

The Excellences of Jerusalem

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'What is to be done about Jerusalem?' is a question heavy on the minds for many of its lovers, in face of the evident determination of Zionism, in its current Israeli governmental expression, to hold the city in an exclusively Jewish monopoly. There are many Palestinians who fear the Holy City is being irreversibly lost through the sundry and devious measures calculated to exclude Palestinian Jerusalemites from residence in, or access to, either its ancient walled contours or its enlarged metropolitan reach.

The 'What is to be done?' question stretches back into 'What is to be thought about Jerusalem?', seeing that mind is always prior to deed and the idea to the action. It is the purpose of this exposition of *Fada'il al-Quds* to argue that the merit of Jerusalem has, for many, been and should always remain, a plural significance. In the words of the Hebrew psalmist, it must be 'the joy of the whole earth' (Psalm 48.2) or, in the thinking of Jesus, its Temple as 'a house of prayer for all nations' (Mark 11.17, citing Isaiah 56.7).

The case to be made in these pages is that, in its own characteristic way, Islam contributed to this non-exclusive cherishing of Jerusalem in that its historic and spiritual relations with the city contrived a significant precluding of Jewish monopoly. Christianity, in its own distinctive idiom, did the same, ensuring through the passion of Jesus and the symbols of Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives that Jerusalem would always possess a vital, but in no way quintessential, role in the emotional retrospect of the Christian society.¹ Two great architectural edifices, the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Resurrection, perpetuate in surely ineradicable terms the

inclusiveness of Jerusalem's story irrespective of political criteria. The city remains enshrined in the poetry, the hymnology and the legend of three faiths, and through these in their bearings and dispersion, reaches to the ends of the earth. Only so does it itself abide as the multiple shrine of universal salutation and possession.

Celebration of Jerusalem found voice in the *Fada'il* (lit. 'Excellences') where Muslim poets in the middle centuries extolled the holy city to which they went as pilgrims or saluted in terms drawn from their Qur'anic loyalties.² Their sense of the sanctity of *Bait al-Maqdis*, as they called Jerusalem, stemmed from its role as the first *Qiblah* of Islam - a theme we must explore. Yet even when the focus of Islamic prayer was turned around to Makkah, so that worshippers then had their backs to 'the furthestmost sanctuary', the original *Qiblah* was not meant to be renounced. At that point it was urgent to indicate that, by the *Hijrah* from Makkah, the city-axis of *Manzil al-Wahy*, or 'house of revelation' had not been abandoned, but that its re-possession and rescue from its idols remained paramount in Muhammad's purpose. He and his *Mohajirun* had been purposive emigrants, not forsakers of their home-town whose centrality remained paramount in the entire venture out of it. In that way, Jerusalem might be said to have been only an apparent casualty of the initial politics of Islam. When the first Umayyad Caliph, Mu'awiya, centred his capital in Damascus instead of Madina, he was careful to take his oath of office in Jerusalem.³

Leaving, for the moment, those celebrations of an Islamic Jerusalem, we must have in place the circumstances by which Islam came so effectively to place itself alongside Jewry and Christianity in the physical and religious adoption of Jerusalem, and so to pluralise-its age-long relevance.

That exposition might well revert to our initial query: 'What is to be done about Jerusalem?'. The robust answer of Islam was to possess it. So it did in 638, six years after Muhammad's death, receiving it in surrender by the hand of the

Patriarch Sophronius with the Caliph Umar himself its recipient in person, Sophronius having reportedly refused surrender to any subordinate commander, in fear lest the terms should be rescinded. That gesture, not to say the garb that either wore,⁴ was burdened with significance.

While Islam was always forthright and uncomplicated in its physical demeanour - not, indeed, 'spread by the sword', but emphatically 'coming as an empire and a power-regime' - there is much uncertainty about the actual circumstances of the armed success of those first decades of expansion. Was there indeed a concerted campaign of piloted advance or did marauding bands somehow stumble into unexpected success while probing frontiers they found too easily penetrable?⁵ At all events the martial means brought surprising - and surprisingly permanent - success, which, as often in warfare, proved its own sanction. Apart from the Crusaders' interlude during the Latin Kingdom and other brief vicissitudes, Islam has retained a physical stake in Jerusalem through almost fourteen centuries and, to this day, the Temple Area remains in Islamic Jurisdiction and, catastrophe apart, seems destined so to stay whatever the political dispositions.⁶

It is that spiritual physicality, if the term be allowed, represented by the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque which precludes exclusively Judaic possession of Jerusalem. The Old City, which as the geographer, George Adam Smith observed, 'looks towards the threshold of Arabia',⁷ is thus 'bound over to eastern interests'. The Christian 'Holy Places' of the Garden and Calvary and the Sepulchre, in their different Christian idiom, similarly plant universal reckoning into the ethos of the city, again irrespective of what may, or may not, be alleged or achieved concerning its political identity as a national capital.

