

## **EIR** Feature

# Vatican summit charts independent course for peace

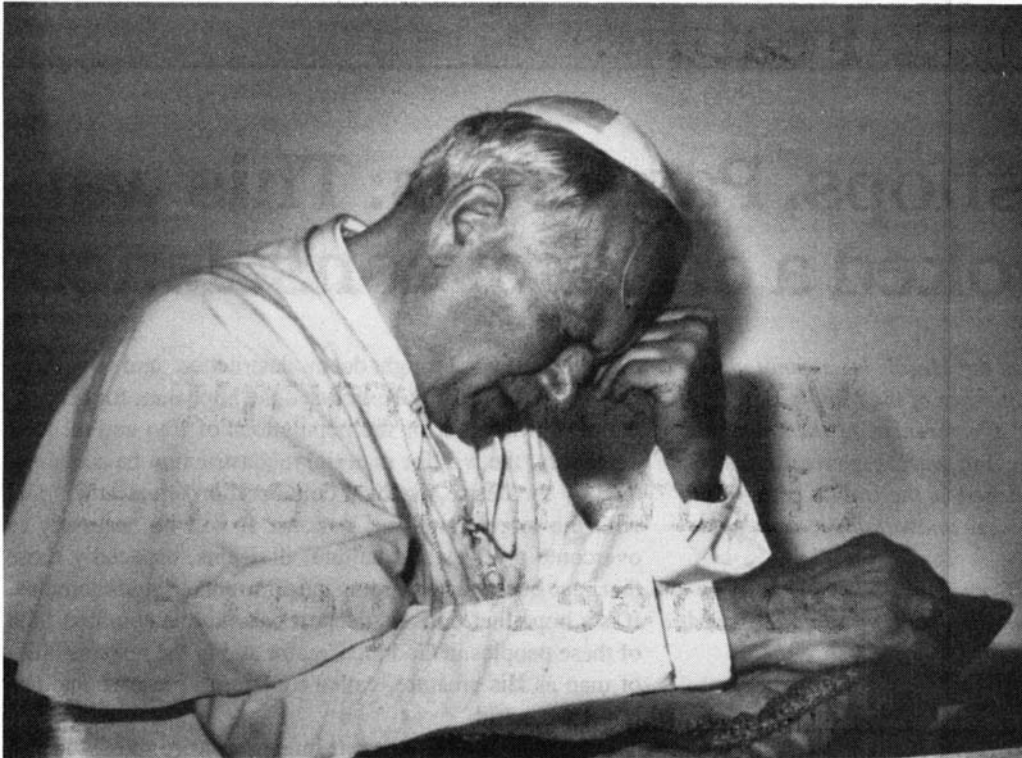
by Umberto Pascali

“We hope that the negotiations for a just peace do not involve humiliation for anybody, nor punitive aspects for some peoples.” This sentence, a pointed reference to post-war Iraq, is taken from a document issued by Patriarchs of the Catholic Churches of the Middle East and by the chairmen of the Bishops’ Conferences of the countries most directly involved in the Gulf War. The religious leaders issued the document on March 6 after two days, March 4 and 5, of deliberation in Rome at the Vatican, in direct, constant dialogue with the Pope.

It was the first time since Vatican Council II that the Catholic Church had put on the international stage the dramatic situation of the Eastern Christian communities. It marked the beginning of a mobilization and a way of “arousing the world’s conscience”—as an insider put it—after the unspeakable crimes committed in that war. The material danger was and is overwhelming, but even more disturbing is the prospect that normal people in the West accept as natural the glorification of violence as the basis for relations among nations—the principle that not justice, but “might makes right,” elevated by George Bush, Margaret Thatcher, and the present Israeli government to a principle of policy.

