

Eastern Church with the Arab Muslims. This is because the Eastern Christians were persecuted by Western Christians on many occasions: during the Byzantine period, during the Crusades, during this century and up to the present. More than that, the Eastern Church paid a very high price because it was used as a cover for the protection of Western interests in the Middle East, in general, and in the Holy Land in particular.

For example: The West, instead of using the spiritual wealth of the Eastern Churches, used their financial weakness and sent missionaries formally to help, but in reality to divide the Christian community. Another sad example is the agreement between Western countries and the Turks in which they divided the holy places between the different denominations, and, as a result the churches in the Holy Land (The Holy Sepulchre or the Nativity) had to be shared among many denominations. The result is struggle, disunity and confusion. . . . Such sad agreement which is known by the name of "status quo" was concluded by the Turks in order to please some European countries and protect their interests in the Holy Land.

In our recent history and in these days while some of you in the West are worrying about the future of the Arab Christians in Islamic countries, we see that your governments are directly encouraging Islamic fundamentalism. I think so because Western countries are financing some Islamic movements in their attempt to create divisions, disorder, and instability in the Arab countries, and such a situation is in favor of Western interests.

On the other hand, because the West is ignoring the rights of one people and doesn't work on just political solutions but supports the oppressors in their oppression, this policy makes people become fundamentalist and fanatical.

After this war in which Iraq, the Arab country that believed in the "Arab national thought," lost the war, there is the risk that fundamentalism will attract more people as a political alternative. Personally, I hope that this will not happen and if Iraq lost the battle this doesn't mean a failure for "Arab national thought."

However, even under Islam we don't feel in danger. They protected us through the centuries while the Western Christians persecuted us. The Eastern Church was able to live under Islam and will continue to do so since it is a Christian and Islamic church. It's Christian because of its creed and doctrines, and it is Muslim because of its culture, language, history, spirituality, and life. This church is an inseparable part of the Islamic Arab world and only our Arab identity and our Arab national aspirations and the Arab Islamic world can protect us Christians in the Middle East. This doesn't exclude dialogue, encounter, and collaboration with the West as long as we do not compromise our future for Western interests. Dialogue can resume if the West respects our dignity and freedom. We are ready to share but not to serve.

Interviews: Palestinian leaders

Muslim or Christian, Palestinians are one

Before their meeting with the Pope on March 14, some of the leading members of the Palestinian delegation from Jerusalem discussed their visit to the Vatican with Umberto Pascali.

Geries Khoury

Director of Al-Liqa center and leader of the delegation to the Pope. He reported on March 12; "Just yesterday, a personal representative of the Pope came to Jerusalem and lit a candle at the Holy Sepulchre on behalf of the Pope, to symbolize the lights of peace."

EIR: What can you tell us about your meeting in the Vatican?

Khoury: I can tell you a few points we will touch on, both in the document we will deliver to the Pope and in public conferences afterward. First, I want to restate our respect for international legitimacy with the hope that the United Nations may serve the whole world and not only the powerful. Second, we demand the enforcement of all the resolutions of the U.N. concerning the Middle East and in particular Palestine.

We request that Israel recognize Resolutions 242 and 338. We ask the international community, all the peoples and their leaders to save justice and to make every effort to apply this international legitimacy to Palestine and to recognize the right of the Palestinians to decide their own future and to create a democratic and free state on the Palestinian land occupied by Israel in 1967, and to recognize the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

We reiterate the unity of the Palestinian people, Christians and Muslims, and stress again that the aim of the Palestinian fight is only the freedom of this people and not the oppression of any other people.

Bishop Lufti Laham

The Greek Catholic Melchite Patriarchal Vicar of Jerusalem, and chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Al-Liqa Center.

Laham: Before the explosion of the war the Holy Father

wrote and sent a very important message to the powers involved in the war asking them to use other means in order to avoid the conflagration of the war. And also after the beginning of the war he repeated again and again this concept. So we are very pleased about his position. As head of the Church in Jerusalem, myself and the other Patriarchs and bishops, we also sent peace messages to world leaders and also to Saddam Hussein and to George Bush. We are also pleased for the very, very important initiative the Pope took now to help to find a solution at the local level here, in Jerusalem, for Palestinians, and Israelis, and for all the problems of the region.

Maybe the war was part of a scenario to create a new situation in the region. Now we will go to Rome at this meeting to make the voice of the Christian and Muslim people heard in order to urge all efforts for the peace in the region. We hope after the meeting in Rome we can organize new initiatives here involving Israelis and Palestinians. We have a good collaboration between Islamic and Christian people, we ask advice from each other. We must find the courage, despite these very difficult situations, to look for peace.

Dr. Thiab Ayyoush

President of the Open Educational Program in the Occupied Territories, Jerusalem; representative, in the March 14 meeting with the Pope, of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.

Ayyoush: In this moment all the leaders of the world are talking about the necessity to deal with the Palestinian issue. I am optimistic about the perspectives.

I appreciate what the Pope did about the Palestinian problem and we, as Palestinians, appreciate very much the initiative for a just peace in the Middle East and for putting an end to the suffering of our people. We hope that the Pope will go forward to put pressure on the leaders of the world and the U.N. Security Council to try to find a solution. We will speak up, whenever a chance will be given to us, in order to call for the national rights of our people.

I want also to stress that we Palestinians, Christian or Muslim, are united in the demand for our national rights, we are one people, we have the same aspirations, and we are very, very united. We always find a kind of agreement among us especially concerning the political issue.

