

# **Iraqi refugees, Israeli-Palestinian tension await new Latin patriarch**

JERUSALEM – The influx of Iraqi refugees into Jordan as well as continuing Israeli-Palestinian tensions are two of the major concerns the new Latin patriarch of Jerusalem said he would face after his June 22 installation.

Patriarch Fouad Twal, who had been coadjutor of the Latin Patriarchate for nearly three years, called Jordan “the heart of the Latin Patriarchate,” which also includes Cyprus, Israel and the Palestinian territories. His remarks were published June 15 on the Web site of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land.

Jordan deserves particular attention, the patriarch said, because it includes two-thirds of the patriarchate’s faithful, half of whom are of Palestinian origin.

“In spite of its stability, this part of the diocese is also in crisis, especially economic crisis, with the influx of Iraqi refugees,” he said. “Christian emigration has started to strongly affect the Jordanian population, too. We must work, as we do here, to give them hope, reasons to hope, to remain Christians in the Middle East.”

Every area within the patriarchate has needs, he said, and all have the same rights for prayers, love and plans for their future.

Patriarch Twal said he was shocked when he first saw the Israeli separation wall. Noting that he was not in Jerusalem during the two periods of the intifada, he said he has seen the consequences of the violence as well as the efforts of Israelis and Palestinians. So far, he said, there has not been much progress.

“The Holy Land is a country that teaches us patience. ... We must join prudence with the courage to speak. And know our limitations. Faced with the complexity of the situation, it is necessary to accept, listen to and be acquainted with all points of view. Above all, it is necessary to entrust all of this to the good God in prayer and silence,” Patriarch Twal said.

Although he has a background in diplomacy, Patriarch Twal said he intends to

emphasize the pastoral and spiritual aspect of the patriarchate.

"Politics concern me to the extent that they affect people's lives, dignity and security," he said.

The patriarch noted that the territory of the patriarchate includes believers of different faiths, including Christians, Jews and Muslims. The Christians are a diverse group, with Palestinians, Cypriots, Jordanians and Europeans who have relocated to live, volunteer or study in the Holy Land. In addition, Israeli Christians are divided between Arab Christians and non-Arab Christians, some of Jewish origin.

"All these groups do not share the same sensibility, including their vision of the conflict," he said. "Hence, the difficulty in speaking, because the bishop is everyone's bishop, absolutely everyone's. Either we want our discourse to touch everyone or we favor one group - which is the easiest - or we have as many discourses as groups, which is not possible.

"But if you want to touch Jews, Muslims, Christians, Jordanians, Palestinians, Cypriots, Europeans all together ... then you have to consider every comma," he said. "I am well aware of the complexity of speaking out, whether it is a speech or a sermon."

He said that his love does not limit itself to Catholics in the patriarchate and he feels that all the citizens of the diocese are his citizens as well.

"Before God, before history, I feel responsible for everyone. And at the same time I am 100 percent aware of my limitations. I know that I will never work a miracle, only sow seeds," he said.

The spiritual base of Christian life in the Holy Land and the joy of living as a Christian will be the main emphasis of his leadership, especially in a time when the church is working to persevere under various hardships, Patriarch Twal said.

"But when, in spite of everything, we are moving forward, when in spite of everything we find the strength to live and the joy of living, the joy of preaching, the joy of proclaiming the Gospel, it is not because of the geopolitical conditions that surround us. ... No, this joy comes to us from the Gospel," he said. "Our joy is not

founded in an improvement of the situation; the reason for our joy is meeting Christ himself in prayer and in meeting others and being in solidarity with them.”

Born into a Christian Bedouin family in Jordan, Patriarch Twal was the fifth of nine children and studied at the seminary in Beit Jalla, West Bank. He worked for five years at the Latin Patriarchate as vicar. He also spent two years as the only Arab studying at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy in Rome before entering the diplomatic service of the Holy See. He served in Latin America, Europe and Egypt and was expected to be appointed nuncio to Kuwait when the Vatican asked him to return to pastoral life as bishop of Tunis, Tunisia, in 1992.