



Who are the Christians in Israel today?

31.03.2017 | Fr. David Neuhaus

JERUSALEM – On Tuesday December 6, 2016, a conference entitled “Who are the Christians in Israel today?” was held and presided by Fr. David Neuhaus, Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel, at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute. Please find below his intervention.

In January 2015, emeritus Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah addressed a congress at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on the Christian Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel. He was insistent that the Christians in Israel have a vocation, saying, “The vocation of the Christian is to point the way to peace and to walk in its path. This peace must be built on the dignity of each human being, Palestinian and Jewish. Blessed are the peace makers for they truly serve God and humanity, all humanity, Palestinians and Israelis and the whole region.” Who are the Christians in Israel today?

Christians in Israel belong to a mosaic of communities.

– Firstly, there is a great diversity of Christian denominations. Byzantine (or Greek) Orthodox and Catholic (who together make up the vast majority of the Christians in Israel), Roman (or Latin) Catholic, Maronites, Armenians (Apostolic and Catholic), Syrian (Orthodox and Catholic), Copts, Ethiopians, Anglicans, Lutherans and a plethora of Evangelical groups. There are also thousands of Messianic Jews, who believe in Christ but do not identify themselves as Christians.

– Secondly, in Israel today there is a great diversity among Christians with regard to their origins and language. They also live in a diversity of socio-political and cultural contexts:

- the local, rooted Christians are for the most part Arabic speaking, identify themselves as Palestinians and live integrated within Palestinian Arab society in Israel. The majority of this population lives in Galilee, in Haifa and the surrounding villages and in the towns of Jaffa, Ramleh and Lydda;
- long term resident expatriates mainly serve in Church structures and institutions. Most of the Christian hierarchical religious leadership is still from this group: Greeks in the Greek Orthodox Church, Italians, other Europeans as well as a growing number of Asians and Africans in the Roman Catholic Church, clerics from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iraq in the Eastern rite Churches, English, German, Swedish and American clerics in the Anglican and Lutheran Churches; etc.
- an increasing number of Christians of Jewish and other diverse origins live within Jewish Israeli, Hebrew speaking society. Most of these have immigrated to Israel in recent decades from the countries of the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as well as from Ethiopia;
- a large number of Christians have come to Israel in recent years as migrants – labor migrants, coming predominantly from Asia, and asylum seekers, coming predominantly from Africa.

Christian citizens in Israel today make up about 2.4% of the total population. This constitutes a major decrease in their proportion of the population since 1948, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs, Muslim and Christian, left the country as refugees and hundreds of thousands of

Jews entered the country as new immigrants. Until 1948, Christians made up about 10% of the population.

In the State of Israel, there are:

- circa 120 000 to 130 000 Christian citizens who are Palestinian Arab and Arabic speaking,
- circa 30 000 to 40 000 Christian citizens who are integrated into the Jewish Israeli Hebrew speaking population, predominantly from the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In addition to Christian citizens, there are:

- circa 160 000 Christian migrants (circa 65 000 Christian migrant workers, legal and illegal, (mostly from Asia), circa 35 000 Christian African asylum seekers (from Eritrea) and circa 60 000 Christians who have overstayed their tourist visas to look for employment (mostly from Eastern Europe).

The State of Israel was established in 1948 however, most Christian communities have maintained older institutional structures that have jurisdiction beyond the borders of this modern political entity. Many Churches maintain their administrative center in Israeli occupied East Jerusalem and have jurisdiction over the faithful in Israel and Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip), some even stretching further and including Jordan, Cyprus and beyond. Thus many Christian Palestinian Arab citizens of the State of Israel have ongoing communal relations with their coreligionists in Palestine and Jordan.

A major issue facing Christian Arabs in Israel is emigration from their homeland. This trend, which began in the nineteenth century, is one of the most important threats to the Christian communities in the Middle East today. There is a serious brain drain in the community in Israel as the young, the educated and the professionals do indeed emigrate leaving behind a more and more impoverished community. Christians also have smaller families than both Muslims and Jews. The result is that despite an overall slight increase in the number of Christians from year to year, there is a significant decrease in their proportion in the overall population. The concomitant immigration of Christian workers and refugees into Israel has resulted in the creation of vibrant communities that live in fragile circumstances, however, their members often rootless are, for the most part, without permanent legal status in the country.

What are the challenges that the Christians in Israel face today?

Defining the challenges that face the Christian communities in Israel today is one way to describe their present reality.

