



Who Are the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem?

30.04.2014 | Malcolm Lowe

There is no individual or group that is empowered to act as "the voice of Palestinian Christians." It is not "the Palestinian Christians" but just one or two individuals who pen those public statements, even if these appear under a title that can vary from the respectable ("Heads of Churches") to the preposterous ("Kairos Palestine"). The only worthwhile question is whether the message is composed in a truly Christian spirit or is merely political agitation clothed in theological verbiage.

Christmas 2013 has been marred, once again, by petty Jew-haters in churches who pose as champions of the Palestinians. The details have been faithfully collected [here](#). Often they claim to be acting on behalf of "the Palestinian Christians." But the Palestinian Christians whom they evoke as witnesses may be merely some clique that has no authority to speak in the name of "Palestinian Christianity," such as the handful of has-beens and wannabes who authored the so-called [Kairos Palestine Document](#). Arguably, the "Heads of Churches in Jerusalem" is the only body that expresses the authentic opinion of Palestinian Christians. But even that assumption lacks a foundation, as we shall see.

The [2013 Christmas message](#) of the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem is, for sure, an admirable and exemplary statement of Christian theology that could guide all people of good will. It consoles the Christian victims of the contemporary Middle East without picking out anyone for blame or descending into partisan politics. Only fanatics, of whatever persuasion, could disagree with such expressions as: "Violence is seen as the only way to impose order and achieve security by some or as the only way to resist oppression and injustice by others. We firmly believe that violence is not the way and that the Jesus as the Prince of Peace came to show us not only how to be reconciled to God, but how to be reconciled to one another. Peace has to begin in the human heart as we recognize the common humanity which we share with every single person who has been created in God's image."

Who is the message talking about? As much about Syrians and Egyptians as about Israelis and Palestinians, as other parts of the message make clear, though without naming and shaming anyone. Just a few years ago, however, there was a marked bias toward the Palestinians in repeated messages issued in the name of the Heads of Churches, whether the regular messages every Christmas and Easter or ones responding to particular events. Sometimes the messages were stuffed with political demands upon Israeli governments and the various Palestinian factions.

The Misunderstandings of May

Those messages prompted an academic lady, Melanie A. May, to publish an annotated collection of nearly seventy of them: *Jerusalem Testament: Palestinian Christians Speak, 1988-2008* (Eerdmans, 2010). The [publisher's blurb](#) claims: "This book bears powerful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the faith and hope of Palestinian Christians living in the Occupied Territories. Melanie May introduces and presents the remarkable public statements made by the Jerusalem Heads of Churches over the course of two decades, from 1988 to 2008. Through Jerusalem Testament the voices of Palestinian pastors speak out on behalf of their own people, calling Christians worldwide to a new covenant with their brothers and sisters in and around Jerusalem."

Unfortunately, both the blurb and even the title of the book are not just misleading but false. The messages normally appear over thirteen signatures. Twelve are those of church leaders, typically in the following order: Greek Orthodox, Latin Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Maronite, Episcopal (Anglican), Lutheran, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic. The thirteenth name, that of the Franciscan Custos, is inserted in fourth place, following the three historic Patriarchs.

Seven of them are not Palestinian churches: the (two) Armenian, Coptic, (two) Syrian, Ethiopian and Maronite ones. They are headed by non-Palestinians and their members are not Palestinians or even ethnic Arabs. The Copts, for example, are descendents of the pre-Islamic population of Egypt, since Islamic law forbids the marriage of Muslim women to Christian men, while reckoning as Muslims the children of a Muslim man and a Christian woman. The Armenians and Syrians are descendants of refugees from the genocides of World War I in Turkey; there were massive killings of Syrian and Greek Christians in Turkey as well as of Armenians. The Maronites, as one of their Heads once charmingly explained to us, call themselves "Arabs" when they are politically weak but "Phoenicians" when they are politically strong.

The other six bodies include Palestinians, but the Greek Orthodox Patriarch is always Greek (together with most of the upper hierarchy), the Franciscan Custos is an Italian, and the Greek Catholics are usually headed by a Syrian, though currently by an Egyptian whose mother was Greek. Thus only three of the thirteen Heads were Palestinians during the period of Professor May's book (and are today), though within living memory even these three always came from Italy (the Latins), the UK (the Episcopalists) and Germany (the Lutherans, before the Arab congregations separated from the Germans and became an independent church).

