

The Holy See and Jerusalem, by William Shomali

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you all for being here in big numbers. You came because the love for Jerusalem unites us whether we are Jews, Moslems and Christians. The other side of the truth is that Jerusalem divides the world since it has two stories, two narratives and two ways of healing its vulnerability.

For these reasons, it is courageous to invite and organize a conference on this contentious theme. At the same time, it is right to thank the office of Search for Common Ground, its Jerusalem Office Co-Director, Mrs. Sharon Rosen, and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for the invitation to address you on this important issue in light of the pilgrimage of Pope Francis. Since he comes to Jerusalem, it is right to know what he thinks and what his predecessors thought about the vocation and status of this Holy City. Pope Francis represents more than one billion Catholics and his voice reaches the 5 continents.

The Holy City has long been at the center of the Holy See's concerns and one of its top priorities for international action, ever since the Jerusalem question existed. I want to limit my talk to the last 50 years. I will approach the topic from three viewpoints.¹

1- The Holy See holds Jerusalem to be unique and different from any other city. Why?

We find its answer in what Pope John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter "Redemptionis Anno" (§1.6) of 20 April 1984: "*...Jews ardently love (Jerusalem) and in every age venerate her memory, abundant as she is in many impressions and monuments from the time of David who chose her as the capital, and of Solomon who built the Temple there. Therefore, they turn their minds to her daily, one may say, and point to her as the sign of their nation.*"

He further points out that before Jerusalem was the City of Jesus the Redeemer, it was the historical locus of biblical revelation, in which more than any other place the Word of God was brought to mankind. Christians view Jerusalem with jealous affection because it was there that the Words

¹ I learned a lot from two major references and quoted them abundantly:

1 *Jerusalem nei documenti Pontifici*, a cura di Edmond Farhat, citta del Vaticano, 1987, which stops until the year 1987. Therefore I used a lot the Vatican Website to find the different speeches of the last two Popes who visited the Holy Land and spoke about Jerusalem.

2 The important lecture done in Jerusalem on Jerusalem and the Holy See (25th of October 1998) by Cardinal Jean Louis Tauran, former Secretary for the Relations with the Governments of the Holy See.

of Christ resonated. For Christians, Jerusalem is the city of their Redemption, the City of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

John Paul II notes that Muslims also call Jerusalem "holy", holding a profound attachment that reaches back to the origins of Islam and have, almost without interruption, lived there for more than a thousand years.

During the visit of Yitzhak Shamir to Vatican in the year 1982, Pope John Paul II said:

“The City should be a crossroad of peace and encounter between the faithful of the three religions, who look at it, live it or visit it as pilgrims or venerate it as a sacred center of their History and of their religious life.”

The same line of thinking continues with Pope Benedict. In his homily at Josaphat Valley on 12 May 2009, he stated that Jerusalem belongs to three religions:

“Gathered beneath the walls of this city, sacred to the followers of three great religions, how can we not turn our thoughts to Jerusalem’s universal vocation? Heralded by the prophets, this vocation also emerges as an indisputable fact, a reality irrevocably grounded in the complex history of this city and its people. Jews, Muslims and Christians alike call this city their spiritual home. How much needs to be done to make it truly a “city of peace” for all peoples, where all can come in pilgrimage in search of God, and hear his voice, “a voice which speaks of peace” (cf. Ps 85:8)!

He then spoke about the multicultural character and universal vocation of this city, referring to it *“as a microcosm of our globalized world”*, a city that, *“if it is to live up to its universal vocation, must be a place which teaches universality, respect for others, dialogue and mutual understanding; a place where prejudice, ignorance and the fear which fuels them, are overcome by honesty, integrity and the pursuit of peace.”*

Pope Benedict clearly recognized the universal values and affirmed that this city must incarnate these values. He states:

“There should be no place within these walls for narrowness, discrimination, violence and injustice. Believers in a God of mercy – whether they identify themselves as Jews, Christians or Muslims – must be the first to promote this culture of reconciliation and peace, however painstakingly slow the process may be, and however burdensome the weight of past memories.”