Identity in diversity and unity: Christian Palestinian Arabs, citizens of Israel

How do Christian Palestine Arab citizens of Israel define their identity? Many describe them as being in the midst of an identity crisis. Some see themselves trapped between Jewish nationalism, which marginalizes them and discriminates against them, and Arab nationalism, increasingly Islamic in its expression, that alienates them.

The fragmentation of the Christian community along denominational lines contributes to an identity crisis. History has divided Christian Arabs into a variety of denominations, whose origins are to be found in the first millennium theological debates, the Reformation, the creation of Eastern Catholic Churches and consequent structural fragmentation. Byzantines, Latins and so-called Monophysites (Armenians, Syrians, Copts, Ethiopians) compete and coexist in the Holy Places and an even greater variety of Christian denominations compete and coexist in the daily life of the community

(Eastern rite Catholic Churches (Byzantine, Maronite, Syrian, Armenian, Chaldean), Anglicans, various Protestants and Evangelicals). For many, these divisions and the resulting rivalries are a source of scandal. Others insist today that their primary religious identity is Christian rather than Byzantine, Latin or Lutheran. Ecumenical dialogue is not only a formality but a day to day reality, in which Christian Palestinian Arabs in Israel, constantly aware of their small numbers, proclaim: “united we survive, divided we disappear”.

The events of 1948 led to the creation of the State of Israel and the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, Muslims and Christians. The continuing conflict has produced a series of wars in which the Arab countries have been repeatedly defeated. Fragmentation of the Christian Palestinian Arabs is not only denominational but also geo-political. After 1948, Christian Palestinian Arabs, like their Muslim compatriots, found themselves in three different socio-political realities. Some became citizens in the newly created State of Israel, some found themselves in territories (East Jerusalem and the West Bank) annexed to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan or in territories (the Gaza Strip) occupied by Egypt, while many others found themselves in a diaspora, living as refugees. In 1967, Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, establishing a military occupation in these territories.

Within the State of Israel, all Arab citizens of the state, Muslim, Christian and Druze, are subject to second-class status, discrimination and marginalization. For many decades, the fight for equality strengthened the bonds among Christians and between Muslims and Christians. This struggle was led by secular political parties, in which Christians often had leading roles, the most important of which was the Communist Party. Generations of nominally Christian politicians like Communists Tawfiq and George Toubi, Emil Habibi and Saliba Khamis and nationalists like Azmi Bishara and Anglican clerics Shehade Shehade and Riah Abu El-Assal worked hand in hand with secular Muslims in the fight against discrimination and marginalization in Israel. However, a rising Islamic Movement in Israel has challenged the secular parties. In recent years, tension based upon the religious divide among Christians, Muslims and Druze has sometimes characterized local conflicts in different Arab locations, the best-known example being the demand by certain Islamic activists to construct a large mosque alongside the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth. The Islamic Movement has fomented these conflicts, as have certain elements in the Israeli administration, which see advantage in dividing the Arab minority.

Elements within the Israeli administration have consistently followed a policy of “divide and rule” with regard to the Arab minority. In the 1950s, the Israeli administration worked hard to separate the Druze community from the rest of the Arab population. Young Druze were drafted into the army alongside Jews (Christians and Muslim are not enlisted) and the State promoted a discourse that defined the Druze as a people distinct from the Arabs, with the support of the Druze traditional, religious leadership. Similar attempts to separate the Christians from other Arabs failed in that period but have been renewed in recent years and are gaining impetus, supported by some Christian Arabs. The attempt is to foster a “Christian” identity that no longer defines itself in terms of the Arab world. This current dwells upon the fears of rising Islamic radicalism and promises of material gain for Christians, hoping to integrate themselves within the privileged Jewish sector. The most blatant form of this attempt to reformulate identity comes in the attempts to enlist Christian Arab youth into the Israeli army. Led by a Greek Orthodox priest, Father Gabriel Naddaf, and a Maronite Israeli army lieutenant, Shadi Khalloul, this current promotes the “Aramaic” rather than Palestinian Arab identity of the Christians in Israel. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land published a letter on this subject in 2013. The Commission said: “The Church sees her task as one of educating our young people to accept themselves as they are, giving them a balanced human, national and Christian education and an awareness of their history, their rootedness in the land and a sense of identity that integrates the different elements (Palestinian Arab, Christian and citizen of Israel) rather than repressing any one of these elements. The bishops and priests must help the faithful in the midst of this “crisis of identity”.

