

Christian Perspectives on Jerusalem

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Since no physical factor can account adequately for the significance of Jerusalem,¹ its importance must derive from its religious significance. This is reflected in its normal Arab name, *al-Quds* (The Holy) and in one of the oldest Islamic names of the city, *al-Bait al-Muqadas* (The Holy House, or Temple). However, since religious significance scarcely ever subsists in isolation from general cultural and political circumstances, any discussion of theological factors must be carried out in the wider context of national and international politics. History confirms that the most spiritual realities can be manipulated to further the political interests of groups near to hand, as well as the foreign policy interests of great powers. Throughout its long history Jerusalem has consistently interested foreign powers.

In the nineteenth century alone, England, Russia, Germany and France were engaged in 'a scramble for Palestine', which invariably took the form of establishing Christian institutions in the land, thereby uniting Christian missionary endeavour with imperialist interest. In this century, after the long period of Ottoman hegemony (1517-1917), Britain ruled the region from 1917-1948, and, since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the USA, and, to a much lesser extent, the former USSR have maintained strategic interests in the region. Of course, there has always been intense religious interest in Jerusalem on the part of Christians. In addition to the interest shown by the different branches of the world-wide Christian Church, the concerns of the indigenous Arab Christian community of Palestine are paramount to this day. But Jerusalem is sacred for others also.

Away from the city, synagogues and churches throughout the world were oriented in the direction of Jerusalem, and before fixing on Mecca, Muslims, too, faced Jerusalem as they prayed - Jerusalem was the first direction for Muslim prayer, the *qibla*. For Jews Jerusalem is the City of David and the Temple. For Muslims it is the place from where the Prophet ascended into heaven. While it has some of the resonances it has for Jews, what evokes the strongest sentiment in the Christian heart is the fact that Jerusalem is the place of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, and where the Holy Spirit descended on the Early Church. With such interest shown by each of the three religions, one might expect Jerusalem to be an ideal place for inter-religious dialogue and sharing.

This paper surveys attitudes of Christians to Jerusalem in the two thousand years of Christian history. It outlines attitudes to the city implied in some of the texts of the New Testament. It situates Christian attachment within the wider context of religious devotion to specific places. It discusses the practice of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land from before the period of Emperor Constantine to the modern one. It examines that specific form of Christian attachment to the city manifested in the Crusader period, with its mixture of piety, reverence for the Holy Places, barbarism and belligerent imperialism. It moves swiftly to the twentieth century when the Christian Church had to deal with the aspirations of Zionism to establish a Jewish state around Zion. Finally, it concentrates on the perspectives of Christians living within the City itself.

But firstly, one must ask the questions as to who speaks for 'Christianity', and who speaks for 'Jerusalem'? Within the Church in Jerusalem itself tradition has established a hierarchy, with the three patriarchal Churches (Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and Latin Catholic) enjoying special authority. Then, on the outside, there are the Holy See, the *World Council of Churches*,² the *Middle East Council of Churches*, and other national or regional ecumenical bodies, such as the *Churches Together in Britain and Ireland*, which express concern for

Jerusalem. No one body arrogates to itself the right to speak in the name of all Christian bodies on this subject which is of interest to all.

All Christian Churches hold the Bible in veneration. It witnesses to the fact that the Holy Land and Jerusalem mark the locus of God's dealings with the Israelites and of His intervention in human history in the person of Jesus Christ. When one talks of a sacred place within Christianity, then, invariably one associates it with the manifestation of some aspect of the divinity within history, be it the history of Jews, and/or of Christians. The Holy Land has a person-sacredness, prior to Jesus, but which is very much enhanced through his ministry. It is not surprising, then, that from a very early period Christians from abroad went on pilgrimage to the Holy City and surrounding areas, *for the sake of the holy places*, and in particular, *to trace the footsteps of Jesus*. However, it will be seen that it was Christians residing in the land, rather than pilgrims from outside who were the architects of a Christian Holy Land.³

The New Testament and Jerusalem

Since Jesus and his followers were themselves Jews, brought up on a tradition of pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the major feasts, it might be expected that they would see the Temple of Jerusalem as the location *par excellence* of God's presence, and the unique locus of divine mediation. However, despite the prominence of pilgrimage within its tradition, Christianity has always maintained a certain ambivalence about the significance of place, and even about the places associated with its Jewish ancestors, especially Jesus. The reasons are theological, and in the course of such disputation recourse is had to certain texts within the New Testament. I virtually confine myself here to the particular perspective of one New Testament author, Luke.⁴

Jerusalem features prominently in Luke's two-volume work, the Gospel of Luke-the Acts of the Apostles. The scene opens in the Temple (Luke 1.5-25), and ends with Paul in (open) prison in Rome (Acts 28.16-31). The events concerning the

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Good News of Jesus Christ, then, begin in the capital of Jewish faith and tradition, and end in the capital of the Roman Empire. Jesus' Ascension into heaven, recorded both at the end of the Gospel, and at the beginning of the Acts serves as a hinge for the two volume work, as the following arrangement of the text suggests:

Ascension
Luke 24
Acts 1

Mission in Jerusalem Mission in Jerusalem
Luke 19.41-24.49 Acts 1.12-8.1a

Mission in Samaria and Judea Mission in Judea and Samaria
Luke 9.51-19.40 Acts 8.1b-11.18

Mission in Galilee Mission to the 'ends of earth'
Luke 4.14-9.50 Acts 11.19-28.31

For Christians Jerusalem is the city in which the Church was born, and for that reason the Church of Jerusalem can lay claim to being the Mother Church of the entire Christian world. Throughout the world, Christian church buildings face Jerusalem, and the altar in each church binds the community with the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, in the perspective of the author of Luke-Acts, the Christian dynamic demands movement away from Jerusalem to *the ends of the earth*.

