



“My heart is ready, Lord”

*“Make every effort to maintain the unity
of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph 4:3)*

“Unity in diversity”

**First Pastoral Letter
of H.B. Msgr. Fouad Twal
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem**

**On the occasion
of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the Holy Land
8 - 15 May 2009**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings to all of you in Christ Jesus. In all Christian charity and faith, in the Lord Jesus who chose and called us to every good work, and in the tenderness of Mary, the holy and blessed Virgin who has always surrounded us with her maternal care, we write this first letter to you as Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

We rejoice, dear Brothers and Sisters, at this opportunity to speak with you about a topic that is dear to the heart of Christ as well as to our own, which is the unity of the Church for which Jesus prayed: “That they may all be one” (Jn 17:21).

1) The desired Unity

This unity, which Jesus requested in his prayer, has its source in the unity of the three persons in God's own self, in the unity of the universe in its admirable diversity, and in the unity of man and woman, to whom the Lord commanded: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.” (Gen 1:28)

God's work shows us in a wonderful way how multiplicity is in harmony with oneness, and unity with diversity. In order to fully realize the plan of unity desired by God, the human being must be *one* with God and must submit faithfully and humbly to the Lord. This fundamental unity is what we pray for every day. It is what we wish for you, and it is what we work for with all our strength.

You form our patriarchal diocese in the diversity of your functions and of your vocations, in Palestine, in Israel, in Jordan and in Cyprus. You are Christ's beloved flock. To all of you our affection and our most cordial wishes.

In desiring unity, we wish for the Church what Christ, who founded her, wishes for her. He entrusted to her the most precious thing he had, he made her *one* by his Spirit, *one* in faith. To you, dear Brothers and Sisters, we wish that you might live in this unity that includes a diversity of origins and of cultures, without discrimination between persons, in the unity of faith and of mind; by living it among yourselves, you will be able to foster it around you.

This is what characterized the first Christians: “The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul.” (Acts 4:32) Nothing divided them, neither wealth nor poverty, neither knowledge nor ignorance: “They were faithful in listening to the apostles’ teaching and to living in fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42)

2) The Elements that constitute Unity

This is what Jesus desired and what was realized in the first community: that those who believed would be of one heart and one soul. There is no other way. For in spite of the various forms of Christian life, we are “all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). When unity is founded on the love of Christ, it cannot be undermined by the diversity or multiplicity of the forms of Christian life. Saint Paul reminds us of that: “I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called... making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph 4:1-3)

Thus we see that the unity of the Church comes first of all from the fact that she is rooted in God who is *One* (1 Cor 8:6), thanks to the revelation which is *One* and to

Christ who is *One* (Rom 14:7), through the working of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son (Eph 2:18). The unity of the Church manifests itself in that of the Gospel, of baptism, and of the ministry that was entrusted to Peter, to the other apostles, and to Paul. The allegory of the body is a sign of this unity. The Church is the body of Christ, which is born through baptism and nourished by the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:17). Its unity is that of doctrine, its diversity is that of the forms of Christian life, which – in spite of their diversity – have one single goal. In the diversity of the ministries and responsibilities, unity is realized first of all through love, through respect of the other, through collaboration and responsibility for the world according to the natural law.

In the Church, communion in faith in the sacraments and in government show God's salvific plan for humanity; they are the visible pillars of the unity which has its invisible origin in the inner working of Christ and of his Spirit.

That is why the present divisions of Christians must be considered to be the result of sin and of the passions. They have nothing to do with pluralism. It is not possible to defer to the end of time the realization of the Church's unity, which is a pledge of credibility and a sign of God's grace, a grace that is not limited to a period or place. We must seek to restore the unity that has been torn by divisions and schisms (1 Cor 1:10; 11:18-19), the unity that has as its foundation one single faith and one single Lord (Eph 4:5-6.13).

This unity in diversity can be compared to that of the body: there cannot be diversity of functions without the body's unity, and the unity of the body does not suppress

the diversity of functions. Many members there are, but one single body. The diversity of functions only strengthens the unity and solidity of the body (1 Cor 12:12-21).