If a solution is really going to be found for the Palestinian problem, then all the Arab countries will go for peace, but if this issue is not solved, with a just solution, then the conflict in the Middle East will continue. We do not need to have a war if we have our national rights. And we have our political representative and we think that any kind of negotiation must go through the PLO.

EIR: What is the Open Education Program?

Ayyoush: I am the director of the Arab University of Jerusalem, and we think we must make every effort to give the

The White House's 'war for possession of souls'

An article published in the newspaper of the Italian Bishops' Conference on March 5, in the middle of the Vatican summit on the Middle East, raises the issue of a pagan religion as a driving cause behind George Bush's war decisions. "The Catholic Church was the less visible target," read the article signed by Maurizio Blondet, under the banner headline "Dear God of America." A leader of the Catholic peace group, Pax Christi U.S.A., Mother Marie Grosso, is quoted saying: "I fear this victorious President and his international order, and I fear even more that Bush in his speeches borrows the language and the symbols of religion." Also quoted is Bishop Walter Sullivan, of Richmond, Virginia: "A Catholic military man must decide according to his conscience whether or not to engage in this war which the Church considers unjust."

Many fundamentalist preachers were deployed by the establishment in order to counter the Catholic Church's opposition to war, Blondet reports: Pat Robertson, Billy Graham, and Hal Lindsay. The latter defined Bush as "the man chosen by God" to accomplish the Biblical prophecies, and wrote: "We are on the verge of Armageddon; this is the first and final battle against the forces of the Antichrist." And, among the forces "of the Antichrist" he listed "the Vatican, the Soviets, the Europeans, the Arabs."

Writes Blondet: "Bolstered by the support of millions of followers who finance their work, the televangelists are the vulgar yet effective interpreters of what people used to call the 'American religion': a real 'state cult,' as the scholar Harry W. Bowden says, 'which has as its center

possibility of an education to people who do not have a chance to go to a regular university. This is the concept of an Open University. So here, given that the universities are closed most of the time since the beginning of the Intifada, we found that we should continue to keep an educational opportunity for our people. So we use videos, we circulate textbooks and try to have people accomplishing their curriculum even if they cannot go physically to a university.

Mousa Darwish

University of Bethlehem; founder of Al-Liqa:

Darwish: We are going to Rome first of all to thank the Pope

the affirmation of the mission and the supremacy of America' and into whose 'powerful symbols, myths, rituals and sacred writings' all Americans are plunged from their infancy. Suspicious of the Catholics (who are looked at as loyal to a foreign power) the 'American religion' has conceived the attack against Saddam as a crusade of the U.S.A., the Empire of Good armed with the power of technology, against evil Muslim obscurantism. . . .

"It is a difficult kind of idea to understand, but in the U.S.A. there is a strange association, present also in Great Britain and Canada, the British-Israelites, which has put these ideas down in black on white. Anglicans and Episcopalians, these people spread books which hold that the Anglo-Saxon people are 'the ten lost tribes of Israel,' descendants of Abraham, the People of the Alliance. . . . The ideology of the British-Israelites obviously was born in England and nurtured the imperialistic impulse of the British aristocracy of the past century. . . . But the same ideology feeds also into Protestant fundamentalism in the U.S.A. . . . Today, the heartland of America, the patriotic and conservative one, convinced of being the chosen people, has somehow come to the conclusion that America's mission is prophetically interwoven with the existence of the State of Israel. As Pat Robertson explains, the return of the Jews to Palestine is the first accomplishment of the apocalyptic prophecies, and brings nearer and nearer the moment in which 'the Jews will recognize the one they rejected, Jesus Christ.' Then the Temple will be rebuilt and the Messiah will come back.

"Says Bill Martin, sociologist of religions at Rice University: 'The Muslim fundamentalists feel they have the mission to convert the world, the Jewish fundamentalists call on the mandate of God on Israel, the Christian fundamentalists want to destroy the Islamic mosque [on Temple Mount in Jerusalem] in order to build in its stead the Temple, thus realizing the prophecies. Obviously the catastrophic potential is enormous.' "



Stuart Lewis

Bush giving a press conference in February on Desert Storm.

In contrast to the "televangelist" crowd identified by Blondet, most of the leaders of American Protestant churches as well as most of the American Catholic bishops, with some notable exceptions, adopted stances highly critical of the Gulf war (see *EIR*, March 1, 1990, page 65). This included the denomination to which Bush nominally belongs, the Episcopalian.

for his attitude toward the Palestinian cause and to ask him to continue his support.

We want to confirm to the Pope that we are willing to reach a peaceful settlement and we want also to confirm that we want our own state, our own flag, our own identity card. And we want to confirm that we Muslims and Christians in the Holy Land, are one body, we are Palestinians. Some of us go to church, some to mosque, and at the same time we are one people. We think the Pope will continue helping the Palestinians to achieve their legitimate rights and self-determination and a Palestinian state.

We also want to make clear to the Pope that we are determined to live with our neighbors, recognizing Israel,

and at the same time we want the Israelis to recognize a Palestinian state.

The Pope expressed the desire to visit Jerusalem. We hope he will go to see directly what circumstances we are in, and although we would mostly like him to visit our own state, we wish he could see how much we are suffering.

As Palestinians we consider Jerusalem as the capital of our state. At the same time we recognize that Christians, Muslims, and Jews have their right to pray in a situation based on a peaceful agreement. We believe that if our cause will be solved then we all will live as brothers. Before 1948 we were on brotherly terms with the Jews. Now if we do not achieve our goals this means the problem will remain.