In the presently prevailing tensions around the latter question, this explicit world-reach of Jerusalem, undiminished as it must remain, may serve to check and sober political exclusivity and perhaps deserve to obviate it. At all events 'joy for the whole earth' has to be the proper destiny of Jerusalem. Islam has its

historic share in that destiny, and the sense of it needs to temper and control all else where politics belongs. 'The excellences of Jerusalem' are neither celebrated nor understood if they are privatised.

It was half a century on from the conquest that Islam first gave signal architectural shape to its physical-spiritual tenancy of the Judeo-Christian heritage. Caliph Abd al-Malik ordered the erection of *Al-Haram al-Sharif* or *Qubbat al-Sakhrah*, on Temple Mount, the earliest and still to this day, in the opinion of many, the finest of Islamic edifices. It was surely meant to rival the splendour, then, of the Church of the Resurrection on the hill opposite across the Tyropean valley, itself only lately reconstructed after the devastation by the Persians in 610, followed by recovery under Heraclius. The Qur'an (Surah 30. 1-3) had noted those vicissitudes in one of its rare references to imperial history beyond Arabia's borders. Islam itself had profited by the toll Byzantine/Persian conflicts had taken on both powers.

The sacred area had been left derelict through the intervening years after Bar Kockhah's abortive revolt and the re-naming of Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina. The Caliph's motive sprang, no doubt, from the Abrahamic associations of the locale and, it would seem, from a perceived need to challenge the eminence of the great Christian edifice and, by the choice of calligraphy for the Dome, to assert the Muslim 'possession' of Isa/Jesus as the Qur'an alleged him to have been.⁸ Some have also surmised that the building of the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem was intended as a rebuke to Makkans who were, allegedly, in disavowal of Damascus at that time.

There can be no doubt, however, that this visible and dramatic sponsoring of Jerusalem by the Ummayyads in such excellence, calligraphic and ceramic, stemmed from the meanings of Surah 17.1: 'Glory to Him who by night took His servant journeying from the sacred mosque to the distant mosque, Al-Aqsa, whose precincts We have blessed, in order to show him our revelations'. The implications of this *taqdis* have been variously interpreted by the exegetes, whether as physical or

mystical. Either way, they belong with the link of Qur'anic monotheism to its predecessor in the Hebraic tradition to which, it would seem, Muhammad in some measure owed the inspiration which drew him into meditation in Mount Hira where his sense of summons to prophethood came.

There is no complete certainty as to the degree or range of his personal knowledge of the prophets and messengers of the Judeo-Christian tradition, whether in the environs of Makkah or the setting of his commercial ventures to the borders of Christendom, or even, conjecturally, to Jerusalem itself, and Damascus whither the Quraishi commerce in spices, incense and perfumes was directed.⁹ The truly germinal theme, it seems clear, was the concept of 'Scriptured' peoples *Ahl al-Kitab* and thus of divine agents in their becoming such, agents who were of the kin of those same peoples.

Plainly, Arab identity with its unscriptured condition of chronic tribalism had no such 'native' prophet/messenger. The mystique of Jerusalem drove home that urgent lack in its legend as the locale of Moses' people and of the Christian 'messenger' Jesus. Hence the dawning conviction of *al-nabi al-rasul al-ummi*, a prophet from among the Arabs bringing 'an Arabic recital'.¹⁰ Prophets were, appropriately, not only to their own peoples, but from among them. This was evident, on both counts, from the formative Judaic precedent. The Qur'an's repeated emphasis on Muhammad's *ummi* 'native' status and the Book's essential 'Arabicity', confirms it. The worship of One God could no less unify Muhammad's fractured local society than it had once ensured the fascinating identity of 'the people of the Book'. That such dual aspiration after political cohesion, an end to costly feuding and a single worship in the tradition of those pioneer *Hunafa*¹¹ was fulfilled in the wake of Muhammad's mission offers the clearest proof that it lay also within its origins in the soul. Of this crucial quality in the eventuation of the Qur'an We may safely identify Jerusalem as an evoking factor.

So much 'the night journey' suggests, however Muslim piety and scholarship interpret its significance, either as an

earthly errand or an 'ascension' into the ultimate heaven of divine-human intimacy and disclosure.