This is the theme that we have chosen for our first pastoral letter. No one is ignorant of the complexity of this topic, nor of the difficulty in preserving unity in diversity and diversity in unity, given the extreme diversity of persons, opinions and positions. But for Christ's love, nothing is impossible!

3) “My heart is ready, Lord”

For our ordination to the priesthood, we chose as our motto the words of the psalmist: “My heart is ready, oh God” (Ps 56:8). We took the same motto again when we were named Patriarch of Jerusalem. Yes, our heart is ready for every sacrifice, it is filled with good will, desirous of spiritual happiness and of fraternal communion in the midst of our expansive diocese. You know of the care and the concerns that we carry in our heart, as well as of our availability to serve the Lord and to place ourselves at your service.

The love of Christ, which binds us to him and to each other, knows no limits; it cannot be held back through the diversity of homelands, origins and cultures. In prayer, the concerns dissolve. Those who believe, receive strength, protection and perseverance. We pray for you, as you pray for us. You are our joy, our crown and our inheritance.

4) A Church with a History of many Centuries

We briefly want to present the history of the holy Church of Jerusalem, the mother of all the Churches, the

Church of the apostles that came forth holy, one, pure and without blemish from the pierced hands and side of Christ. It is a glorious Church. We also want to speak about the difficulties she had to face and that she could overcome thanks to the kindness of Christ, her shepherd, and thanks to the courage and the sacrifices of her faithful.

The Church of Jerusalem is the land of Revelation and the homeland of the prophets. No other Church had the honor of being directly founded by Christ himself. She includes Palestine, Israel, Jordan and the island of Cyprus, all of them lands mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. It is thus easy to understand the will of God for these regions that were first sanctified by the prophets, then glorified by the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection and the Ascension of the Word himself, then by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the disciples who were gathered around the Virgin Mary in constant prayer.

– **Our Church in the thought of God:** We can say that our diocese is in the heart of God. The Bible expresses this fully. The New Testament mentions on every page the localities where our salvation was realized “when the times were fulfilled”: Nazareth in Galilee where the Annunciation took place; Bethlehem of Ephrata, which saw the Savior's birth; Jerusalem, the “city of the great King” (Mt 5:35) where “the temple [of the body of Jesus] was destroyed and rebuilt in three days” (Jn 2:19); the Judean desert; the sea of Galilee; the Mount of the Beatitudes and Mount Tabor; Jacob's well in Samaria, and many other places that today still witness to Christ, his life, his words and his plan of salvation. Jesus answered the Pharisees, who wanted to silence the acclamation of the disciples and the crowd: “If

these were silent, the stones would shout out.” (Lk 19:40)
All the stones of this land preserve the memory of its history and tell the events of the salvation accomplished in it.

Thus, by the will of the Lord, our diocese became the cradle of the first announcement of salvation. The Lord himself sanctified this land where he granted us to see the day on which he gave us “by his light to see the light” (Ps 35:10). At the same time, through baptism, faith and love, every Christian “was born in Jerusalem”, as the psalmist prophesied: “And Jerusalem is called 'My Mother!', for everyone is born in her. It is he, the Most High, who upholds her. The Lord records in the register of the peoples: Each one was born there.” (Ps 87:5-6)

Here are some of the places in our diocese mentioned in Scripture:

- Jesus is baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist;
- later, “he travels around the Decapolis”, including Philadelphia (Amman), Gerasa (Gerash), and Scythopolis (Beissan);
- at the time of the Ascension, he tells his apostles and disciples: “The Holy Spirit will come down upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem first, then in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8);
- in the Acts of the Apostles, we read: “All the inhabitants of Lydda (Lod) and the Sharon valley were witnesses [to the miraculous healing of Aeneas by Saint Peter] after which they turned to the Lord. A certain Tabitha lived in Joppa (Jaffa)... A certain Cornelius lived in Caesarea. He was a centurion of the Italian Cohort...” (Acts 9:35-36; 10:1ff.);

- on the island of Cyprus, which also belongs to our Latin patriarchate, the Acts of the Apostles recount the apostles' sojourn and ministry, especially that of Paul and Barnabas: “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they [Paul and Barnabas] went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God... going through the whole island as far as Paphos...” (Acts 13:4-6).