On the other hand, their constituencies are not only Palestinian, but include Israel and Jordan. The Greek Patriarchate stretches as far as the Gulf States, the Latin Patriarchate includes Cyprus, the Episcopal Diocese includes Lebanon and Syria, while the Franciscans come from all over the world. Moreover, with the exception of the Arab Lutherans, the churches that have Arab members have far more of them within the State of Israel than in the territories of the Palestinian Authority.

Thus it is ridiculous to speak of the thirteen as if they were Palestinian churches headed by Palestinian Christians. This error, however, is not peculiar to Professor May but just taken over from what almost all pro-Palestinian foreigners, including many academics, take for granted.

The annotations of Professor May are also infected by Palestinian propaganda taken at face value. Just [one example](#) is her writing (p. 44) that "...in September 1996... Prime Minister Netanyahu... gave the go-ahead to open the 'Western Wall Tunnel,' an archaeological tunnel that runs under Al-Aqsa and the Haram al-Sharif." This is not an inadvertent slip, since she repeats it (p. 55): "the archaeological tunnel that runs underneath the Haram al-Sharif." Indeed, this claim was propagated by Palestinians, provoking violent riots in which people were killed and wounded. But it was a gross lie. The "tunnel" does not go under Al-Aqsa or the Temple Mount (a term that she apparently avoids, maybe in deference to the malicious Palestinian lie that there was never a Jewish temple there). Second, it is not an archaeological tunnel. Third, not it but something else was opened.

To be precise: this is the ancient street, maybe already existing in the time of Jesus, but buried for centuries, which runs along the western side of the Temple Mount. It was unearthed by removing accumulated rubble in the substructures of more recent buildings. And what was opened was not the site, which was already available for visits, but merely an exit to the Via Dolorosa at its northern end. The idea was to enable a continuous stream of visitors from south to north. If Professor May has ever been in Jerusalem in the meantime, she could have booked a place in a tour and seen for herself. The tours have been continuing year by year without provoking further riots, because the Palestinians realized that they had been induced, once again, to get themselves killed by the lies of

their leaders.

Yet the most egregious mistake, in which also Professor May is not alone, is the assumption that those various messages were composed in conference by the thirteen signatories. As far as I could ascertain, having lived since 1970 in Jerusalem, each one of those messages, up to today, was normally the work of a single individual. The Heads of Churches themselves may have done little more, if anything, than add their signatures. Sometimes they did not even all do that, but the message went out anyway.

The Musings of Sellors

Throughout the period of Professor May's book (1988-2008), it is not even clear that any of the messages issued in the names of the Heads of Churches was written by a Palestinian. Certainly, in the second half of that period the man who composed the messages was not a Palestinian but a recently arrived Englishman, Michael H. Sellors (1936-2010).

During 1997-2002, Sellors was Dean of the Episcopal St. George's Cathedral. Upon his retirement, he decided to stay on in Jerusalem instead of returning to his old diocese in England, where he was rumored to have a wife. His eccentric appearance and manners made him known to some as "Mad Mike." But if you have read the Barsetshire novels of Anthony Trollope, the favorite author of the late British PM Harold Macmillan, you would not be surprised by strange Anglican clerics.

Although Sellors no longer had a mandate, the Heads of Churches let him continue to coordinate their occasional meetings and business, while he continued to style himself "Very Rev'd." He found lodging through the generosity of one monastery or another. Only now there were fewer restraints on his composition of messages. One hopes that one or more of the Heads of Churches scrutinized his Christmas and Easter messages, but other messages were prompted by sudden turns of event. The messages went out by what might be called the "Mad Mike maneuver." That is, they were sent to the offices of all the Heads of Churches with a note to the effect that "this will go out at midday if I do not hear from you." Never mind if, as happens to prelates with widespread dioceses, some of the Heads of Churches were out of the country.

Most of the Heads of Churches may have played a passive role in the formulation of such messages. Yet someone whose touch can be sensed in some of those statements is Michel Sabbah, whose term of office as Latin Patriarch (1987-2008) covered almost exactly the period recorded in Professor May's book.