It is true that the Abrahamic associations with Mount Moriah and the *Aqedah* are transferred from Jerusalem to Makkah, from the Temple court to the *Ka'bah*, but the cave below the *Sakhrah* has part in Abraham's travels, not to say with Solomon and Jesus. These had their place, as earlier noted, in the initial *Qiblah* of nascent Islam. From this it seems clear that Muhammad's preaching anticipated recognition on the ground of its proven continuity with the precedents from which it had drawn its confident exemplars. This is evident from its constant emphasis as 'confirming what is already in your hands'. The only sense in which it was innovative lay in its being, now for the first time, an Arabic text via an Arab voice to an Arab audience, not in the custody of a 'foreign', immigrant folk nor mouthing an alien speech.

When, after the *Hijrah* from Makkah to Madina and - as noted - it was urgent to indicate that Makkah was not in any way forfeit to pagans, and those initial anticipations of recognition by Jews and others were disproven, the surrender of the Jerusalem *Qiblah* was necessary to safeguard the coming political self-sufficiency of Islam. Islam in Madina needed to forego Jerusalem, but only axis-wise, in order to re-contain Makkah. Even so, it was for those early Muslims 'a hard thing'. The passage runs:

'The simpletons among the people will be saying: "What has turned them from the prayer-direction they were observing?". Say: "To God belong alike the east and the west. He guides whom He wills into a straight path. Thus have We made you a central community, that you might be witness to mankind as the prophet is witness to you. The prayer-direction which you (s.) hitherto observed We ordained so, only to identify those who would loyally follow the messenger in contrast to those who would turn tail. The matter has been a big issue, but not for such as keep to God's guidance. God is not one to

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let you down in your faith. God deals gently and mercifully with mankind. We see you (s.) turning your face upward to heaven. We now definitely turn you to a prayer-direction of real satisfaction to you. The command is: "Set your face toward the sacred mosque. Where-ever you (pl.) find yourselves set your face in its direction". Those to whom the Book is brought know for sure that it is the truth from their Lord. God is not neglectful of what they do.' (Surah 2. 142-144)

Qiblahs, evidently, are not about divine locations. Allah is everywhere. Despite initial misgiving, the Muslims took the change in their stride. For the next eight years their political orientation would be round to whence they had come. Jerusalem would be secure enough as, in due course, the third holiest city of Islam with its aura carried securely over, to be gathered firmly into the expansion ensuing from a recovered Makkah via Madinan arms. Islam would retain Jerusalem on its own unilateral terms of vital, if secondary, relevance.

By the same token, that absorbed significance would be on radically distinctive terms. In the Jewish tradition Jerusalem carried a strongly ethnic, confessional aura. It was pre-eminently 'the city of David', of whom there is relatively little in the Quran.¹² He it was who had secured it from the Jebusites to be the keystone, in his unification of south and north, of Hebron and Samaria, as the twin poles of the short-lived united monarchy. Only when the single-Temple cult, in the terms of the Deuteronomist, had overcome the long and obstinate tradition of local shrines and cultic forms, could Jerusalem become in that resounding phrase of the prophets, 'the place of the Name', the unique focus of Hebraic worship and identity. As such, 'the place of the Name' was inherently people-meant and people-known. 'Thither the tribes go up' - the tribes of Israel alone. The Temple was the possession of 'chosen people' and Jerusalem its ikon. For all its priestly aura, this distinctiveness also identified prophethood as inherently a Judaic phenomenon - a monopoly

status Muhammad, as we have seen, was yearning to invade as also potential of Arab participation.

This sharp exceptionality, characterising Hebrew prophethood, was explained by Martin Buber when he wrote:

'Everything is hallowed by Yahweh but Yahweh is in no such relationship to any being in the world except Israel, that He could be qualified as the Holy One of this being. He is not the Holy One of the world, nor the Holy One of the human race, nor of any other people but the Holy One of Israel only, because Israel alone was hallowed by Him as a people'.¹³

It was from an impetus, however precisely we appraise it, from that Hebraic privilege that the Qur'an arose, but only by radically rejecting the exceptionality. This is the ultimate significance of Muhammad and the Qur'an as making good a claim to prophethood, having nexus with Hebraic patterns yet disavowing their exclusive definition. This, in turn, must be the shape of Islam's breaking into the possession of Jerusalem as a city-symbol requiring to be a shared entity. 'The excellency of Jacob' (Psalm 47.4) would have to be - as Muslim poets had it - 'the excellences' in the plural. If it be noted that any 'Jerusalem-bent' in Islamic prophethood was only made good by physical conquest, the same would be true of the Jebusite story. In our own contemporary situation we are faced with the question whether Jerusalem can ever be co-operatively, as distinct from competitively, loved? That its 'excellences' are not unilateral is not in doubt. Before, however, coming to what Muslim *Fada'il* had to say of them, it may be useful to study how the Christian faith conceives of Jerusalem. For it has its own vision of what might be meant by 'the place of the Name', which is relevant to the Islamic.