As we can see, we are dealing with very different countries and languages, but the love of Christ unites them, He who “from every tribe, language, people and nation” (Rev 5:9) made one single people, and who made brothers and sisters of us by bringing us closer to one another, as Saint Paul says: “You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (Eph 2:13)

In recalling the golden age of the Church, Saint Luke wrote in the Acts of the Apostles: “The Church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.” (Acts 9:31) The same book of Acts describes magnificently the community life of the first Christians “who were of one heart and soul... They had all things in common... no one among them was in need.” (Acts 2:42ff; Acts 4:32ff.) In spite of the difficulties, we aspire to such a community life that is permeated with the spirit of the apostles.

5) The present situation of the Church

Without interruption from the first century to our own day, our Christian communities have preserved “the

deposit of faith”, and that in spite of adversity and persecution. The grace of God and the collaboration of people of good will have built up the civilization of this region, which is at the heart of the Christian world. But difficult circumstances have tried Christ's flock in his land. We cannot penetrate the ways of divine wisdom, which has permitted such trials. It is only in the mystery and the light of the cross that we can understand something of the meaning of these adversities by remembering the Savior's warning: “Whoever wants to follow me must carry his cross...” (Mt 16:24)

Recently, the city and territory of Gaza underwent a great drama, which caused the death of some 1,500 people and thousands of wounded. Many Palestinian houses and establishments were destroyed. With our own eyes, we saw the distress of the poor citizens, especially of the children, the women, and the elderly, victims of political and military conflicts that have not ceased to hold sway for more than sixty years. The Church in Gaza has had its share of suffering, which tragically increased the affliction of the Christians who represent only a tiny minority on a national scale. Unfortunately, in almost all parts of our diocese, the local Christians only make up a small number.

Our faithful and the other Palestinian citizens aspire to sovereignty and independence. In the land of Christ, they are not foreigners. It is their homeland that saw the birth of the Blessed Virgin, of Christ, of the apostles and of the Church.

The Christian is an authentic citizen who is faithful to God, loyal to his or her homeland. The Palestinian people have a legitimate aspiration to freedom and sovereignty. Like the Israeli people, it desires stability and security.

Ultimately, peace cannot be established without justice, as we read in the prophet Isaiah: “The fruit of justice will be peace, justice will bring forth rest and security for ever.” (Isa 32:17)

– **The Holy Father with us:** In the midst of the darkness that surrounds us, we have seen a great light arising: His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI visited our countries in order to bring us peace and comfort. We have been awaiting with impatience this historical visit that filled us with hope. It was the father's visit to his children in distress. He came to support us by his prayers and his care, he came to confirm our faith, he who “bears the concern for all the Churches”, including that of Jerusalem, beloved little flock of Christ. The Sovereign Pontiff also opened his heart to the Christians of other denominations and to the non-Christians, above all the monotheists. Let us remember that two of his venerated predecessors, Paul VI in 1964 and John Paul II in 2000, had already visited this Holy Land, showing the importance of the mother Church and of its unity. Like them, Pope Benedict wanted to express his solidarity with the people of this region, sharing their hopes and their sufferings and giving flesh to St. Paul's declaration of love: “If someone grows weak, I share his weakness; if someone has fallen, that hurts me.” (2 Cor 11:29)

Like his two predecessors, the Holy Father began his apostolic visit in Jordan, where he blessed the corner stone of the new church at the site of the Baptism of Christ, and the University of Madaba. Then he continued his pilgrimage to the holy places in Israel and in Palestine, thus underlining the unity of our diocese on both sides of the Jordan and in our Holy Land. We welcomed with love and

esteem the successor of Saint Peter in the chair “of the most holy Church of the Romans”, as Saint Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, wrote in his synodal letter. In the hope of faith, we prayed with the Sovereign Pontiff in all these holy places that the Reign of Christ might come to his Land. The Pope walked in the steps of the Blessed Virgin, of Saint Joseph, of the Lord and of the apostles, traveling to the Jordan of Christ’s baptism, to Nazareth of the Annunciation, to Bethlehem of the Nativity, to Jerusalem of the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension and Pentecost. Together with the Savior's Vicar, we “have drawn water, inebriated with joy, from the wells of salvation” (Isa 12:3). With him we prayed that the land of redemption, the river of baptism, as well as the whole region might live in the peace brought by the Virgin's Child who was born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:1-5).

