

**Educating for Peace in Israel and Palestine**  
**BibleLands' Inaugural Annual Lecture**  
**Archbishop Elias Chacour**  
**13 April 2010**

Thank you for this introduction that tempts me to ask if you have any questions. [audience laughter] Brothers, sisters, ladies and gentlemen, it's a great honour for me to stand in this cathedral and to address you with a message I carry all over the world, and I never forgot that whatever I say stems out from my own personal experience. I'm not a politician. I belong to no political party and that's why whenever I mention this ongoing conflict between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs I have the impression I am having a knife in my hand and moving it in a lively wound; it hurts. Whatever you say or you might think, you will have people to contradict you; to disagree with you, and our dream now is to come to a point where we can agree to disagree agreeably. We are not yet there unfortunately.

The longest conflict we have known between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs – what is going wrong? Who is right and who is wrong? Is there any solution for this complicated and murderous conflict and if there is any solution where would that be? In other terms is there hope for the Jews and the Palestinians to gain back peace and justice, justice and peace? Why did I fly from Galilee right here to Oxford to address you? What do I want from you? I will try to answer all these questions very briefly and please don't expect from me to mention every detail about that conflict. It's impossible to deal with such a complex situation that is lasting over a century in a few minutes – 60 or 50 minutes. I beg your pardon if I miss many points, but the reality, whatever I will say, is my deep sincere conviction that I learned from my own life experience.

The best way to start to introduce you to the complexities and to the heaven hope would mean that I tell you who I am. I was not born Archbishop, you might know that [audience laughter]. Well, I am a Palestinian and a proud Palestinian. I have nothing to be ashamed of being Palestinian. I'm a Palestinian Arab, my mother language is this very easy to learn Arabic language [audience laughter]. I hear your laughter. I believe that Americans are not big at languages, but not English people. If you don't believe me that Arabic is easy I invite you to come back with me. I will introduce you to our kindergartens, you will see that even our children speak Arabic [audience laughter]. Palestinian Arab Christian – that complicates the picture, because in the western media to say Palestinian evokes terrorism. We are accused of being a nation of terrorists, very few enlightened people have realised that we are a terrorised nation, and to be Arab means to be a Muslim and a Muslim normally is a bloodthirsty, inclined to violence human being, which is wrong in fact. And here is a person who says I am a Palestinian Arab Christian. Well, in fact, I thank God because I was not born Christian. When I discovered that, it was the greatest discovery of my life. I was not born Christian. I do not know about you here, brother and sisters. Were you born Christians, Jews or Muslims or are you like me? I was born a baby – only a baby but with birth certificate. I was created, imagined on the image and with the likeness of almighty God, not more but not less either. And here I find myself of the same seed with my Jewish, Muslim, believer, non-believer, brothers and sisters, human beings – we were all born babies on the image with the likeness of God, and if we forget that, woe to us, we would become like wolves devouring each other.

I was converted to Christianity not long ago. Not long ago, for us Palestinian Christians, we count time differently from you. We never forget the Swiss for putting this age in our arms, for us we still feel it in our body that time, oh my goodness, one thousand years are like one day before the Lord, so what are two thousand years? It's the day before yesterday that the younger boy from Nazareth was hanging around with our boys and girls, with our elderly, with our shepherds, sharing our weddings and our funerals. Watching everything – our clouds, our water, our flowers – and he took all of that and made of them the parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. He spoke with such authority. He did not say to those who followed him 'Ah! Happy you are because you are persecuted; because you are hungry and searching for justice.' That man would never have said that. We have two texts of the Sermon on the Mount – the one says *ashray* and if there is any Jew who understands Hebrew he would vibrate to *ashray* that's taken from *yashar* and from *osher v'osher* and the second text says to *varwhom* (? phon.) and both of them mean literally straight, straighten up, straighten up yourself you hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Get up – go ahead, move, do something if you want to be a peacemaker. Peace never requires contemplators, peace requires proactive people who get their hands dirty, to build peace and justice for every human being. That was the teachings of that young boy from Nazareth. Some of my ancestors – my forefathers – listened to him, followed him up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the bloody Jerusalem where all the prophets died – were killed – because they protested against the injustices of the then authority in Jerusalem. Some even deserted Jerusalem – went down to the seashore of the Dead Sea to rely back again on God rather than on the Shahs and on the weapons of Egypt.

