Gregory III

Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, of Alexandria and Jerusalem of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church
Jerusalem - al Quds

"All my joy is in thee, Jerusalem." (Psalm 86, LXX)
"Rejoice, holy Sion, Mother of the Churches, dwelling-place of God, for thou wast the first to receive remission of sins, through the resurrection." (St. John of Damascus 8th. century. Written at St. Saba's, near Jerusalem in the eighth tone of the resurrection.)

This gives the reason for Jerusalem's greatness.
Psalm 87 tells all the greatness of Jerusalem:
God defends her
God founded her
She is all-glorious
Philistines, Ethiopians, Phoenicians from Tyre: all were born in her
Everyone calls Jerusalem mother
Everyone is a native of Jerusalem
Happy are those who live in thee!
There are many psalms praising Jerusalem, singing of going up to Jerusalem, asking peace for her.
The Prophet Isaiah enters into dialogue with Jerusalem, with ineffable accents and expressions... through whole chapters that go to make up Christian hymnography.
The Psalms, the prophets furnish the material for the passionate love of Jews for Jerusalem.
Jesus has a very significant interchange with Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." (Matthew 23:37-38)
It is from Jerusalem that he asks his disciples to go out into all the world and preach the joyful proclamation of the Gospel.
The First Church Council is held at Jerusalem.
Saint Paul speaks emotionally of Jerusalem, "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." (Galatians 4: 26)
Saint John of the Apocalypse sings of Jerusalem with prophetic rapture, "And I, John, saw the holy city," (that is the title of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which is mine)"new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men." (Revelation 21: 2-3)
Pope John Paul II wrote, "This is the message of the Land of Palestine, the spiritual homeland of all Christians because it was the homeland of the Saviour of the world and of his Mother." (Redemptoris Mater)
In Islam, Al-Isra’ and al-Miraj, or the Night Journey and Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad from the Rock or Mount Moriah in Jerusalem is an event in Islamic tradition that seeks to demonstrate both the greatness of Jerusalem, its holiness, its unique character and the greatness of Muhammad. Every prophet must be linked with Jerusalem! In Islam, Jerusalem was the first direction for prayer. A pilgrimage is not complete unless it ends in Jerusalem.

One of the finest covenants between Muslims and Christians - that between Caliph Omar and Patriarch Sophronios - was written in Jerusalem (638 AD).

The Franks called Crusaders, were chiefly moved by a great love for Jerusalem and the holy places. (That is a digression!)

All that was fine!

It all goes to show that Jerusalem is the capital of our faith: Jews, Christians, Muslims, Canaanites, Jebusites...

On the basis of all that, and with all due respect for different political viewpoints about Jerusalem (where I lived for twenty-six years as Patriarchal Vicar and Bishop from 1974 to 2000) and for my Palestinian brothers whom I served for twenty-six years and my Jewish brothers whom I knew and with whom I always had frank and sincere friendship, I dare say what I put forward in a paper as early as 1990:-

I say that Jerusalem is the capital of faith for all of us, yours, mine, our, their capital...

Why do you wish to make it into a political capital, capital of your politics?...

Here I know I am not echoing received wisdom, or, as we say in Arabic, I am a bird singing a different tune from all the others!

Still I dare repeat it often today and shall say it again tomorrow. I am an Arab Christian, in complete solidarity with my Palestinian brothers. Together with other Christian leaders in Jerusalem, I have always affirmed in several documents, (such as the Kairos document published some months ago by all the Christians of Jerusalem and the Holy Land) the right of both peoples, Palestinian and Israeli, to life, to a homeland, to nationhood, freedom and dignity.

It is on that basis, on the basis of Jewish, Christian and Muslim spirituality - and despite all the legitimate aspirations of Jews, Christians and Muslims - I say and repeat, that Jerusalem is the capital of our faith. Full stop!

I beg you Israelis, Palestinians, Arabs, Americans, Europeans, don't make it into a political capital! Don't make it into a town hall where you are governor or mayor...

Don't usurp God's rights over this city, so that it becomes subject to you or you, instead of being subject to it yourselves and to God who founded it, for it to be the city of God, the city of all God's children, as Psalm 87 reminded us!

No people has power over Jerusalem, since she is haram, holy!

That is how all the numerous sayings of the prophets on Jerusalem must be interpreted. What has been said about Jerusalem by the prophets must be understood, according to the mentality, the thought, the prophetic vision about Jerusalem. This is both the Word of God and of the prophets in the name of God. That word, the fruit of divine inspiration must not
be degraded, caricatured, devalued, void of content, by interpreting it through a political and ethnic decision.

The Word of God must remain the Word of God, the sublime Word, full of symbolism, a Word of God that leads to God. It cannot be translated by a human word. With the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this Word of God about Jerusalem has been politicised and manipulated, lost its beauty and sublime, divine character!

God spoke to men and women, in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land! That Word of God cannot and must not be interpreted through human words. The Word of God must be kept in all its purity and divinity.

God founded Jerusalem. God made its history, its past, its present and will make its future. Take your merely human hands off Jerusalem, you politicians. Respect God's plan, his economy for her. She is not your fiefdom, your domain, your property!

She owns you and you don't own her. You men and women are all - without preference, pride, or desert - her children.

Don't divide Jerusalem by your measurements, your metres and barriers. Serve her together. Jerusalem is not big, if she is reduced to a political capital (like Paris, Madrid, Berlin) like the capitals of this world. She has been and will remain the capital of faith of us all, Jews, Christians and Muslims!

Saint Gregory the Theologian said, that the holiness of the Holy Land is not a monopoly of holiness, but a starting point for holiness in the world and for the world.[1]

The Bible always speaks of the new creation, the new Jerusalem, the new earth. The earthly Jerusalem is divided and the cause of divisions.

The heavenly Jerusalem, the Mother of us all, is free, strengthened and united.

Let us all work together - Jews, Christians, Muslims - believers of the whole world, Easterners, Europeans, Americans, for the salvation of Jerusalem, for the holiness of Jerusalem, for the haram of Jerusalem.

May Jerusalem be and remain the capital of our faith, of Faith! The capital of man, of everyman!

The capital of Hope, of the love of God for all mankind and of love among human beings.

Gregorios III

Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Of Alexandria and of Jerusalem

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