

Christian Inclusion in Educational and Economical Development in Palestine. Socio-Cultural and Economical Challenges in a Context of Conflict

L'inclusione dei cristiani nello sviluppo educativo ed economico in Palestina. Sfide socio-culturali ed economiche in un contesto di conflitto

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This article concerns the role that the Christian Community in Palestine plays in various fields, specifically their involvements in education, and consequently on economy. The choice of the title has found stimulus from both emergency and conviction. The emergency is the way the Palestinians are living; the conviction is according to which education, animated by the Christian message is the most effective weapon to reconstruct the conscience and to form new generations that are better able to develop and to rebuild the society in all of its economical, political, and social aspects. It is also a reflection on the maintenance of this presence, that has been possible thanks to the potentialities, to the courage and, obviously, to the awareness of its roles and a proposal that looks at the actuality and the future.

Keywords: Education, Conflict, Inclusion, Economy, Christian involvement.

abstract

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The role of social, cultural and economic factors within the context of the geographical, demographic and political background of the Middle East conflict is simultaneously direct and indirect, transparent and subtle. The purpose of this article is to explore this dichotomy in light of the Christian community's development and enrollment in Palestine¹. The specific focus of this article is Christian communities style and method of self-presentation, which has experience countless events throughout the centuries and subsequently evolved (Eid, 1995, p.59). Even during the period between the World Wars, Arab writers and thinkers who brought ideas of nationalism and radical political and social actions were mainly Christians². This important historical role within the Christian community is often ignored by susceptible mass media, which seems to select a historical narrative often based on prejudice that is fully divorced from reality and truth.

It is important to note that there are numerous Christian Palestinians authors, poets who offer a meaningful contribution to the culture of the Palestinian people and to the creation of a social philosophy and politics, which is based on justice, liberty, and equality. However, before the significance of this point can be fully grasped it is crucial to understand the concrete reality of the contemporary situation in Palestine, considering both the positive and negative factors within the Christian community. Referencing this, contemporary author, Andrea Pancini, concluded his book *The Arabic Christian Community in the Palestinian Territories*, in the following way;

"From the social and political point of view, both in Israel and in the area of the Palestinian autonomy, new perspectives are being opened for the Arabic Christian communities in connection with the peace process: it however, especially in the Palestinian territories, has suffered a consistent hemorrhage from its own members that is hardly retrievable. The challenge that sets the future to these communities is to elaborate correspond strategies to strengthen its own roots in a political context more stable and propitious, although not too much numerous, to practice a meaningful cultural and social role to be remarkable actors in the two political entities – institutional of affiliation" (Pancini, 1996, p. 310).

Pancini is a very well versed in the historical and contemporary Middle East situation and in his writings he emphasizes the important role that Christians have in this moment. This emphasis helps Christians in the Middle East better clarify not only their identity and also their historical tradition of valuable con-

- 1 The term Palestine derives from Philistia, the name given by the Greek writers to the land of indigenous people who lived there since the beginning. This term has been associated with the samaal region and that includes the modern Israel and Jordan. This region is also known as the Holy Land for the presence of and significance to the three monastic religions. During the Ottoman rule, this name was adopted for the region mandated to Great Britain, and for long time this term denoted a specific region even though it did not specify precise boundaries. Generally, the word Palestine is being used to define a region bordered on the east by the Jordan River, on the north by the modern Israel, on the west the Mediterranean (including the coast of Gaza), and on the south the Negev desert (1999-2001 *Britannica on line – consulted on Friday 25 May 2001*). SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES, *Report of the commission on the Palestine disturbances of August 1929*, London 1930, p. 8.
- 2 Affirmed by Hassan Bin Talal, the prince of Jordan in his book *"Search for peace"*.

tributions to the educational system. This knowledge cannot be neglected or omitted, and it should also be noted that the formation of young people happens through the social interaction, not only through the level of basic social interaction. As a minority group, the Palestinian Christian community cannot function without significant interaction with the majority group, Palestinian Muslims. This contact helps also to clarify their identity more through the testimony of life and the important presence of all Christian institutes, which are widespread in the region as a whole and affect the economy in a direct and indirect way.

This study gathers and subsequently reflects on the remarkable importance of the presence and involvement of the Palestinian Christian community in the land of its birth, at the center of the monotheistic world. The goal of this article is to make an important and concrete contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the central role played by the Palestinian Christian community in the Holy Land, with the hope that it will break the ground for other new and continuing studies on the topic.

For generations, the Palestinian Christian community has contributed to the formation and development of the society in which inserted using methods that were both continuous and creative³. Christians, despite being a minority, are present inside various governmental organizations and a variety of social structures. One example, Hanan Ashrawi, was Minister of higher education in the Palestinian National Authority and took a very important role in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) during the first year of the peace process⁴ (Pacini, 1998, p. 279).

This century holds the possibility of not only the discovery of new a Christian image, but also renewal era of the church (Riccardi, 2001, p. 197). The visit of His Holiness John Paul II to this land gave new meaning to this possibility. His visit gave the community a new and invigorated image of their identity and continually developing significance for their presence in Palestine.

