

Review

The first three volumes of the Journal

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The Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies' vision and aim is to open up the field for discussion in the area of Islamic Jerusalem. There have been courses and publications dealing with Jewish Jerusalem and Christian Jerusalem, but, until the first publication of the Journal, there has not been much work done on the Islamic perspective of Jerusalem and its diverse history. Little was known until now about the importance of Jerusalem to the Muslims living in and around the area and about the Muslim history in Jerusalem. The Journal, therefore, is an imperative source for the continual understanding of Muslims living, working and worshipping in Jerusalem.

The impression given of the main vision and aim of the Journal is that it is meant to show, through history, historical sources, religious ideology and religious vision, that the two peoples, Israeli's and Palestinian's and the three monotheistic religions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism, can all live together in peace and harmony in Jerusalem. History has shown that, excluding the Crusader period, the inhabitants of Jerusalem lived in relative peace and achieved peace and stability through establishing justice for everyone. This historical fact comes across in many of the articles published. The articles in the Journals and their authors, give up-to-date research, both historical and political, from historical and contemporary societies, to back up their arguments on issues such as, the importance of holy Jerusalem for the Muslims, the excellences of Jerusalem, the life and significance of Saladin, the urban environment in contemporary Jerusalem and numerous other areas. Each of the ten articles published tackle different areas of the history, religion and culture of the people who inhabited and

still inhabit the 'city' of Jerusalem. Some of the articles aim to show that, from Caliph Umar's assurance of safety to the people of Aelia, the Muslim people have been most tolerant towards the Christians and Jews and continue to be so throughout Jerusalem's history. Historical sources have been referred to and examined with immense scrutiny, in order to discover the truth about the Muslim history in and around the Jerusalem area, especially in Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi's article on Umar's assurance of safety to the people of Aelia. This article in particular takes the reader for an intense examination of the assurance and why Jerusalem is so significant to the Muslims. Looking back to the period of Umar, the author, through exact structuring, leads the reader to see the vision and aim that she thinks the author is insinuating, for the possible basis for a solution to the problem of Jerusalem. This is done, however, in quite a subtle manner and is balanced in its examination of historical events.

El-Awaisi's article isn't the only article that makes an attempt at such a vision and aim. Karen Armstrong's article, 'Sacred Space: The Holiness of Islamic Jerusalem' takes a similar line of argument, but looks at history from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, through to the Crusader period. Her article, I feel, emits an aura of concern for the religious human rights of the people of historical Aelia and Jerusalem today. In some sense I think she realizes that there is a possibility that, unless something is done, a modern day Crusade and all its atrocities could happen to both sides. The reason for her saying this and for one supporting her arguments, is that she believes that, in our contemporary society, people are becoming too engrossed with the seizure and occupation of what is considered "sacred" land, rather than the importance of the rights of the numerous people who live and worship on the "sacred" land. Land seems to be becoming more important than human rights. For example, in the peace negotiations that have been ongoing for a long time, a 'Land for Peace' concept was conjured up as a possible solution to the Jerusalem problem. This concept is

what Armstrong argues against because it won't work. It is too tricky to satisfy everyone's demands for land. Neither the concept of Land nor Security will bring peace, but Justice will. This is one of the most important elements that are found in most of the articles; that there cannot be peace and stability without justice. If justice for everyone is established, then it is inevitable that peace and stability will follow. This idea is being circulated by the Journal because it is a new idea that states that there cannot be peace and stability amongst different kinds of people if justice for all isn't established. This, history tells us, is exactly what Caliph Umar did in 638 A.D. after he conquered Jerusalem from the Byzantine's. He managed to establish peace and stability through the Islamic idea of justice. Numerous other articles state this concept clearly and it is obvious that this is their fundamental vision and aim of projecting this idea in their articles.