Immediately after retirement, himself now freed from restraints and unwilling to let go, Sabbah played a role in formulating the Kairos Palestine Document, published in December 2009. The main instigators of this document, however, were two Palestinians employed by the secretariat of the World Council of Churches (WCC): Yusef Daher and Rifat Odeh Kassis. Although the document was presented to the world in Bethlehem, its ultimate origins, not to mention the funds for its promotion, lie in Geneva.

Not long after the retirement of Sabbah, Sellors suddenly died (January 27, 2010). One morning he was noticed to be speaking incoherently, but unfortunately people ascribed that to over-indulgence. By the time he was persuaded to go to an Israeli hospital and was diagnosed with a stroke, it was too late.

Thus the enthusiastic talk of Professor May's blurb about "the faith and hope of Palestinians" and "the voices of Palestinian pastors" is a lot of twaddle. Instead, her book in large measure documents the musings of an eccentric Englishman that were given an automatic green light by mainly non-Palestinian church leaders.

This is not to disparage the Heads of Churches. On the contrary, for most of them, whom I have known, many examples could be given of their devotion to their flocks and their truly Christian spirit. Many also have to travel frequently and officiate in prolonged obligatory worship services. With few exceptions, such as Sabbah and Arab Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan, they have no time to waste on penning political commentaries.

Well might they think it a waste of time. It would be hard to find any instance in which the messages compiled in Professor May's book had any impact on political processes. Real-time politicians may listen politely to church leaders, but they have much more important issues on their minds, such as the economy, national security and ensuring their own reelection. The only people who made much of those messages were pro-Palestinian academics and bureaucrats in the WCC and Western churches, who themselves have no political influence.

Back in October 2012, for instance, fifteen mostly Protestant church leaders [sent a letter](#) to the US Congress, asking it to reconsider military aid to Israel. In the meantime, unimpressed, Congress has increased that aid to Israel. Reasons for this are evident. Since President Obama's speech in Cairo (June 4, 2009), for which he received that year's Nobel Peace Prize, the Middle East has descended into increasing warfare and chaos. In Egypt itself, all the contending factions are [furious with the US](#). Apart from US bases in the Persian Gulf, Israel is the only foothold of remaining US influence. The military aid, moreover, is used in the interest of the US: some is spent on purchasing US arms, some on developing anti-missile defense systems that the US wants to use itself.

Today it is another individual who writes the messages and, moreover, gives the Heads of Churches adequate time to review them. There is no need to mention the name, or even whether it is a man or a woman. It is enough to say that a Palestinian can be a truer Christian than a foreign pro-Palestinian, even if those who flaunt their Palestinian Christianity often are not.

Even when the messages touch on political issues, the tone has now changed. In advance of the debate on Palestinian statehood in the UN General Assembly in 2011, the Heads of Churches published a [communiqué](#) stating "the principles upon which we agree": "1. A two-state solution serves the cause of peace and justice. 2. Israelis and Palestinians must live each in their own independent states with peace and justice, respecting human rights according to international law. 3. Negotiations are the best way to resolve all outstanding problems between the two sides. 4. Palestinians and Israelis should exercise restraint, whatever the outcome of the vote at the United Nations. 5. Jerusalem is a Holy City to the followers of all three Abrahamic faiths, in which all people should be able to live in peace and tranquility, a city to be shared by the two peoples and the three faiths."

Here there is no partisan stance on behalf of Israelis or Palestinians. Some of us would argue that to talk of a two-state solution is fanciful when a [three-state solution](#) has already arrived (with Gaza and the West Bank going their separate ways). But since the governments and media of the world still entertain that fancy, the Heads of Churches are not to be reproached.

Rehabilitated Churches

The disappearance of Sellors and Sabbah is only part of the explanation for the changed tone of the messages. The control over what is put out in the name of the Heads of Churches has also tightened. This is because the internal crises of various churches have been resolved.

First and foremost, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate has emerged from a prolonged series of problems (examples of which will follow). The importance of this development is that the Greek Patriarch is the chairman of all meetings of the Heads of Churches and the acknowledged

spokesman on their behalf for formal and ceremonial purposes. During the long twilight of the Greek Patriarchate, Sabbah could attract the limelight for his own purposes.