The ongoing struggle for Palestinian independence has provided a platform on which Christian Palestinian Arabs can not only surmount their denominational divisions but also unite with Muslims in a joint program of action. Palestinian Arab Church leaders have been outspoken in their condemnation of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and their demand for Palestinian statehood, among the most prominent being emeritus Latin (Roman Catholic) Patriarch of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah, Greek Orthodox Bishop Atallah Hanna, emeritus Anglican Bishop Riah Abu El Assal and Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan. Christian Palestinian centers to promote Christian unity and solidarity with the Palestinian cause have sprung up in the past decades to strengthen this consciousness of being both Christian and Palestinian. Among these can be mentioned the Al-Liqa' Center in Bethlehem, founded by Palestinian Arab Israeli citizen Greek Catholic Dr. Geris Khoury, and the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Center in Jerusalem, founded by Palestinian Arab Israeli citizen Anglican Canon Naim Ateek. Some leaders of the Palestinian evangelical communities have also integrated into this ecumenical effort to unite Christian Palestinians around the national cause. One example is the collaboration among Palestinian theologians in the composition of the Kairos document that formulated a Palestinian "cry of hope" in the face of the continuing Israeli occupation of Palestine. Within Israel, one particularly Christian face to the struggle for Palestinian rights has been the campaign to rebuild the destroyed Christian Palestinian Arab villages of Ikrit and Kufr Bir'am on the northern Israeli border, which were evacuated in 1948 and subsequently destroyed. This campaign was given particular prominence by former Greek Catholic Archbishop of Galilee, Yusuf Raya, who had arrived in Israel as archbishop in 1968 after participating in the struggle for African American rights in the US south, alongside Martin Luther King. Archbishop Raya was one of the first Church leaders who spoke out for the rights of the Palestinian Arab citizens in Israel.

The ascendance of radical Islamic options, which have succeeded in separating the Gaza Strip from the West Bank, has pushed Christians into the margins. A vocal Islamic Movement inside Israel has created concerns among Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel too. The latest series of uprisings in the Arab world, beginning at the end of 2010, has revealed the deep desire of the masses for freedom and dignity but has also opened a Pandora's box of radical Islamic alternatives to secular Arab regimes, constituting a palpable threat to the Christian dream of equality and integration in the Arab world.

At the same time, the growth of new communities in Israel, especially Evangelical and Pentecostal, have also led some Christians to take their distance from both the traditional Churches and their Muslim neighbors. "Born again" Christians (mutajadidin in Arabic) sometimes justify some aspects of Jewish nationalism, Zionism, usually based upon their literal reading of the Old Testament. These communities are often in some kind of relationship with parallel communities of Christians living in the Jewish, Hebrew speaking milieu.

Christian Palestinian Arab citizens of the State of Israel play an important role within the Arab minority. Christians are often highly educated and serve in the most prominent professions as doctors, social workers, lawyers, engineers, academics and business people. The best Arab schools in the State of Israel are Christian schools and some of these are the best schools in the country overall. Much of the local Arabic language press, theater and literature are the fruit of Christian endeavor. One Christian Palestinian Arab writer, Anton Shammas from the entirely Greek Catholic village of Fassouta, has even been considered one of the leading Hebrew language authors, after the 1986 publication of his novel Arabesques. Christians also have a leading role in organizations that combat discrimination and campaign for human rights. At present, one of the Israeli Supreme Court judges is a Christian, Salim Joubran. A long series of Christian parliamentarians has served in the Israeli Knesset, most of them members of the Communist and other Arab parties, including two who serve in the present Knesset, Basel Ghattas (Balad) and Aida Touma-Suleiman (Joint List).

In March 2014, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries in the

Holy Land published a statement in the continuing attempts of the Israeli authorities to separate Christians from their Palestinian Arab roots. The statement said: “We, the heads of the Catholic Church in Israel, would like to clarify that it is not the right or the duty of the Israeli civil authorities to tell us who we are. In fact, most of our faithful in Israel are Palestinian Arabs. They are obviously Christians too. They are also citizens of the State of Israel. We do not see any contradiction in this definition of identity: Christian Palestinian Arabs who are citizens of the State of Israel. (...) If the Knesset indeed seeks the good of the citizens of Israel, it should invest every effort to legislate laws that remove discrimination, whether it be against Jews or Arabs, Christians, Muslims or Druze. In creating a society that unites all citizens in equality and strives for justice and peace, there will remain no reason to fear for anybody and Israelis and Palestinians, Christians, Muslims and Druze, can live together in mutual respect and dignity, working together to build a better future.”