6) The Hemorrhage of Emigration

The emigration that has decimated the Christians of our diocese is due to the political instability, the economic difficulties and the uncertainty as regards the future. We hope that the Holy Father's visit will bring forth and strengthen our faith, our courage, our tenacity, our loyalty towards the Lord and his land, as well as peaceful coexistence among its inhabitants.

In 1922, the Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem made up a little more than 53% of the population. In 1948, there were 31,000 Christians in the Holy City, making up 20%. Today, there are only 10,000 Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem out of a total of about 850,000 inhabitants, of whom the majority are Jewish. For more than 1970 years,

Bethlehem and Nazareth were Christian. In 1948, the inhabitants of Bethlehem were still 85% Christian; today, they are no more than 12%. In 1948, Christians made up 20% of the population of Palestine; today, there are no more than 50,000 in the West Bank and about 3,000 in the Gaza Strip. The latest statistics spoke of 120,000 Arab Christians in Israel. In Jordan, there are about 160,000 Christians, which is about 3% of the kingdom's population that is estimated at 5 ½ million.

Our Latin patriarchal diocese of Jerusalem numbers about 65,000 Arab faithful in all the regions mentioned above; to these must be added a few hundred Hebrew-speaking faithful as well as a few hundred local Cypriot Catholics. They are gathered together in an apostolic, ecclesiological, spiritual, historical, existential, and administrative unity within the framework of full communion between the See of Saint James the Lesser and that of Saint Peter in Rome. Saint Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (†638), described Rome as “the seat of Orthodox teachings” and “the light of all the Churches under the sun”.¹

7) The Unity of the Land of Salvation in the Bible

Providence wished to embrace all these regions of the land of Canaan, Philistia and Jordan (Ammon, Moab, Edom, Galaad, etc.) thanks to faith in Christ, who has already “gathered together the scattered children of God” in such a way that He has done away with all discrimination “between Jew and Greek” (Gal 3:27-28); for in baptism, all

1 Mansi X, § 896, cité par Christoph Von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1972, p. 94 ; cf. S. Sophrone, *Lettre synodique*, in Mansi § 3188 D.

“have put on Christ”. Christ himself, who was followed by large crowds, went about in all of these lands, which include the Decapolis (Mt 4:25; Mk 5:1ff.; 7:312). Most of the towns of the Decapolis are in Transjordan. According to the historian Plinius, these are Scythopolis (Beissan – Beit Shean) in the Jordan Valley, Hippos, Damascus, Gadarah (Umm Qays in Jordan), Rafanah Qanatha, Pella, Dyon, Gerasa (Jerash), Philadelphia or Rabbat-Ammon (Amman). The prince of the apostles, Saint Peter, went from Jerusalem to Jaffa and Caesarea, where he baptized the first pagan convert, the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10). The deacon Philip evangelized the Philistine coast, in particular Azot (Ashkelon) and Gaza (Acts 8:26ff.). Saint Paul evangelized the island of Cyprus.

8) The Unity of the Jerusalem Patriarchate throughout the Centuries

It is true that the Church only enjoyed freedom after the Edict of Milan in the year 313. But the reign of Christ had spread throughout his homeland well before that date. The Jordan was the natural gate to the Oriental world. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Holy See consecrated the unity of the “three Palestines” by naming the bishop Juvenal (422-458) Patriarch of the Holy City.² The pontifical legates as well as the emperor and the rest of the conciliar fathers recognized the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem patriarchate over the “three Palestines”, which included the following regions:

² Anton Odeh Issa, *Les Minorités chrétiennes de Palestine à travers les siècles*, Jérusalem, 1977, FPP, pp. 79 sq.