Luke 24.44-49 and its echo in Acts 1.3-8 synthesise Luke's account of the ministry of Jesus, and propel his readers forward into the continuation of that mission in the Church, a mission beginning in Jerusalem, but destined for the ends of the earth. The text stresses that: the universal mission was inaugurated by the risen Jesus; the mission of Jesus and of the Church is in fulfilment of the Scriptures; and, suffering and rising from the dead will befall the prophet Jesus. But above all, for our purposes, the Gospel is to be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Here Luke reveals the dynamic movement from

Jerusalem, the place where his Gospel begins and ends, to the capital of the Empire, at which point he closes his Acts.

If Luke propels the gospel to the mainly gentile city of Rome, he recognises the seminal function of Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish faith. The link between the mission to the gentiles and that to the Jews is intimate. In both Luke 24.47-48 and in Acts 1.8 the witness to Jesus will begin in Jerusalem, and be carried forward into all Judea and Samaria, and finally to the end of the earth: 'Stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high' (Luke 24.48), and, 'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you' (Acts 1.8).⁵

The Christian Gospel in Luke's view, then, is not tied to any specific land. Indeed, the disciples of Jesus are commissioned to proclaim it to *the ends of the earth*. It would, of course, be ludicrous to conclude that Luke's perspective denies the legitimacy of Christians living in Jerusalem. However, the question of the link between Christian communities around the world and the birthplace of the religion remains. The significance of Jerusalem for Christians lies not only in the fact that Christianity was born there, but more fundamentally that in that location the saving activity of God was accomplished. Jerusalem highlights for Christians that their religion is not a matter of mere ideas and ideals, but derives from the intervention of God in history in that place and its surroundings.

Jerusalem as a Sacred Place for Christians

For Christians Jerusalem has many of the characteristics of a sacred place, wherein there is the possibility of breaking through from the level of earth to the level of heaven. The religious person desires to be as near that space as possible. Mircea Eliade, having surveyed the occurrence of the symbolism of the *centre of the world* in diverse regions, moves to a specifically Christian consideration: 'To Christians, Golgotha was the centre of the world; it was both the topmost point of the cosmic mountain',⁶ and was so portrayed in ancient maps: e.g., the *Mappa Mundi* of Hereford Cathedral places Jerusalem, and

the Crucifixion, at the very centre of the world. Eliade argues that humankind cannot live without a sacred place, and he names this universal condition of humankind, the *nostalgia for Paradise*: 'The desire to be always, effortlessly, at the heart of the world, of reality, of the sacred, and, briefly, to transcend, by natural means, the human condition and regain a divine state of affairs: what a Christian would call the state of man before the Fall.'⁷

Nevertheless, one must ask whether Christianity, which does not require its faithful to make pilgrimage, has a theology of sacred places? St John's Gospel, chapter 4, is presented frequently as raising the question of the significance of place in the Christian dispensation, since Christ spoke of worship, neither on Mount Gerizim, nor Mount Zion, but in spirit and in truth.

Gregory of Nyssa's famous letter of 379 AD is viewed as an embarrassment to supporters of pilgrimage. His major critique of the practice is that Christianity has no thoughts on places. Instead it stresses that the core of religion relates to closeness to God and neighbour. Going to places brings people no closer to God, he claims, and hence Christians should stay at home. Contrary to popular opinion, however, Gregory was no doctrinaire critic of the *tactile spirituality* one associates with places sanctified by Christ. He recognised that in a profound sense the Holy Land was especially holy for Christians because of the fact that Jesus traversed it. The terrain itself, he says has 'signs of the Lord's sojourn in the flesh'. Gregory's context in this second extract was different from the earlier one. He was reacting against the uncompromising intellectualism of a fellow bishop, Eunomius, for whom the dogmatic exactness of Christianity, couched in the language of a philosophical system was prized above all else. Gregory insisted in this second context that Christianity was not a matter of the mind only, but invited participation in sacramental practices and symbols. The terrain of the holy places 'received the footprints of Life itself', and serve to remind one that God once walked the earth.⁸

Pilgrimage to the Sacred Place⁹

The notion of a *sacred place* is fundamental to pilgrimage, and no pilgrimage site matches Jerusalem. Unlike most termini, it is the goal of pilgrimage for three religions, and for the different groupings within each. It is, then, a *multitude* of holy cities, rather than *a* holy city. While the origins of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land are obscure, the practice certainly predates the conscious efforts of the emperor Constantine to provide a physical anchorage for the Bible.¹⁰ The province of Palestine harboured the Christian origins of the pilgrims.

Immediately after his victory at Chrysopolis in 324, Constantine ordered the restoration of the Church's property in the eastern part of the Empire. Presumably, the news that the Holy Sepulchre had been discovered and that the site had been converted into a Christian basilica increased the number of pilgrims to the region. We have accounts of pilgrimages by the Bordeaux Pilgrim (AD 333) and Egeria (AD 381-384) illustrating their desire to visit the Holy Places. Egeria's Bible was her constant travelling companion. According to the account of St Jerome, veneration of the sacred sites, and especially that of the Cross and the Tomb of the Resurrection was high on the priorities of two Roman noblewomen, Paula and her daughter (*Letter to Eustochium* 9.1). It is clear from a survey of early Christian pilgrimage that a major concern was to visit the places associated with the Bible, and especially with the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem.

