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APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
OF HIS HOLINESS
PAUL VI
TO THE BISHOPS, CLERGY
AND FAITHFUL OF THE WORLD
CONCERNING THE INCREASED NEEDS OF
THE CHURCH IN THE HOLY LAND

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VENERABLE BROTHERS AND DEAR SONS
AND DAUGHTERS:
HEALTH AND THE APOSTOLIC BLESSING

We turn to you, venerable brothers and dear sons and daughters, in order to draw your attention to the duty we have of showing the Christian communities of the Holy Land the meaning of the ecclesial charity that unites us all.

The Church in Jerusalem, in fact, has a privileged place among the cares of the Holy See and of the whole Christian world. Interest in the Holy Places, and especially in the city of Jerusalem, is shown also in the highest assemblies of the nations and by the major international organizations. This interest aims at protecting their safety, and guaranteeing the free exercise of religion and worship.¹

Today, this interest is all the more necessary because of the grave religious, political and social problems existing in the Holy Land: the complex and delicate problems of the coexistence of the peoples of the region, of their living in peace, and questions of a religious, civil and human nature which involve the life of the different communities that live in the Holy Land.

With sentiments of anxiety, yet enlightened by a ray of hope, we recall again what we said recently, namely that the continuation of the state of tension in the Middle East, without conclusive steps towards peace having been taken, constitutes a serious and constant danger. This danger imperils not only the peace and security of the people there—and the peace of the whole world—but also threatens certain values which for various reasons are supremely dear to such a great part of mankind. In addition, the continuing existence of situations lacking a clear juridical basis internationally recognized and guaranteed, far from contributing to a fair and acceptable solution which takes account of everyone's rights, can only make such an achievement more difficult. We are thinking especially of Jerusalem, the Holy City and the capital of monotheism, towards which there turn more intensely in these days the

thoughts of Christ's followers, and of which, on a par with the Jews and the Moslems, they ought to feel fully "citizens".²

For our part, we cannot but recall the pilgrimage we made to the Land of Jesus in January 1964. We wanted to go there so that in the Holy Places, where Christ was born, died, rose again and ascended into heaven, we could personally honor the mysteries of our salvation.³ Nor can we forget the meeting with those Christian religious leaders, including the Greek Patriarch and the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, and with the crowds of the faithful who pressed about us in, as it were, an exuberant embrace of faith and charity.

Speaking of this intention of ours to the Council Fathers we explained the purpose of the journey: it was necessary "to intensify prayers and deeds",⁴ in order that the Council might come to a happy conclusion. For this reason we decided "to become ourself a pilgrim to the Land of our Lord Jesus",⁵ "the land where the Patriarchs, our fathers in faith, once lived; the land which echoed with the voices of the Prophets, who spoke in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the land, above all, that the presence of Christ made for ever blessed and sacred for Christians, and—we may say—for the whole human race".⁶ "No one can forget that when God, as man, wished to choose for himself a country, a tongue and a family in this world, he chose them in the East".⁷

"We seem to find a mysterious relationship between that land, Jesus Christ, Peter, his succession and Rome", as we recalled on the evening of our return to Rome from our pilgrimage to the Holy Land.⁸

This blessed land has thus become in a certain sense the spiritual heritage of the Christians of the whole world, who dream of being able at least once in their lifetime to visit it as pilgrims and to express their devotion and manifest their love for God who became the Infant in Bethlehem, the young Worker in Nazareth, the divine Master and Wonder-worker throughout the whole region, the Crucified Christ of Calvary, the Redeemer risen from the tomb which is in the "Temple of the Resurrection" (ho naós tis anastáseos)—as this church is called, in an evocative phrase, by the Greek-speaking Christian brethren.

But it is also a country in which, besides the Shrines and the Holy Places, a Church—a community of believers in Christ—lives

and works. It is a community that in the course of history has undergone innumerable trials and has suffered painful difficulties. Internal divisions, persecutions from without and, for some time now, emigration have weakened it, leaving it no longer self-supporting, and therefore in need of our understanding and of our moral and material help.