You know what happened to my compatriot, the man from Galilee. If you don't I will tell you. He was delivered to the authority, condemned, tortured, crucified, buried and I do believe, I hope you do also, otherwise you be wrong, the third day he is risen, and his followers were instructed 'stay in Jerusalem till I send you something' and the 50<sup>th</sup> day after his resurrection while they were gathered in one of the upper rooms somewhere in Jerusalem, doors locked out of fear of the Jewish authority as we read in the Acts of the Apostles. Here he did send them something – what did he send them? Can you know, what? [audience calls out] Loud! [audience calls out 'Holy Spirit'] No, wrong! [audience laughter] Read the Acts of the Apostles. He never started sending the Holy Spirit, he started sending them his wind, *Ruwach, Roho*, a strong wind. He stormed their minds – he cleansed their minds and they started saying from now on there is a new conception of chosen-ness, of election, they said the Jews are no more elected, I'm sorry, and the Christians are not elected. Not the Muslims, you are not there yet. Who was elected, chosen to share the divine banquet with the lamb of God? It was only and exclusively man and woman – every man, every woman. What do you do with the chosen people, the Jewish brothers? Well ask them, are you men and women? If they say yes, remind them they are warmly invited to share the divine banquet with God, but if they say 'we are not men and women' you face a real problem.

We have done that with Christians when we pretended out of baptism there is no salvation – so far so good, but what kind of baptism? The reformed, re-reformed, or not yet reformed? Unable to decide, the West organised 30 years of wars of religion. To end by the starting point, every baptism in the name of the Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the right baptism. And these who were in the upper room were my forefathers – 120 – who were they, my forefathers? Me the Arab Palestinian Christian. Some of them were Jewish – I say that without any pride or any shame.

You know why? Because Jews were also born babies on the image of the likeness of God. Some others were Romans, my forefathers, others were Greeks, and if we read the Acts of the Apostles, others were Arabs. There was no Brits there. And they went all over the world after he sent them the Holy Spirit, preaching something absolutely new in the context of the Roman empire. They started preaching that there can't be any difference between Jew and Gentile. Oh, that's so good, but I would have expected some courageous charismatic Christian leader some 70 years ago to stand up in Europe and to say it can't be true that there is proof for German against Jew. And we are still looking for such a leader, to stand in Israel and to say loud and clear 'there can't be so much difference between Jew and Palestinians.' We have a long way to go still. We never learn from our own mistakes, and they say there is no proof man against woman, Lord against slave, you know why? Because you are all invited to become adopted children of God - even you British people [audience laughter]. Yeah? A simple fact but a fact.

These were my forefathers as 2009 years ago that I became Christian, since then we Palestinian Christians were obsessed in telling the story of our man from Nazareth and we have the pleasure to tell you the story of the empty tomb and of the risen Lord, that's why we are too busy telling the story – we are bad theologians and worse philosophers, we don't want to go into abstractions. Palestinian Arab Christian, I am also – to confuse those who have never been confused – I am also a citizen of the State of Israel. Palestinian Arab Christian citizen of Israel, and I cherish and respect and venerate my four affiliations, the one as the other. I can't do away with any of them, but I try to put an order of priority. What am I first? Can I be foremost above all a citizen of the State of Israel? I could not agree because I have a small problem with the State of Israel. Israel is 62 years old; I am 71 years old – I am older than Israel.

I did not emigrate into Israel at an early age, it's Israel that was created in my country when I was a young man, and the first image about Jews was given to me by my father. He gathered us and said 'children, there are rumours that within a few days we might see Jews coming as soldiers to our village. They have machine guns but be not afraid – they do not kill. These are survivors from a certain satanic plan in Europe to exterminate them and, thank God, the man who wanted that was not able to fulfil his satanic ideas. Some escaped, survived, and they are coming to our town, our country. We need to show them that somewhere in this world they are welcome'. And father continued, 'these are our blood brothers. They pride themselves as we do to be the descendants of an Iraqi citizen called Abraham.'