So widespread was the practice of pilgrimage to Jerusalem by the end of the fourth century that Bishop Gregory of Nyssa felt obliged to remind Christians that where the Lord in the Beatitudes called the blessed to possess the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5.1-12), he did not include among their good deeds going up to Jerusalem on pilgrimage; and where he spoke of blessedness he did not include that kind of devotion (*Epistolae*. 2).

However, while pilgrimage played a major role in the formation of a Christian idea of a *holy land* it was not the

pilgrims from abroad, who came and went back home, who were the architects of the notion, but, rather, the Christians who were born in the land itself, or came to live there. The indigenous Christian community included Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Paula, Melania, Hesychius, the monks who lived in the Judean desert, Cyril of Scythopolis, Sophronius, and John of Damascus. 'Almost every Christian thinker who contributed significantly to the Christian understanding of the holy land lived, at least for part of his or her life, in the land.'¹¹

The Crusades

Granted the significance of the Holy Places within Christianity one may question whether, and if so to what extent Christians ought to interest themselves in political control over the terrain of the Holy Places. The question arose in a particular way in the eleventh century. The Crusades represent a particular expression of Christian attachment to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. But, as always, religious and theological factors find their place within a matrix of wider political, social and ideological factors. The Crusades were a series of expeditions from Western Europe ostensibly designed to wrest the Holy Land from Islam, and retain it in Christian hands. However, purely political factors also influenced the movement: the East offered the prospect of land for an expanding population in Europe.

Nothing in the manner in which the Crusades were conducted reflects a specifically Christian disposition. Indeed, they were marked by extreme brutality. It is sufficient for our purposes to indicate the kind of religious and theological thinking that was presented as justifying the barbaric behaviour associated with them. As a holy war authorised by the Pope, it was an attempt to recover Christian territories lost to the infidels.¹² The papal justification of recourse to violence can be traced back to the views of St Augustine, who, appealing to Abraham's preparedness to sacrifice even his son, and to the killings by Moses and Elijah, argued that God could directly command violence, and that to obey the command was an admirable

example of faithful obedience. When war was waged in the name of God, then, it was a just war *par excellence*. Collections of Augustine's views were compiled just before the First Crusade (c. 1083 by St Anselm of Lucca; c. 1094 by Ivo of Chartres). In the 1070s and 1080s Pope Gregory VII introduced the idea of a knighthood, and the groups of knights, called into being by the Pope, and scattered in Germany, France and Italy marked a step towards the Crusades.

When Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095, he called out soldiers 'for Christ's war'. The aim of the Crusade was the liberation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In terms of the prevailing theology, the sins of an individual Christian merited temporal punishment, and could be atoned for only by the confession of sins, and by undertaking the acceptable discipline of penance. The journey to Jerusalem to liberate the Church could function as the penance. Indeed, by the decree of Urban II Crusaders were granted a *Plenary Indulgence*, i.e., all the temporal punishment their sins had merited would be remitted. Moreover, in the event of dying in the course of the Crusade, they would be granted the status of martyr.

In December 1095 Urban II wrote to the faithful in Flanders, appealing for volunteers 'to liberate the eastern churches', guaranteeing that the military enterprise would serve for the remission of all their sins. Fulcher of Chartres (written 1100-6) records the words of the Pope's sermon at the Council of Clermont (27 November 1095): 'Oh how shameful if a race so spurned and degenerate, the handmaid of devils, should conquer a race endowed with the faith of almighty God and resplendent with the name of Christ!' The Pope appealed to the greatness of King Charlemagne and Louis: 'May you be especially moved by the Holy Sepulchre of Our Lord and Saviour, which is in the hands of unclean races, and by the Holy Places, which are now treated dishonourably and are polluted irreverently by their unclean practices...Take the road to the Holy Sepulchre, rescue that land from a dreadful race and rule over it yourselves.'¹³

The urgency of the task is emphasised by the Pope, in a passage which unites Christian piety, xenophobia and ignorance:

Jerusalem is the navel of the world, a land fruitful above all others, like a second paradise of delights. The Redeemer of the human race made it famous by his birth, embellished it by his life, sanctified it by his passion, redeemed it by his death, left his seal on it by his burial. This royal city, placed at the centre of the world, is now held captive by her enemies and is enslaved to pagan rites by a people which does not acknowledge God.¹⁴

The audience, we are told, shouted in unison, 'God wills it! God wills it!' The Pope referred to the Crusade as a holy pilgrimage. The pilgrims must carry the cross on their front or breast, in compliance with the Gospel exhortation, 'Whosoever does not carry his cross and come after me is not worthy of me'. A series of Crusades followed the First Crusade (1096-1099); Second Crusade (1145-1153); Third Crusade (1189-1193); Fourth Crusade (1202-1204); Fifth Crusade (1217); Sixth Crusade (1228); Seventh Crusade (1248); Eighth Crusade (1270), but when the Mamelukes conquered Acre in 1291 Christian rule in the East ended. The devastation caused by these foreign incursions is inscribed deeply in the collective memory of the peoples of the Middle East.