It has long been a truism for Christians that 'the road to Jerusalem is in the heart'. The meaning is double - the heart will yearn to travel there but has no need to do so. After the

Byzantine Empire lost control of the Holy City, western Crusaders were the only 'Christian' state-makers coveting and ruling it politically, until the arrival, on foot in token of humility, of the British General Allenby late in 1917, to displace the retreating Ottoman Caliph. He had been aided by an Arab Revolt which had rejected the option of Ottomanism in favour of alliance with western 'liberation'.¹⁴ Implicit here was a Muslim decision, not only about the feasible auspices of the Islamic future, but also of a radical break with an Islamic past, a break in which the defeated Turks themselves joined by their abolition of the ancient Caliphate.

The politics of the Middle East at that time were inevitably militarised by the First World War confrontation between the Allies and the Central Powers. The British acquisition of Palestine was by no means a renewal of the Crusades. The 'Mandate' concept, despite the scepticism with which it was greeted, was a genuine effort - albeit political and military - to implement the ideology of Woodrow Wilson concerning 'national autonomy'. What bedevilled it in the sequel was the contradiction in that one ideal between Arabism and Jewry in its Zionist fervour.

In the long retrospect of the Christian Church since its Pentecost, the medieval Crusades have to be seen as a terrible aberration disowning the meaning of the very Cross they carried. Christian faith had no legitimate mind to demand physical control of territory to ensure pilgrimage, as the Crusaders argued. Being 'in Christ', as the New Testament saw it, had no need of some 'political kingdom',¹⁵ or territorial sovereignty.

The Crusades had thought otherwise. They were also a long delayed *lex talionis*, or 'retaliation' for Muslims inroads into Spain and France centuries earlier. They were also bent to do what they perceived Eastern Orthodoxy too pusillanimous to undertake, namely confront Islam and subdue it. If Byzantium, or what remained of it between 640 and 1457, failed to achieve this, let the western Church do so for them. The East, moreover, in

Western Rome's view, was in schism anyway after 1054 and so merited papal correction.

The point in recalling these dimensions now is that they underline by contrast the de-politicised attitude of Christian faith to Jerusalem, as not having a 'holiness' only 'Christian power' can duly protect. In this quality Christianity is distinct from Islam, though both faiths, in current Israeli triumphalism, share - though differently - the same anxieties about a Jerusalem whose 'excellences' are and must for ever be plural.

It follows from this that Christian devotion has been capable of 'eternalising' the legend of Jerusalem, of 'image-ing' a heavenly city, the abiding love and haunt of the saints from earth. Christian hymnology is full of this theme.¹⁶ It counterparts the spiritualising of Jerusalem's holiness which we have summarised above. It thus reinforces the vision of a far dispersed, de-territorial and super-ethnic community which loves the chance of a physical return to its environs, but possesses its mystique in any and every time and place, all travel apart.

This distinctively Christian set-of-soul about Jerusalem, explored here only to illuminate how it differs from the Islamic, may well be described by the concept of 'the sacrament of geography'. Though land and locale are eminently dispensable they are, none the less, in physical quality 'the place of the Name'. Visits to them may then be a 'means of grace', whereby imagination is kindled into vividness and meanings present themselves to faith. The hillsides of Galilee, the charm - or tumult - of the heart-shaped Lake, the Mount of Olives,¹⁷ the aura of Gethsemane, the panorama of walled Jerusalem - all these minister to apprehensions of the meaning of sacred history even though 'the Christ of faith' has superseded the ancient Temple as 'where we meet with God'. In a word, the 'excellences' of Jerusalem are such that, while the heart seeks them out where sight can know them, it knows them well within already.

This brief excursus into Christian perceptions of 'the holy places', Jewish, Muslim and Christian, which Jerusalem possesses

leads us back usefully to Islamic thoughts as our main pre-occupation here. We can carry forward this clue - just pondered - of what may be called 'divine associationism'. The term may be immediately suspect to Muslims, thanks to the urgent anathemas on any and all *shirk*, or 'associating' with Allah of pseudo-deities after the pagan fashion of the Quraish. But it is not false worships that are here in mind, but necessary 'messengers'.