The period of office of the Greek Patriarch Diodorus I (1981-2000) was beset by problems. His first acts included the exile from Jerusalem of young priests seen as protégés of his predecessor, the saintly Benedict I. On one occasion, the limousine of Diodorus was found to be carrying drugs and gold on his return from Jordan. After a long investigation, the Israeli authorities decided to accept his story that he knew nothing about it. In his last years, he was virtually incapacitated by illness. His state of health was then exploited by a group of Israelis to obtain a document in his name, granting a long-term lease of various properties to the State of Israel for sixteen million dollars. Only, his signature had been forged and the dollars provided by the Israeli side [went missing](#). The convictions of the last defendants in this case were recently confirmed by Israel's Supreme Court.

His successor, Irenaios I (2001-2005), was beset by other problems. His recognition by Israel was long delayed because of an alleged letter sent by him to Yasser Arafat; the letter was eventually seen to be a forgery. In the meantime, he accused his chief challenger in the election of [hiring a hit squad](#) for half a million dollars to kill him. How that rival, who had been the Secretary of the Patriarchate under Diodorus, could have acquired so much money was not explained.

Subsequently, a young man engaged by Irenaios obtained a power of attorney from him and used it for purported leases of patriarchal property to various Jewish groups. The report of a [commission of inquiry](#) set up by the Palestinian Authority acknowledged that Irenaios had not intended to lease the property, but his behavior had excited such fury among Palestinian members of the church that the Holy Synod voted to depose him and elected a successor, Theophilos III. Further factors in the background were the personal style of Irenaios toward others in the Patriarchate and his clashes with members of other churches.

Thereupon fresh letters appeared, allegedly from Theophilos to enemies of the State of Israel. For two years, consequently, Israel continued to recognize the deposed Irenaios and even invited him to official functions, where he was shunned by other Christians. Eventually, in 2007, the allegations were admitted to be just more nonsense and Theophilos was recognized. There are still disgruntled members of the church who try to spread lies about him, but he has gained increasing respect among the majority, whether the Arabs or the Greeks.

Fortunately for Theophilos, he had always been a simple servant of the church who was not identified with any political stance or clerical faction. He found the finances of the church in a miserable state, partly because access to the church's bank accounts was blocked during the periods of non-recognition. Thus his rehabilitation of the church, enabling it to resume its titular leadership of all the local churches, began just at the point where Professor May's book ends.

Among other churches, also the Episcopal (Anglican) Church had problems in the period of Professor May's book. Both Bishop Samir Kafity (1984-1998) and Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal (1998-2007) manifested Palestinian nationalism as fervently as any Christian faith. Bishop Samir once opened his Easter sermon (I was there) with the following message: "We Arab Christians of Jerusalem, we are the Easter People because the Resurrection took place here." Therewith he negated all Christian theology. The fundamental tenet of all Christian churches, however they may otherwise differ, is that Jesus Christ died to atone for the sins of the whole world, not just for Jews, let alone latter-day Arab Christians of Jerusalem. "Jesus Christ... is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

So that was heresy. The Palestinian Heresy, alas, has undermined several Protestant churches in the meantime. This heresy makes the Palestinians into the chosen people and treats the Kairos Palestine Document as infallible scripture, whereas one is permitted to disregard or twist the plain meaning of the Bible, of course. The latest church to fall victim to this heresy is the [Church of](#)

[Scotland.](#)

The most astounding event during Samir's period of office occurred during a visit to London. The Metropolitan Police, unaware of his identity, detained him in Baker Street underground station. After some days it was decided that there was no public interest in charging him. (Nor is there a public interest in specifying here the reason for his arrest.) On his retirement, this Palestinian nationalist decided to resettle in California. So much for the Easter People.

In the election for Samir's successor, the challenger defeated by Riah was Naim Ateek. The latter, however, continued to be a focus of rivalry to Riah until Ateek agreed to go on pension and withdraw from involvement in church affairs. Thus Ateek and his Sabeel Center, so beloved of pro-Palestinian Christians worldwide, in no way represent Ateek's own church.

As soon as Bishop Suheil Dawani took over in 2007, he started proceedings in the Israeli courts against his predecessor. Just before retirement, Riah had taken legal steps to register a church school in Nazareth in his own name and rename it as the "Bishop Riah Educational Campus." He began collecting large sums in school fees. There were also other serious accusations of [financial irregularities](#) and [fraud](#).

