**The Christian Churches of Jerusalem**

September 25, 2015

**Rev. Fr. Frans Bouwen**

Born in Belgium, Frans Bouwen is a member of the Society of Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) and has lived in the Old City of Jerusalem since 1969. He is editor of the periodical “Proche-Orient Chrétien”, specialised in the history, tradition and present life of the Churches in the Middle East, with a special emphasis on ecumenical and interreligious relations. He is a consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome, and a member of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue with the Orthodox Church as well as of the International Commission for Theological Dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. He is at present also vice-moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. He is active in various ecumenical and interreligious dialogue groups in the Middle East and in Jerusalem, and for many years was the president of the local Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church in Jerusalem.

1. Introduction. Meeting last week of the dialogue between Catholic and Orthodox Church. “It went quite well, because we lowered our expectations.
2. Three Patriarchs in Jerusalem.
3. Greek Orthodox Patriarch: H.B. Theophilos III (+ Holy Synod).
4. Rumanian Orthodox Representation. Anecdote: Rumanians built a hostel and church in Jericho without the permission of Theophilos. He insisted that it only serve the Romanians.
5. Russian Orthodox Representation. Anecdote: The Russians had built a church on the Jordanian side. Jordan is giving property to develop pilgrims. They didn’t get Orthodox permission. So it was resolved by saying that the
6. The White Russians.
7. Latin Patriarch: H.B. Fuad Tual. He has no more authority than any other bishop in the Catholic Church. Auxiliaries:
8. Auxiliaries: H.E. Boulos Marcuzzo, Nazareth.
9. H.E Marous Lehham, Amman.
10. H.E. William Shomali, Jerusalem.
11. [Emeritus: H.B. Michel Sabbah, Patriarch.[
12. Armenian Orthodox Patriarch: H.B. Nurhan Manoogian. He is ordained in Armenia.
13. Other Churches.
14. Oriental Orthodox.
    * + 1. Coptic Orthodox: Anba Abraham.
        2. Syrian Orthodox: Mar Sewerios Murad.
        3. Ethiopian Orthodox. Abune Embakom.
15. Oriental Catholic Archbishops and Patriarchal Exarches.
    * + 1. Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church.
    1. Jerusalem. H.E. Joseph-Jules Zerey.
    2. Galilee. H.E. George Bacaouni.
    3. Amman. H.E. Yaser Ayyash, Archbishop.
       * 1. Maronite Archbishop and Patriarchal Exarch: Moussa El Hage.
         2. Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarch. H.E. Bishop Pierre Melki.
         3. Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarch. Unknown.
         4. Chaldean Patriarchal Exarch. Unknown.
16. Anglican and Protestant Communities.
    * + 1. Episcopal Church (Anglican): Bishop Suheil Dawani.
        2. Evangelical Lutheran: Bishop Munib Yunan.
        3. Others: Presbyterian Church, Baptists, Nazarene Church, Church of God, etc.
17. Custody of the Holy Land (OFM): Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa.
18. Discussion. Christians are 1-2% of Israel, but there may be as many as 3-4%.
19. Demographics. The official number of Christians is “officially” 200 K, with 110,000 Latin Christians and 78,000 Greek and other Oriental Orthodox. Bouwen said that the unofficial total may be twice that size, perhaps 400 K, with some being uncounted Christians, such as Messianic Assemblies, refugees from the former Soviet Union, and others. How did he arrive at the higher figure?
    * + 1. There are 200,000 Christians “officially,” but other estimates are higher, maybe twice as many, 195-200 K. “Like the numbers in the Bible, they are very precise but not exact.”
        2. The official number and the real number are different. When Catholic missions report numbers, they inflate them
20. The Latin Catholics: 110,000.
    * + 1. Latins are the majority in Jerusalem: 45 K.
        2. The Greek Catholics more important. Greeks in Galilee, 55 K.
        3. Maronites are in the north, and they live in Lebanon as well, 8 K.
        4. Others, 2 K
21. Greek Orthodox: 70,000 K.