– **The first Palestine**, with Caesarea Maritima as its capital, included Jaffa, Gadarah, Lydda Nicopolis (Emmaus) Javne (or Jamnia), Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, Rafah, Beit Jibrine, Nablus, Sebaste, the “Paremboles”, which is to say the Bishopric of Tents in Jericho and its surroundings (with Peter Assab-Albayt as its bishop) and Bakkatha (near Naour in Transjordan).

– **The second Palestine**, with Scythopolis (Beissan) as its capital, included Lajjoun, Aksal, Tabor, Cana of Galilee, Saffouyah, Tiberias-Pella (Khirbat Fahil), Gadarah (Um Qays in Transjordan), Hippos (Qal'at Al-Houssun in Jordan), and Capitolias (near Irbed in northern Jordan), home of the martyr Peter of Capitolias.

– **The third Palestine**, with Petra as its capital, included Kerak, Ariopolis (Rabah), Zoarah (Ghaour As-Safi) and Ayyalah (Aqabah).

During the Christian golden age in the 6th century, there were 49 bishops in this region – 27 in the first Palestine, 13 in the second, and 9 in the third – and a multitude of churches: 14 have been counted at Madaba, 15 at Umm al Jemal, 13 at Jerash, and 5 at Aboud (near Ramallah).

Unfortunately, the schisms tore Christ's seamless tunic. The Crusades tried to restore the Christian presence in the Holy Land at the end of the 11th century. The Latin Patriarchate was founded during that period, but its titular soon had to reside in Europe.

Saint Francis of Assisi came to the Holy Land, to where his Friars Minor followed him, officially delegated

by the Holy See since 1333 in order to be the guardians of the holy places. Latin rite communities then formed around the sanctuaries of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Cana, Jaffa, Ramleh, Jericho, and St. John of Acre. In the 17th century, Francescus Quaresmius, Franciscan custos of the Holy Land, expressed the need for a Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem, in order to watch over the local Catholics and the pilgrims and to better defend the rights of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land. The Frenchman Claude Beyle, who was then Egyptian minister of education (1832-1840), asked that the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem be re-established.³

9) The Restoration of the Latin Patriarchate

On July 23, 1847, Pius IX decreed the restoration of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem with his Bull *Nulla celebrior*, and he named Msgr. Joseph Valerga as residing Patriarch in the Holy City.⁴ Msgr. Valerga, who was originally from Sardinia, was then the Apostolic Delegate in Mesopotamia. Pius IX wanted to strengthen the Catholic Church in the Holy Land in the face of the challenges that seriously threatened it. According to the report by Cardinal Acton of May 3, 1847, the pope wanted “to restore the episcopal order to the mother of all the Churches for the greater good of the faithful and the pilgrims.” Pius IX wanted to ordain Msgr. Valerga himself and as he did so, he gave him the title of Patriarch on October 10, 1847.

3 Anton Odeh Issa, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

4 Anton Odeh Issa, *ibid.*, p. 221.

– **Msgr. Joseph Valerga:** Patriarch Valerga obtained the same rights from the pasha as the two other Patriarchs of Jerusalem – the Greek and Armenian Orthodox ones. When he arrived in Jerusalem, the faithful of the Latin rite numbered 4,141. At his death, they counted 7,000 and ten new parishes had been founded: Beit Jala (1852-1853), Jiffna and Lydda (1855), Ramallah (1856), Bir Zeit, Taybeh and Beit Sahour (1859), Nablus (1860), Salt (in Jordan, 1866), and Jaffa of Nazareth (1869).⁵ Msgr. Valerga also re-established and modernized the Equestrian Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher, the main benefactors of the patriarchate. Pius IX blessed this initiative on January 24, 1868, in the Bull *Cum multa sapienter*. At the death of Msgr. Valerga, there were 1,414 Knights from twenty countries. Today, there are 24,000 Knights and Dames of 28 different nationalities. Soon a local branch of the Order will be created that will be made up of the children of the diocese who are noted for their generosity and their commitment; we rejoice over this and are very proud of it.

