing factors are: a faulty understanding or interpretation of religion and sometimes even the explicit manipulation of it. It is relatively easy to captivate and excite the masses through religious feelings.

Religious extremism changes religion into a particular and exclusive absolute; it is replacing God by one's self as an individual or people. Basically, under the pretext of religion, it is

seeking, consciously or unconsciously, to impose one's own interests, whether as an individual or as a people. It is to refuse the sense of history, reducing it to the present moment.

**23. Is it true that religions separate human beings and cause wars?**

This seems to be true if we look at the behavior of certain believers today or in the course of past history. In reality, religions help unite people among themselves and before God. It is not religion that is at the root of discrimination, disputes and wars. It is rather people themselves who have a poor understanding of their religion or who make improper use of it.

**24. Can the clergy take part in “legitimate” armed struggle?**

Absolutely not. The clergy have chosen for themselves a vocation of praying for men and women, guiding them towards good, and inspiring mercy in human hearts. Their duty is to proclaim true values and to serve as guides along the way leading to these values.

Politicians choose the duty to govern the affairs of state, and the military that of defending security and its dignity by fighting. The duties of human society are numerous and diversified; each citizen fulfills his or her duty according to one's vocation and capacity.

With regard to political or military realities, the clergy must defend the truth. They have the responsibility to help people become conscious of their rights and duties, to do what their duty to their country demands, and to obey their legitimate leaders in what concerns the common good. It is also the obligation of religious leaders as clergy to speak out whenever there is oppression and to be the voice of those who have no voice, to defend the weak and the oppressed.

**25. What is the role of the Church in case of conflict?**

Wherever a political power, whether national or foreign, violates the rights of a people or of a category of persons, the Church must raise her voice and take every initiative she can to defend the weak and the oppressed. Even where her members belong to one or other groups or parties in conflict, she nevertheless must care for the good of both parties. For she is at the service of humankind as such; therefore, at the service of all. She raises her voice to remind us what is right and to defend the oppressed whoever they may be.

She also has the mission to propose ways of dialogue and reconciliation and to invite all concerned parties to participate.

## **26. What is the role of religious leaders in the Holy Land?**

Religion invites religious leaders to: a. defend the weak and the oppressed.

b. call persons and peoples to have the courage to recognize what is just and to accept it for oneself as well as others;

c. educate people in the ways of peace;

d. hold a dialogue between diverse religions in order as far as possible to arrive at a common vision of justice and to establish peace.

## **27. Can the dialogue between religious leaders of the Holy Land have an influence on peace?**

Given the considerable impact of their word and example on the great majority, religious leaders have a determining role in shaping public opinion which in turn can have repercussions on the election of political leaders and on their choices and programs of action.

This is why a dialogue between religious leaders of the three monotheistic religions which ends in a common vision of justice and peace and a common message addressed in this spirit to believers would have an important impact on the peace process.

Among other things, religious leaders, as stated above, bear the great responsibility of educating people for peace and leading the way with the courage to see how justice for one side is inseparable from justice for the other and recognizing their rights and dignity. Only in this way can the call to peace and reconciliation become possible.

## **6. RECONCILIATION, FORGIVENESS AND LOVING YOUR ENEMY**

### **28. What is our place in this situation?**

The conflict has been imposed on us. We are involved in it both as citizens and as Christians. Our reactions as citizens and as Christians must not be contradictory. On the contrary, they ought to complete one another. As citizens, we belong to a people fighting for their rights. As Christians, we still belong to this people in the struggle for their rights. Furthermore, we have a particular vision: it is God who gives us our place and our vocation in the history we share with all those around us every day. God is our Creator. He has spoken to us through revelation in order to save us and to be instruments of salvation for all.

Our role as Christians faced with sometimes cruel and hard to accept realities is to witness to this grace and salvation offered to us and to all who desire it, and to act with all, even with our adversaries, on the basis of this vision of God's grace and salvation offered to everyone.

### **29. What does God expect of us in this situation?**

He expects us to see his image and his dignity in all human beings. For all are his creatures and his children. He watches over us and "makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust" (Mt 5:45). We need to know we are never alone in a conflict situation. God is always with us. He is Emmanuel. He is always there and invites us to imitate him and

adopt his way of caring for all his children.