The next significant interference from a 'Christian' power in the political life of Palestine came with Britain's General Allenby's capture of Jerusalem on 9 December 1917, preceded by His Majesty's Government's declaration of sympathy for Zionist aspirations (the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917). Soon after (24 July 1922), the League of Nations entrusted to Britain the responsibility to establish the Jewish national home (the Mandate for Palestine, Article 2), with the Mandate incorporating the terms of Balfour Declaration (Preamble; Articles 2, 4, 6, 7, 15, 22, and 23). Clearly the intentions of the British Government and the League of Nations to further the

interests of the Zionists would have immediate implications for the indigenous Arab Christian community of Palestine. This new development sounded alarm bells for Christian bodies from the outside also, which feared for the security of their interests in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Because of its centralised organisation and the extent of its constituency the Holy See (the Vatican) was to be at the forefront of opposition to Zionism.¹⁵ Let us trace its evolving stance to developments in the Holy Land and Jerusalem since then.

Jewry, Zionism, the Holy See and the Holy Land

In line with the growth of Western interest in the region during the period of decline of the Ottoman Empire, the Holy See expanded its interest in the Christian Holy Places. Prior to the Balfour Declaration its major concern focused on their likely fate 'in the custody of the synagogue'. The Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri, remarked: 'It is hard to take back that part of our heart which has been given over to the Turks in order to give it to the Zionists'.¹⁶ On 6 March 1922, Gasparri severely criticised the draft British Mandate for Palestine, which Lord Balfour had presented to the League of Nations on 7 December 1920, as being incompatible with the Covenant of the League of Nations. The British plan would establish 'an absolute economic, administrative, and political preponderance of Jews,' and would act as 'the instrument for subordinating native populations'.¹⁷ One detects here the emergence of a concern for the rights of the Palestinians in the land, whose Christians were among the staunchest Arab opponents of Zionism, and supporters of nascent Arab nationalism. It is equally clear, however, that the Holy See had little enthusiasm for an Arab government in the area, which it predicted would be unreliable and weak. The Holy See was happy to support the social and economic interests of the Palestinians, but not the implications of Palestinian self-determination.¹⁸

Reflecting the new order in the aftermath of the First World War, the Holy See, ever attentive to the needs of the

Church universal, began to pay more attention to the interests of the Christian community in the Holy Land, which, of course, was overwhelmingly Arab (80 per cent in the 1931 British Census of Palestine). Interest in the affairs of Arab Christians inevitably led to concern for the wider Arab nationalist community. However, after the Second World War, such was the international support for Zionism in the wake of the virtual annihilation of mainland European Jewry that it was virtually impossible for the Holy See to challenge Zionism publicly.

The establishment of the State of Israel on 79 per cent of British Mandated Palestine, and the expulsion and displacement of some 750,000 Palestinian Arabs,¹⁹ including some 50,000 Christians, 35 per cent of all Christians who lived in Palestine prior to 15 May 1948, while acknowledged to be a disaster, did not induce the Holy See to make any diplomatic representations. In his Encyclical Letter, *In Multiplicibus* of October 1948, Pope Pius XII expressed his anguish at only the general conditions of refugees, and in that which followed it six months later, *Redemptoris Nostri*, he was no more specific. These two encyclicals do not go beyond the expression of predictable, broad moral and religious principles, with no explicit political implications. The Palestinian issue was scarcely mentioned publicly for the next twenty years.

The Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Nostra Aetate*) of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) provided a stimulus to better relations between Christianity and other religions, including Judaism. Parallel with this was the growing sense of the essential link between the Gospel and issues of justice and peace.²⁰ Translated to the Middle East, there were two, somewhat conflicting tendencies developing, a greater respect for the Jews, and a growing sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians.

A number of significant factors influenced future developments. The victory of Israel in the war of June 1967 imposed a new sense of the reality and power of the Jewish state. Contacts between Jews and Catholics increased. Pope Paul VI

stated his concern at the decrease in the numbers of Christians in the Holy Land. If their presence were to cease, 'the shrines would be without the warmth of the living witness of the Holy Places of Jerusalem, and the Holy Land would become like a museum'.²¹ In addressing Israeli Jews on 22 December 1975, he said,

Although we are conscious of the still very recent tragedies which led the Jewish people to search for safe protection in a state of its own, sovereign and independent, and in fact precisely because we are aware of this, we would like to ask the sons of this people to recognize the rights and legitimate aspirations of another people, which have also suffered for a long time, the Palestinian people.²²

This was the first time that any Pope had recognised the rights and legitimate aspirations of the Jews to a sovereign and independent state of its own. The other side of the coin lay in his appeal to the victors to recognise the corresponding rights of the vanquished.

By 1983 Mgr. W. Murphy, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace acknowledged that the Holy See 'recognizes the factual existence of Israel, its right to exist, its right to secure borders, and other rights that a sovereign nation possesses'. Pope John Paul II welcomed Shimon Peres, the Israeli Prime Minister, to the Vatican on 19 February 1985. The Pope's visit to the Roman synagogue on 25 June 1986 marked another stage in the growing cordiality between the two bodies. After Peres' visit, the Holy See spokesman referred to differences on essential problems, which included the status of Jerusalem, the sovereignty of Lebanon over all its territory, and the lot of the Palestinian people.²³

The appeal for recognition of the rights of both peoples has been a constant call of Pope John Paul II. Its most comprehensive expression is contained in his communiqué released to the press after Yasser Arafat's visit of to the Pope (15

September 1982).²⁴ Moreover, in his Apostolic Letter, *Redemptiois Anno* of April 1984, he said,

The Palestinian people who find their historical roots in that land and who for decades have been dispersed, have the natural right in justice to find once more a homeland and to be able to live in peace and tranquillity with the other peoples of the area.²⁵

During his visit to Austria in June 1988, the Pope called again for equality for Israeli Jews and Palestinians, and pointed out that full diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Israel are 'dependent on a solution to the Palestinian Question and the international status of Jerusalem.' The Palestinians, he went on, have a right to a homeland, 'like every other nation, according to international law.' In his Easter Message of 1991 John Paul II said,

Lend an ear, humanity of our time, to the long ignored aspirations of oppressed peoples such as the Palestinians, the Lebanese, the Kurds, who claim the right to exist with dignity, justice and freedom.