– **Msgr. Vincent (Mansour) Bracco:** This Patriarch (1873-1889) founded eleven new parishes, including four in Palestine and seven in Transjordan. The parishes of Fuheis and Kerak were founded in 1874 and 1875 respectively. In 1879, the tribe of the Uzeizat moved from Kerak to Madaba, where they settled. Through the mediation of the *moutassarif* (superintendent) of Nablus, the Latin patriarchate then obtained permission from the

5 Hanna S. A. Kaldany, *La chrétienté contemporaine en Palestine et en Jordanie* (en arabe), Imprimerie Safadi, Amman, 1993, pp. 174 sq.

governor of Damascus to construct a church. The parish of Madaba was officially founded in 1881. In the meantime, the patriarchal seminary in Jerusalem gave several local Palestinian priests, including Frs. Anton Abedrabbo (from Beit Jala), Hanna Sarena (from Jerusalem) and Yaaqoub Awwad. The Rafidia parish (near Nablus) was founded in 1877, that of Gaza in 1879, that of Reineh (near Nazareth) in 1880, that of Hosson in 1885, that of Zababdeh (near Jenin) in 1887, and those of Anjarah and Ajloun (in northern Jordan) in 1897. During this time, in 1880, one of the priests from the Latin patriarchate, Father Youssef Tannous Yamine, together with Mother Marie-Alphonsine Ghattas (from Jerusalem) founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Rosary, whose vocation is to assist the parish priests in their ministry, especially with women and girls.

10) The Latin Patriarchate in recent History

Patriarch Ludovico Piavi, ofm, founded one single parish, that of Moujeidel in Galilee, which he entrusted to the Franciscan Fathers. But the catastrophe of 1948 scattered the faithful of that community. The succeeding Patriarchs, T.B. Camassei, Barlassina, Gori, Beltritti and Sabbah (the first Arab Patriarch after the restoration) continued to found new parishes and branches, while strengthening the communities that already existed in collaboration with the Franciscan Fathers, the guardians of the sanctuaries, and the other religious orders. For since the restoration of the Latin patriarchal seat of Jerusalem in 1847, the male and female congregations and religious communities have not stopped flocking to the Holy Land. They perform devout

work in the service of the Lord and of his children in all the regions of our diocese.

In 1948, the establishment of the State of Israel was a source of hope and of joy for a certain number of faithful in the patriarchal diocese of Jerusalem. At the same time, the Palestinian people were the victims of a great tragedy. This distress obliged some 900,000 Palestinians to flee from their homeland and to take refuge in the neighboring countries, especially in Jordan and in Lebanon. Some emigrated to the West. Among the Palestinian refugees were many Christians who came above all from Tiberias, Beissan, Jaffa, Lydda, Ramleh, Haifa, Nazareth and East Jerusalem. In 1967, the Six-Day War increased the number of Palestinian refugees by some 700,000, of whom many settled in Jordan, where they were fraternally welcomed like their compatriots in 1948.

It is to these Christian communities that the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem exercises its ministry in apostolic and pastoral concern, also offering a Christian education in school and university establishments. The diocese shares this mission with the Franciscan Fathers and the many orders and religious congregations. Among the members of the secular and regular clergy, both local and international, above all in Palestine and Jordan, there reigns a spiritual unity and a family spirit of long standing. Thus Palestine is linked to Jordan. At present, the majority of the members of our patriarchal clergy are Jordanian. Others of Palestinian origin come from families that have been residing in Jordan for at least three generations. Right from the beginning of the Latin patriarchate, its missionaries founded all the Latin parishes in Transjordan, set up the schools, the churches, the hospitals and the welfare organisms at the service of all

categories in the population. All this was done before the foundation of the modern States in the region and before the establishment of the various ministries, in particular those for education and health.

The Church of Jerusalem remains one and united thanks to the shared prayer, charity and faith as well as the coordination among its institutions in Palestine and Jordan. This unity goes beyond the administrative divisions imposed by politics. On the other hand, we spare no effort in consolidating fraternal relations among the children of the patriarchal diocese of Jerusalem, the “mother of all the Churches.”