Michael H. Sellors had been appointed Dean of the Episcopal Cathedral in 1997, so he was penning his pro-Palestinian messages during the whole period when his Palestinian bishop was allegedly committing those offenses. A photograph of Sellors with Bishop Riah can be seen [here](#) (Sellors is on the left).

Later, Riah's wife was involved in a [fracas](#) in the diocesan offices. Through rulings given in 2008 and 2010, the Israeli courts restored the Nazareth school to the church. The [Episcopal Province](#) thereupon requested Riah to return some five million New Israeli Shekels to the diocese. Evidently, Professor May needs to be discriminating in her enthusiasm for "Palestinian pastors."

Shortly after, in 2011, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior suspended the visa granted to Suheil as a non-Israeli citizen from Nablus because of allegations that he had illegally transferred Jewish-owned land to Palestinians. (Some suspected a connection between this attempt to undermine Suheil and the earlier affair.) Even without a visa, however, Suheil could continue to reside in Jerusalem and return after visits to the parts of his far-flung diocese in Arab countries. The allegations against him, like the fictitious letters ascribed to the Greek Patriarchs, were malicious nonsense.

Despite having the greatest reason for grievances against Israel, Suheil has been the least politicized recent Episcopal bishop. Like Theophilos, his focus is pastoral, aiming to rebuild his church while balancing relationships between the three local governments: Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian. The same can be said of the current Dean of the Cathedral, who could also have resented the long delay before Israel allowed him to live together with his wife and children (his citizenship is Israeli, hers Palestinian). As with the Greek Orthodox, the return of a Christian spirit to the leadership of the Episcopal Church can be greeted as a blessing.

What is the upshot of all this? People in foreign countries should beware of granting automatic respect to messages appearing in the names of the Heads of Churches. Currently, besides Theophilos and Suheil, the leaders of the Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches and the Franciscan Custos do enjoy widespread respect beyond their own communities in Jerusalem. The messages, regardless of how much input they receive from those Christian leaders, are perceptibly Christian in tone. But it was not always thus.

In any event, there is no individual or group that is empowered to act as "the voice of Palestinian Christians." It is not "the Palestinian Christians" but just one or two individuals who pen public

statements, even if these appear under a title that can vary from the respectable ("Heads of Churches") to the preposterous ("Kairos Palestine"). The only worthwhile question is whether the message is composed in a truly Christian spirit or is merely political agitation clothed in theological verbiage.

The New Trickery

Sleight of hand in regard to the Heads of Churches, however, has not yet stopped. Last year, the WCC announced a "World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel" (September 22-28, 2013) with the subtitle "Pray, educate, and advocate for justice in Palestine" (yes, here "Israel" was omitted). As part of this scheme, whose broader implications you can read about [here](#), the WCC disseminated a so-called [Prayer from the Jerusalem Churches](#). It contained five paragraphs beginning with the words "We, the churches in Jerusalem..." Quite naturally, anyone reading a prayer with such a title and such wording would assume that it came from the Heads of Churches.

Indeed, the American Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) called it a prayer from the Heads of Churches when it passed the prayer on to its members. Only, a sharp-witted Elder of that church decided to check it out. (I am in possession of the subsequent correspondence, but will suppress most names.)

The relevant representative of the PSUSA eventually replied to the Elder, quoting verbatim from a letter from Yusef Daher (the WCC official mentioned earlier). The prayer, wrote Daher, had been "prepared by" a "committee of Bishops," some of whose names Daher specified. Not all the people named by Daher, however, were bishops, and only one was a Head of Church, namely, Arab Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan.

The Elder then wrote back, pointing out that messages from the Heads of Churches usually come with signatures on behalf of the three historic Patriarchates and the Custos, etc., not just the name of Munib Younan (the latter is usually the eleventh in the list of thirteen). In response, he was forwarded a second letter from Daher.

The wording of this second letter is somewhat confused, but its basic point seems to be that the earlier mentioned "committee of Bishops" includes members appointed by all thirteen Heads of Churches. However, instead of saying that the prayer had been "prepared by" the committee, as in his first letter, Daher now merely claimed that the prayer was "introduced to" the committee and "modified by some of them." Whereas his first letter had ascribed authorship to the committee, now he was admitting that it was written by someone else.

Since all the people specifically named by Daher as belonging to his "committee of Bishops" were people whom I had met at one time or another, I asked one of them what he could say about this story. He told me that he had had nothing to do with writing the prayer; it had merely been sent to him by Daher with a request for comments, but he had made none.