- 3 The concept of development is not easily definable. For this reason and as to give the right attribute and correct meaning, it was supposed to start from a definition with a human dimension. Development could be defined through the use of the data of every state, or through the quality of life, or according to some human rights scales that represents a fundamental measure and is considered a measurement of development. It is important to underline the notable changes during the last decades. After the Second World War, the obsession of the development was all expressed in economic terms. The changes began during the sixties with concepts that are technically very specific. Also, in the last decades, the World Bank and the United Nations have essentially abandoned the economic indicators and have already moved toward complex indicators that exclusively exclude economical aspects. The most important complex indicator is the index of human development that considers three factors: 1. *The income, or the level of material comfort*, 2. *The hope of life*, 3. *The level of education*. It seems that the international organizations have finally considered the Christian message that puts the human being at the center of the attention. The Palestinian Christian community has been involved in this kind of development in the Middle East since the beginning.
- 4 Dr. Hanan Ashrawi was the official Palestinian spokeswoman in the group for the negotiation for many years. And for three years she was elected as a minister of higher education in the Palestinian National Authority (*Britannica Book of the year, Chicago 1993, p. 34*). Nowadays there are some Palestinian Christians who are ministers in the national authority or having a very important position. For more information see also. D. TSIMHONI, *Christian communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank since 1948. A historical, social and political study*, Westport, Connecticut, London 1998, p. 168.

1. Culture, Religion and Economy

In any situation as complex and entrenched as the conflict in Palestine there are a wide variety of factors to consider, but in this instance the instability of peace and justice, and the continuously uncertain vision of the future are paramount (Pozzo, 1984, pp. 269-284). The shifts in control throughout the centuries has left Palestine with people with a diversity of heritages, many of which are mixed ethnicities, which was caused by intermingling between the residents and those who were brought in after each change. This diverse group of people includes Christian, Muslims and Jews⁵. Within the Palestinian Christian community, membership goes beyond the boundaries of culture and it is not tied to a certain language, pattern, or tradition⁶. In this land, Christian faith is able to live easily within every culture. However, the embodiment or exact method of expression can manifest in different, culturally dependent ways. Yet the expressions through which these messages are passed remain the most serious problem. This predicament of how to apply new elements of civilizations for the service of society, like values throughout the educational institutes, symbols etc, remains the duty and the responsibility of the Christian Community. The presence of the religious dimension in the daily life of the people and in their civilization does not simply appear without significance or intention, but rather it continues to but it continues to guide the way for relationships of cooperation.

From 1516-1917AD, Palestine was considered as the land of conquest and exploitation by the Turkish and an important strategic holding to use as a base to attack British occupied Egypt (Al Mawsua' Alfalastiniah, 1984). The corrupt administration of the Turkish and the fiscal oppression reduced the country to a state of economic poverty. With the help of the European initiatives through the Turkish governments, Christians had a new liberty in practicing their faith which was greatly facilitated by the after opening of new schools, hospitals and institutions (Baratto, 1999, p. 24). During this period the Ottoman government fol-

5 SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES, Report of the commission on the Palestine disturbances of August 1929, London 1930, p. 8.

6 In the last years the Palestinian society has suffered a radical change. It used to face every new challenges required by the historical contingencies, in which a non-indifferent role is taken again by the Israeli occupation. Specifically, today the Palestinian Christian, busy in the formation, has the responsibility and the duty to be able to adopt different way of communication to be listening of the proposals furnished by the other inhabitants the Holy Land: from the Islamic culture and from Jewish side. On this point, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem recently wrote "read and live the Bible in the country of the Bible today" to give a general form to the Christian's contribution, valid for every time: *"Common testimony and dialogue with everybody [...] We also believe that the church of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, through its experience and its reflection, can offer a unique contribution in the context of the churches of the region and in communion with the universal church. The church in Jerusalem will be happy to be listened by the others and to welcome their answers. We hope that our message, over that from the Christian community, can also be welcomed by our Moslem brothers and Jewish as contribution on our behalf to the coexistence and the peace, in the respect of the beliefs of all"*. The patriarch gives a great appeal to hope, asking Christians to stay in the heart of this injury that has reached an unbearable level. Far from every rhetorical thought, it seems that only through a true social-political commitment is able to help preparing a healthy and ready environment to welcome everyone with his own differences.

lowed the infamous policy of intentionally creating uneducated populace, which brought disastrous cultural deterioration and was characterized illiteracy among a great part of the Palestinian populations (Sfeir, 1993, p. 76).

At the end of 18th century, the Catholic community was counted at 59,731 members; of these there were 56,874 from the Latin rite (Di Alcono, 1856, p. 60). It is important to note that before the Turkish conquest, Palestine had a significant Christian population, which was divided between the Greek Orthodox, who were living in a mainly urban community, and the Syriac speaking Christians, who were mostly settled in the rural areas⁷. The non-Muslims, which included the Christians, were measured under the law of *millet* (autonomous religious communities⁸), and the choice of their leaders was subject to the sultan's authorization. During this time only the different communities were recognized separately as a body in the Millet system (O'Mahony, 1995, pp. 240-242).