Emigration and immigration: the “new Christians” in Israel

Alongside emigration of Christian Palestinian Arabs from their homeland, there has been a significant immigration of non-Arab Christians, who have settled within Jewish, Hebrew speaking society in Israel. These non-Arab Christian populations have created the blossoming of Christian communities and the establishment of makeshift churches in places where the Church had not been present, at the very heart of Jewish towns and cities. Today, south Tel Aviv has one of the largest Christian populations in Israel, tens of thousands of Christians, belonging to a plethora of churches, Orthodox, Eastern, Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Messianic, as well a diversity of sects. This population, diverse in its origins, introduces new forms of Christianity to the State of Israel.

Christian members of Jewish families and Christians claiming Jewish ancestry have been migrating to Israel since 1948. Granted many of the same privileges as their Jewish co-nationals, they identify mostly as Jews. Among the most well-known examples of Christians of Jewish origin who sought to immigrate to Israel are the Roman Catholic Polish Carmelite priest Osvald Daniel Rufeisen, whose demand to be recognized as a Jew in Israel in 1959 made headlines, and the Roman Catholic Dominican priest, Bruno Hussar, who founded the Jewish-Arab cooperative village, Neve Shalom. The “Brother Daniel” case made some aware of this new population of Christians. Structures that were set up to serve their religious needs made Hebrew the language of a Christian population for the first time in the history of the Church. The Catholic founded “Work of Saint James” (that became a Vicariate in 1990) has continually promoted the possibility of being Catholic, Israeli and a Hebrew speaker, integrated within the Jewish population.

Today, after the massive waves of immigration from the countries of the ex-Soviet Union (about one million people between 1990 and 2005), the non-Arab Christians in Israel number about one quarter of the Christian citizens (between 30 to 40 000). This is about 10% of the immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union whom the State defines as being non-Jews. Under pressure to assimilate into the Jewish population, some hide their Christian identities, adopt Jewish customs and even convert to Judaism. The assimilation process is even more successful with the children of these immigrants who are educated in the secular, Jewish Israeli school system, with almost no exposure to the Christian faith and traditions of their parents. The State promotes conversion to Judaism for those perceived as having Jewish heritage and this is particularly the case within the Israeli army, where young people are encouraged to enter the “mainstream” by becoming formally Jewish. The Institute for Jewish Studies began its work in 1999, and set its sights on converting thousands of the non-Jewish Russians annually and the Israeli army has its own parallel courses for non-Jewish soldiers.

Tens of thousands of Christian migrant workers and asylum seekers, the majority from Asia and Africa, have boosted the number of Christians in Israel. At the beginning of the 1990s, a stream of

African and Asian migrant workers entered Israel, replacing cheap Arab labor as the authorities increasingly impeded Palestinians from the Occupied Territories from entering Israel. An increasingly wealthy Israeli society also began to import tens of thousands of caregivers for the elderly, the handicapped and the sick. Although many migrant workers remained for a limited time in Israel, returning to their countries of origin when their permits expired or when they were deported, some migrants have established families in Israel. The children of migrant families have been integrated into the public school system, becoming Hebrew speakers and largely identifying with their country of adoption. The arrival of the children and their schooling facilitated lengthier stays for their parents and some migrant families have been granted permanent residence in recent years.

After 2007, when Europe closed her southern borders to Africans fleeing civil war and famine through North Africa, an increasing number of asylum seekers came to Israel, by way of Egypt, making their way across the Sinai border. The first stream was mainly from south Sudan and Darfur. They were fast followed by increasing numbers of Eritreans. Israel cannot deport these populations back to their countries of origin because of international conventions but refused to process the individuals who came into the country as refugees, giving them instead group protection, which can be withdrawn whenever the authorities see fit. Group protection was withdrawn, for example, when South Sudan proclaimed independence and thousands of Sudanese Christians were deported back to a country that was still in the throes of violence and famine. Increasingly, Israel has sought to discourage Eritrean and other African asylum seekers from coming into the country by setting up quasi-prison facilities for those entering and fortifying the border with Egypt. At the same time, those already in Israel have been pressured to leave, a departure facilitated by the signing of voluntary deportation papers. Nonetheless, the children born to these asylum seekers are integrated in the Israeli Jewish Hebrew language school system, facilitating a partial integration of their families too.