The signing of the Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel on 30 December 1993 marked a new phase in their relationship. Like many agreed statements before it, it is viewed very differently by the two signatories. While supporters of Israel see in it approval of the state by a major moral authority, the most the Holy See can point to are statements about general principles of religious freedom to which the State of Israel commits itself. The absence of any reference to Palestinian Arabs, or to the injustice done them on the establishment of the State of Israel and since, is striking. The only reference to overtly political matters is in Article 11, wherein both parties commit themselves to the promotion of peaceful resolution of conflicts (1), and the Holy See solemnly commits itself 'to remaining a stranger to all merely temporal conflicts, which principle applies specifically to disputed

territories and unsettled borders' (2). One hopes that the agreement may contribute towards some form of restitution for the injustices done to the Palestinians, and towards a sensible peace in the region. If the members of the Catholic Church consider that the Church has much to do to atone for its brutality towards Jews in the past, let them argue for it to be done graciously, and at the Church's own expense. Present-day Palestinians, as the innocent third party, should not have to continue to pay the price for the sins of others.

In the course of this century the attitude of the Holy See to the Holy Land has changed, in line with the momentous changes which have taken place in the Middle East and in its own perception of its role in the world, and in its desire to exercise its mission to be the *Church of the Poor*. Contemporary Catholic Theology, with its recovery of the sense of the Church as the People of God could not allow its interests in the region to be exhausted by a parochial interest in the religious monuments of the past.

Concern from Within

Since Jerusalem is primarily the domain of those who live there, one must pay particular attention to its inhabitants. There are 114,000 Palestinian Christians in Israel, and 50,352, in the Occupied Territories, giving a total of 165,000 Christians in Israel-Palestine, or 41.3 per cent of all Palestinian Christians world-wide.²⁶ For the Christians of the Holy Land, who refer to themselves as the 'Living Stones', Jerusalem is a spiritual centre and a place of frequent pilgrimage, and for those who live in the Holy City itself, it is also their physical home.

However, the very survival of these Christians is under threat. After he had visited the Holy Land and Jordan (1992), Archbishop George Carey of Canterbury expressed his fear that, 'In fifteen years' time Jerusalem and Bethlehem, once centres of strong Christian presence might become a kind of Walt Disney theme park'.²⁷

In addition to the devastation of the 1948 *Nakba* (catastrophe), the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has resulted in massive emigration of Christians from the region, to the extent that the Christian population of Jerusalem has fallen from some 40,000 in the 1940s to some 10,000 today. Emigration surveys show that Palestinian Christians leave both the Occupied Territories and Israel for identifiable economic and social reasons, reflecting the dire political situation: they lack the opportunity of earning their living, and ensuring some stability and future for their children. The claim that the growth of Islamic fundamentalism has added to Christian emigration is not supported by the findings of any of the emigration surveys.²⁸ When one takes account of patterns of natural growth, the gap between the present Christian population, and that which it would have been, had it been allowed to develop, is all the greater.

One of the results of the *intifada* was the increased politicisation of the Christian Churches in the Holy Land. Moreover, a new awareness of the situation of the Palestinians was developing in the Churches in the West.²⁹ The *Middle East Council of Churches* reciprocated, with a delegation to Britain in November-December 1989, which left British Christians in no doubt that Palestinian Christians shared in the aspiration for an independent Palestinian state.

Parallel to the mass movement of opposition to the occupation, Palestinian Christians were developing an indigenous liberation theology. This continues to have a significant effect on opinion within the Churches abroad. Organisations promoting links between Christians abroad and those in the Holy Land were founded (for example, *Living Stones* in Britain), and in Palestine itself *Sabeel*, the Palestinian Liberation Centre was established. The new climate resulted in the production of significant studies by both Palestinian³⁰ and international scholars,³¹ and the convening of international conferences, both at home³² and abroad,³³ which have exposed the human cost to the Palestinian community of the Zionist enterprise.

Another noteworthy feature of the activities of the Christian Churches in Jerusalem is the unity they manifest in their present crisis. The leadership has issued common statements, including *The Significance of Jerusalem for Christians* (14 November 1994).³⁴ It summarises the theology of Jerusalem agreed by all Christians, and situates the discussion within the current political climate in which the members of the indigenous Christian Church in Jerusalem live their daily lives.

The document stresses the holiness of Jerusalem for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and appeals for reconciliation and harmony among people, whether citizens, pilgrims or visitors. Because of its centrality and the postponement of its final status in the current Arab-Israeli peace process, it is important to reflect on Jerusalem. The statement records that Jerusalem has been destroyed time and again, only to be reborn anew and rise from its ashes. Religious motivation has often played a preponderant role, leading to the supremacy of one people over the others. Yet its universal vocation and appeal is to be a city of peace and harmony among all its inhabitants. The lesson of history is that it cannot belong exclusively to one people or to only one religion. Jerusalem should be open to all, shared by all. Those who govern the city should make it 'the capital of humankind.' It reiterates the Christian Vision of Jerusalem, deriving from the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus. It summarises the contribution Christian theology and the practice of pilgrimage make to the Christian estimation of the city. It describes the place of the continuing presence of a living Christian community in the land, the 'Living Stones' who enliven the holy archaeological sites. For these local Christians as well as for local Jews and Moslems, Jerusalem is not only a Holy City, but their native city, where they live with the right to continue to live there freely, and with full freedom of access to its holy places for those who live outside the city. Its special status presupposes a special judicial and political statute for Jerusalem which reflects its universal importance and significance for the three religions, locally and internationally.