However, let us not stop only at the mystical greatness of the city. Its grandeur goes side by side with, and is the reason of, its fragility and vulnerability. We can see this not only from the past history of the city when crusaders came to conquer it in the name of Christ, but also from its recent history.

Which leads me to the second point.

2- The Jerusalem question

Indeed, there is a conflict, or rather there are conflicts, because of Jerusalem and within Jerusalem - all related to its universally accepted uniqueness. It is unique in itself, and consequently it is also unique in its conflicts.

Between 1948 and June of 1967, Jerusalem was divided in two: West Jerusalem, which covered an area of about 38 square kilometers, was under Israeli control, and East Jerusalem, which contained an area of some 6 sq. km, was ruled by Jordan. The famous Mandelbaum gate used to separate the Western part from the Eastern part. Communication between both parts was limited. Special permits were necessary to allow the Arabs of Israel to come to visit the Holy places or their families living in the Eastern part.

In June 1967, following the 1967 War, Israel annexed some 70 sq. km to the municipal boundaries of West Jerusalem, and imposed Israeli law. These annexed territories included not only the part of Jerusalem that had been under Jordanian rule, but also an additional 64 square kilometers, most of which had belonged to 28 villages in the West Bank, and part of which belonged to the municipalities of Bethlehem and Beit Jala such as Beit Safafa. Following their annexation, the area of West Jerusalem tripled in size, and Jerusalem became the largest city in Israel.

Regarding Jerusalem we have two narratives. For Israel, Jerusalem is not an occupied Territory. It belongs to Israel from the time of King David who conquered it and made it his capital. It is the City where the Holiest Jewish site, the Temple, was built. Therefore it should remain its capital for ever. For Palestinians, the Arab and Moslem world, East Jerusalem is an occupied city which should become the capital of the future Palestinian State.

Because of this dual vision, many embassies refused to move to Jerusalem on the basis that Tel Aviv is the capital until a solution is found to the Jerusalem question. In fact, most of the World embassies, including

the American Embassy, are collocated in Tel Aviv. In Jerusalem, instead, there exist around 12 General consulates with special status. Since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, these Consulates have held the status of a quasi-embassy. The Consulates are responsible for the area of the *Corpus Separatum* and the disputed territories. The Consulates' districts include Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The countries which operate these consulates do not regard them as diplomatic missions to Israel or Palestine, but as diplomatic missions to Jerusalem. And the heads of these missions do not submit letters of credence to the Israeli president, PLO Chairman, PNA president, nor to any other head of state.

Some of the countries with consulates-general in Jerusalem maintain contacts with the Palestinian National Authority and Palestine Liberation Organization in the consulate-general's responsibilities. Most of the countries with consulates-general in Jerusalem have separate embassies in Tel Aviv that are accredited to Israel.²

These countries are USA, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Turkey, Sweden, Greece etc. The Holy See has done the same under the name of Apostolic Delegation. This means that the Holy See and the other nine countries did not accept the new situation which was born in Jerusalem after its annexation in 1967.

Our third and main consideration:

3- The Holy See and Jerusalem

How has the Vatican's position on Jerusalem developed over the past 50 years? In the beginning, the Holy See supported the proposal for internationalizing the territory, the "*Corpus Separatum*" called for by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 of November 29, 1947.

In the years that followed, although the objective of internationalization was shown to be unattainable, the Holy See continued to call for the protection of the Holy City's identity. It consistently drew attention to the need for an international commitment in this regard. To this end, the Holy See has consistently called for an international juridical instrument, which is what is meant by the phrase "an internationally guaranteed special status."

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_diplomatic_missions_in_Israel

At the present time, while maintaining the request for a special status internationally guaranteed, emphasis moves to Jerusalem in a global context and to the preservation of its identity and vocation: the holy places, the areas surrounding them, guarantees for everybody of their own cultural and religious identity, freedom of religion and conscience for the inhabitants and the pilgrims, and the broader cultural dimension.ö

a) Urgency to find a solution to the Jerusalem question

In most negotiations, the Jerusalem question has been placed at the bottom of the agenda. It is understandable that the difficulty and delicacy of the question of Jerusalem have meant that it has been left till last. But we all know, and the Israelis and the Palestinians are the first in this, that peace and coexistence in the Holy Land and Middle East have no future, unless an answer is found to the political question of Jerusalem. Allow me to quote once again from "Redemptionis Anno" of 1984, in which His Holiness Pope John Paul II wrote: "I am convinced that the failure to find an adequate solution to the question of Jerusalem, and the resigned postponement of the problem, only compromise further the longed-for peaceful and just settlement of the crisis of the whole Middle East."