### **30. What does it mean to love your enemy?**

The enemy is whoever offends, violates, or destroys another person's dignity, rights, honor, body and goods. For God, not even the greatest sinner or evildoer is an enemy. Every person is a creature, created in his image, the object of his love, called to conversion and salvation. For the Christian too, no one is an enemy in the absolute sense of the term. This means that in spite of the evil a human being is capable of, he still remains God's creature, his image, loved by him and the object of his providence.

### **31. Does loving your enemy mean leaving him alone and submitting to injustice?**

Not at all. On one hand the enemy, despite all the evil he has done, still keeps his God-given dignity. On the other, while fully conscious of this dignity, we require from him that he repair all the evil he has done, and that he stop all his evil intentions.

Furthermore, to open the eyes of our adversary and to lead him on the right path is a work of setting him free so he can really be God's creature and a true brother of every human being.

### **32. How can we forgive an enemy who has seriously harmed us or continues to do so?**

To forgive does not mean resigning ourselves to accepting the offense or the cause of the evil done to us. This would be an injustice both to us and to the enemy himself. To forgive does not change evil into good: murder remains an evil and a crime, and the violation of rights is still a violation as well as an evil that must be rejected.

To forgive means first of all seeing the image of God in our adversary and the permanence of God's love for him. Secondly, it requires of him that he remove the offense, that he repair the evil

and restore all our rights. Thirdly, it is the purification of the soul from bitterness and hatred. In this way, we are imitating Christ who forgave those who crucified him and who bid us to forgive and love our enemies. To forgive, in the deepest sense, is to enter into the great interior combat of purifying the soul, imitating God, and seeing all creatures as he sees them. This combat is one with the mystery of the combat of Christ himself by entering into the mystery of the cross. It is not given to everyone to understand this. Jesus said: whoever can understand let him understand.

### **33. Is it really possible to forgive?**

To forgive is difficult. Whenever we forgive our enemy, it is the same power of the cross acting in us, and we work with Christ for our own salvation and that of our brothers, even if they are our enemies. This is just what God asks of us: to work together to open the way of salvation for my “enemy” by my forgiving attitude.

Bitterness and hatred in the soul are a curse which destroys us from within and becomes an obstacle to the conversion of others. What God wants is to free us from evil, both me and my adversary. It was to overcome evil and to save us and set us free that the Word of God became incarnate. Furthermore, loving and forgiving purifies the soul and renews in it the energy to continue to seek justice.

According to this vision, we want to stress that forgiveness is possible. It is difficult; it demands a great spiritual combat. But it remains possible, because it is above all a gift and grace from God.

### **34. So should we give up defending ourselves and leave the situation as is?**

No, we must continue to fight in order to defend ourselves by every legitimate means. To claim our rights from our “enemy” means wanting him also to be in the right, freed from his injustice to us. To claim our rights is to defend our dignity, but it is also to

defend the dignity of the adversary and to help him enter into the way of reconciliation and salvation.

### **35. Can we refuse to forgive? What would this mean?**

The refusal to forgive can come from the seriousness of the injury or from the despair of the person wronged who sees the impossibility of justice. This results in the blindness of such a person incapable of seeing beyond his humanity to contemplate the good, merciful and all- powerful God in his mystery. To knowingly refuse to forgive is spiritual suicide. In the plan of God, suffering is a source of purification and spiritual growth. To refuse to forgive is to render sterile the suffering experienced. Forgiveness turns suffering into a source of redemption, puts an end to discouragement and despair, and renews our strength to continue the search for justice.

### **36. What does reconciliation mean and what are the conditions for it?**

Reconciliation begins whenever oppression ends, and justice is achieved. Therefore, reconciliation is a relationship of peace no longer marked by past conflict. Among the basic conditions, we note especially:

- to find out the truth about the conflict;
- to dare to name reciprocal wrongs and responsibilities, to analyze their origins and contexts, and to rank them according to hierarchy;
- to agree on a reciprocal recognition of our respective identities, existence and rights; - to repair what can be repaired; If this path is completed together, a new life is offered us in mutual respect.