These brothers and sisters of ours, "who live where Jesus lived and who, in the vicinity of the Holy Places, are the successors of the very first Church, which gave rise to all the other Churches",⁹ enjoy precious merits in the sight of God and a high spiritual credit with all of us. In a unique way they share daily in the sufferings of Christ, and live up to their name as Christians by the testimony of a lively faith, open-hearted love and genuine poverty, in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel. Were their presence to cease, the Shrines would be without the warmth of this living witness, and the Christian Holy Places of Jerusalem and the Holy Land would become like museums. We have already had occasion to express openly our anxiety at the decreasing numbers of Christians in the ancient regions that were the cradle of our faith.¹⁰

From the very day of the Resurrection, when the Divine Master's most faithful followers went to visit his tomb, the first Jewish-Christian nucleus had the merit of preserving the memory of the most important Holy Places, showing the remains of them to the pilgrims who began to visit them at a very early date.

Sentiments of faith and piety impelled the first Christians to seek almost physical contact with the Holy Places and to hold impressive liturgical ceremonies there.

It is of course true that Christianity is a universal religion, not linked to any one country, and that its followers "worship the Father in spirit and truth".¹¹ But it is also a religion based upon an historical revelation. Alongside the "history of salvation" there exists a "geography of salvation". Thus the Holy Places possess the invaluable quality of providing faith with an indisputable support, enabling the Christian to come into direct contact with the setting in which "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us".¹²

Recent archaeological excavations, carried out by important cultural institutes, including the Biblical School of the Dominican Fathers and the *Studium* of the Franciscan Fathers of the

Custodia di Terra Santa, have brought to light fresh remains dating from the time of Christ and the Apostles.¹³

There are documents from the fourth century onwards which speak of pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land and indicate routes to make their journeys easier.¹⁴

Later, the well-known Arezzo Codex describes both the monuments in the Holy Land and the ceremonies held there, especially in Jerusalem during Holy Week.¹⁵

Saint Jerome, through his sojourn in Palestine and the impulse that he gave to Biblical studies, increased to a notable degree the interest in the Land of Jesus on the part of the Western Christian world and of cultural groups. It was in his time that two religious houses and a hospice were built in Bethlehem, a clear sign of a considerable flow of pilgrims.¹⁶

Later too the Holy Land continued to attract numerous pilgrims, in spite of the dangers of the journey and the limited and slow means of communication. Through the help of generous benefactors there was a consequent increase in religious houses and churches; the city and even the desert came to be populated by monks and penitents of every country and every rite, who discovered in the Land of the Lord the well-springs of the Christian life.

Down through the centuries the changing pattern of history has had its effect on the flow of pilgrims, which has known flourishing and less happy times. Since the last century there has been a constant increase in the number of pilgrimages, made easier by modern means of transport and motivated by a deeper sense of faith.

It is worthy of note that during the Second Vatican Council many of the Fathers went on pilgrimage to the Holy Places. And it is encouraging to see that many priests and religious like to spend a few days of retreat in Jerusalem on the occasion of their ordination or of special anniversaries. We would like to see even more of such visits to the Holy Land. This is why it has been our desire that the Notre Dame Hospice in Jerusalem should be reopened for the purpose, among others, of receiving groups of priests.

Such pilgrimages have been able to favor meetings with peoples of different beliefs, since not only the Christian com-

munities—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—but also the Jewish and Moslem communities look to and travel to that blessed Land, especially to Jerusalem, as to their spiritual center.

We earnestly hope that these contacts will increase and contribute (as we think and trust that they will) to mutual knowledge and respect and to the coming together of brethren, sons and daughters of the same Father; we hope too that they will lead to a deeper understanding of the primary need for peace among peoples.