These are emphatically 'associated' with Allah in that His is their sending and that they are crucial to the knowledge and the doing of His will in the world. They carry a representativeness on behalf of God. It is from persons sent from God that places derive their repute as being 'hallowed' by their sojourn, their preaching or their burial. It is only through Allah's 'near ones', *awliya*, that locales invite reverence and are magnets to faith. Whether Abraham, Jesus or Muhammad, cities - Makkah, Madina, Jerusalem - have their mysterious aura only because they have their 'messengers', and these in turn have their standing only as having been 'sent' by and from God.

Therefore, in standing in awe of places, we are in awe of persons and in awe of them as 'agents' sent in Allah's Name to be bearers of His 'Books' as His 'Prophets'. There can be no dispute about this sequence of inter-association. It has to be the vital clue to what our faiths hold about places, whether Makkah or Jerusalem, the *Ka'bah* or Temple Mount.¹⁸ What we have in prophethood is intimately entwined with where it was received and whence it came to us in our time. No one in Islam can mistake the frequency with which it is said in the Qur'an: 'Obey Allah and obey the Apostle'. There is this 'God and...' formula inseparable from any theism. To be sure, there is no 'and' in the *Shahadah*, only something like a colon, but there is no forgetting how 'bonded' in the Confession are 'God and His Messenger'. *Rasul-Allah* is, as Arabic grammarians say, *mudaf wa mudaf ilaihi*, or 'in construct'.

There is nothing irreverent in this. According to faith, 'it is the Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes'. Nor is the formula, in any way, a compromise with *shirk*. Indeed, there is a

sense in which our very knowledge of the guilt in *shirk*, i.e. of worshipping other than God, we owe to the divine 'agency' which brought that knowledge to us. For there is no 'revelation' without a human means, no divine disclosure without an earthly instrument". The *Shahadah* is deeply incomplete if we recite only the first half. For God is only known and worshipped and obeyed through earth-seeking, human-meant, truth-sending, and this finds agencies requisite and worthy to be revered.

The Quranic precept about *Tasliyah* in Surah 33.56:

'God and His angels call blessing upon the Prophet. O you who have believed, you also call down blessing upon him and greet him with a greeting of peace'.¹⁹

This divine act of *Salla ala-l-nabi*, which believers are to emulate, signifies a divine 'satisfaction' with him seeing that his mission was a divine design. Its discharge means a heavenly approval leading to benign benediction upon him. When the 'believers' also recite the formula: *Salla Allahu alaihi wa sallam*, they share, as far as in them lies, with this divine approbation. They associate their 'submission' to the Qur'an with an acknowledgement of the Book's divine origination. If there was no point in the 'associationism' we are studying, there could be no occasion of grateful recognition of Muhammad. The two are one.

It is noteworthy - though seldom understood among Muslims - that there is a similar meaning in the Gospel salutation to Jesus: 'This is my Son, my Beloved in whom I am well-pleased', 'Son' is synonymous with 'servant' throughout the Biblical writings.²⁰ God's being well-pleased with Jesus is not some distant serenity nor a remote condescension: it is rather the satisfaction of a double purpose, the harmony of two wills - the one ordaining, the other obeying, the one devising and the other fulfilling. The whole of Christian Christology is built on this theme, so that 'God was in Christ' in the terms in which 'the Christ was in God'.

Study of Islamic *Tasliyah* in this way is here no theological diversion. Nor is it out of place. It is only the 'association' of God in His will with human means in its fulfilling, that we have the 'association' of such human means with earthly locale, with sites in time, with the abodes of events. It is Muhammad's 'journey' which sacrilises -AlAqsa, just as his first *Qiblah* towards it makes Jerusalem beloved. Both are valid because of the 'associations' of that city with prophethoods Muhammad believed prefatory to his own. Jerusalem is 'holy' to Christians as the dramatic city of Jesus' tears (Luke 19.41-44), as the place of his crucifixion outside its Roman walls, as the place of his resurrection. In all Scripture there is some measure of such interplay between who and where, between the action and the stage. Has not Islam always seen the *Hijrah* as more than a mere Journey? The hazardous terrain between Makkah and Madina in 622 was felt to be a movement out of an old past into a future of destiny. It was measured not merely in miles but in eras, as a venture into faith. One may not divorce the singer from the song.²¹

It must follow that how we take places will hinge on how we hold faiths. This is eminently the case with Jerusalem. To write of its 'excellences' is to measure its meanings. We are insisting throughout that these are plural and not - as some Zionists today demand - unilateral and exclusivist, as if 'the holy city' could be inalienably the capital of any one party. That bitter issue, however, has to be sobered by the realisation that it is Jerusalem which is at stake, and not some acres of earth, a mere place on a map. What was once a *qiblah* may not be treated as a squabble: what witnessed Jesus' cross must be forever exempt from vulgarity.