During this period, many Christian writers took a position in regards to the problematic political situation in Palestine. Some of them published books articulating an argument for Palestinian nationalism. One example is Najib Azouri, a Christian who worked for the Ottoman government in Jerusalem, before relocating to France in 1904 (Al Mawsua' Alfalastinia, 1984). He wrote the book *The awakening of the Arab Nation*. He called for Arab unity and for the formation of an Arab Catholic church to replace all small Christian groups, many of whom were likely Protestants (Musallam, 2000, p. 97).

Another famous young Christian author was *Najib Nassar Al-Khoury*, the founder the Al-Karmel newspaper (1908-1914), which was suspended several times by the Zionists. In this newsletter, he intended to persuade people against selling their land to the Jewish immigrants. He was one of the first people to publically call for a Palestinian Arab identity. Also he has called for the opening Arab religious, industrial, vocational and agricultural schools with the intentional that such institutions would have a positive impact on the economy of the region (Musallam, 2000, p. 102).

Many more examples can be given to demonstrate that during the Turkish period the Christians were in a good position to defend their right as Palestinians and also as Christians, while promoting educational opportunities. Hanna Issa was another active Orthodox Christian who worked tirelessly as to maintain his identity as Orthodox. Before he died in 1909, he wrote many articles in his newspaper *Al-Asma'i* to advocate for the establishment of national and agricultural schools in Palestine to teach the equality of all; specifically emphasizing equality

7 According to McCarthy the Christians moved mainly in the 19th century from living in the rural centers to the main urban centers. J. MCCARTHY, *The population of Palestine: Population history and statistics of the late Ottoman period and the mandate*, New York 1990, pp. 12-14.

8 On a first level, this system has driven the Christians to consider themselves an unfamiliar and strange in the Palestinian society. In the moment that they practiced their right of being Christian, they no longer fit the role for being citizens in the country. On another level, this system transformed religious affiliation to a minimal social and sectarian association. So the person become classified since birth, and this is the reality from which the church is still suffering (A. ISSA, *Les minorités chrétiennes de Palestine à travers les siècles*, Jerusalem 1976, pp. 187-193). You can see more details about this dimension of the Christian community in Palestine in: A. O'MAHONY, *Church, State and the Christian Communities and the Holy Places of Palestine*, in TAYLOR W. – PRIOR M., *Christians in the Holy Land*, London 1993, pp. 13-16.

between Christians, Muslims and Jews (Al Mawsua' Alfalastiniyah, 1984). His contributions to the community number far more than what he is most commonly remembered for, he was also an economist because he called for the people to establish banks, develop trade and industry throughout Palestine (Musallam, 2000, p. 97). Hanna Issa was a brilliant and dynamic individual whose philosophy ought to be more widely studied by all.

At the end of the Turkish dominion in 1914, one of the most famous voices was that of the famous Khalil As-Sakakini, who became an active journalist after his return from the United States in 1908 (Al Mawsua' Alfalastiniyah, 1984). He believed in the independence of the Jewish people, but not on the cost of others, and in an interview in 29th of March in 1914 with the Al-Iqdam newspaper he said the following;

"Zionists want to possess Palestine, the heart of Arab countries and the middle link that connects the Arabian Peninsula with Africa. Thus, it seems that they want to break the link and to divide the Arab nation into two parts to prevent their unity. The people have to be aware. It possesses a land and a tongue. If you wish to kill a people, cut their tongue and occupy their land. This is exactly what the Zionists intend to do to the Arab nation...." (Musallam, 2000, p.104)

All these individuals represent the position of the Christian community in Palestine, and of course their position was very close to the position of the church. However, unfortunately, these Christian voices were shut down and silenced by the Ottoman government at the beginning of the war. Many of them were deported or silenced by imprisonment and harassment. The challenge to build an economy on the cost of others is the worst face of civilization.

There were also some very important female voices speaking out on these topics at this time. One example of a Christian woman is that of Eva Al-Masri, who has very famous for her declarations in regards to the involvements and contributions of Palestinian women in Palestinian society (Zuaiter, 1979, pp. 478-480). Al-Masri was not the only woman; there were many more who were not only involved in meetings and conferences, but also in aid actions. The actions and achievements of Palestinian women during this time period is an unfortunately under acknowledged topic of history, but one that is deserving of serious and deep research.