In a few days the soldiers came. We offered them our beds, we prepared banquets for them – we wanted them to feel OK, to feel as brothers. They did not kill anybody; they took our beds, ate our food and we slept on the roofs of our houses for ten days, after which the officer of the army (we know his name, he died only six years ago), ordered all heads of families to come together to see him; my father was with them. They went to see him, he said 'you go back home, you take wife and children and you go away for two weeks and this is a written promise, in two weeks you would come back.' What can a simple peasant do except obey him? And we left our homes in the hope that in two weeks we would come back. We stayed under our olive trees, fig trees, almond trees – it was great for us children to sleep in the open for two weeks, but after that it becomes a problem. The same heads of families gathered back again and went to see the army – that same officer – among them was my father. They went but they never ever came back. We learnt later on that

they were loaded onto military trucks and driven from Northern Galilee to the neighbourhood of the city of Nablus in the West Bank and the orders were clear – you cross the borders and go wherever you want. This land does no more belong to you. If you try to come back you will be dead before you cross the borders. They had no alternative but to obey and they started their Via Dolorosa, their way of suffering. They went down to the Jordan River and crossed the Jordan River. Don't ask me with what kind of boat crossed the Jordan River, you need no boat, this is the only river I know about in the world. About which there was much more ink spilt to describe it than there is water in it. And they marched our men in Jordan to Damascus in Syria to Beirut in Lebanon and were stuck with the hundred of thousands of other Palestinians who were literally ethnically cleansed and became refugees in the Arab countries. Very few were able to infiltrate back through the Northern borders with Israel and Lebanon. Among them was my father. This is how we knew what happened to them – he told us all the hardship, the difficulties they encountered. We became by then refugees; we found an abandoned room in the nearby village and settled there, saying two or three weeks and the hostilities would stop and we would return home. We were too naïve – we are still there. Father always instructed us to remember that we had a right to return, but he always discouraged all of us to use violence as was used against us to obtain our right. He told us to repeat 'violence will bring violence against you, do not do it.' The village was all a Christian village. Life turned around the church more than anything else.

To make a long story short, we would not stay quiet – we went to the Supreme Court of Justice of Israel, 1949. The resolution was in our favour, they have to return these Arab peaceful people. The army opposed. 1950, we went again to the Supreme Court of Justice; the resolution was in our favour. 1951, the same thing, so we resolved to go. It's a distance of 5 kilometres. We started marching towards our homes that were still there standing waiting for us to return. When we were about to reach the village, half a kilometre away, aeroplanes came from I don't know where and started raining bombs on the homes and on the church. The homes were destroyed, the church was partly destroyed, we stood there on the hillside of that place and we cried and that hill side is called, up to today, the Biram People Wailing Wall. My father wanted always to return back to rebuild his father's land, his father's home. His family tree goes into that village to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He was never given that right to return. He died in 1992 in Haifa. We buried him in the cemetery of our village, we had the right to return, but dead. We want to return alive maybe more Jews would come around one burying having nowhere to go would like to give them hospitality again.

That man my father wanted always one of his children to become a priest. We are four brothers. He tried with the elder – he remained three months in seminary and escaped. He did not want – he was clever. The second one threatened to commit suicide if father would send him to seminary; he did not send him. The third one escaped from home and disappeared in Jordan for three months, then father promised he would not send him to seminary, he came back home. Who remained? The youngest, and I was the youngest. He delivered me to the Bishop; I starting thinking 'why not be a priest? After all it's not bad.' Slowly, slowly I started loving becoming a priest. I said at least I can restore - try to restore – some of the broken dignity of my people. So I decided, with God's help, I would be a priest. I was sent six years to Paris to study at the Sorbonne and at the Institute Catholique and when I came back in 1965 I was ordained priest in Nazareth. One week later my Bishop said 'Elias you are a priest now – you need to have a parish. I will send you for one