### **37. Can we speak of a spirituality of peace?**

The Christian life is a continual effort to stay on the right path and to walk with God and towards God with others in truth. Peace is

the work of God the Creator who made the universe in its harmonious beauty and unity. It is also the great promise of God in salvation history each time his people turn from him and fall. Peace is still the great gift of the new creation which finds its source in Christ's resurrection.

For believers, peace is the spiritual effort of the heart and soul exerted in every moment of daily life in order to live continually in harmony with God and with others, while at the same time continuing the search for justice and peace with all men and women of good will.

A spirituality of peace is thus based on one hand on the interior peace of the whole human person, body and soul, and on the other, by accepting the daily involvement towards realizing peace as justice and mercy leading to forgiveness and reconciliation.

## **7. A VISION FOR THE FUTURE 38. What is our vision of real peace?**

Any vision of the future in the Holy Land, given the importance of religion in our hearts and in our lives, must rest first of all on the spiritual renewal of all religions - the purification of hearts and minds on the personal and institutional level showing the true significance of religion as the love of God and respect and love for all his creatures with all their differences. On the basis of this vision, everyone's rights can be recognized and restored. Once these rights are recognized for all and become a reality, real and lasting peace will be possible.

## **39. What political solution would be envisioned?**

The solution would be to permit Palestinians to enjoy their full freedom of self-determination to choose the form of political life they desire, including establishing their own independent state. In this way, trust could be built and developed, thus putting an end to all forms of violence and all recourse to force by the state and by

resistance groups. Once Palestinians can enjoy security for themselves, Israelis will also have the security they long for so much.

#### **40. What is Jerusalem's role in any future peace?**

Jerusalem has a central and symbolic value for religion and for the world. God has given it the mission of being the city where God and humanity meet, where reconciliation takes place between them, between persons and between peoples. Jerusalem is a universal symbol of fraternity and peace between people. Moved by a genuine spirituality, all believers of the three monotheistic religions could work together to make this city really become what God wants it to be: a place of encounter with God, and consequently a place to inspire peace and reconciliation in hearts and minds.

#### **41. How can the question of Jerusalem be resolved?**

The basis of any solution is equality for its citizens with their rights and duties so that no one is superior to anyone else, and no one subject to another or in need of protection from others. All are equal and all are equally protected by the laws.

In Jerusalem, there are two peoples: Palestinians and Israelis, and three religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Jerusalem is a holy city. By this holiness, it has a unique character which distinguishes it from every other city in the world. This is why its status is like no other city or world capital. It requires a particular status guaranteeing the rights of all its inhabitants and its three religions, preserving its sacred as well as its cultural character, placing it above wars and hostilities, and guaranteeing free access for all, friend or foe, in times of peace or war.

It is up to the two peoples concerned, Israelis and Palestinians, with the collaboration of the religions involved, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, to define this special status and to govern

the city accordingly. Both the international community and all humanity have the duty to assist the two peoples to achieve this particular status. The recognition of this status by the international community will guarantee its stability.

Within the framework of this special status, Jerusalem can be the “capitol” for both peoples concerned and for two states, thus becoming the cradle and symbol of mutual recognition and fraternal coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis. It can also be a symbol and source of peace for all the peoples of the region and of the land.

#### **42. What is the position of the Holy See on Jerusalem?**

The Holy See distinguishes, without separating, two aspects of the question of Jerusalem: the conflict over sovereignty, and the safeguarding of its religious and cultural significance. With regard to conflict over sovereignty, it is up to both parties concerned, Israelis and Palestinians, to find a solution to this problem. The Holy See considers it a question of justice which must be settled by the two parties involved. But it also reserves the right because of its moral authority to express its opinion by saying whether or not justice is respected in solutions suggested. It recognizes the position of the international community and the resolutions of the United Nations on this subject as well.