From 1917-1948, when Palestine was under British control, it was a country of about 24,000 sq. km, and was already small enough that the Jewish Agency resolved and declared that the only way to resolve the problem of continual persecution was to immigrate to Palestine⁹. They immediately began to plan to relocate the population to Palestine. They chose to implement illegal immigration (Gilboa, 1994, p. 44). During the British Mandate, Jewish immigration into Palestine increased dramatically. More than 400,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine during the Mandate, increasing their percentage of the overall population from about 8% in 1920 (with the vast majority of those being recent immigrants) to

9 GOVERNMENT OF PALESTINE, department of education, *Note on education in Palestine 1920-1929*, Jerusalem 1929, p. 3.

about 30% at the end of the Mandate (Al Mawsua' Alfalastinia, 1984). The percentage of Palestinian land owned by Jews increased from 1.7% of the total Palestinian land in 1920 to about 6% in 1947 (Gilboa, 1994, p. 45).

Directly following this period of crisis, the civil administration was established in 1920, but it maintained a policy that favored the Jewish people (Al Mawsua' Alfalastinia, 1984). This put the Arab population in a deepening twofold crisis, first because Jewish immigrants continued buying land, which in the end only served to deprive so many families from their livelihoods, and second because with Order 688 countless families who made their living off the land were forcibly evicted. So the British Mandate was in the increasingly complicated situation of trying to protect the right of the Palestinians; both Christians and Muslims, while the Jews were declaring their unilateral right of owning and controlling the land (Hadawi, 1967, pp. 58-60). Therefore, the economy of the Palestine, which was based on products of the land, was almost totally halted. Recently an interesting movie by an Israeli named Amos Gitai, entitled *Kedma or Toward East* explores the dramatic arrival of the Jews and the impact on the inhabitants of Palestine (Amos, 2003). This portrayal really supports the devastating effect that loss of the land had on Palestinian society.

It is not easy task to summarize all the events experienced by the Palestinian community and their subsequent reactions during this period, but what is hugely important to realize is the rapid acceleration of events at a time when the Palestinian themselves were not prepared to address such changes. This period is characterized by the development of political, social, economic and the cultural aspects of life in conjunction with a daily struggle against the British mandatory system and their passing of resources and facilitation of the entrance of the Jews in Palestine. The chart below illustrated the shift in the demographic situation from 1922 to more recent years (Al Mawsua' Alfalastinia, 1984).

		Christians	Muslims	Jews ¹⁰	Others ¹¹	Total
1922 ¹²	Palestine	73,024	590,890	83,794	7,917	757,182
		660,641		91,707		
1944	Palestine	135,547	1,061,277	528,702	14,098	1,739,624
		1,196,824		542,800		
Year	Area	Palestinians		Non Palestinians		Total
		Christians	Muslims	Jews	Others	
1975	HL	170,000	1,844,000	2,888,000		4,902,000
		2,014,000				

10 The Jewish communities who are living in the settlements are called settlers. In 1945, 70,000 Jewish settlers came to the area and as a result their number has become superior to that of the Palestinians. And of course later more Jewish immigrants arrived to Palestine. They were divided into two sections, one in Europe who were working under the name of the Jewish Agency to transfer the possible number of the Jewish people in Palestine, and the other where they were operating directly in Palestine to strike the British targets who were on the Palestinian coasts to stop the Jewish clan destined to enter, and to prepare the unloading of these immi-

To better illustrate the situation, words are not actually necessary. This example renders a very clear development for the current reality while taking into consideration the condition of the Christian community in the 2002 (Della Pergola, 2002, p. 34). So long as illegal Jewish immigration and settlement continues to grow in Palestine, these numbers will be ever changing.

The experience of Christians in the Holy Land is enriched by a culture that over the centuries has developed into so many traditions, faith testimonials, sufferings, involvements and contributions. The Palestinian National Charter, which was formulated directly after the birth of the PLO during the national congress in Cairo from the 1st to 17th of July in 1968 (Al Mawsua' Alfalastiniyah, 1984). The following quote is from a very important article, which explored the equality in the Palestinian society and the liberty for each religion during that time. Some of these paragraphs are so important for the Christian Community. "*Palestine is the homeland of the Palestinians Arab people; it is an indivisible part of the Arab homeland, and the Palestinian people are an integral part of the Arab nation*" (Peters, 1984, pp. 417-420). This first point gives all Palestinian Christians the right of declaring themselves to be Arabs and participating in Arab culture, as well as contributing to Palestinian society as full members instead of outsiders.

This article can immediately be connected with the document sent to the Churches of the east entitled *The Light of the East*, in which the Pope writes to confirm the very important role of these churches and their patrimony as part of the patrimony of the universal church. Moreover, he writes that it is essential for all people to articulate themselves according to their own culture and thought (Giovanni Paolo II, 1995, p. 10). It is an invitation for all Christians to deepen their significance and presence in the East.