It is appropriate to recall here that the jurisdiction of the two Orthodox patriarchates of Jerusalem, the Greek and the Armenian one, also extend over Palestine, Israel and Jordan. Their titular resides in Jerusalem, as do the Orthodox and Catholic patriarchal vicars of the Copts, the Syrians, and the Ethiopians.

– **“The mother of all the Churches” at the service of all nations:** The Church of Jerusalem looks with tenderness upon all the children of its local communities, Arab, Jewish and Cypriot, as well as its children of all nationalities. The Church goes beyond the differences of race and culture, since she is Catholic, that is to say, universal. She wants to go beyond the political conflicts, in order to embrace all her children in the love of Christ. In this way, she witnesses to the reciprocal charity that has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love. We have been united and gathered together from the four corners of the world through the blood of Christ on the cross (Eph 2:13; Col 1:20).

11) The Year of Saint Paul

H.H. Pope Benedict XVI has invited the Church to celebrate the second millennium of the birth of Saint Paul. In this spirit, he inaugurated the Year of Saint Paul on June 29 of last year. On this occasion, the Holy Father conferred on us, as well as on other brother archbishops and metropolitans, the *pallium* in the Eternal City of Rome, where the blessed apostles Peter and Paul died as martyrs. This was no coincidence. For Providence there is no coincidence. This gesture by the Sovereign Pontiff was meant to place our Latin patriarchate of Jerusalem under the protection of the great apostles Peter and Paul, a protection that is all the more welcome, since the afflictions and challenges encountered by the mother Church are great. She must rise up and be renewed, “even if our old self grows weaker every day” (Eph 4:22).

– **The grace that transformed Saul of Tarsus:** When we think of the present situation of the mother Church, we become sad because of the diminishing number of her children, the wounds of emigration and of division. But we look with firm hope at the empty tomb, which inspires us with strength and courage. In this spirit, we are comforted by the miracle that overwhelmed Saul, the Pharisee from Tarsus and fierce persecutor of the Church of God (Gal 1:13ff.). We renew our faith in the risen Christ whose voice rang out on the way to Damascus, softening the hardest of hearts and bringing to Himself the most obstinate fanatic, who hated the Nazarean and his adherents! Following the example of Paul, we pray for all the peoples who live in the land of the cross and the resurrection, so that they “may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim 2:2).

– **Saint Paul, apostle of unity:** Our countries have been divided through cruel circumstances. But we remember the commandment and the wish of the Lord: “That they may all be one!” (Jn 17:21) This priestly prayer of Jesus for unity finds an echo in Saint Paul's recommendations to the Corinthians: “Be united in the same mind and the same purpose. (...) For it has been reported to me that there are rivalries among you. What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Peter', or 'I belong to Christ'. Has Christ been divided?” (1 Cor 1:10ff.)

Saint Paul looked after the mother Church and organized collections for her: “Now concerning the collection for the faithful of Jerusalem, you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside whatever you have managed to save.” (1 Cor 16:1f.) In his second letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul again dedicates two chapters to assisting the Church of Jerusalem: “Brothers and sisters, we want to tell you about a generous initiative that God has caused to come forth from the churches of Macedonia. (...) They have put all their means into it, and even more, as I am their witness, by asking us spontaneously, as a grace and with great insistence, to be united with us in order to come to the aid of the faithful in Jerusalem.” (2 Cor 8:1-9.15)

– **Learning from Saint Paul:** Here, I repeat the Holy Fathers' exhortation: it is necessary to read, to meditate and to study the writings of Saint Paul with the aim of following his example, as he himself wished: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (1 Cor 11:1) May we, clergy and faithful, be

able to make Saint Paul's spirituality our own. He was able to proclaim: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me", and "For me, to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21), and again: "The love of Christ urges us on." (2 Cor 5:14)

Difficulties in the Pauline Writings: In his second letter, Saint Peter spoke of the difficulty of certain Pauline writings: "Believe that if God takes his time, it is in order to save you. And Paul, our beloved brother, wrote to you about this with the wisdom that God gave him. He speaks of it in all his letters. We must acknowledge that they are at times difficult to understand, and people without sure instruction or with only a little misunderstand them to their own damage, as they do with the other scriptures." (2 Pet 3:15-16)