22. Syrians. 8-10 K
23. Protestants.
    * + 1. Anglicans 3k
        2. Lutherans 2K
        3. Baptists?
24. Other Christians.
    * + 1. Refugees from the Soviet Union: 300-400 K. Many are Christians, but do not claim it, because they would lose the “right to return.” Also they may not be convinced Christians.
        2. Migrant Workers. Many are Christians,
        3. Asylum Seekers. Mostly Orthodox from Eritrea.
        4. Hebrew-Speaking Christians. Many Christians pray in Hebrew out of sympathy with Israel. The Vicar is Father David Neuhaus, SJ.
25. History.
26. Christian Presence in Jerusalem.
27. In the beginning, the Christians were Jewish; then they became non-Jewish.
28. Diversity from the start: Aramaic, Greek speakers. Tensions from the start. Book of Acts presents an idea portrait.
29. The Period of Pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
30. Some come to visit, then stay. The visitors want official representation in Jerusalem.
31. Communities in the Holy Land were established, but all recognized the Patriarch of Jerusalem as their Bishop. St. Jerome settled in Bethlehem around 400 AD. He was a Latin from the West, but he considered the Patriarch as his bishop. Unity in Diversity.
32. Monasteries in the Judean Desert. As many as 4,000 monks.
33. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem accepted Chalcedon (451 AD). Chalcedonians understand Jesus Christ as one “person” in two “natures.” How do the non-Chalcedonians understand him? But the non-Chalcedonian bishops no longer accepted the Patriarch of Jerusalem.
34. Are Jerusalem’s divisions a scandal? Perhaps, but Jerusalem was not responsible for the divisions.
35. Division between East and West, 1054.
36. This divided situation remained until 1,099 and the Crusades.
37. Islamic Conquest, 638. Christians gradually adopt the Arabic language in social and public life, and also in liturgy. “They exchanged one Semitic language for another” (613-1200).
38. With this arabization, a large sector of the population adopts the religion of Islam. Christians become a minority. The Caliph came to receive the surrender of Jerusalem. Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Middle East. It was spoken by the Jews and the people of Palestine. Arabs are 20% of the Muslims, but they consider themselves the “true Muslims,” because they speak the language of the Qu’ran.
39. In Algiers and Morocco, tribes continued to speak their own language, and were not Islamized. In Iraq and Turkey there are Christians that continue to speak Syriac.
40. People who became Christian when it was the official religion became Muslim when it became the official religion. But Islam is deeply-rooted in this area.
41. After the Council of Chalcedon, the Bishop of Jericho. There was an Arab-Christian presence from early on, especially in Jordan. Our Latin Patriarch today is the descendent of a Jordanian tribe that is Arab Christian.
42. The Crusader Period. By this time, the majority were Muslims.
43. The Europeans did not recognize the Patriarch. He fled, and may have died.
44. The crusaders made one of the their priests the first Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. They thought they were unifying Jerusalem and Rome. But they faithful did not accept it.
    1. The Crusaders created resentment among the local Christians. As long as the Latin Patriarch was present, the Greek Patriarch was in exile.
    2. People believed that there could only be one bishop in one place.
    3. When the Crusaders left, the Greek Patriarch returned, and the Latin Patriarch became a “titular” bishop (in name, but not in locale).
45. The Franciscan Custody.
46. Did Francis visit Jerusalem? Perhaps.
47. In the 14th century (1336), the Franciscans received a mandate to take care of the holy places.
48. They started created communities in Jericho, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jerusalem.
49. Ottoman Empire, 1517.
50. The Nineteenth Century. At the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan states and then Greece achieved independence. The missionaries (apart from the Franciscans) were allowed back. (The Carmelite Fathers on Mt. Carmel were an exception.)