The representatives of the Jerusalem Church concluded :

Jerusalem is a symbol and a promise of the presence of God, of fraternity and peace for humankind, in particular the children of Abraham: Jews, Christians and Muslims

We call upon all parties concerned to comprehend and accept the nature and deep significance of Jerusalem, City of God. None can appropriate it in exclusivist ways. We invite each party to go beyond all exclusivist visions or actions, and without discrimination, to consider the religious and national aspirations of others, in order to give back to Jerusalem its true universal character and to make of the city a holy place of reconciliation for humankind.

Internationalising the Christian Concern

On 27-28 October 1998, at the invitation of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, delegates from several Roman Catholic Bishops' conferences in Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia, together with the members of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, assembled in Jerusalem, to reflect on the question of Jerusalem. Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, presented a paper outlining the Holy See's position on Jerusalem. Metropolitan Timotheos read a paper outlining the Greek Orthodox position, and Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah presented the 1994 Memorandum.³⁵

Archbishop Tauran insisted that 'the distinction often made between "the question of the Holy Places and the question of Jerusalem" is unacceptable to the Holy See. It is obvious that the Holy Places derive their meaning and their cultic and cultural uses from their intimate connection with the surrounding environment, to be understood not merely in terms of geography but also and most especially in its urban, architectural and above all human community and institutional dimensions.' The situation

in Jerusalem today, he insisted, has been brought about and is maintained by force, and the 1967 military occupation and subsequent annexation of East Jerusalem is illegal. Unilateral action or an arrangement imposed by force cannot be a solution.

The Holy See, rejecting every exclusive claim to Jerusalem, insists that the city is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, and is the cultural heritage of everybody: 'Jerusalem is an unparalleled reality: it is part of the patrimony of the whole world...The Holy See continues to ask that it be protected by "a special internationally guaranteed Statute".' The historical and material characteristics of the City must be preserved; there must be equality of rights and treatment for those belonging to the communities of the three religions found in the City; and the rights of access to the Holy Places must be safeguarded.' He adds that 'The sacred character involves Jerusalem in its entirety, its holy places and its communities with their schools, hospitals, cultural, social and economic activities.' Any solution must have the support of the three monotheistic religions, both at the local and international level, and proposes that not only the contending parties, the Israelis and Palestinians, and the sponsors of the Peace Process, but wider representation to guarantee that no aspect of the problem is overlooked - a clear bid for the participation of the Holy See itself.³⁶

The Final Communiqué of the meeting reiterated the unique value of the City for the three religions, the region and the whole world, expressing the hope that Jerusalem would be a universal symbol of fraternity and peace. It should be a place of encounter and reconciliation among religions and peoples. While down the centuries being viewed as 'the Mother Church' for Christians, it is a city of three religions and two peoples, for whom it embodies 'the heartland of their respective national aspirations.' In working towards a final solution political leaders ought to take account of the concerns and hopes of believers. In a context of the ongoing closure of the City to Palestinians who live outside, it reiterated that 'Free access to Jerusalem should be guaranteed to all, local people and pilgrims, friends and

opponents. There should be a special statute for Jerusalem's most sacred parts, and that statute should be supported by international guarantee.³⁷

One detects in the World Council of Churches (WCC), which reflects the perspectives mainly of the Protestant Churches, a remarkable unanimity with the concerns of the Holy See, which, of course, presents the perspective only for all Christians in communion with Rome. In addition, national or regional Protestant Churches have issued statements relevant to Jerusalem.³⁸ The Eighth Assembly of the WCC, meeting in Harare (3-14 December 1998) issued a comprehensive statement on the status of Jerusalem. It *reiterates* the significance and importance of the Christian communities in the city, condemning once again the violations of the fundamental rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem, which oblige many to leave. It *considers* that negotiations concerning the future status of the city should take place without delay, and should be a product of a comprehensive settlement for the region. It *recalls* the framework established in international law related to the status of Jerusalem. The statement *notes* that the United Nations retains authority and responsibility for Jerusalem, and that 'no unilateral action nor final legal status agreed by the parties can have the force of law until such consent is given.' The statement *recognises* that the solution to the question of Jerusalem is in the first place the responsibility of the parties directly involved, but that the three religious communities have a central role to play in the negotiations.

The Assembly adopted the principles which must be taken into account in any final agreement: the peaceful settlement of the territorial claims of Palestinians and Israelis should respect the holiness and wholeness of the city; access to the Holy Places should be free; the rights of all communities of Jerusalem to carry out their own religious, educational and social activities must be guaranteed; free access to Jerusalem must be assured and protected for the Palestinian people; Jerusalem must remain an open and inclusive city; Jerusalem must be a shared city in terms

of sovereignty and citizenship; the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention must be honoured with respect to the rights of Palestinians to property, building and residency; the prohibition of effecting changes in population in occupied territories; and the prohibition of changes in geographical boundaries, annexation of territory, or settlement which would change the religious, cultural or historical character of Jerusalem without the agreement of the parties concerned and the approval of the international community.