It is thus appropriate to read the letters of Saint Paul, especially the difficult passages, in the presence of priests or of lay people who know the Sacred Scriptures and who are known as being rooted in the Church, persons who are "worthy of teaching the others" (2 Tim 2:2). Here, we can suggest a certain order in the Pauline writings, beginning with the simplest: the letter to Philemon, the pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus, the two letters to the Corinthians, those to the Galatians, to the Colossians, to the Ephesians and the Thessalonians, ending with the letter to the Romans. Biblical commentaries and dictionaries can be useful to us, in particular the *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* by Father Xavier Léon-Dufour, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

– **The spirit of the apostles:** Our motto is spiritual life with Christ, in Christ, and for Christ, with whom we have been

clothed since our baptism. As Tertullian wrote, “the Christian is another Christ.” We take Saint Paul as our model; he responded with love to the love of Jesus, “who loved us and give himself up for us” (Gal 2:20).

– **“Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel”**. We must proclaim the Gospel, following the Savior's order: “Go to all nations and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19) and: “Go to the whole world, bring the Good News to all of creation” (Mark 16:15). And the Apostle of the Nations exclaimed: “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). We must all proclaim the Good News, and we must do so by our communion, our words, our conduct, our good works, our faith, sowing love and peace in people's hearts.

– **The Church does not belong to us**: The Lord also calls us to witness to Him and His Word in the society in which we live. Such witness must be given first of all by our life, as Saint Paul wishes: “Finally, my brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Phil 4:8) The Lord himself invited us to this witness by our life: “May your light shine before men. Then, seeing your good works, they will give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Mt 5:16) Saint Paul echoes this commandment of Christ when he declares: “Brothers and sisters, the God who said: May light shine in the midst of darkness, has himself shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor 4:6)

In addition to the witness of our life, we must not hesitate to respond when we are questioned about our faith, as the apostle Peter recommends: “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; but do it with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Pet 3:15-16)

12) The Christian Family

In addition to the Year of Saint Paul that we are celebrating with the universal church, we draw your attention to another big project of our Catholic Churches in the Holy Land: it has to do with the Christian family, the importance of which we understand ever more. Our Catholic Churches are trying to develop a common pastoral vision. They are together organizing initiatives that are meant to promote and deepen Christian life in the family. One of these initiatives was the recent publication of the booklet *Prières de la famille chrétienne* [Prayers of the Christian Family]. We want this booklet to come to all homes as a useful instrument to bring forth and make grow the spirit of family prayer. Prayer unites the Christian family and strengthens it in the love of God and of the neighbor. This pastoral initiative is meant to deeply encourage the families in understanding and assuming their providential role in the Church and society. We invite all persons concerned, parish priests, parish communities and institutes of consecrated life, to cooperate for the good of the Christian family. Thus we hope to be able to foster the family, the first cell of the Church and of humanity, in a clear-sighted and concrete way.

Conclusion: It is the Spirit who unites us

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we have come to the end of this first pastoral letter. You will fill in whatever gaps there may be. Let us all work for the unity that the Lord himself desired. Let us pray for that same unity. It is the Holy Spirit who gathers us together and unites us in spite of our diversity.

We hope that in this letter we have recalled the most fundamental aspects of our Church and its identity. The prominent characteristic of that identity is the diversity of the regions and the human groups that make it up, as well as the forms of Christian life that it gathers together. This diversity is a source of wealth if we know how to welcome it in a positive and fraternal way, animated by the Holy Spirit who gathers together the most diverse charisms in building up the one House of God (1 Cor 12:4-7).

Let us point out that this pluralism is also present in all our societies that are made up of very diverse religions, cultures and human groups. We hope to be artisans of unity among the inhabitants of our countries. We ask the Lord to help his Church in the Holy Land on its pilgrimage by granting us His grace and blessing.

I assure you, dear Brothers and Sisters, of my affection and my esteem. Let us try “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” And may the Lord bless you.

† **Patriarch Fouad Twal**

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