* 1754. Creation of the Greek Catholic Archdiocese of Galilee.
* 1838. Greek Catholic Patriarchal Vicariate in Jerusalem.
* 1842. Anglican-Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem. Anglican, Lutheran missionaries wanted a presence in the Holy Land.
* 1847 Restoration of the Latin Patriarchate.

1. Conclusion.
2. There has been a constant Christian presence.
3. After Islam, Christians began to speak Arabic.
4. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch represents the most direct line of succession since the time of the Apostles.
5. There have always been foreigners, not always with official representation.
6. Main Obstacles to Ecumenical Relations.
7. The history of conflicts around the holy places.
8. There is a column in the Holy Sepulchre linked to the “holy fire.”
   1. This has been going on since the 8th or 9th century. When the Crusaders took over, they prevented the Greek Orthodox from coming, and the Holy Fire ceased.
   2. The date of Easter cannot be changed. The holy fire comes down on a certain day. So accommodation with the Latins is not permitted. The patriarch is body-checked for fire-starting material. When he gets the “holy light,” he gives the fire to the Armenians and the Syrians.
   3. The Caliph destroyed the tomb to put an end to the practice of the holy fire. Which means that the Muslims believed in it as well.
   4. The Greeks consider themselves the rightful custodian, and that the other churches are their guests. Things began to improve with Paul VI and Athenagoras VI. Little by little, mentalities have changed.
9. The First Intifadah (1987-88).
10. The churches were confronted by violence. The churches were moved to speak with one voice. The Latin Patriarch Sabbah and the Greek Orthodox Patriarch were able to under. In 1988 they called for a just solution in a Common Statement. The Israeli censorship did not allow the statement to be published in Arabic.
11. In 1994, another common statement. The churches meet every two months. They are the Patriarchs plus the Christos. They have an official status with the Israeli authorities. They discuss common “external” problems, but not theology.
12. The civil authorities gave the Holy Places to the churches that cooperated with them. Georgian mercenaries in the Army of the Mamluks had influence, and so some sites were given to the Georgians. The Holy Cross monastery is a Georgian establishment.
13. Proselytism of the Past. The Orthodox sometimes feel that the Latins are proselytizing.
14. There is instead a collaboration. We’d like to be more pastoral, but we cannot. Local Orthodox clergy have almost no theological education. They have no real theological education. They have not graduated from seminaries.
15. The faithful. Many say, “We are a numerical minority, but we do not need special status.”
16. In Bouwen’s view, “If Christians want a future, they have to work together.”
17. National and Cultural differences. Mixed Marriages. Officially, a mixed marriage between Orthodox and Latin does not exist. The two are, in the eyes of Israel, “Christians.” The bride will enter the church of the husband. The children will be baptized in the church of the father. But in practice, the children go to Church with the parent who goes to church.
18. Positive Developments.
    * 1. The Status Quo. In 1852 the *status quo* was established between the Sultan in Istanbul and the Christians. Things will remain as they are: status quo.
19. Maintenance of the Holy Sepulchre.
20. This was recognized by the West in 1855. In 2013, in Bethlehem, there was a problem. The church had to work together for the restoration of the church in Bethlehem.
21. In the 1950s, the Jordanians obliged the churches to come together to work on the Holy Sepulchre. “If the churches cannot reach agreement, the civil authorities will step in.” They were forced to work together. Restorations lasted until the year 2000. They inaugurated the decoration of the dome above the tomb. An America gave a large sum, divided three ways, Greeks, Latins, Syrians. The three Patriarchs, plus the Christos, were present together. They did not pray together, but prayed separately.
22. The churches still have not found a way to adapt the *status quo* so that they can work together. The Holy Sepulchre has one entrance, even though the Israelis say that this violates all safety rules.
23. The Cleaning of the Manger Site. It’s usually done between the Latin Christmas and the Eastern Christmas. There’s a disagreement on Youtube: https://youtu.be/pjNOaUDROyQ. A Muslim family has the key to the Manger site, so that they can tax the pilgrims.
    * 1. Latin Catholics are abstaining, not fasting.
         1. In Bethlehem, there are Latin Catholics won’t fast in Bethlehem, because the Muslims fast. So they abstain.
         2. The Orthodox fast by abstaining from meat and milk. It’s abstention from quality not quantity. This is good. It is accommodation between Latin and Orthodox.
      2. The role of the Christos. He played an important role in the visit of Pope Francis.
      3. Kairos Movement. In 2009, the Kairos Document was published by Palestinian Christians. It’s an outcry for help and hope. This was the work of grassroots Christians, helped by some priests and bishops. It has brought many Christians together. The Anglicans, Lutherans, and *al Liqa* (a center mainly Catholic and Orthodox) work together. Our former Latin Patriarch, Michel Sabbah, has moral authority. He was the first Arab Patriarch, now age 82. Palestinian liberation theology is *sabeel*, Lutheran is *al-Kalima*.
      4. Immigration. The absolute number of Christians is not diminishing but their significance is. We should not compare the numbers today with those before. Bethlehem used to be two-third Christian. Now it is one-third. In the last fifteen years, Christians have emigrated, and they do so many times more frequently than Muslims. Religion plays a role, but it is secondary.
24. In 1948. 40,000 Christians. Today there are 10,000 Christians in Jerusalem.
25. In 1967.
    * 1. Schools.
         1. Most Christian schools follow the national curriculum. The Christian has higher expectations than the Muslim.
         2. It is a different spirit than the Islamic spirit. The Muslim has more capacity for endurance. When the Christian no longer sees the future, he moves on.
         3. Secularization. The Christian structures are still there – your are either Christian, Jew or Muslim – you cannot be “nothing.” But are Christians “sociological Christians” or “believing Christians”? The laity do not yet have a role to play.
      2. The visit of Pope Francis and his meeting with Patriarchs Bartholomaios I of Constantinople and Theolphilos III of Jerusalem in May 2014.