Saint Paul had at heart the well-being of the faithful in Palestine and organized a collection for the poor among the faithful at Jerusalem. His appeal was answered generously by the Churches in Macedonia and Achaia and the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea. The newly-founded communities among the Gentiles felt themselves indebted to the members of that Church from which they had received the riches of spiritual goods, which they repaid with the fruits of their charity. The Apostle took the contributions personally to the Holy City, valuing the collection as a bond of unity between the new communities of believers and the original Church in Jerusalem.¹⁷

It was not outside of God's plan that the historical events of the thirteenth century brought the Order of Friars Minor to the Holy Land.

Ever since that time the sons of Saint Francis have been in the Land of Jesus—for an unbroken series of years—serving the local Church and guarding, restoring and protecting the Christian Holy Places. Their fidelity to their Founder's desire and to the Holy See's mandate has often been sealed with acts of extraordinary virtue and generosity.

The Friars Minor appealed directly to the great and to the humble for alms, and those entrusted with this task had the official title of "Procurators" or "Commissaries of the Holy Land".¹⁸ However, with the passage of time and increased need, their work proved insufficient. Therefore the Supreme Pontiffs on several occasions with paternal solicitude ordered the "Collection for the Holy Places", specifying the purpose of the collection and the times and means whereby offerings were to be sent to their destination through the Ordinaries.¹⁹

From the second half of the nineteenth century there was an important increase in pastoral, social, charitable and cultural works for the benefit of the local population without distinction and of the ecclesial communities of the Holy Land.

Unfortunately the local Church is lacking in material means. It is also suffering from the serious and prolonged consequences of the war that, it can be said, has been going on for decades. And it is not possible to ask the local faithful for sufficient help, since most of them have barely enough to keep themselves alive.

If this Christian community which originated in Palestine two thousand years ago and is still there today is to ensure its continued survival, if it is to make its presence active and effective also in the service of the other communities with which it shares its home, then the Christians of the whole world must be generous and help the Church in Jerusalem with the charity of their prayers, the warmth of their understanding and the tangible expression of their solidarity.

At this time we renew our hope for and our fervent encouragement of sincere and willing efforts towards a just and prompt peace, in the equitable recognition of the rights and legitimate aspirations of all the peoples concerned.

It is obvious to everyone, in fact, that the various civilizations that have sprung up in the Holy Land in the course of the centuries must come together, so that the groups of people belonging to them, though different for many reasons, may establish a form of cooperation and may remain in that region as in a "syn-odós", to give the Greek word its basic meaning of going forward together.

In this process of coming together, the Christian presence in the Holy Land, together with the Jewish and Moslem presence, can be a factor for concord and peace. This has a particular importance especially for us Catholics, confident as we are that "the future is in the hands of those who are able to pass on to the generations of tomorrow reasons for living and hoping".²⁰

This initiative of ours, however, is intended to have no other significance than a religious and charitable one, even though we cannot refrain from mentioning the particular importance of the question of Jerusalem and the Holy Places, a question that has been dealt with in other solemn papal documents.

Impelled therefore by the appeal that comes to us from that Land and by the commitment of our pastoral ministry, we renew and extend the norms laid down by our predecessors, in particular those of Leo XIII and John XXIII, and we make the following provisions:

1. In all churches and oratories, whether belonging to the diocesan clergy or to religious congregations, there are to be special prayers offered for our brethren of the Church in the Holy Land, and a collection is to be taken up for them. This is to be done once a year, on Good Friday or on another day to be named by the local Ordinary. The faithful are to be informed in good time that the collection is to be used for the upkeep not only of the Holy Places but above all of those pastoral, charitable, educational and social works which the Church supports in the Holy Land for the welfare both of their Christian brethren and of the local communities.

2. The offerings are to be sent in due time by the pastors and rectors of the churches and oratories to their Ordinary, who will transmit them to the nearest Commissary of the Holy Land (whose activity, so praiseworthy in the past, seems to us still valid and functional), or through some other suitable channel.