Causes, when they become political, are seldom innocent of what disserves them. For, as T.S.Eliot had it: 'They who serve the greater cause may make the cause serve them.'²² The 'excellences' of Jerusalem deserve to be excellently cherished and sung. It is time to turn to poets and travellers in Islam who sought to do so.

The habit of composing *Fada'il* or 'praises' of *Bait al-Maqdis* (the name long current before Jerusalem came to be styled *Al-Quds*) began in the 2nd Islamic century and seems to have developed as a dimension of *Hadith*, or 'tradition', handed down from the *Sahaba*, or 'Companions' of the Prophet. Its long incidence through succeeding centuries is eloquent of the abiding esteem of the city. One might take Mu'awiya's concern to bind it somehow into the whole of Syria - by his claim that God's choice of it for His holy prophets spelled the sanctity of *Al-Sham* itself - 'God's choice among His countries'.²³ He is reported to have said that, speaking from its pulpit, 'The area between the two walls of this mosque is dearer to God than the rest of the earth'. It was a holiness which, he claimed, reached throughout Syria also.²⁴

His zeal may have owed something to the contemporary revolt of disaffecteds in Makkah and Madina and to his own clan's late adherence to Islam while Muhammad lived. Political intrigue and tension cannot be excluded from the fame of Jerusalem but it is significant how many Umayyad Caliphs chose to take there the *Bay'a* or allegiance-oath of their nobles. Abd al-Malik, the builder of the *Qubbat* and in whose time a rival Caliph, Ibn al-Zubair, was acclaimed in Madina, constructed a highway from Damascus to Jerusalem. Arabization of coinage and administration was proceeding apace, but Jerusalem was cherished primarily for its 'sacred rock' sanctity. It was Umayyads who erected the first Al-Aqsa building, further embellishing the holy precincts and commemorating Muhammad's visitation and *Mi'raj*.

One intriguing feature under successive caliphal dynasties as far as the Fatimids, was the habit of approximating pilgrim acts around the shrines of *Bait al-Maqdis* to those of the statutory *Hajj* in Makkah. It is reported, for example, by traditionalists that Umar saluted the locale where the Dome and Al-Aqsa would rise, with the Makkan pilgrim cry: *Labbaika Allahumma*, 'Here I am O God'. There are also indications of

ceremonies of *Tawaf*, circulation around the sacred rock, or pilgrims to it would perform the Makkan 'standing' and celebrate the *Adha* feast there. It could be that these usages arose, in part, from political factors straining relations with factions in Makkah. But they are clearly witness to the perceived status of *Bait al-Maqdis* as 'the *qiblah* of all the prophets'. It was also piously perceived as the final *qiblah* of our human mortality, the place whither to wend the way of piety, as the proper place in which to die and be buried. There was mortal as well as posthumous merit in praying in Jerusalem, as well as merit in the care of sacred precincts or their restoration in the wake of earthquakes and other adversities. Through the long centuries, 'praises' of the *fada'il* of the city persisted, exciting or explaining the zeal for its visitation. In turn, the celebrities, poets like Farazdaq, or theologians like Al-Ghazali, or geographers like Al-Wasiti, who came there, savouring its prestige, gave currency to its fame and worth.

Rigorous historians may have reservations about this cumulative celebration of the 'excellences' of Jerusalem, aware of the proximate nature of traditional lore and its liability to political or sectarian influence. Yet these 'praises' leave us with one final concern in appreciating, in today's tense scene, the Islamic cherishing of the 'virtues' of *Al-Quds*. We are brought back to the perception with which we began, namely that Jerusalem - by irreducible historical factors - has to have a plural, that is a triple, 'ownership' of love and may not properly be unilaterally annexed. Its perceived sanctities are not alienable or fit for monopoly in solitary terms. How this cardinal principle of its being is to be registered politically is the still open question, but it is incontestable religiously.

It will be useful to conclude with a Qur'anic reflection that takes us behind Moses and likewise even behind Abraham. Things Mosaic have always been constitutive of things Judaic - the Exodus, Sinai, the covenant and, from all these, 'the promised land'. The Qur'an, to be sure, records them²⁵ in its own idiom.