The new Christian populations constitute a dilemma for a state that defines itself as Jewish. Whereas, Christian Arabs are clearly distinguished from the Jewish mainstream because they generally live within an Arabic speaking milieu, geographically and institutionally separate from the Jewish Hebrew speaking milieu, many of the new Christians live at the very heart of Jewish society. The new Christian Israeli citizens (mostly from the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) make no political demands on the State but do seek total social integration. Their children are educated with Jewish children, serve in the army and intermarry with Jews. Small signs of recognition of this Christian presence have appeared. One example is that since 1996, Christian soldiers in the army can swear their oath of loyalty to the military on a copy of the New Testament. The challenge for these Christians is transmitting their faith to their children in the midst of a strongly secular and stridently Jewish society. For those Christians who are not citizens, the labor migrants and asylum seekers, the precarious living conditions, exploitation in the labor market, lack of social and medical benefits and growing racism (particularly directed against the Africans) are enormous challenges. Yet here too, the generation born in Israel to labor migrants and asylum seekers is attracted to the vibrant secular Israeli culture and only rarely continues to frequent the Christian communities and churches in which their parents are at home.

These new Christian populations have also led to the establishment of new communities, many Evangelical, Pentecostal and other forms of African, Asian and Latin American faith communities. Many of them are charismatic and led by individual pastors, who rent premises in the neighborhoods in which the migrants live. Tens of shop, apartment and bomb shelter churches are spread throughout south Tel Aviv, the hub of migrant life. Foreign Evangelical and Pentecostal missionaries have also set up local organizations in Israel that not only gather the new Christians but also try to attract Jews and Muslims and Arabic-speaking Christians. Among the Evangelical and Pentecostals there is also a wide spread support for Christian Zionism and organizations like the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem or Bridges for Peace also engage in pro-Israel lobbying and fund-raising. The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, founded by

strongly Zionist Rabbi Yehiel Eckstein, encourages Jewish Christian dialogue and reconciliation based upon unwavering support for the State of Israel among Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

Suspicion of Christianity and Christians, based on theological arguments (“Christianity is idol worship”), historical hurt (“Christians have treated Jews badly”) and ideological animosity (“Christians side with Palestinians in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”) is present in Jewish Israeli society. This has created a discourse and practice of contempt in some Jewish circles in Israel leading to manifestations of anti-Christian sentiment in some areas: spitting at traditionally garbed clergy, spraying anti-Christian slogans on churches and institutions, damaging property and making fun of the Christian faith in the media. Particularly at risk in the face of anti-Christian sentiment are the groups of “Messianic Jews”, many of whom are new comers to Israel, who believe in Jesus Christ but insist that they are part of the Jewish people. They have been the focus of attacks in word and act by Jewish religious organizations that oppose Christian “mission” and promote anti-Christian discourse and policy.

Although some elements in Israeli society are working hard to educate Jews about Christianity, about the Christian minority in Israel and about the need for dialogue, much work remains to be done so that the Jewish majority can accept Christians and all other non-Jews as an integral part of Israeli society.

Institutions, service and inter-community relations

Christians in Israel live as a mosaic of diverse groups, submerged in worlds that are Muslim (within Arab society in Israel) and Jewish (mainstream Israeli society). Relations with Muslims and Jews are not marginal but are essential for the survival and welfare of these communities. The two majorities, however, are not always sensitive to the Christian presence. In reaction, Christians adopt a variety of strategies:

– assimilation: some Christians seek to resolve the tension of belonging to a marginal minority by seeking to assimilate within the majority, be it Muslim or Jewish. Although conversion to Islam or Judaism is rare, choices of behavior that camouflage Christian identity and underline belonging to the dominant majorities are sometimes adopted.

– dialogue: the Christian traditional leadership and some of the laity try to engage the majority, both Muslim and Jewish, in a dialogue that focuses on the need for a discourse of respect, equal rights, shared values and most importantly shared citizenship.

– withdrawal: many Christians, in the face of marginalization and discrimination, prefer to withdraw from the public sphere and create closed environments where Christians can feel comfortable. Trends in housing and schooling in recent decades have seen the enrolling of most Christian children in Christian private schools rather than in government schools and the creation of housing projects where Christians live isolated from their non-Christian neighbors.