month to a village called Ibillin, and after one month we will decide your final assignment.' I was 24 years old – who am I to ask questions to the Bishop? He said one month, it will be one month. I looked for the village; after much difficulty I found it. I was driving a Volkswagen Bug that I received from a German family for my priesthood. But the one month was symbolic. I did not know, what now I know by my practice that my Bishop, like all other Bishops have normally a very short memory, they forget so easily. My Bishop forgot me and I stayed 38 years [audience laughter] waiting for the one month to finish. It would not have finished if the Synod and Rome did not decide to give me a new cross to become the Archbishop of Galilee. I went to that village for one month, I expected at least to find what I had in Paris – a room, toilet, kitchenette – small things, but nothing of that all. I had to stay 6 months sleeping and living in the Volkswagen Bug. Do not pity me please, I don't need pity. It was not difficult to sleep in the Volkswagen for the simple reason, then I was not that big, I was much smaller [audience laughter]. When you become priest or Bishop worse you tend to put on and on weight, that's what I did; now I regret it. What can I do?

I tried to study who is the Arab Palestinian Israeli minority and I discovered that we are the poorest group of the Palestinians who many, despite of some problems, to stay in or around their towns and villages, because with the declaration of Israel there has been a systematic ethnic cleansing destroying 460 Palestinian towns and villages, confiscating all the lands preparing space for the future coming of Jews to the Holy Land. And now we are 1,300,000 Palestinian Arabs with Israeli citizenship. Not like the Jews have citizenship – we are a different citizenship, we are tolerated with more to do with us, we are number two, sometimes number three. But I discovered that we are a very young community; 75% of our people were under 28 years old and 50% were under 14 years old. I said to myself that the future with the Jewish neighbours would depend on the education we give to the 50% and I decided to consecrate all my life to serve this young generation of 14 years old and less.

We started by collecting abandoned old books from families and we started the first Arab public library in Galilee. Now it became the large library of Mar Elias Education Institution we continued by organising summer camps for our children. The first summer camp I wanted for 500 children, it's the minimum you can aim at in this country, but the first of the summer camp I was facing 1,127 children, what to do? First come first served? That's understandable, but I'm from a very poor family. I never came first or second or last, I always came after the last. Our home has been confiscated and destroyed, our lands taken, we fled with the clothes we had on us and we remained that poor for many, many, many years. So I decided to accept all these children.

1980 last summer camp we became free to circulate, no more military regime, we had – just imagine – 5,000 for the summer camp, and when you are 5,000 you are entitled at least to a miracle of multiplication of bread! [audience laughter] But I needed that not once but three times a day for three consecutive weeks. It means I needed a super Jesus Christ to make these miracles, I myself do no miracle. I spent hours praying for inspiration – what can I do? In the evening that day I decided to convene 30 meetings, one in each village where the children came from and to invite their mothers, and I invited each group of mothers to send us 10 mothers a day and here was young Abuna Chacour with 300 most beautiful mothers coming to prepare sandwiches and drinks for 5,000 children of God and they made it, they made the miracle. You would say what a beautiful Christian community you have Father

Chacour. Oh, I don't deny our Christian community is very beautiful, but the ladies who came were not all Christians, the majority were Muslim. May I remind you that if you are Baptist or Roman Catholic or Orthodox or Anglican we do not have the monopoly of doing good, and we do not have an exclusive control over the activities of the Holy Spirit, others can do as well if not better.

1981 I filled the agency to provide the villages with higher education, we had not high school, out of 8,500 inhabitants only 90 teenagers went to high school among them 5-8 young girls and that was the double catastrophe. I wanted to build a high school – what to do? I'm in Israel, I'm a lawful citizen unless if the law goes against human rights then I don't care for the law. You need a building permit. I applied for a building permit and three weeks later the answer came - denial. What to do? I need a school. So I asked myself what you need in order to have a school, you need a building permit or you need a building? I decided I need the building. So we started a construction without building permit and que sera sera. Three months later the police came: 'show me your building permit.'

I said 'come on you know I don't have a building permit.' He said 'then how can you build without a building permit?' I said 'sir, I never build with permits, I always build with sand, cement, steel, stone'. The police was outraged, I was burning from inside. He said, 'but you know you are not allowed to do that in a civilised country'. I said 'I wish you were civilised, you'd have given me a building permit, but if I build without building permit it's to help you become more civilised'. That was more than the police could take on [audience laughter] and he said 'OK,' he orders like that 'stop building and you are summoned to court'. We did not stop building, we continued and I went to court.