Religion is part of the daily life of the Palestinian population and specifically the Christian community; Christians in the Middle East attend church and live a popular religiousness, which consists of devotions and traditions. Currently, many young people are starting to practice less practicing and to distance themselves from the church. The fact that Christians live among a Muslim majority can help

grants (Y. GILBOA, *Il blocco marittimo britannico della costa palestinese 1945-1948*, in "Storica rivista", Modena, VII (Luglio 1994) 6, pp. 44-46). But what we mean today with settlers are those who move from living in the Israeli Territories to become habitant of the Palestinian Territories in an illegal way. And they are who are creating all obstacles for the peace process. Another reason for the growth number of the populations in Palestine was the expatriation; exodus of so many Jewish between 1948-1951. It has arrived to 42% of the increasing number of the population. The immigrants of the Jewish people has arrived to 680.000 especially from Africa and Asia, and Europe in the first four years after the declaration of the state in 1948 (AL MAWSUA' ALFALASTINIAH (PALESTINIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA), Vol., II, Damascus 1984, p. 558).

- 11 Although there are number of other minority groups, such as Druses, Baha'is, and the Samaritans community still living in the Palestinian Territories, they are too small to influence the dominant Palestinian culture. The number of Samaritans at Nablus rounds up to a little over one thousand, and they still maintain their distinct cultures and beliefs. Their name derived from the old SAMARIA region in the northern part of the old kingdom of Israel, where they have built their temple against the practices of Jerusalem (AL MAWSUA' ALFALASTINIAH (PALESTINIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA), Vol., II, Damascus 1984, p. 529).
- 12 SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES, *Report of the Palestine disturbances of August 1929*, London 1930, p. 8. And, AL MAWSUA' ALFALASTINIAH (PALESTINIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA), Vol., II, Damascus 1984, p. 556.

them clarify better their identity and witness Christian values; but Christians can easily get swept up in the mentality of the majority¹³. However just as many Christians have an open mentality and are able to live and maintain their Christian identity despite the strong connection between the socio-political ideas and religious convictions (Khoury, 1978, p. 88).

Andrea Pacini explored this topic in his book about the Christians in the Arab world, confirming and assure the secular approach for Palestinian context:

“The unity in the struggle for Palestinian autonomy, which has characterized the last decades, allowing religious differences to be overcome, seems to open up prospects of a future institutional structure in the territories based on equal rights, regardless of religious affiliation. A constitutional charter is currently drafted for the new area of autonomy, which seems to be based on principles of secularity” (cfr. Pacini, 1996, p. 303).

The position of the Christian community is an important juxtaposition between avoiding the intermingling between religion and nationalism. So the inclusion of the church is of a secular type that should be recognized as the only path to development, modernization and democratic system. Perhaps the first real Arab Christian nationalist was Adib Ishaq, who called for comprehensive Arab unity through bypassing religious limitation and emphasizing the principle of civil unity within the Arab homeland. He explained it in the following way:

“... we shall not elevate one group above another, and we shall not revert to be the followers of one creed at the expense of another, for all of us are brothers in the homeland, and we are attached by the unity of language” (Levin, 1978, p. 77).

Probably, it is right to say that the Arab religious awareness is indebted from its outset to the efforts of Christian intellectuals who urged for social unity as a basis for the idea of the homeland. So Christian Palestinians were attentive as not to mix between the religion and nationalism. Therefore, it is clear that religion played a very important role in the first stages of the history and life of all nations, so therefore religious harmony can smooth the the way for national unity (Hourani, 1977, p. 370). This is a special moment for the Palestinian Christian to define their position in the society.

In this context, it is impossible to separate faith and culture without destroying both, therefore the church is both local and universal. It grows in a culture that surrounds it, for God is seen to be present in all cultures. The point is not to analyze certain theological concepts, but rather to examine the period of difficulty in the Middle Eastern culture. Can the presence of a same local culture become a unifying factor for the Palestinian communities? Today, the Arabic language and culture are considered the language and culture of the local Arab Palestinian Christians; which is hugely important for an increasingly unified people.

13 Muslims who are living in the Palestinian Territories and Gaza strip represent the 97% of the general population, the 3% includes Christians and others. Della Seta, 1999, p. 171.

2. The Prize of the Conflict

It is impossible to ignore the results of the Middle Eastern conflict on all the inhabitants of this Land. The situation has degraded the relationship between the Israeli and the Palestinians even with both groups looking for a real and lasting peace. Unfortunately, both sides have lost long-term vision and the situation is increasingly complicating every day. The lack of real, sustainable peace in the region has served to increase the suffering and the instability of the social situation. The Palestinian society has come to be a disturbed context under the Israeli occupation, Gaza is separated from the West Bank and the North is separated from the South, which has put the Palestinian National Authority in a control crisis. The experience of living in Gaza, for example, is completely different and more difficult than living in the West Bank. This difference is valid also for the North and South, and Jerusalem remains a completely different case altogether. Therefore, it is very hard to give a correct reading to the actual situation in this complex society.

The presence of the “*below the poverty level*” factor is continuing to increase because of the closure of the Territories, which doesn’t permit many to work. Although the situation is almost at the worst it has ever been, there are several factors that prevent an increase in people living below the poverty level. One source of this prevention is the unity among the Palestinian populations; this attitude comes and is based on a traditional point of view, that “*that no one should be forgotten*” and the people as a whole want to survive (Peruggia, 2001, p. 6). Without a real peace in the region there will be no real investment, especially in the Palestinian Territories. There are many who are employed, but with very low salaries, which creates a group who live in *hidden poverty*. Unfortunately, many Christians are leaving because they do not want to live in this situation and look elsewhere to find a better life, rather than remaining in a place where there is little hope for economic improvement (Khoury, 2000, pp. 24-25).

