

UNITED NATIONS CONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR PALESTINE

COMMITTEE ON JERUSALEM.

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On Good Friday 15 April 1949, His Holiness Pius XII addressed to all Archbishops and Bishops of the Catholic world an Encyclical Letter on the subject of the Holy Places of Palestine. The full text is reproduced below for the information of the Committee on Jerusalem.

The Passion of Our Redeemer, vividly recalled to us during these days of Holy Week, makes the minds of Christians turn with the deepest reverence to that Land which Divine Providence willed to be the cherished home-country of the Word Incarnate, and in which Christ Jesus lived His earthly life, shed His Blood and died.

Yet at the present time, as we recall the memory of those Holy Places with more ardent devotion, Our heart fills to overflowing with the keenest anxiety because of the difficult and uncertain situation which there prevails.

During this past year, We have urged you insistently, Venerable Brethren, in successive Letters, that all should join in public prayer, to implore the cessation of the conflict which has brought destruction and death to that Land, and a settlement of the dispute on principles of justice, which, while fully safeguarding the freedom of Catholics, would at the same time provide guarantees for the safety of those most holy places.

And now that the fighting is over, or at least has been brought to a halt by the recent truce, We offer Our most sincere and heartfelt thanks to God, and ~~voice~~ Our emphatic approval of the efforts of those whose noble endeavour has contributed to the re-establishment of peace.

But although the fighting has ceased we are still a long way from quiet and order in Palestine. For We are still receiving complaints from those who have every right to deplore the profanation of sacred buildings, images, charitable institutions and the destruction of the peaceful homes of religious communities. Piteous appeals still reach Us from

numerous refugees, of every age and condition, who have been forced by the disastrous war to emigrate and even to live in exile in concentration camps, a prey to destitution, contagious disease and perils of every sort.

We are not unmindful of the considerable help afforded by public and private agencies for the relief of these suffering thousands; and We Ourselves, continuing the work of charity, organized from the beginning of Our Pontificate have left nothing undone, within Our means, to meet the more urgent needs of this unhappy multitude.

But the condition of these exiles is so critical and unstable that it cannot longer be allowed to continue. While, therefore, we encourage all generous and noble souls to put forth their best effort to aid these homeless people in their sorrow and destitution, We make earnest appeal to those responsible that justice may be done to all who have been driven far from their homes by the turmoil of war and whose most ardent wish now is to turn once more to the ways of peace.

During these holy days, this is Our fondest hope, and likewise that of all Christian peoples; that peace may finally shed its light over the Land where He, Who is called by the sacred prophets "Prince of Peace" (Is.9;6) and by the Apostles of the Gentiles "Peace itself" (Ep.2;14), lived His life and shed His Blood.

We have never ceased to pray repeatedly for this enduring and genuine peace. And to the end that it might be made enduring at the earliest possible moment, We have already insisted in Our Encyclical Letter "In Multiplicibus"; that the time has come when Jerusalem and its vicinity, where the precious memorials of the life and death and of the Divine Redeemer are preserved, should be accorded and legally guaranteed an "international" status, which in the present circumstances seems to offer the best and most satisfactory protection for these sacred monuments". (A.A.S. a 1948, pag, 435).

We cannot help repeating here that same declaration, encouraged as We are, by the thought that it may also be an inspiration to Our children. Let them, wherever they are, use every legitimate means to persuade the rulers of nations, and those whose duty it is to settle this important question,

to obtain for Jerusalem and its surroundings a juridical status whose stability under present circumstances can only be adequately assured by a united effort on the part of those nations that love peace and respect the rights of others.

Besides, it is of the utmost importance that due immunity and protection be guaranteed to all the Holy Places of Palestine not only in Jerusalem, but also in the other cities and villages.

Not a few of these places have suffered serious loss and damage owing to the upheaval and devastation of the war. Since they are religious memorials of such moment - objects of veneration to the whole world and an incentive and support to Christian piety - these places should also be suitably protected by definite statute guaranteed by an "international" agreement.

We are well aware of the intense desire of Our children, following ancient tradition, to go on pilgrimage once more to those places from which they were barred by the disturbed conditions that prevailed; the year of atonement which is at hand makes these desires all the stronger. It is only natural that during this period the faithful should be more eager than ever to visit that Land which was the scene of our divine redemption. God grant that these longings be satisfied as soon as possible.

To bring about this happy result, it will be necessary, of course, to make such arrangement as will allow pilgrims to approach freely those sacred edifices so that each may profess his devotion without let or hindrance and remain there free from fear and danger. It must also be agreed that it would be objectionable for pilgrims to see these places profaned by sinful and worldly entertainments, which are assuredly an offence to the Divine Redeemer and to the Christian conscience.

Moreover, We very much desire that the many Catholic Institutions which have been erected in Palestine to help the poor, to educate youth and give hospitality to visitors, may be enabled, as is fitting, to carry on undisturbed the work they did so laudably in the past.

Nor can We omit to point out that all those rights regarding the Holy Places, which Catholics during many centuries have acquired and time and again defended valiantly, and which Our Predecessors have solemnly and effectively vindicated, should be preserved inviolate.

Such, Venerable Brethren, are the thoughts We wished to make known to you.

Encourage the faithful committed to your charge to be even more concerned about the conditions in Palestine and have them make their lawful requests known, positively and unequivocally, to the rulers of nations. But let them especially implore unceasingly the Help of Him, Who is the Ruler of men and nations. May God look down with mercy on the whole world, but particularly on that land which was bedewed with the Blood of the Incarnate Word, so that the charity of Jesus Christ, which alone can bring tranquillity and peace, may conquer all hatred and strife.

Meantime, may the Apostolic Blessing, which We lovingly impart to you, Venerable Brethren, and to all your flock, be a pledge of heavenly gifts and a token of Our affection.

Given at Rome, St. Peter's, on the fifteenth day of the month of April, Good Friday, in the year 1949, the eleventh of Our Pontificate.

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