In court the judge was Jewish, the police was Jewish and I am a Palestinian infringing on the law. What do you expect them to do? Don't tell me because what you think is wrong. The police wanted the destruction of that building. The judge asked me, 'Mr Chacour, you don't say anything, what do you say?' I say 'if you destroy this building I will take some pictures, go all around the world showing what Israel does for those that want to build school. Or you can order the police to facilitate providing us with a building permit and I will go tell that all over the world'. That judge says, the Jewish judge, 'where is your lawyer, Mr Chacour?' I said 'I don't have a lawyer, it's too expensive'. 'No, no, no, it doesn't go like that, I give you a time to come to court on Sunday morning, I'm praying for peace and justice in Israel. This is my decision – if you don't come we will decide in absentia and it will be the destruction of your school, and if you don't like that you can write a letter protesting against coming on Sunday, I will see what we can do'.

I waited the six months and the week before I wrote the letter to the judge saying I am a Christian Priest, you judge have no authority to order any small or big Rabbi to come to court on Saturday sharp in the morning and Sunday is my Sabbath, I don't come to court. The fax was returned saying in that case I decide to postpone the decision for another six months that would end Sunday morning at 10 o'clock [audience laughter]. I protested and he re-postponed time and again. Six times this Jewish judge postponed the decision because of Sunday morning 10 o'clock, till I was able to find a Jew who brought the building permit in return for \$1,000. I called the judge, 'you can decide the decision whenever you want, I have the building permit', and he said 'in that case next session will be next week on Monday morning at 10 o'clock' [audience laughter]. Maybe this is to tell you please, whenever it is you hear

mentioned a Jew and a Palestinian do not imagine you are mentioning two traditional enemies who wait to drink the blood of each other. It's not true.

Nine months after we started the construction, the first building was ready. We started with 82 children and four teachers, and now 25 years later we have 4,500 students, 290 faculty members, among them 100 PhD holders, 90 Master Degrees in all disciplines. My question, had the school not existed where would be all these faculty members be scattered nowadays? How many would be in Europe, in America, in Australia? Probably the majority. Our students, I did not mention to you, but I need to mention that, we are a Christian school, a very committed Christian school, seriously devoted Christian school, and because we are these Christians we cannot tolerate to be alone. We need our Jewish brothers, our Muslim brothers to come and join us and profit from the facilities we have. It's normal that the school be opened to Muslims. We have 60% of our children are Muslims, beautiful boys and girls. Some of the girls have their head covered others do not have their heads covered, few girls even have no head I have to fix the head on their shoulders, because they are as shallow as we Christian girls and Jewish girls. You know why? Because Muslims are created on the image of the likeness of God as well as the Jews and the Christians.

A few years ago we had up to 82 Jewish kids. I spent so much time convincing their parents to accept sending them to our school, and when they agreed the children arrived and I was scared – I did not let them go into the classrooms. I prepared four buses, loaded them with children, our children and the Jews, the Jewish children came and I said, 'please go to Mount Carmel, spend the day in the open and when you come in the evening we'll see what will happen'. They went, when they came back it seems that they forgot that they were Jewish or Palestinians, Muslim and Christians. They discovered that they were just kids. They exchanged addresses, e-mails, telephones, faxes and their relations are still holding very strongly. They come and spend a few days in our families, we go and spend a few days in their families. We try to tame each other and because of all these children I discovered that we need to achieve unity within the deep thorough respect of diversity. I don't need a Muslim in our school to become Christian or a Jew to become Christian, I need them to be good Muslims and excellent Jews, this is how I can be with them.

1986 - we already had over 700 children but we had space only for 350 children, so I decided to expand the school to build a gym, a sports hall with few workshops and some classrooms. I applied for a building permit and they said it's perfect, you will have your permit. But you know our Israeli bureaucracy is sooooo sloooooow, I understood the decision has got to be a political one not anything else. So I left them busy with bureaucracy and I got myself busy with construction. We put the first roof when the police came and said, 'you stop building until you have the building permit and you are summoned to court'. Ladies and Gentlemen, until I became Archbishop I was 37 times in court always for building permits. We stopped building and started digging underground rooms in the rock. I invite you when you come there to come and see these rooms in the rock because I wanted by all means to provide education for our young boys and girls. At the same time I started knocking on the door of every official 'please help us to obtain the building permit' – nobody refused but nobody helped.