But Islam has been interested in going behind Moses to Abraham, to affirm divine relationship antecedent to Sinai where only Jews were assembled and where all generations of them undertook the covenant they had exclusively with Yahweh. Paul, in the New Testament, notably in his letters to Galatians and Romans, was also interested in Abraham as party to divine meanings, relevant to Paul's case-making, that were prior to Moses and Mosaic covenanting.

Yet sadly Abraham is not reconciling territory despite fine efforts like those of Louis Massignan and his disciple Youakim Mubarak, to have it seem so.²⁶ There is the conflict between Ishmael and Isaac, then between Esau and Jacob, when we pass from Abraham. Does he belong to Mount Moriah or was he, rather, the builder of the *Ka'bah* at Makkah? Was he, as for Jewry, the founder of a 'seed', a 'nation' out of part of his progeny,²⁷ or was he primarily, as for Muslims, a supreme iconoclast who physically demolished his family's idols?

These discrepancies make it doubtful that Abraham and appeal to him can conciliate the pleas and passions around 'holy land and holy city'. Or they will not do so unless we can find something anterior even to Abraham on which 'chosen-ness'²⁸ can be transcended in what unifies us simply in single human terms. Is what we need not available to us in the concept of the cosmic 'oath' in Surah 7.172:

'When your (s.) Lord took the progeny of the sons of Adam from their loins, He took them to witness on their own souls, saying: "Am I not your Lord?". They answered: "Yes. Indeed, we witness to it". This was lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: "We had not known it to be so".'

This theme of the cosmic oath is in line with the Noahid bond of Genesis whereby 'seedtime and harvest shall not fail', i.e. the dependability of nature for humankind under God as entrusted with that *Khalifah* over it, which is the gist of all husbandry, agriculture, technology, arts, sciences and so

economies and societies in their histories, their laws and identities.

In this common human privilege there are no privacies and no monopolies, no exclusive holiness, no 'peculiar peoples', only distinctive races, climates, living spaces and environments and a rich diversity of cultures - all under God in an equal benediction and at a comparable risk to their 'ever generous Lord'. The 'excellence' of Jerusalem is to have been, and to remain, one (redoubtable) of such capital cities summoned, as such, to be 'the joy of the whole earth'.

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¹ Not 'quintessential' in that Jerusalem, for the early Church, was in measure displaced by Antioch as the springboard of mission westward. Its centrality was a matter of deep association, not of utter necessity. The essence of early Christianity was its 'being scattered abroad', having no sacred territory, no 'chosen' people and no indispensable language. See below:-

² On the *Fada'il* see, e.g.: L.I.Levine ed. *The Jerusalem Cathedra*, No.1, 'Muslim Literature in Praise of Jerusalem', Isaac Hasson, pp.168-84. Also S.D.Goitein: *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Leiden, 1966, pp.135-48.

³ His shift of the capital from Madina to Damascus was a new departure. Since Madina was being forsaken, Jerusalem may have been a prudent and auspicious choice, or - in Qur'anic terms - a preference for 'the olive' over 'the fig', these in Surah 95.1 understood by many to symbolise Syria and Palestine, or Damascus and Jerusalem.

⁴ Sophronius received Umar in full patriarchal robes, whereas Umar presented himself in 'the clouts of battle'. The contrast was eloquent of much else in the event.

- 5 See, for example, Walter E. Kaegi: *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge, 1992.
- 6 There would certainly be disaster were Jewish Zealots ever to succeed in plotting re-possession of Temple Mount with a view to Temple re-building. Secularism in Israel would never accede to such defiance of the fates.
- 7 See George Adam Smith: *Jerusalem from the Earliest Times to A.D. 70*, London, 1907, Vol. 1, p.3.
- 8 Seeing that the verses chosen from the Qur'an for its decoration come, in the main, from Surahs 3 and 19 - the long; nativity narratives of Isa, Ibn Maryam al-Masih, the 'style' by which the Jesus of the Christian Gospels is known in the Qur'an.
- 9 Such widespread, north-south commerce - 'the caravans of the Quraish' (106.1) is a strong tradition, though recent research has thrown doubt on its extent and volume. Certainly Makkan prestige seems to have undergone development under the Prophet's great grandfather in the later decades of the 6th century.
- 10 On this reading of *ummi*, see my *The Event of the Qur'an*, London, 1971, Chaps. 2 and 3.
- 11 The *hunafa* (s. *hanif*) were seekers, or worshippers, of One God in the antecedents of original Islam, apparently cherishing *millat-Ibrahim*, 'the community of Abraham'. Scholars are uncertain about the provenance of the *hunafa* but they were clearly a formative influence in the sense of mission of Muhammad prior to his 'night of power' in Qur'an-experience.
- 12 Despite David's being associated with the *Zabur* (Psalms) named, with Torah, *Injil* and Qur'an as the four principal 'books' of Allah. David has the distinction of being the only individual to have the title *khalifah* in the Qur'an (38.26) in any political sense, it being normally applied to humans at large in their creaturehood, ruling Allah's creation as His 'deputies'.
- 13 Martin Buber: *The Prophetic Faith*, trans. C. Witton-Davies, London, 1949, p.207.