The document was a restatement of principles but also of concrete steps deriving from these principles. “We believe that the reestablishment of peace in the Middle East cannot take place except through the implementation of justice and by removing both the recent and remoter causes of the conflicts that trouble the region.” It mentions in particular four “causes of conflict.” First, “Lebanon must fully reacquire its unity, independence, and sovereignty.” Second, “the Palestinian people’s inalienable rights to a homeland and to freely decide about their future must be recognized.” Third, “the specific and sacred characteristics of the City of Jerusalem” must be taken into account in any international negotiation. Fourth, “development plans must be promoted” urgently in the region.

In his final speech, John Paul II expressed his desire to go “as a pilgrim” to Jerusalem. A few days later, representatives of the Pope went to Jerusalem to pray



*Pope John Paul II during his visit to Colombia several years ago. His nearly 60 different diplomatic initiatives failed to stop the Gulf war, but now the Pontiff is actively promoting the basis for a just peace.*

at the Holy Sepulchre and to place a candle there, a reminder of his yet unfulfilled desire to go to Jerusalem.

As a first visible step, on March 14, the Pope received a delegation of Jerusalem Palestinians, both of Christian and Islamic religions, who put forward a peace plan. The delegation was led by the young Palestinian theologian Dr. Gerjes Sa'ed Khoury, director of the Al-Liqa ("Encounter") ecumenical center in Jerusalem. The delegation included also the Patriarch of the Latins in Jerusalem, Patriarch Michel Sabbah, a personal representative of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Salahudin Al' Alam, Bishop Lufti Laham, patriarchal vicar of the Catholic Greek Melchites, Bishop Nahim Nassar, leader of the Lutherans in Jerusalem, and Ibrahim Shaaban, spokesman for the Pan-Islamic Conference.

For the first time, during the March 4-5 "summit" in the Vatican, the Pope received a personal message from the Pan-Islamic Conference thanking him for the position taken during the war and supporting his peace efforts.

The delegation was accompanied by leading representatives of the Europe Near East Center (ENEC), the ecumenical organization based in Bari, Italy which had made a major effort to make the meeting with the Pope possible. Among them were ENEC president Sen. Pietro Mezzapesa; the vice president of the European Parliament, Hon. Roberto Formigoni; ENEC director Father Nicola Bux; and the mayor of Molfetta, Hon. Enzo De Cosmo. The delegation led by Dr. Khoury, while underlining the necessity to guarantee security to Israel, is insistent that the Palestine Liberation Organiza-

tion is the political representative of the Palestinians.

The papal peace offensive is as far removed as one can imagine from the lawless insanity of the present Anglo-American leadership. It is thus not astonishing that the Anglo-American ruling elites are threatening the Pope. In the March 9 issue of the *Financial Times*, the mouthpiece for the London banks, John Paul II was singled out for a scurrilous attack.

Anxious that the announced new social encyclical celebrating the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum*, might be a frontal attack on "free enterprise," the *Financial Times* states: "The Vatican is nervous about acquiring political labels, but John Paul II has long been one of Europe's leading socialists. Indeed the pinkish label which the Church's social teachings have acquired over the past century, with their emphasis on the responsibility of governments to guarantee human dignity and social justice, has been given a deeper hue by the two social doctrine encyclicals of this papacy, *Laborem exercens* of 1981 and *Sollicitudo rei socialis* of 1987. . . ."

"Though it [*Sollicitudo*] sets out to be an even-handed condemnation of the impact on the Third World of 'imperialism' and 'neo-colonialism' practiced by East and West . . . the impression the Pope gives is that he can find little more to praise in liberal capitalism than in Marxist communism."

The article concludes with the ominous comment that "John Paul II is unlikely to be too concerned if in preaching a Gospel based on still more overtly socialist values, he upsets Western governments of a more conservative stripe."

