

# The Gaza War: French Catholic Leaders Call for Ceasefire

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## Unofficial Translation

Anastasis is an advocacy group of young Catholics who have written extensively about the current situation in Israel and Palestine. A position taken by French Catholic priests, deacons, consecrated persons, and men and women religious on this issue seemed important to them. Drafted by the group, this text was signed by more than 150 leaders of the Catholic Church.

As ordained ministers, religious, and people having responsibilities in the Catholic Church of France, we call for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the establishment of political conditions for peace in Israel and Palestine. We call on the French Government to exert serious diplomatic pressure on the Israeli Government with a view to putting an end to the ongoing offensive operations and launching the decolonization of the occupied territories of the West Bank.

Like all Christians in the West, we are often embarrassed when it comes to speaking out about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Conversations usually end with a slightly awkward "it's complicated." The history of Jewish-Christian relations is not irrelevant here.

The shadow of the Christian anti-Judaism of yesteryear, which described the Jews as a deicidal people, and hoped for them only to disappear through conversion to Christianity, rightly weighs on our consciences. We may be tempted to free ourselves from the weight of guilt of this Christian anti-Judaism, which was one of the sources of European antisemitism that led to the genocide of European Jews, by not allowing ourselves any speech that is critical of the State of Israel.

### **The State of Israel is not Judaism**

The State of Israel, however, is not Judaism. The present right-wing government of the State of Israel is far from being perfectly representative of the people of the State of Israel, and the people of the State of Israel certainly do not correspond without qualification to the people of biblical Israel. To criticize the current government of the State of Israel is not to criticize Judaism. To criticize it in the name of the values of Judaism – hospitality to the stranger, preference for the poor and weak, perpetual insistence on social justice – is, on the contrary, a tribute to the inspiration of the prophets.

In the name of Jewish traditions, the wellsprings from which Christians drink, it is time to call for justice and peace by means of effective action. The Psalmist's affirmation that "*justice and peace embrace*" (84:11) means that no lasting peace can be built on gross injustice. To be a "*peacemaker*" (Matthew 5:9) cannot, of course, be reduced to the mere maintenance of order if that order is unjust, but consists in implementing a just order and "*breaking all yokes*" (Isaiah 58:6).

### **Goliath vs. David**

The current behavior of the State of Israel, playing on the right of the strong, taking advantage of the absence of Western reactions and US funding, jeopardizes the establishment of long-term peace and prepares for future violence of desperation. It is absolutely no longer possible to present the current attacks in Gaza as legitimate retaliation for the horrific massacres of 7 October and the captivity of the hostages, whose release remains urgent. They are disproportionate, disproportionate, extremely violent and deadly, and in contradiction with the most basic humanitarian law.

The ongoing questioning, conducted at the United Nations at the initiative of South Africa, about the potential genocidal intent of these attacks, indicates in itself, and without there being any need to wait for judicial actions, that the limits of decency and the rights of war have long since been crossed. To remain silent on this subject by saying that "it's complicated" is to choose Goliath against David, the former against the latter, the rich against the poor, the powerful against the humble. Jewish values must be brandished against the government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

### **Who is my neighbor?**

By putting an end to the accusation of a deicidal people, and by taking an interest in interpretations of the Bible other than Christo-centric readings, the Second Vatican Council happily opened a new chapter in Jewish-Christian relations, one that is much more decent, respectful and fruitful. For some Christians who tend to self-define, this desirable rapprochement is coupled with a counterproductive effect of forming a Judeo-Christian bloc opposed to Muslim otherness. They go so far as to see the current war as a kind of religious war, when in fact it is a colonial war and asymmetrical oppression.

The question that confronts us in this context is that of the Gospel: who is my neighbor? A superficial answer would suggest that it is the one who is close to me, who resembles me, who is not far away. Some Western Christian intellectuals, arguing from the close relationship between Jews and Christians, between the West and the State of Israel, feel a duty to take up the latter's cause. The Gospel, however, indicates a completely different

definition: the neighbor is the foreign or the stranger, the one who does not resemble me, who draws near to me and invokes my own responsibility.

### **Their faces compel us**

Christians in the West find it difficult to identify with Palestinian Arabs, whether they are Muslims or even Christians. This makes them all the more our neighbors. The injustice they suffer, which only denial can make invisible, calls us. As Emmanuel Levinas would say, their faces, in their current vulnerability, obligate us. To do nothing is to pass by the suffering person whom we have seen, instead of stopping in our journey like the Good Samaritan whom we claim to want to emulate (Luke 10:25-37).

We claim to be disciples of a Galilean Jew who invites us to take up the cause of oppression. We are horrified by the destructive power currently at work in Gaza, and we refuse to be complicit in it by our embarrassed silence. We want to bring the voice of our Palestinian brothers and sisters before our leaders and, both as members of our country's civil society and in the name of the Gospel, participate in building a French path for the construction of justice and peace, which cannot go forward without the other.

[See the original article in *La Croix* for the list of more than 150 French Catholic signatories.]