It is obvious that in conditions of war and poverty, the psychological disturbances will increase. This is especially true during the last several years, which have brought a continuing and increasing disaster to the Palestinians. The absence of peace threatens the personal sense of security and in some cases creates separation between the populations. All these things can increase frustration, which may lead to an explosion on both the personal and national level. During the 11th Assembly of Catholic Action, wrote the following about the actual situation in Palestine:

“The worst kind of violence is invisible; it lies in the intentions of creating reality that is based on an injustice. This form of violence is most dangerous because it quietly changes reality and builds up the injustices committed in a particular context to the point where a continuation of this injustice becomes cause of unrest and eventually explodes into full-fledged violence”¹⁴.

This perspective articulated by Sfeir is particularly valuable because her opinion

14 Jacqueline Sfeir is the member of the pontifical council for the laity, and ex dean of the faculty of education at the catholic university of Bethlehem. J. SFEIR, *opening address of the XI national assembly of the catholic actions 25-28 April, Domus Pacis, Roma 2002*, p. 4.

is objective and given without any attempt to justify the violence, but rather than to highlight the negative aspects of violence against the populations with an emphasis on long-lasting trauma. The violence, which is another factor to be considered in its own right, is a clear indicator of frustration and shattered illusions. This violence developed out of the closure of the territories, so people react with anger, frustration and hostility. With the peace process, the candle of hope flickered brightly for a while, but currently the entire Palestinian society is suffering the consequences of this conflict. On November 2000, the His Excellency the Patriarch Michael Sabbah requested the intervention of the entire world to stop the violence. He wrote to address all believers in the following way:

“Our people in the Holy Land are living in gloomy days during which the dream of peace, which once seemed very close, is now vanishing away. Violence, retaliation, fear, death, unemployment, the end of the peace process summarizes our situation today” (Sabbah, 2000).

Christians affirm that they are against all forms of violence, but the Israeli occupation is the first and the worst shape of violence against human rights. His Holiness Pope John II declared on the Sunday of the Palm 31 March 2002 in his homily that *“the true strength is in the fidelity to the truth”*¹⁵. So Christians have to be honest with themselves and others about the reality of situation and the real cause for this violence. This cycle of violence received global attention. In his visit Anthony Zinni, the American Representative to the Middle East, explained that that terrible psychological situation on both sides is a sign for the whole world to put an end to these clashes between the two sides¹⁶.

3. Economic Challenges

For the vast majority of the inhabitants of Palestine, the economic situation deteriorated during the British Protectorate. Despite that most Christian schools offered free education, there were countless obstacles for those who wishes to attend. The current situation is destroying the Palestinian economy. Much of the local economy in the Palestinian territories is based on tourism and before the Intifada there were dozens of tour buses coming every day to the different cities

15 This message of the Holy Father comes from a moment when a delegation from the CEI came back from the Holy Land, as a visit of solidarity and symbol of peace, and here the Pope began call for the truth. The church has chosen the right moment to call for justice and truth. Also the Pope also called for the young people to be honest and truthful (Cf. A. ZEMA, *Vibranti parole del Papa ai giovani nella messa per la Domenica delle Palme sul sagrato della Basilica Vaticana. La vera forza è la fedeltà alla verità*, in «ROMA-SETTE» XVI(31 Marzo 2002)13, p.2.) In a second meeting and in a later article of this Journal, there is a clear the connection shown between the international day of youth and the tragedy in the Holy Land. The Pope calls for pilgrims of solidarity and for the violence to decrease in this beloved land for all religions. F. CIFELLI, *Verso La Gmg: il viaggio delle due delegazioni italiani in Terra Santa e in Canada. Giovani, pellegrini di pace*, in «ROMA-SETTE» XVII(31 Marzo 2002) 13, p. 2.

16 *Incontro a Ramallah tra Arafat e l'inviato Usa*, in "L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO", 30 novembre 2001, p. 2.

of the West Bank¹⁷. Nowadays Hotels are often empty, souvenir shops are closed and restaurants are without customers. Workers stand outside begging for work. There is currently little hope for improvement and the economic situation continues to deteriorate. It is fairly well accepted that the main considerations and interests from external players in the international political circle is the defense of the economic affairs originating from the oil resources. Unfortunately, this international policy has a little to do with justice or with rights of the nations (Mancini, 2001, p. 12). There is no economy that seeks to behave in an ethical fashion; rather they instead fight over the limited resources.