Then I started understanding, unfortunately, we are in a modern state, we are no more in the Promised Land, as much as in the land of promises. After 6 years I got despair. I decided to take the big mean to reach a building permit. I realised the

shortest way to Jerusalem passes through Washington DC. I bought a flight ticket and flew into Washington and landed at the national airport, which is at the centre of the city. I have heard that there was a problem with President Bush, one problem, with all his top officials the President wanted to install extra security measures around the residences of officials and James Baker who was the Secretary of State refused to have any extra security measure. I said that's perfect for me why don't I go and pop into the residence of the Bakers? The only thing they can do is reject me and so what. I hired a car, rented a car and drove to Foxhall Road number 17 and parked in front of that house of the Bakers. I knocked on the door, he was not there. His wife Susan Baker, bless her heart, came herself to open the door, which is already very strange – the wife of Secretary of State never opens the door herself, but she was expecting some more ladies to come in, and she opened the door and I was there.

I don't look like a lady, right? And with my beard it's very strange. She was shocked she immediately said 'who are you?' I said 'madam, I am another man from Galilee'. We call Jesus Christ the man from Galilee and then you see I'm the other man from Galilee – it's like an atomic bomb in the conscience of those that listen to you. 'Do you have an appointment with us?' I said, 'madam, we men from Galilee we never make appointments we make appearances' [audience laughter]. Later on she told me how confused she felt. She surely did not want to let me in; she could not kick me out. She invited me, not to the living room, but to the kitchen, oh they have a huge kitchen I could spend all my life there without having any problem. And she gave me something to drink that I never liked, she gave me a glass of iced tea that I swallowed out of politeness and before finish, one of the things she said 'I'm sorry I have to let you go Mr Chacour I am busy', and she was taking me to the exit door, 'I'm busy with 20 American ladies, we are having a Bible study hour'. I was already in the exit door, I said, 'what kind of Bible study do you have ma'am?' She said 'we are having a look on the so-called Sermon on the Mount'.

I said 'wow, I pity you. Good luck!' [audience laughter] She said, 'why do you pity me?' I said 'but how can you understand anything from that? It was not written by an American person but by a person next door to my village. He did not write it in your American slang but in my Semitic language. What would you be able to understand? Good luck madam', and Susan Baker said 'I see. Can you help us understand it better?' My God, what could I expect better than that? I said, 'I will try' and I was introduced this time to the living room, no more to that kitchen. And they were 20 very nice, lovely, beautiful American ladies waiting. It took me two hours to explain the eight first verses of the Sermon on the Mount, that was rather a very long appearance you reckon, right? I ended by telling them, 'please go convince your husbands to accept getting their hands dirty for peace and justice for the Jews and for the Palestinians. If they refuse, convince them to get two fingers at least dirty. It's enough to bring us peace and justice, Jews and Palestinians together'. I left my books to the Bakers and flew back to Galilee.

A week later the telephone rang in my office – it was Susan Baker saying, 'Mr. Chacour, can we pray together?' Why not? And we prayed together. I never imagined that will come a day in my life where I would be speaking to almighty God on the telephone. In America they do it, I do it like Americans do it, normally we speak directly with God over there. And this operation repeated itself twice/three times a month. More than once a third person interrupted our prayers saying 'now it's my time to pray' – it was James Baker himself. After three months I became their prayer

partner, their beloved Abuna. I don't imagine they could say no to anything I would ask them. I called Susan and said, 'can you write a letter to Premier Shamir the Prime Minister of Israel encouraging him to give us a building permit for a gym? I am in deep trouble'. She said, 'yes I will do that immediately' and she wrote a two page typed letter and showed it to Jim when he came in the evening. He said, 'no, you will not send that, it might create a diplomatic crisis between Israel and the United States, they don't care but we care far too much'. It was just after Gulf War One with this very complicated coalition he had built up and he did not want to see it disintegrating. Here is the ...[inaudible]... 'Susan sign the letter, I will sign it with you and I will take two copies of Abuna's books and go into Shamir's office, I promise you I will not leave his office before having a written promise that in a week's time Abuna will have his building permit'. This is how we got the building permit.