Conclusion

It is clear that Christians have a special reverence for Jerusalem, mainly as a city associated with the climax of the ministry of Jesus and the birthplace of the Church. While it would prefer to have its religious interests guaranteed by authorities favourable to its perspectives the Church has endeavoured to protect them by various agreements with the successive rulers.

The Christian attitude to Jerusalem in the twentieth century has been dominated by the challenge of Zionism and its determination to create a state for Jews world-wide, at the cost of depriving the indigenous population of its homeland. While the Church has never diluted its interests in the Holy Places various developments within Christian theology have made it increasingly sensitive to the population of the region. The attitude of the Holy See to the Holy Land has changed, in line with the momentous changes which Zionism introduced into the Middle East, and in its own perception of its role in the world, and in its desire to exercise its mission to be the *Church of the Poor*.

We have seen the great similarity in the various pronouncements of the Holy See and the WCC, and a sharing of perspectives with the leadership of the Jerusalem Church. In addition to concern about specifically religious issues, there is widespread anxiety for the human and national rights of the people of Jerusalem and its surrounding areas. These cluster around concern for equality for the three religions in the city and for the two nations. The fact of Israel's existence and its hitherto

unchallengable power is rather taken for granted, and the religious leadership by and large has settled for an approximate justice for the Palestinians, without demanding the rolling back of the Zionist aggression and the full compensation which a full justice requires.

¹ The city does not lie on a major trade-route; it is not near to mineral resources, nor to soil suitable for large-scale agricultural development; its water supply is not abundant.

² See Ucko, Hans, ed.. *The Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem for Jews, Christians and Muslims* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994). See also *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People. Statements by the World Council of Churches and its Member Churches, With a commentary by Allan Brockway, Paul van Buren, Rolf Rendtorff and Simon Schoon* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1988).

³ See Wilken, Robert L., *The Land called Holy. Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New York and London, Yale University Press, 1992), p. 119.

⁴ For a systematic treatment of each of the New Testament witnesses to Jerusalem see Walker, Peter W L, *Jesus and the Holy City. New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids MI and Cambridge UK, Eerdmans, 1996).

⁵ See further my *Jesus the Liberator. Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4.16-30)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 24-25; 52-60.

⁶ *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, London/New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), p. 375.

⁷ *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p. 383.

⁸ See further my 'Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Yesterday and Today,' in Prior, Michael and William Taylor (eds), *Christians in the Holy Land* (London: WIFT/Scorpion Press, 1994), pp. 169-75.

⁹ See further my 'Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Yesterday and Today', pp. 169-99. and 'A Perspective on Pilgrimage to the Holy Land', in Ateek,

Naim, Cedar Duaybis and Marla Schrader, *Jerusalem: What makes for Peace?* (London: Melisende, 1997), pp. 114-31.

¹⁰ Melito of Sardis visited the Holy Land in the middle of the second century, so as to establish accurately the books of the Old Testament, and to examine the relevant places. He, the earliest known Christian pilgrim, was in search of the biblical past. Alexander, a future bishop of Jerusalem, travelled from Cappadocia in the reign of Caracalla, with the stated purpose of prayer and investigation of the sites. Origen travelled around Palestine seeking out the location of events recorded in the Scriptures. Firmilianus, a Cappadocian bishop, visited Origen, and was in the Holy Land for the sake of the holy places. Pionius, a contemporary of Origen, also visited the Holy Land.

¹¹ Wilken, *The Land called Holy*, p. 119.

¹² Riley-Smith, Louise and Jonathan, *The Crusades. Idea and Reality, 1095-1274* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), p. 1.

¹³ In Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, p. 43.

¹⁴ In Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, p. 44.

¹⁵ Although the terms are used interchangeably in common parlance, strictly speaking, one ought to distinguish between the Holy See and the Vatican. The Holy See is the juridical personification of the more than 1000 million Catholics who are in communion with Rome, and, while not a state, enjoys the rights to make international agreements and receive and dispatch representatives. The Vatican is a state, albeit of less than 1 km. sq., and of only some 1000 inhabitants.

¹⁶ Minerbi, Sergio I., *The Vatican and Zionism: Conflict in the Holy Land, 1895-1925* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. xiii.

¹⁷ In Kreutz, Andrej, 'The Vatican and the Palestinians: A Historical Overview', *Islamochristiana* 18 (1992): 109-25, p. 115.

¹⁸ Indeed, as late as January 1948, Mgr. G. Montini (the future Paul VI, then the Under Secretary for Ordinary Affairs) told the British Minister to the Vatican that the Holy See preferred that 'a third power, neither Jew

nor Arab...have control of the Holy Land' (Perowne to Burrows, 19 January 1948 - FO 371/68500, in Kreutz, 'The Vatican and the Palestinians', p. 116).

¹⁹ Elia Zureik surveys the estimates of those expelled, showing that they fall within the range, 700-800,000 ('Palestinian Refugees and Peace', in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 93 (1994): 5-17, Table 3, p. 11), but more recently Salman H Abu-Sitta argues for a total figure of 935,000 (*The Palestinian Nakba 1948. The Register of Depopulated Localities in Palestine* [with accompanying Map, *Palestine 1948 50 Years after Al Nakba. The Towns and Villages Depopulated by the Zionist Invasion of 1948*], London, The Palestine Return Centre, 1998, p. 14.

²⁰ See the encyclicals of John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, *Pacem in Terris*, of Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and more recently of John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, and *Laborem Exercens*.

²¹ Apostolic Exhortation, 'Concerning the increased needs of the Church in the Holy Land', (1974).

²² *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, January-March 1976, p. 134.