- 14 See the study of Arab options around the turn of the 20th century in Hassan Saab: *The Arab Federalists of the Ottoman Empire*, Amsterdam, 1958.
- 15 The point was neatly captured by Kwame Nkrumah, leader of the nationalists in Ghana and architect of its independence from the British, as the first African 'free state' in modern times. He paraphrased the words of Jesus, according to Matthew 6.33, to read: 'Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things will be added to you'. It might be said to phrase also the logic behind the *Hijrah* to Madina in 622. See K.Nkrumah: *An Autobiography*, London, 1957, p.164.
- 16 Many translated from Greek and Latin by John Mason Neale, and perhaps most notable of all: 'Truly Jerusalem name we that shore, Vision of peace and of joy evermore' *O Quanta quales*.
- 17 Sadly as its contours are now marred by building, roads and the ugly screees these create on its flanks.
- 18 This truth is not to overlook that, in Muslim lore, how Makkah is held to be 'the navel of the earth', as is Jerusalem according to Jewish piety. The fact that Makkah is the abode of the *Ka'bah* and that the *Ka'bah* has 'the black stone' fallen from heaven - and 'black' by human sin - does not diminish the fact that the city is also birthplace of the Prophet and Mount Hira the 'cave' of early *wahy*.
- 19 See discussion of *Tasliyah* in C.E.Padwick: *Muslim Devotions, Prayer Manuals in Common Use*, London, 1961, Oxford, 1995.
- 20 It is also explicit- in the Christmas Song about 'men of goodwill', meaning: 'Those in whose wills the pleasure is what pleases God', i.e. a harmony of direction and obedience, the crux of 'peace on earth'.
- 21 On the 'personal', as distinct from the 'tribal', element in the decision of the *Muhajirin*, see: M.A.Lahbabi: *Le Personalisme Musulmane*, Paris, 1964. A Moroccan writer, he sees the *Hijrah* as a watershed' in religious experience.
- 22 T.S.Eliot: *Murder in the Cathedral*, London, 1968 ed. p.48.

- 23 See more fully Ed. K.J.Asali: *Jerusalem in History*, Buchhurst Hill, Essex, 1989, Chap. iv, Abdul Aziz Duri: 'Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period, 7th-11th Centuries', pp 105-29.
- 24 K.J.Asali: *Jerusalem in History*, p. 109.
- 25 And using the term 'the holy land'. See Surahs 20.12 and 79.16 re the valley where Moses was told to shed his sandals. The term *al-qudus* is used only for the 'the Holy Spirit'.
- 26 Louis Massignon (1883-1962) See: *L'Herne: Massignon*, Paris, n.d. and Youakim Mubarak: *L'Islam et Le Dialogue Islam*, and *-L'oeuvre de Louis Massignon*, both 1972, Beirut, and G.Bassett-Sani: *Louis Massignon: Christian Ecumenist*, ed. & trans. A.H.Cutler, Chicago, 1974.
- 27 We often forget Keturah by whom Abraham had other progeny who do not figure in 'holy seedings'. See Genesis 25.1f. and 1 Chronicles 1.32f.
- 28 An honoured (maybe we could even say a 'chosen') quality belongs to all identity. The question is - on what does it turn? Jewishness hinges on the ethnic factor of Jewish motherhood. The Christian criterion is - that of 'faith in Christ' incorporating 'community' open to all. We might say that Islamic identity (albeit *Millat Ibrahim*) is heart-confession of the defining *Shahadah* which is also open to all who will to make it. These 'chosenesses', with their archaeological and spiritual stakes in the one city have somehow to relativise the communal expression (not the 'theology') of their distinctiveness. Maybe the divine question, so gently phrased: 'Am I not your Lord?' can inspire them to do so.