From this response, we also learn that the prayer was neither "prepared by" the committee nor "introduced to" it (as if the committee had sat in session about it), but just sent to members of the committee individually. The only significant element in Daher's two different accounts that has not (yet) been refuted is the claim that the prayer was "modified by some of them."

So what we have here is a repeat of the "Mad Mike Maneuver." Something was written by somebody and sent to various people, then put out in the name of "the churches in Jerusalem," whether or not the people contacted had even reacted to it. These people were at first portrayed as its authors, but then, when questioned further, Daher admitted that they were not.

Daher had something to do with its composition, maybe aided by a native English speaker, but who beyond that? The only contribution of "the churches of Jerusalem" was "modifications" by some people to whom the prayer was sent, if even that is true. Still, the WCC disseminated the prayer all over the world and maybe none of its recipients, with the exception of the Elder, ever realized that it did not come from the Heads of Churches.

Very clever. Just don't be taken in again next time.

Appendix of Messages

Below are links to various messages published in the name of the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem. The first item is a selection of older messages made by Pax Christi for its own militant purposes. Afterwards come as many Christmas and Easter messages as could still be found on the web, starting in 2000. Missing are the messages for Easter and Christmas 2003 and for Christmas 2005; anyone who can find a link to any of these messages is welcome to report it in a reader comment. Interspersed at the appropriate points are a few of the occasional messages issued in response to particular events (there were many more in the time of Sellors).

For most of the individual messages, alternative links were found. Therefore, a short quotation from each message has been added; if the link given becomes inactive, a search for that quotation may lead to the message on another site. It will be seen that sometimes only some of the Heads of Churches are listed as signatories and sometimes there is no list at all. As explained above, it is uncertain whether all the Heads of Churches saw all the messages issued in their names.

[1989-2007 Selected Messages](#)

Remember that the selection is representative only of the interests of Pax Christi. It is included because older messages are not easily found on the web.

[2000 Easter Message](#)

"The last few months have been encouraging to us all in view of the manifestations of solidarity from our Christian family..."

[2000 July: Messages of the Three Patriarchs to Camp David](#)

"Greetings to you from Jerusalem as you strive to bring peace to our beloved Holy Land..."

[2000 Christmas Message](#)

"In the year 2000, our land - the land of Jesus' birth - cries out in pain again..."

2001 March Appeal to Governments and World Leaders

"Concerned for the spiritual, mental and bodily well-being of all the citizens of this Holy Land, Christian, Moslem and Jew..."

[2001 Easter Message](#)

"Indeed, after the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Churches of Jerusalem witness with one voice and one heart to the glory of His Resurrection..."

2001 October Urgent Appeal

"We the Patriarchs and the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem appeal to our Brothers and Sisters around the world to help in a time of urgent need in the Holy Land..."

[2001 November Message about the Nazareth Mosque](#)

"We, the leaders of the Christian Churches in the Holy Land, are alarmed by recent developments on the ground..."

[2001 Christmas Message](#)

"We wish you all a Blessed Christmas and hope that this solemnity will bring us justice and peace..."

[2002 March Call to Palestinians and Israelis](#)

"We, the Patriarchs and the Heads of Churches in this Land, are concerned for the recent developments and the spiral violence directly affecting the lives of the people..."

2002 Easter Message

"When Jesus entered the City of Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday he was fulfilling prophecy written some Five hundred years before his birth..."

[2002 Christmas Message](#)

"Once more we turn our thoughts and prayers to the gift that God gave us His Eternal Word in the Person of His Only Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem..."

2003 August on the Separation Wall

"We the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem affirm our determination to do all in our power to work for Peace in this Holy Land..."

[2004 Easter Message](#)

"As we gaze on the Cross of Christ, we need to ask ourselves some penetrating questions if we would claim to be true disciples..."

2004 Christmas Message

"Another Christmas is upon us and we go to Bethlehem to adore the Word of God who became flesh and appeared as a new born child there..."

[2005 Easter Message](#)

"Though our Churches celebrate Holy Week and Easter at different times this year (on the 1st of May and on the 27th of March)..."

[2006 February Advocacy for Peace](#)

"During the last 39 years Churches, Church Leaders and ordinary Christians have worked tirelessly and patiently advocating for Peace in Palestine and Israel..."