What was very impressive is that one and a half years later, James Baker decided to come and visit us in that school. My goodness, it was like the Messiah coming. We are a small unknown village and the Secretary of State of America comes to visit us. Who are we? But he came. When he arrived there he said, 'Abuna, I'm not coming to see you, we see each other enough in Washington, I am coming to make an act of solidarity together with you and our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters, to tell them that we mind to see them stay in their homes and their land and their country.' Act of solidarity.

Do you do that when you come the Holy Land? You go to the Holy Sepulchre – it's great, rub your hands against the marble, I have nothing against, but don't forget that these marbles have nothing to do with the body of the Lord, they were imported from Italy not long ago. And don't stay long in the Sepulchre – get out! Not from the Holy Sepulchre only but from the Sepulchre you have built for yourself against a relative, a friend, a country, a community and people – get out from your Sepulchres and go back to Galilee to meet the risen Lord. Don't stay long in Galilee; we have enough problems Jews and Palestinians together there. Go back to your Galilee in England and give some time to a person who needs your attention; who needs your forgiveness, who needs to forgive you. That is your Galilee of the resurrection for me. We would love to have you come and visit us. We love to welcome you and I don't know what's the value of visiting shrines, dirt and sand and the stones without giving some time to the living stones, the local Christians of the Holy Land. You don't need to know us, you need just to come in – come in! If there is a door don't worry, it can never be closed. It's either open or there is no door – come in. We will never ask you who are you? We will never ask why do you come here? We will just say come in, you are most welcome, we give you drink, we give you to eat and when you be about to go we would ask a favour. You know what, can I have your address to keep in touch with you? We want to keep in touch with you, we need your friendship.

There are thousands of stories – some are extremely painful, some are joyful. With the little things I've told you, who is right and who is wrong? The Jews are right or wrong or the Palestinians? What is that conflict about? Let us say what is it not about. It's not a racial conflict. Both people claim to be Semitic – children of Abraham. It is not a religious conflict. Proof to that – for 14 centuries we were living together without any systematic persecutions the one against the other. If it's not racial nor religious, what is it about? Well, if you consult Colin Chapman in his famous book called *Whose Promised Land?* you would conclude that the conflict is about identical claims of two nations on the same territory. The Jews say 'this is our promised land,' the Muslims and the Christians say 'OK, you are free to believe that

but you cannot impose that on us – this is our ancestral land. We remember you were deported 2,000 years ago, not by a Palestinian leader but a Roman leader. We saw you going away – now you come back as you want. You are welcome with us; we cannot welcome you without us. You want our jacket? Take it. You want our trousers also? No. We cannot strip.’ Striptease has never been a Palestinian phenomenon. But that is the fact now.

I think that it is a conflict between two rights. The Jews say ‘enough Diaspora – we want freedom of expression, we want a home and a homeland.’ The Palestinians say ‘that’s excellent – we sign! Provided the freedom you want for your children does not mean as it means de facto absence of freedom for our children. The home you wanted – good, provided it’s not depriving us of our home and we become homeless. We cannot agree. The homeland you want – OK, provided you don’t reduce us to refugees, to a disperse nation’. And believe me the Muslims and the Christians are attached to the Holy Land, if not more, it’s at least as much as the Jews are attached to that land. We love our land, we educate our children to go slowly on the land because they might be walking on the ashes of one of their ancestors and Allah, God, the God of Mohammed orders Muslims to be ready to sacrifice their lives, either to protect their land or protect their wives. Are they playing games or are they sincere? I think they are very sincere. It is the conflict between two rights. The one who is wrong among us is the side who continues saying ‘I’m the only one right, he’s wrong,’ and the one who might be right is the one that says ‘I am also right.’ That’s why the Jews have been always asking for peace – never got any peace. Palestinians have been asking for justice – never got any justice, but misery upon misery. Why? Because none of us has listened to the Prophets and to the Scriptures. Muslim, Christian, Jews imposing on us if we want peace and security we have to pursue justice and integrate. Without both together it is in vain that we pile weapons, money, lobby. It will all be in vain, because the only protector of Israel and Palestine is God himself.