# Pope, Bishops, Patriarchs: This war has provoked a crisis of conscience

*The following documents from the March 4-5 summit of the Patriarchs of the Catholic Churches of the Middle East and the chairmen of the Bishops' Conferences of the countries most directly involved in the Gulf war, were translated by EIR staff from versions published in the Italian press. The official Vatican English texts were unavailable to us at press deadline.*

*We present first excerpts from Pope John Paul II's concluding intervention; and then the final communiqué signed by the participants.*

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## Excerpts from Pope's final speech

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Dear brothers, your presence here this morning is like the continuation of the meeting that took place the day before yesterday, which had been called by me in order to exchange information for a mutual evaluation of the consequences of the conflict on the populations of the Middle East region. . . . This idea was primarily fostered by the strongest desire to jointly discover what initiatives would be capable of overcoming these negative consequences and favoring a long-lasting peace, based on justice and understanding.

Our meeting has been, first of all, a profound experience of ecclesiastical communion, favored by the common sensitivities and responsibilities deriving from the ministry granted to us by Christ. . . . This unity among pastors of particular churches that witness the Gospel inside societies with such different characteristics in the East and in the West, should be a starting point, for you who have experienced it, an indication for the believers entrusted to your pastoral care, and a symbol of a real and early reconciliation among those peoples whom the recent war saw opposed to one another and whom the persisting problems of the Middle East continue to set against one other.

You have described many situations of suffering and dangers caused by the ongoing tensions and the lack of understanding which could increase if there is not a rapid commitment of everybody to seek dialogue and mutual trust. All this brought sadness and worry into our heart and increased the conviction that without real justice one cannot have peace, and that justice cannot be adequately achieved except through peaceful means.

The Gulf war brought death, destruction, and huge environmental damage: We expressed the hope that, for the people of Kuwait and for the populations of Iraq and all their neighbors, the will for material reconstruction be accompanied by the desire for loyal collaboration among them and with the larger family of nations. It will be necessary to overcome grudges and cultural divisions, especially those that have been created among the different religious domains. It is a hope that finds its deepest basis in the common faith of these peoples in God the Creator and in the responsibility of man as His creature, called by Him to preserve and improve the world.

Our hope and our concrete intentions were addressed also to the serious situations prevailing in other parts of the world. We have spoken about the Holy Land, where between two nations, the Palestinian and the State of Israel, an antagonism continues to exist that increases tensions and anxieties and which up to now has seemed irreducible. The injustice to which Palestinian people are being made victims demands a commitment by everybody and in particular by national leaders and the world community. Only through the intense search for an immediate inception of a solution, can that people finally be recognized in its dignity and also be a guarantor of everybody's security.

The reference to the land where Christ was born brought our thoughts to the city where He preached, died, and rose again: Jerusalem, with its holy places, dear also to the Jews and Muslims, and with its communities chosen to be a crossroads of peace, cannot continue to be a motive of discord and dissent. I fervently hope that one day, circumstances will allow me to go as pilgrim to that unique city in the world, and from there to relaunch, together with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim believers, that message and plea for peace already directed to the whole human family on Oct. 27, 1986 in Assisi.

Our thoughts went then to beloved and sorely tried Lebanon, where another situation of injustice has weighed for more than 15 years on an entire people. There, too, an international order is upset and a sovereign country deprived of its complete independence. The whole world cannot ignore so much suffering and above all risk losing such a rich experience of dialogue and collaboration among different religions and cultures.

In that region, other countries and other peoples have been living for years in a situation of tension because of unresolved or maybe forgotten situations like that which exists in Cyprus and that connected to the beleaguered Kurdish people. . . .

What can the Catholic communities of the East and the West do? The Christians of the East are called to witness their faith in societies where they are a minority: It is their aspiration to do this with courage, feeling that they are fully builders and participants of the societies they belong to. This implies first of all a genuine dialogue with their Jewish and Muslim brothers and a genuine religious freedom on the base of reciprocal respect.

In this sense, already on Jan. 1 of this year I dedicated the celebration of the Day of Peace to the theme: "If you want peace, respect the conscience of every man."