b) Extending representation at the negotiating table

The universal vocation of Jerusalem requires, according to the Holy See, that any possible solution should have the support of the three monotheistic Religions, both at the local level and at the international level. Besides, as they are being proposed, the negotiations are expected to include the participation of the sponsors of the Peace Process and other parties could also be invited to contribute. The Holy See believes in the importance of extending representation at the negotiating table: in order to be sure that no aspect of the problems is overlooked and to affirm that the whole International Community is responsible for the uniqueness and sacredness of this incomparable City.

c) A solution based on international law

The Holy See believes that there is an obligation to find an öadequateö solution to the problems of Jerusalem. What applies to the Occupied Territories or disputed Territories applies as well to Jerusalem which means the application of international law.

On his arrival in Bethlehem on 22nd March 2000, John Paul spoke about a solution on the basis of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions and declarations: (He said)

“In the international forum, my predecessors and I have repeatedly proclaimed that there would be no end to the sad conflict in the Holy Land without stable guarantees for the rights of all the peoples involved, on the basis of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions and declarations”

d) A recommended special Statute internationally guaranteed for Jerusalem

JP II in 1984 mentioned clearly the special status and the international guarantees for Jerusalem: *“There should be found, with good will, a concrete and just solution by which different interests and aspirations can be provided for in a harmonious and stable form, and be safeguarded in an adequate and efficacious manner by a special Statute internationally guaranteed so that no party could jeopardize it.”*

Looking to Jerusalem, the Holy See continues to ask that it be protected by "a special internationally guaranteed Statute".

What is meant by this?

In the Holy See's view: - the historical and material characteristics of the City, as well as its religious and cultural characteristics, must be preserved, and perhaps today it is necessary to speak of restoring and safeguarding those still existing; - there must be equality of rights and treatment for those belonging to the communities of the three religions found in the City, in the context of the freedom of spiritual, cultural, civic and economic activities; - the Holy Places situated in the City must be preserved, and the rights of freedom of religion and worship, and of access, for residents and pilgrims alike, whether from the Holy Land itself or from other parts of the world, must be safeguarded.

A special statute would seek to correct the inequalities that may affect the residents of the city in matter of services, infra-structures, health, housing and education.

e) What about the "extraterritoriality" of the Holy Places?

At stake is the basic question of preserving and protecting the identity of the Holy City in its entirety, in every aspect. For example, the simple "extraterritoriality" of the Holy Places, with the assurance that pilgrims would be able to visit them without hindrance, would not suffice. The identity of the City includes a sacred character which belongs not just to the individual sites or monuments, as if these could be separated from one

another or isolated from the respective communities. The sacred character involves Jerusalem in its entirety, its holy places and its communities with their schools, hospitals, and cultural, social and economic activities.

Such a statement about a just solution according to "the parameters of international law and the resolutions of the United Nations" was repeated on many occasions by the different Popes.

f) Reconciliation within Jerusalem

The Holy See mentioned very often the term reconciliation between the two peoples and the three religions which exist in the Holy City. John Paul II in 1984: *"Indeed, in so far as she is the homeland of the hearts of all the spiritual descendants of Abraham who hold her very dear... Jerusalem stands out as a symbol of coming together, of union, and of universal peace for the human family."* As such, Jerusalem, therefore, strongly yearns for peace worldwide, especially for those who worship the one, great God, the merciful Father of the peoples. Sadly, though, John Paul says *"it must be acknowledged that Jerusalem continues to be the cause of daily conflict, violence and partisan reprisals."*

The Vatican wants to be a protagonist in this reconciliation. In this sense the speech of Pope Benedict to President Peres was moving. He requested peace between Palestinians and Israelis because both are his friends and he does not want that his friends suffer at the hands of each other. Listen to the tone of the speech:

"I wish to put on record that I came to visit this country as a friend of the Israelis, just as I am a friend of the Palestinian people. Friends enjoy spending time in one another's company, and they find it deeply distressing to see one another suffer. No friend of the Israelis and the Palestinians can fail to be saddened by the continuing tension between your two peoples. No friend can fail to weep at the suffering and loss of life that both peoples have endured over the last six decades. Allow me to make this appeal to all the people of these lands: No more bloodshed! No more fighting! No more terrorism! No more war! Instead let us break the vicious circle of violence. Let there be lasting peace based on justice, let there be genuine reconciliation and healing. Let it be universally recognized that the State of Israel has the right to exist, and to enjoy peace and security within internationally agreed borders. Let it be likewise acknowledged that the Palestinian people have a right to a sovereign independent homeland, to live with dignity and to travel freely. Let the two-state solution become a reality, not remain a dream."

g) But reconciliation needs forgiveness

In his arrival speech in Bethlehem on May 13, 2009, Pope Benedict said in front of President Abbas there can be *“No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness”* (*Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace*). Benedict pleaded with all the parties to this long-standing conflict *“to put aside whatever grievances and divisions still stand in the way of reconciliation, and to reach out with generosity and compassion to all alike, without discrimination.”* With common sense and sound reasoning, he puts the matter very simply that a *“Just and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the Middle East can only be achieved through a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect, in which the rights and dignity of all are acknowledged and upheld.”* His plea to all leaders in the process is *“to make a renewed commitment to work towards these goals.”* In particular calling on the international community *“to bring its influence to bear in favor of a solution.”*

The same idea was repeated courageously in Aida camp on May 13, 2009, in front of the wall: *“On both sides of the wall, great courage is needed if fear and mistrust is to be overcome, if the urge to retaliate for loss or injury is to be resisted. It takes magnanimity to seek reconciliation after years of fighting.”* All of us know that in any relationship peace is achieved when the parties to a conflict are *“willing to move beyond their grievances and work together towards common goals, each taking seriously the concerns and fears of the other, striving to build an atmosphere of trust. In this light, Benedict states. There has to be a willingness to take bold and imaginative initiatives towards reconciliation: if each insists on prior concessions from the other, the result can only be stalemate.”*

Conclusion

1. The Holy See asks that Jerusalem be respected for its universal and unparalleled vocation, for its being a treasure and patrimony of the whole world.
2. It is the view of the Holy See that every exclusive claim - be it religious or political - is contrary to the logic proper to the very City itself. I must insist: every citizen of Jerusalem and every person who visits Jerusalem should embody the message of dialogue, coexistence and respect evoked by the City. Exclusive claims cannot be backed up by numerical or historical criteria only.
3. Having said that, I must add that there is nothing to prevent Jerusalem, in its unity and uniqueness, becoming the symbol and the

national Centre of both the Peoples that claim it as their Capital. But if Jerusalem is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims who live here, it is also sacred to many people from every part of the world who look to it as their spiritual capital or travel there on pilgrimage, to pray and to meet their brethren in faith. It is the cultural heritage of everybody, including those who visit it simply as tourists.

4. Remain three final remarks:

- a) The urgency to find a solution to the Jerusalem question, a solution based on international law. The Holy See often recommended special Statute internationally guaranteed for Jerusalem so that no party can jeopardize it.
- b) But international law cannot solve the Jerusalem question if there is no real cohabitation between the different components of the city. This cohabitation requires reconciliation and forgiveness between its inhabitants. It is not the case today. Therefore the religious leaders have an important role in promoting this reconciliation.
- c) Finally and in order to underline it, I conclude with the idea of extending representation at the negotiating table. Why?

Israelis and Palestinians, in the desired search for a political settlement of their conflict over Jerusalem, cannot overlook the fact that the City has aspects which go far beyond their legitimate national interests. They, therefore, have to take these aspects into consideration in looking for a lasting political and territorial solution. In the same way, they should give due consideration to the efforts and demands of all legitimately interested parties. In this, Israelis and Palestinians must not feel in any way restricted, but rather honored and reassured.