²³ According to Fr Giovanni Caprile, the problems were: a just solution to the Palestinian problem, and the establishment of a Palestinian homeland; an internationally guaranteed special status for Jerusalem, with access to, and equality for Christians, Jews and Muslims, making Jerusalem a real centre of spiritual and fraternal development; and, finally, an improvement in the legal rights and social situations of the Christian communities living under Israeli control ('La Santa Sede e lo Stato d'Israele', in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 16 February 1991, pp. 357-58).

²⁴ *La Documentation Catholique* 73 (1982), 17 October, pp. 921 and 947.

²⁵ Secretariat pro non-Christianis, Bulletin 57 (1984), XIX(3), p.254.

²⁶ See Sabella, Bernard. 'Socio-Economic Characteristics and the Challenges to Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land', and Geraysy, Sami. 'Socio-Demographic Characteristics: Reality, Problems and Aspirations within Israel', in Prior and Taylor, *Christians in the Holy Land*, pp. 31-44, 45-55. Palestinian Christians world-wide number some 400,000, constituting some 6.7 per cent of some six million Palestinians. Salman H Abu-Sitta's estimate of 8,415,930 for the number of Palestinians world-wide

in 1998 alters the percentages somewhat (*The Palestinian Nakba 1948*, p. 15).

27 *MECC News Report*, January 1992, p. 2.

28 See Sabella 1994 and Geraisy 1994.

29 See for example the report by the ten member delegation. *Impressions of Intifada. Report of a British Council of Churches Delegation to Israel and the Occupied Territories, March 1989* (London: BCC. Inter-Church House, 1989).

30 E.g., Chacour, Elias, *Blood Brothers* (Eastbourne, Kingsway, 1985) and *We Belong to the Land* (San Francisco, Harper, 1992); Ateek, Naim Stifan, *Justice and Only Justice. A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis, 1989); Rantisi, Audeh, *Blessed are the Peacemakers. The Story of a Palestinian Christian* (Guildford, Eagle, 1990); Raheb, Mitri, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995); and, most recently, El-Assal, Riah Abu, *Caught in Between* (London, SPCK, 1999).

31 E.g., Ruether, Rosemary R and M H Ellis, eds, *Beyond Occupation* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1990); Wagner, Donald E, *Anxious for Armageddon. A Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians* (Scottsdale, Herald Press, 1995); Cragg, Kenneth, *The Arab Christian. A History of the Middle East* (London, Mowbray, 1992), and *Palestine. The Prize and Price of Zion* (London and Washington, Cassell, 1997); and Prior, Michael, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), *A Land flowing with Milk, Honey, and People* (The Lattey Lecture 1997) (St Edmund's College, Von Hügel Institute, Cambridge University, 1998, and in *Scripture Bulletin* 28[1998]: 2-17), *Western Scholarship and the History of Palestine* (London, Melisende, 1998), and *Zionism and the State of Israel: A Moral Inquiry* (London, Routledge, 1999). See also O'Mahony, Anthony (ed.) *Palestinian Christians: Religion, Politics and Society in the Holy Land* (London, Melisende, 1999).

32 The most significant of these are the three international conferences convened by *Sabeel*. The First International Symposium was held in March 1990 in Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem, and the papers were edited by Naim Stifan Ateek, M H Ellis, and R R Ruether, and published under the title, *Faith and the Intifada. Palestinian Christian Voices* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis, 1992). Selected papers of the 1996 Conference, 'The

Significance of Jerusalem for Christians and of Christians for Jerusalem' were edited by Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis and Marla Schrader and published under the title, *Jerusalem: What makes for Peace? A Palestinian Christian Contribution to Peacemaking* (London, Melisende, 1997). Selected papers of the 1998 Conference, 'The Challenge of Jubilee', were edited by Naim Ateek and Michael Prior and published under the title, *Holy Land - Hollow Jubilee: God, Justice and the Palestinians* (London, Melisende, 1999). Another major international conference was held in Jerusalem in 1994, whose proceedings were edited by O'Mahony, Anthony, with G Gunner and K Hintlian, *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London, Scorpion Cavendish, 1995).

33 In Britain alone, there have been several conferences on Christians in the Holy Land. In addition to the Cumberland Lodge 1993 Conference (see Prior and Taylor, *Christians in the Holy Land*), major conferences were held in London University (1991 and 1993), Cambridge University (1992), and in Warwick University (1993 - the December 1993 special edition of *The Month* 26 [2nd-n.s.] contains a number of these papers).

34 It was issued in Jerusalem, with the authority of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, the Latin Patriarch, the Armenian Patriarch, the Custos of the Holy Land, the Coptic Archbishop, the Syriac Archbishop, the Ethiopian Archbishop, the Anglican Bishop, the Greek-Catholic Patriarchal Vicar, the Lutheran Bishop, the Maronite Patriarchal Vicar, and the Catholic Syriac Patriarchal Vicar. The text is reproduced in *Documents on Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, PASSIA, 1996), pp. 28-31. This invaluable resource contains also other Christian documents on Jerusalem, plus documents reflecting Muslim and Jewish religious positions, as well as a range giving political perspectives.

35 Other contributions were made by Faisal Hussein, Hayim Ramon, Harry Hagopian and Fr Majdi al-Siryani.

36 Archbishop Tauran's paper is published in *Bulletin Associated Christian Press* (Jerusalem, Christian Information Centre) No. 403 (November-December 1998): 2-7.

37 *Bulletin Associated Christian Press* No. 403: 7-8.

38 See my *Zionism and the State of Israel*, pp. 112-23.