3. The Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Churches, in accordance with the Instructions given by us, will take steps to ensure that the *Custodia di Terra Santa* and the local hierarchy can, within their respective competencies, continue to consolidate and develop their various projects, in full harmony among themselves and in close collaboration with the other bodies that have special links with the Holy Land and which concern themselves with the affairs of the local Church.

In addition to the *Custodia di Terra Santa*, there exist in fact other works worthy of support and assistance, among which we would mention the Pontifical Mission.²¹ In issuing this appeal, we hope that the faithful of the whole world, while increasing their offerings for the collection traditionally called the Collection for the Holy Places, will not fail to give their contributions and cordial support to all the Church's work in the Holy Land, so that witness to the Gospel may be kept lively and the presence of Christ's followers at the Shrines may be strengthened.

On this occasion we assure all these organizations of our lively

satisfaction and offer them our encouragement, that their witness of charity towards their brethren in the faith and for the welfare of every man in need may be ever more effective.

Finally, we express our praise and support of all the charitable organizations and of all men of good will who are helping to alleviate the grave sufferings of the people of the Holy Land, who still face the fear of an uncertain and difficult future. God grant that their beneficial action, with the restoration of that peace which all desire, may prepare better days for those who live in the Holy Land.

With our Apostolic Blessing.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on the twenty-fifth day of March in the year 1974, the eleventh of our Pontificate.

Paulus P. P. VI

NOTES

¹ Treaties of Vienna, Sévres, Montreux, League of Nations, UNO.

² Address to the Cardinals, AAS 65 (1973), p. 23.

³ Address to the Council Fathers, AAS 56 (1964), p. 39.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Holy Father's greeting to His Excellency Mr. Zalman Shazar, President of the State of Israel, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 7-8, 1964, p. 6.

⁷ Allocution to the Catholic Hierarchy, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 7-8, 1964, p. 10.

⁸ *Il pellegrinaggio di Paolo VI in Terra Santa*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964, p. 140.

⁹ Concluding discourse of Paul VI at the Stations of the Cross in the Colosseum on April 9, 1971, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 10, 1971.

¹⁰ Address to the Cardinals, AAS 62 (1970), p. 47.

¹¹ Jn 4:23.

¹² Jn 1:14.

¹³ *Casa di S. Pietro a Cafarnao*, *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum*, Jerusalem; Vincent-Abel, O.P., *Jérusalem nouvelle*, Gabalda, 1914-1926.

¹⁴ *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, ed. P. Geyger, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, Vienna 1898, Vol. 39, p. 25.

¹⁵ Fr. G. Gamurrini, S. *Silvae Aquitanae Peregrinatio*, in *Studi e Documenti di Storia e Diritto*, 1888, pp. 97-184.

¹⁶ Cf. T. Tobler-A. Moliner, *Itinera latina bellis sacris anteriora*, I, 1877, pp. 43-47; II, 1880, pp. 133-142.

¹⁷ Cf. Acts 11:29; 24:17; Rom 15:25-31; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:1-9; Gal 2:10.

¹⁸ Martin V, *His quae*, 24 February 1421, in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, Vol. VII, Rome 1904, p. 549, no. 1471.

¹⁹ Sixtus V, *Nostri Officii*, 1589; Urban VIII, *Alias fel. rec.*, 1644, in *Bullarium diplomatum et privilegiorum etc.*, Turin 1868, Vol. XV, pp. 320-324; Innocent X, *Salvatoris et Domini Nostri*, 1645, *ibid.* pp. 403-404; Leo XIII, *Salvatoris et Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*, December 26, 1887, in *Acta Ordinis Minorum*, 7 (1888), pp. 17-18; Benedict XV, *Inclitum Fratrum Minorum*, October 4, 1918, in AAS 10 (1918), pp. 437-439.

²⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 31.

²¹ The Pontifical Mission for Palestine, whose current President is also National Secretary of the C.N.E.W.A. in the USA.