In an interview with His Excellency the Patriarch Michael Sabbah by the “Il REGNO” Journal, which occurred after the visit of the Pope to Syria, the Patriarch gave a specific and direct description of the economic situation:

“These are difficult moments, not only for the loss of the tourism; the whole economy doesn’t have anymore foundation and base, there is no structure: neither tourism, neither internal economy, any possibility of development, the closed roads and the difficulty of movement, we cannot move from here to there: everything is out of the norm” (Mattè, Strazzari, 2001, p. 374).

The economic crisis began roughly fifty years ago, when so many Jewish immigrants arrived in Palestine¹⁸. The point is not to make a in depth economic analysis, but to understand the context for the current economic difficulties. For decades the Palestinian populations have struggled to establish their own economic project, and this lack of independence effects all aspects of life.

The economic situation for the vast majority of Palestinians seriously deteriorated throughout the British occupation. Nearly the entire population of Palestinians were farmers whose economic livelihood was decimated by British exploitation. Agricultural production in the Palestinian sector dropped dramatically during the Mandate, as imports increased, the situation declined further into debt and people were increasingly being forced off the land.

The Jews, on the other hand, had access to huge amounts of external capital that poured into the area from wealthy American and European Jews. In this situation, both Christian and Muslim Palestinians became poorer and were automatically judged by the society as a second-class people. They began to feel like strangers in their homeland. This economic situation gives a clear idea of what people are experiencing on a daily basis. Recently, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and during the Intifada, have found that 58.7% of the Pales-

17 Tourism has been always affected by the political situation, especially during serious conflict events. In 1936, the percentage of tourists visiting Palestine decreased to 40% in comparison to past years, in 1936 the visitors were only 34.952 against the 56.270 in 1935. It is clearly shown that the serious conflicts in Palestine bring with them a great loss of tourists and in consequence a loss of the economic situation for the whole region. *Il problema dell’immigrazione*, in “TERRA SANTA” Jerusalem XVI (15 Stembre 1936) 9, p. 267.

18 According to the commission on the Palestine disturbances for the year 1929, the migration should not exceed the economic capacity as not to deprive any of the present people of their employment. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES, *Report of the commission on the Palestine disturbances of August, 1929*, London 1930, p. 100.

tinian population cannot pay treatment costs, and 43.4% were not able to reach the health center (PCBS, 2001, p. 9). This can only hasten the populations reaching an explosive attitude towards the continued exploitation and oppression. According to the PCBS, the percentage of households below poverty line has reached a high of 60.8% in the Palestinian Territories and the percentage of households who received humanitarian aid during the Intifadahs reached 53.3% (PCBS, 2001, pp. 8-16)¹⁹.

The topic of education and its relation to the economic growth has interested so many economists and researchers. One of these researchers, Carnoy, affirms this important relation saying;

“With the shifts to a more competitive international environment and the development of information and communications technology, education has become an increasingly important variable in such explanation”
(Carnoy, 1995, p. 191).

In his explanation he presents the educational system as a way to improve the economic situation, and that the economic prosperity can help in the educational reform (Carnoy, 1995, p. 192). The Christian community, in such a context, can play a very notable role in their reform due to their creative approach to scientific researches and studies. This would actually be an expansion of a role already exist, which can become the dominant power of the post-Intifada society and the key for the nation’s development.

The Catholic Near East Welfare Association tells the story of a Christian family who lived for many years in the USA and sent every cent to build their house in one of the cities next to Bethlehem. After a while their dream became true, but then they found themselves being bombed by the Israeli troops and they were forced to leave the house²⁰. The family income was nonexistent, and because of the city closure none of the family members were able to work anywhere. The money that they had saved throughout the past years has depleted. The family still has the desire to stay in Palestine, but what does the future hold for their children? (Miller, 2001, pp. 16-19).

Due to the socio-economic situation, students not attending school is becoming increasingly. They go to work to cover school’s costs, because their families cannot afford the fees. Therefore, these children feel deprived from experiencing their childhoods and they are forced to grow up too quickly and often shoulder the responsibility of adults. This brings negative aspects not only on the personal level, but also throughout the entire society. Without peace there cannot be any

19 A big part of this humanitarian aid comes from Christian resources, different agencies and some directly from a catholic relief centers. In many cases even the catholic aids goes directly and first to Muslims families who are in need, and eventually it became a condition that for each number of Christian family there must be a number of Muslim families.

20 A set of measures have been practiced on the land by the Israeli occupation during the Intifada, which affected and impeded the movement of persons and goods between Palestinian Territory and other countries, including Israel, through a total or partial closure of all border points. This, of course, has decreased the total quantity of real income which is earned by the Palestinian family monthly, regardless of its sources.

kind of development in any sector in this society. This means that the present economic situation is connected to the political situation in the whole region. It should be also taken in consideration that the other form of attack on Palestinian economy is manifested in the loss of freedom of movement. In 1995 Israel withdrew from seven of the largest Palestinian cities and towns, but kept its troops in the villages and the surrounding areas. As a result, they have isolated all the population centers in the West Bank and Gaza. Each town, in effect, becomes a large jail for its inhabitants²¹.