As for its religious and cultural significance, the Holy See asks that the main part of the city with its Holy Places and the human and religious communities living there be respected for what they are, and that the rights of religious freedom and freedom of conscience be insured as much for its residents as for pilgrims from the entire world. It also asks that there be equal rights and treatment for members of the communities of the three monotheistic religions found in the city, in their spiritual, civic, and economic activities. Finally it asks for freedom of access to the holy city for local Christians as well as for pilgrims from around the world.

For this purpose, as stated above (Q 41), a special status is necessary. It should be administered by both peoples, and then recognized and guaranteed by the international community.

#### **43. What is the position of the local Church on Jerusalem?**

The position of the local Church of Jerusalem is practically the same as that of the Holy See. Concerning the conflict over sovereignty, since our faithful form part of Jerusalem's inhabitants, as citizens they are involved in the conflict, and as the faithful, they are the Church. Therefore, we hold that both peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, must be equal in all rights and duties, including sovereignty over the city. All the churches of Jerusalem have together affirmed their position on Jerusalem in the common memorandum of 23 November 1994 on the significance of Jerusalem for Christians.

#### **8. CONCLUSION HOPES AND FEARS 44. Peace - who really benefits from it?**

The answer seems evident for those guided by human, moral and spiritual values. It is not so evident to those dominated by political ambitions and by the spirit of domination and vengeance.

Today, neither Palestinians nor Israelis can look at their children without feeling a great fear for their future.

One can take refuge in a substitute for peace in the obsession with security. The system of security can become tyrannical and very costly. Moreover, enemies are needed to justify one's very existence with its consequent costs. Security thus becomes an obstacle to peace.

To demand security before creating conditions of justice is to think and act without considering the human reality. Each will have the security it gives the other.

Violence and the spirit of vengeance also blocks peace because they in turn provoke further violence and further vengeance.

In a narrow political vision, it is impossible to break the spiral of domination, injustice and violence. We must seriously ask ourselves what our region will be like in 25 or 30 years. Looking objectively at the question of peace today, one does not have to be a pessimist to foresee a desert full of cemeteries and the ruins of everything being constructed now. On the other hand, there could be the opposite possibility of a burgeoning of development, well-being and a better life for all, if today's politicians, freed from fear and selfish interests, had the courage to realize peace through justice.

Only a just peace, realized through dialogue and mutual trust, will be able to free Israelis and Palestinians from fear of the future. Peace is beneficial not only to the powers of this world who have a protected life even though threatened, but to the weak, to families, to the young, to the Palestinian and Israeli communities whose lives are exposed every moment. For these, peace is beneficial, and it is they who must claim it.

**45.** We present this text as the fruit of a common reflection by a group of theologians of the Church of Jerusalem, as a contribution to education for peace, in a spirit of collaboration with all people of good will so that this 20th century may end with the resolution of conflicts in a plan of peaceful coexistence for all peoples of the Holy Land in the spirit of the great Jubilee.

One of the commentaries on the plan of this reflection states: "The reflection is too idealistic and inapplicable to our reality of the Holy Land where two parties are in confrontation, the one strong, Israel, having at its disposal military power and world opinion, and the other, weak and unarmed, the Palestinian people..."

It is precisely in order to break this human impasse that a vision is

necessary - a vision which would have all the parties face their real strength which is the God-given dignity that all have received equally from him. Let us emphasize that countries can be conquered by arms and people oppressed by force, but the soul of a people cannot be killed nor peace vanquished. To the weak we say: you must not lose hope, the divine dignity in you is greater and more powerful than any human power. Furthermore, the key to peace rests in your hands as much as in the hands of the mightiest...

To enter into this vision, and for it to become part of our real lives, we need God and the gifts of his Holy Spirit, but we must also cooperate with God to build with him real peace. The work for peace and the prayer for peace go hand in hand as it is so well expressed in this beautiful prayer attributed to Saint Francis which every believer in one God and every community can make their own:

*Lord,*

*make me an instrument of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let me sow love;*

*where there is injury, pardon;*

*where there is division, unity;*

*where there is doubt, faith;*

*where there is error, truth;*

*where there is despair, hope;*

*where there is darkness, light where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,*

*grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;*

*to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,  
in forgiving that we are forgiven,  
in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

*Amen.*