Your communities cannot shrink from a profound and concrete commitment of sincere solidarity toward those who find themselves poorer and needier because of the war and the sad circumstances which have struck their lands. I am sure that the Catholics of the whole world, with your help and your determination, will be able to hear these requests for help and to thus genuinely witness their adherence to the teachings of Christ.

It will be the commitment of this Apostolic See first of all to evaluate and to welcome the suggestions received during this meeting and, in the limits of its jurisdiction, to continue diplomatic contacts and to solicit from the political bodies and from the international organizations a renewed commitment to peace.

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## Final Communiqué

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We Patriarchs and Bishops who have participated in the meeting on the crisis of the Gulf and the Middle East called by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, in spiritual communion with him, want first of all, after this tragic experience of war, to express our solidarity with all the people of the region and to bow before all the victims of the conflict, to pray for them and their families.

Having reached the conclusion of this meeting, we feel the duty to express to the Pontiff deep gratitude for this gesture of pastoral solicitude. We do this on our own behalf, on behalf of the communities entrusted to us, and of the Bishops' Conferences we represent. . . . As the Holy Father declared since the first day of the conflict, we unanimously believe that the resort to the force of weapons signals "a defeat for humanity," a setback for the international community, and an assault on the most cherished values of all religions. "Never again war," Pope Paul VI had declared at the U.N.O. in 1965!

This war . . . has deeply marked the heart of the peoples, and provoked everywhere a crisis of conscience even if it

saw the mobilization in our cities and in our churches, both in East and in the West, of a great number of men and women and in particular of young people, in favor of peace and justice. The prayer and imploring to God went on incessantly in our churches and among our populations.

Opening this meeting, the Holy Father wanted, among the other things, to stress that for the Christians of the East, "this is the time of conversion and authenticity" in order to offer "their testimony and their contribution to a more fraternal society."

We, Patriarchs and Bishops, welcome this appeal as directed to the whole Church and assure that will be our deepest commitment:

- To confirm the faithful of our Churches in the Faith, Hope, and Charity, supporting all the Christians of the Middle East that they not consider themselves alien in that part of the world.

- To assure our Jewish and Muslim brothers that we desire to maintain with them a genuine, profound, and constant dialogue based on our faith in the only God and on our common concern for the values of justice and advancement of mankind, and which allows any religious community an authentic religious freedom on the basis of mutual respect and reciprocity.

- To reject any religious motivation and interpretation that could have been attributed to the Gulf war, in which it is not to be seen either a conflict between East and the West, nor much less a conflict between Islam and Christianity. As the Holy Father told us, "a 'holy war' cannot exist because the values of worship and brotherhood, deriving from faith in God, lead to meeting and dialogue."

We trust that His Holiness will continue his action of persuasion toward national leaders and the international organizations so that the Middle East may not lack justice and that it be pursued by peaceful means.

We hope that negotiations for a just peace involve neither humiliation for anybody, nor punitive aspects for some peoples.

We believe that the reestablishment of peace in the Middle East cannot happen except through the implementation of justice and by removing both the recent and the remote causes of the conflicts that trouble the region. We know how persistently the Pope has sought to keep alive the causes of the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples. Lebanon must fully re-acquire its unity, independence, and sovereignty. The Palestinian people must have their inalienable rights to a homeland and to freely decide their future recognized, just as the Israeli people must be able to live within secure borders in harmony with their neighbors.

We want also to attest to our concern and the concern of our faithful that, in the sought-after international political initiatives on the problems of the Middle East, it is feared that the specific and sacred characteristic of the City of Jerusalem may not be taken into due consideration: the specialness of the

religious communities that live there, the sacred places dear to millions of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim believers.

For our part we want to affirm that we will continue to do everything possible in our communities and in our societies so that no people and no country of the region may be excluded from the true road toward justice and peace or be injured in some way in its fundamental rights.