Palestinian youth have likened their lives to like a bird trapped in a cage. Palestinians are often forbidden to travel from one town to another. Military checkpoints obstruct roads. Many people, especially those who come from the village areas, have a very difficult time reaching their place of employment. Some individuals take as many as five taxis each way for their daily journey. They may take the taxi until it reaches a block, get out, climb over the obstruction, and catch a second taxi as far as it can go, and then repeat the process until they reach their destination. It takes a person, hours and hours to get to work, when it ought not take more than forty minutes.

In the coming future there will be a closure of so many educational institutes because of the economic situation. If this comes to pass, it will be considered a crime against the educational sector and against the economical growth of this region.

4. Final Considerations

To consider past accomplishments, both successes and failures, is common to human nature. Some reflections bring approval and pride, but for others there is grief and sadness or even disappointment and regret. In war, all claim to fight for a principle, for democracy and freedom of all, and also for a safer and better world. This was said during World War I and it has repeated again during World War II, and so on. Even former US American President George W. Bush used this justification to declare the war against terrorism, calling the war good against the evil. It will no doubt continue to be proclaimed each time where there is a conflict until the end of time. Paradoxically, once the war is over each nation goes back to practice the same injustices which brought forth the original conflict. For a long time the Church lived in a tragic situation under such cyclical regimes, whereby there were divisions and injustice. This served to greatly weaken the pioneer role of the

21 In his address to the US Catholic Bishops this past summer in Atlanta on 13 June 2001, Patriarch Sabbah told his audience that while violence on the Palestinian side expresses itself in stone throwing, gun shooting, mortar fire, and, unfortunately, in suicide bombings, it takes other forms on the Israeli side: the sealing of Palestinian towns and villages, the blowing under of agricultural fields, especially at harvest time, the cutting down of thousands and thousands of olive trees, the bulldozing of houses and buildings, the indiscriminate shelling and bombing of civilians and the protection of settlers who themselves use violence. Unfortunately, Sabbah said, the voices of Christian Palestinians go unheard in the United States, where U.S. politicians and the media look only at the manifestations of the conflict in the Middle East rather than its cause: Israel's continuing illegal occupation of Palestinian land.

Church. But later the Churches of the Holy Land came to understand that only *through cooperation could they make their prophetic voices heard in order to achieve justice, and empowerment for their identity in the Arab civilization.*

Palestine needs a new profile in forming and developing all aspects of life. This is not something that can be developed overnight, but it is a duty and has to be done with the contributions of the international community together with the efforts of the local inhabitants. The development of human resources is long and complex process that requires considerable investments. Therefore, there should be a real effort for a continuity of services and verification of the intended targets for development. The need for a state profile is related to the level of development in each political activity that is viewed and used as behavior whereby the average person should not become a victim of those in power. It may be possible to construct a *Participatory development*, based on the idea of including the people in political, social, and cultural development. It has to become part of the modernization theory as a precondition for socioeconomic changes, which work to reproduce and enrich large-scale social interaction. Understanding the capability of the Arab World and the Middle East to adequately deal with this kind of development, it becomes clear that it is not so much about capability, but the political, economic, and cultural circumstances that hamper the overall acceptability of any new changes.

Moreover, this country profile could serve as a basis to study and compare various approaches and strategies for the development of Palestinian society. Serious reexaminations of the past and reformulations of future efforts to create directions for a better economic situation is an integral part of this process. This article does not have the motive of provoking the discussion of the implications for appropriate policies to deal with the economic situation; nevertheless most of the conclusions drawn are only tentative. Further research and strong empirical evidence must be derived before one can positively provide a correct set of strategies guiding principle. It is appropriate, however, to conclude with a few words of anticipation and prudence. The Christian Community is energetic and active in this country profile for its patrimony. This was affirmed even since the Vatican II; *a very important patrimony that shouldn't be forgotten, that should feed the Christian memory of our country challenging the present and our future worries. We have to be honored and illuminate* (Rizzi, 1997, p. 35).

In conclusion, it is clear that from the social, cultural, economical and political point of view, new perspectives for the Arabic Christian communities in the area are opening in connection with this dramatic situation. The challenge to these communities is to elaborate on strategies to practice meaningful cultural and social role not only in an effective affiliation but also to give space for an adjudicative processes and for alternative conflict resolution methods.

The question remains about what kind of relationship can be established between economy and ethics? This query is essential, because through this mediation on the Christian perspective on ethics, a whole practice of economics can be built. It can be ascertained that a great difference of opinions is tied up to the multiplicity of the experiences, of moral convictions or of economic cultures. Inside these differences, however, it seems possible to retrieve an ethics that can integrate in the economy as much as into social life.

In conclusion it is worthwhile to affirm that the history of the Christian com-

munity in Palestine is a history of continuity, which today continues to want to express itself as an active part of the future State. Therefore, Christian educational institutes particularly have to be a part of this process of transformation that guarantees integral growth. Every developed in Palestine can influence the whole surrounding area. Therefore, the measurement of every proposal must include the evaluation of its impact on its surroundings.

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