– emigration – many Christians in the face of the challenges to being an Arab and/or a Christian in Israel, choose to seek a better future for themselves and their children in other countries, usually where Christians are the majority.

Despite the small number of Christians in Israel, the Christian institutional presence is very significant in areas where the Church has been traditionally present, predominantly in the Arab sector. This institutional presence was built up over centuries and particularly from the 19th century onwards included schools, hospitals, orphanages, shelters for the handicapped and the elderly that catered for Christians and an ever-increasing number of non-Christians. Most of these institutions were established by foreign Christians, particularly by Catholic religious orders and congregations. Today, these Christian institutions give prominence to a Christian community, even though small in number, in areas like Jaffa, Ramleh, Nazareth, Haifa and many towns and villages in Galilee. Educational institutions, medical facilities and welfare organisms constitute important arenas in which Christian discourse and values can be promoted in the larger society. The Christian institutional presence in Israel introduces the important reality of a Church that serves all and especially the neediest. As most of the institutions are situated in Arabic speaking areas, the outreach, beyond the Christian community, is predominantly to the Muslims.

The continued promotion of the Christian institutions at the service of the entire population must go hand in hand with the development of an appropriate Christian discourse about the world in which Christians live. It is this discourse that must also distinguish the Christian as a voice for justice, peace, pardon, reconciliation and selfless love. The Christian presence in Israel is not and will not be measured by its statistical importance but rather by the significance of its contribution to society, particularly in its service of education, health and relief work and in its language of love.

What future for the Christians in Israel?

Ongoing discrimination against and marginalization of Christians in Israel weakens already fragile communities that play a very positive role in the life of the country. However, Christians, perhaps more than all other residents of Israel today, are primarily threatened by the ongoing state of war between Israel and the Palestinians. The occupation of Palestinian lands, discrimination of Arab citizens in Israel, violence in the region and socio-political unrest are all elements that threaten the future of Christians as well as everyone else.

Prophets of doom predict that the Christians in Israel and throughout the Holy Land are disappearing and that the day will dawn when there might be no Christians in the area. Educated Christian Arabs are indeed migrating out of their homeland and those that stay are having fewer children. However, new Christian communities, however fragile, are being formed. Christians have the vocation to contemplate the future with hope, actively engaging the challenges of the present:

– Christian education needs to deepen a sense of belonging to the land and the particular vocation of being Christian in the Land made holy by the history of salvation.

– Christians need to confront the temptation to emigrate with a focus on this Christian vocation and at the same time maintain links with the Christian diaspora in order to garner support for those who stay.

– Christians need to unite more and more, not only across the divisions of denominational identities but also across the socio-political boundaries that originate in the diversity of origins and socio-political contexts. Christian Palestinian Arabs must accommodate the new Christians among them as equal members of the Church and new Christians must get to know their Palestinian

brothers and sisters and stand in solidarity with them.

– Christians need to engage in civil society, bringing to it a discourse that focuses on Gospel values like justice, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation as well as demanding the fostering of a civil city in which basic belonging is based upon citizenship rather than on religious, denominational or ethnic identity.

– Christians need to identify those Muslims and Jews who are allies in the struggle for a society in both Palestine and Israel in which freedom, equality, dignity and the respect for human rights are foundational.

– Christians from Israel need to play a greater role in the developing dialogue between Christians and Jews. This dialogue constitutes one of the most astonishing revolutions in the 20th century, making Christians and Jews partners and allies on many issues after centuries of suspicion and hostility. Christians in Israel are in the unique position of being the only Christian minority to live in a state in which the Jews are the majority.

David Neuhaus, son of German Jews, was born in South Africa. At the age of 15, he moved to Israel; with 26 years, he converted to the Roman Catholic faith. Neuhaus finished his studies in political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with a doctorate. In 1992 he joined to the SJ and on August 20, 1994 professed his perpetual vows. After his theological and philosophical training and study of theology and Scripture at the Jesuit Centre Sèvres in Paris and the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome Neuhaus received on 8 September 2000 his priestly ordination. Since 2001 he teaches at the Bethlehem University and at the Studium Theologicum Salesianum in Jerusalem, and at the Latin Patriarchate Seminary in Beit Jala. He is also Research Fellow at the Jewish Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. On March 15, 2009 David Neuhaus was appointed by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Fouad Twal, Patriarchal Vicar for the Hebrew-speaking Catholics.

Source: [Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem](#).