Moreover, solidarity in sharing spiritual and material wealth will be the sign and proof of our commitment to make sure that—as His Holiness has said—“poverty and the lack of prospects for the future” do not prevail and that, with the help of everybody, the populations of the Middle East, who have most suffered, shall be finally placed in conditions to offer their contribution to the pacification of the region and thus to the world.

We trust that there will be a more just redistribution of the natural wealth of the region and that development plans shall be promoted to support the less favored populations. All this will be made easier by a strict regulation of the arms traffic and by a controlled and substantial disarmament, binding all sides.

The exchange of ideas of these last two days confirmed to us that Christians—as well as our brothers of other religions—have a word to say and a role to play so that a world of brotherhood may not just be a dream. We, as believers, are convinced that with faith in God and confidence in man, His creature, the world can change its face.

For this hope of collegiality and of participation, this meeting between East and West is a prophetic sign of reconciliation.

In profound communion with the Holy Father we entrust these intentions of ours to the mercy of God and to the intercession of the Queen of Peace.

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## Interview: Patriarch Nashrallah Sfeir

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# Lebanon not at war, but also not at peace

*Fiorella Operto interviewed Nashrallah Sfeir in Rome. He is Patriarch of the Maronite Christian Church, in Lebanon.*

**EIR:** You took part in the Middle East conference recently here in Rome. Can you comment on it?

**Sfeir:** It was a good initiative, and promising for the future. The first result was to dissipate the climate of tension which had been created between Islam and Christianity, because there have been people who wanted the Muslims to think this was a new crusade by the Christians against Islam. That is

not true at all. It is not a religious war. The war has as a cause Iraq's aggression against Kuwait, but there were also other causes, and other interests [involved]. Allow me to say that if the resolutions which were decided on for Lebanon and Palestine by the United Nations Security Council had been enforced, I think Iraq would not have attacked Kuwait. But since those resolutions were not enforced, it is possible that Saddam thought no U.N. resolution would ever be enforced.

That is why this conference is important and will allow us to intensify the dialogue among believers of different religions, especially the monotheistic ones, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three believe in one God, the Creator, and if we all believe in one sole God whom we call Father, we must treat each other as brothers. This is the direction in which the world has to go.

**EIR:** What future initiatives are there?

**Sfeir:** We must encourage believers to establish a dialogue with their fellow citizens, whether they be Jews or Muslims. Some projects can be launched; or humanitarian aid organized to alleviate the sufferings of populations. There could be social projects to benefit all the citizenry. We could promote the birth of cultural institutions, intellectual institutions, so that Christians can understand Islam and vice versa, and both could understand Judaism, and vice versa. We have to come up with initiatives which bring people closer. . . .

Today in Lebanon there is no more war. But you cannot say there is calm. The political situation is not good, nor the social situation. The factories have been wrecked, unemployment is very high, and the Lebanese pound is totally devalued. The people are suffering poverty. Minimum wages are \$75 a month, and it is impossible to live on that. There are huge problems in the health sector. Just to get into a hospital you have to pay 3 or 4 million Lebanese pounds, and if it is for a complicated operation, you need 12 million pounds. In education, the situation is very, very difficult.

Politically . . . well. We have a President, a government, a parliament. But quite a few of the parliamentarians are dead and there are thoughts of appointing others. But to appoint parliamentarians is undemocratic, and it is being contested.

There are still troops of non-Lebanese armies on Lebanese territory. It is necessary, in order for Lebanon to be completely autonomous and independent, for the non-Lebanese troops to leave the country, which has not yet happened. That is why you cannot say the situation is resolved; it is not resolved. A lot of efforts will be needed to arrive at the peace which is desired and for people to be able to live a normal life.

I asked for the non-Lebanese troops to leave the country, and for the U.N. resolutions to be respected. The Palestinian cause, too, is a just cause. We cannot allow a whole people to remain for 30, 40 years with no homeland. Many Palestinians have lived most of their lives waiting. We cannot be surprised if they explode. They have to be given a homeland, and until that is done, we cannot speak of peace in the Middle East.