Why do I tell you all these stories? After all you are living comfortably – you have nothing directly to do with us there, and I come to trouble you. It’s because of two reasons. First, because I believe in every one of you. You can make a difference for the better, you can make a change for the better and second, it is because I am a very well known international beggar. You know what a beggar is? Is a poor person who asks favours, bakshish, and if I came here it is in order to beg, and I beg from you, you have to respond positively if you want us to stop this insane situation of war between the Jews and the Palestinians. If you care enough to see our kids grown up to live to build hope and not to be sacrificed on the altar of wars, you have to give me, and I’m coming to beg from you.

Please don’t count on money – sterling pounds – you will be giving. I never beg for money. Money is very important; without money I would not have been able to build the schools, to give scholarship for hundreds of young girls, to promote education, to organise encounters Jews and Palestinians to live together to know each other. Money is important but I am the last to beg for money. I beg for something much more difficult to give. I beg for friendship and that’s easy to give, and for solidarity – that’s much more difficult because this implies a change of attitude and of conviction. What kind of solidarity? I am a Palestinian – a proud Palestinian. I beg you if you have Jewish friends, if among your Jewish friends you have some fanatical Jews (and there are some like that), if among your Jewish friends you have some very strong fanatic settlers who dream day and night how to get rid of the presence of the

Palestinians in the Holy Land. If these are your friends please for God's sake continue providing them with friendship. They need your friendship more than ever before. Stand with them, take their side, give them money, give them all the wealth of Great Britain – I would be only grateful. But, taking the side of the Jews, who said that would be automatically meaning to be antipathetic to the Palestinians? You don't know us. I think I'm the first Palestinian who has been privileged to stand in this beautiful cathedral and to address you like that. You know a lot about us; you don't know us. We have been portrayed to be the dirty Arabs of Israel; we're not dirty, we like to take a shower twice a day. We have been portrayed to be the terrorists of the Middle East; we are the terrorised of the Middle East.

Don't let your friendship to Jews mean automatically antipathy against the Palestinians and if by any chance accompanying BibleLands to see your projects and you contacted Palestinians, if you have read *Blood Brothers* and *We Belong to the Land* you have seen the real suffering of Palestinian people – how much they endured. They pay the bill for what the Western world has done to the Jews, and if by any chance you have been to the refugee camps, you enjoyed their hospitality and you decided to take our side we Palestinians – goodness, why not? Take our side please, it's not bad to take our side – you would be for once on the right side. But if taking our side we Palestinians would mean for you to accept everything we do because we are all blessed. If your friendship to us means that you start hating the Jews please know that we do not need your friendship in that case. Because what do you do when you become one-sided for those that are against Jews you reduce your God to become one more enemy in this cruel fight and we don't need any more enemy, we are being cruel to each other enough to say no to one-sided friendship. We don't need one more enemy, we need one more common friend. Can you be that? Come forth. If not, stay in peace at home rather than to come forth to reduce us into pieces.

If you go to Israel you will see this very ugly wall that was built one hundred of kilometres. We danced when the wall of Berlin crumbled. We never had the nightmare one day it will be imposing in our country, dividing families, scattering families. If you go to Bethlehem, please do not try to destroy that wall – it's too strong for you to destroy, but try at least to build a bridge over the wall. One bridge under bridge, all bridges the wall will disappear and instead relations will be born again between Jews and Palestinians. We do not need to learn how to live together, we need rather to remember how we used to live together. Sixty-one years ago and before, we need to have this memory. I hope we do it.

I don't sit idle and hope – I get my hands dirty. We're trying with the Christian community in Israel, which counts one hundred forty nine thousand Christians, we are 25% of Palestinian Christianity which remain in Israel. Our main concern is the ongoing immigration abroad. Nonetheless, Israel and Palestinians recognise that the Christian community is a voice of moderation that never agrees on any kind of violence. State violence – we don't agree. Individual violence, resistance violence – we don't agree. The problem can be solved when we can agree to disagree agreeably. And help us to do that.

Thank you for your patience. Thank you.