2006 Easter Message

"This year the celebration of Easter falls in our Churches on either April 16th or 23rd. The close proximity of these two dates should strengthen the solidarity of our celebrations..."

[2006 September on the Status of Jerusalem](#)

"Once more, we have experienced another period of deadly violence in the war in South Lebanon..."

[2006 Christmas Message](#)

"As we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, we need to remember that he came to be the light for us and for the world, and to guide us in the paths of peace and justice in our land..."

[2007 Easter Message](#)

"Having opposed early Christians and, indeed, sought to bring many of them to trial for their faith, St. Paul was suddenly challenged by our Blessed Lord as he journeyed to Damascus..."

[2007 June Action for Peace](#)

"As Patriarchs and Heads of Local Christian Churches in Jerusalem we call upon our fellow Christians in this Land and across the world to join us in the International Church Action for Peace in Palestine & Israel..."

[2007 Christmas Message](#)

"Another Christmas is upon us and still we seek Peace for this Holy Land amidst continuing hardships..."

[2008 March Condolences to Olmert and Abbas](#)

"We write to express our condolences for the killing of the Yeshiva students, not least to the parents and families of the victims..." "We the Patriarchs and Heads of the Christian Churches in Jerusalem address this letter to you to express our condolences for all the victims who have fallen and are still falling in this wave of violence in Gaza..."

[2008 Easter Message](#)

"Many people limit their thoughts on Easter to the empty tomb. How important then, for us to concentrate on the first manifestation which our Lord made to his disciples..."

2008 Christmas Message

"As we prepare to celebrate Christmas there seems to be even more, darkness, conflict and despair in the world around us..."

[2009 Easter Message](#)

"As we greet you all for Easter we would remind you that the Resurrection is not something tacked on to the end of our Christian Faith..."

[2009 Christmas Message](#)

"We, the Patriarchs, Bishops and the Heads of Christian Churches in Jerusalem, follow with deep concern, regret, and shock the war currently raging in the Gaza Strip..."

[2010 Easter Message](#)

"We, the Heads of the Churches in the Land of the Holy One, share with you the Good News of the life of our local Christian Church as one Body in Christ who live the resurrection faith every day..."

2010 Christmas Message

"We, the Heads of the Churches of Jerusalem, share with you in praising God for the birth of the holy child on a cold night in Bethlehem so long ago..."

2011 Easter Message

"However, when we in Jerusalem, the city of redemption, see the suffering of our Christian brothers and sisters in Egypt, Iraq and elsewhere in our region our joy becomes more solemn..."

[2011 September on Palestinian Statehood](#)

"Looking ahead to the upcoming General Assembly of the United Nations this September 2011 and the bid for Palestinian statehood, the Heads of Christian Churches in Jerusalem feel the need to intensify our prayers..." (The picture accompanying this post does not portray the Heads of Churches but guests from various churches at a Christmas reception.)

2011 Christmas Message

"This 'Good News' was first proclaimed to the people of God in this very holy place, where Joseph and Mary, the shepherds and the Magi rejoiced with the heavenly host..."

[2012 Easter Message](#)

"The faithful, through their Lenten journey and pilgrimage, walk in faith toward the empty tomb so that they may be filled with grace through the Risen and Triumphant Lord..."

[2012 Christmas Message](#)

"We, the Heads of the Churches of Jerusalem, bring you greetings of joy, peace, hope and love from the Land of the Nativity: the Joy and the peace of God that were announced by the heavenly host of Angels..."

[2013 Easter Message](#)

"Each year the Church calls us to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through Divine Liturgies and Paschal ceremonies and gatherings..."

[2013 May on Holy Saturday Incident](#)

"We, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, watched with sorrowful hearts the horrific scenes of the brutal treatment of our clergy, people, and pilgrims in the Old City of Jerusalem during Holy Saturday last week..." (This refers to the forcible detention of a priest who tried to push through a police barrier: see here, at the end.)

2013 Christmas Message

"We praise God for the Word made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ from the pure blood of the Blessed Virgin Mary and for her willingness to co-operate with his divine plan..."

Source: [Gatestone Institute, January 2014](#). Malcolm Lowe is a biblical scholar living in Jerusalem. Republished with kind permission by the author.