Although many articles look at the concept outlined above, they also examine in depth, reasons that are given so often as to why Jerusalem is one of the most unique places/locations in the world and why it holds so much significance to the two peoples residing there and their faiths. Religious history has dictated why the people should feel such passion and be in such awe of this holy place. Perhaps this is why there is so much conflict today, due to the heightened sense of passion, love, nationalism and religious faith? These feelings are held by all concerned: Israeli's and Palestinian's who are Jewish, Christian or Muslim. Two articles are dedicated to the significance of Jerusalem to the Muslims, which do show that Jerusalem is very significant to them, but what is interesting at the moment are the arguments put forward by Kenneth Cragg and Michael Prior as to why Christianity is drawn so much to Jerusalem. Prior's article is very interesting and has some very interesting points. For instance, the quote that I think is absolutely fundamental to the understanding of the Christian position towards Jerusalem is that, 'the terrain of the holy places 'received the footprints of Life itself', and serve to remind one

that God once walked on the earth.’ (Prior, 1999, P.6). One cannot stress how much of an impact the quote above has had on one’s own opinion of the origins of Christianity and on the significance of Jerusalem to not only Christianity, but to all three religions. It is a very beautiful sentence. It stresses the point that Jerusalem is indeed a sacred place, for, ‘to Christians, Golgotha was the center of the world; it was both the topmost point of the cosmic mountain.’ (Prior, 1999, P.5) Jerusalem is a holy land, and great concern is felt for it by all the Christians who dwell within it, but not only by them. ‘What can the case of Islamic Jerusalem tell us about the nature of holy cities?’ (Michael Dumper, 1998, P.22). Prior’s document, like numerous others, ‘stresses the holiness of Jerusalem for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and appeals for reconciliation and harmony among people, whether citizens, pilgrims ‘or visitors.’ (Prior, 1999, P.17). It seems to me that the articles published in the Journals are, therefore, academic appeals to the governments and people of Israel, Palestine, the European governments and Jerusalem itself, for peace and reconciliation between them. The Journals seem to attract good attention, so perhaps they will have some sort of influence on the Middle East crisis. Maybe the vision and aim of the Journal will be expanded to include a solution. At the moment, however, it appears that its aim and vision is to provide facts and arguments to support reasons for why there should be a fair, and just settlement made for all people concerned. For once according to Cragg, the positive aspects of Jerusalem should be focused on, rather than the negative ones. Perhaps then a solution would emerge.

What struck me as a reason for why the land of Jerusalem is so important to the people is explained or attempted by Kenneth Cragg in his article. It’s a very interesting article in terms of describing the link between a place and people’s faith. The location and person’s faith are interlinked; there is no separating them. According to Cragg, they are interlinked because the ‘messengers’/prophets were ‘sent’

specifically/called towards the cities of Makka, Madina and Jerusalem by God Himself. This is why Jerusalem is so spiritually important. It's easy to see after studying the Journals that Jerusalem is a special place on earth, which holds immense significance for everyone globally and can't be treated like a normal place. However, it could be argued, especially against the Christian perspective, that there is no need for physical control of land to bind faith and people together. If it is true that, as Cragg puts it, 'being 'in Christ', as the New Testament saw it, had no need of some 'political kingdom', or territorial sovereignty.' (Cragg, 1998, P.9), then why is the land issue so dominant in peace solutions, not just in Jerusalem, but worldwide? Why is so much significance placed on land? Significance is explained in Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi's article, 'The Significance of Jerusalem in Islam: An Islamic Reference' and Marwan Abu Khalaf's article, 'The Significance of Jerusalem to Muslims.' The latter article is much shorter than the former, but it is very concise in its contents and what it aims to portray. These articles make an attempt at answering these questions with plausible arguments. El-Awaisi's article is an article that looks to the past in order to look to the future. It is a passionately historical piece of work that puts forward arguments for why people should sit up and take notice of the Muslim perspective on Jerusalem. However, going back to the significance of land, an intriguing comment was made which said that, "giving up any part of Palestine is like giving up part of its religion." (El-Awaisi, 1998, P.10). Is territory equivalent in significance to religion? This does not seem to be a plausible statement to make. How can land be made equivalent in any form to parts of religion? It seems like a striking and uncompromising statement to make, but perhaps it has been misunderstood. Surely, then, the Muslim Spiritual Vision is different from their Material Vision? Religion, i.e. Islam, belongs to the Spiritual Vision and the land to the Material, so why is taking land from Palestine like taking part of its religion

if the two visions are different? Perhaps the visions have nothing to do with it, but it does come across as being strange. One article, which deals with the contemporary issue of Christian-Muslim relations, interlinks with the articles on the significance of Jerusalem to the Muslims and Christians. Duncan McPherson's article holds an important vision and aim for the Journal for it deals directly with the relations between the religions since the beginning of the 20th century. Macpherson points out that from the period of destruction, violence and chaos stemming from 1917 to the present day, the relations between the three religions hasn't been great. The relations have been improving though, between the Muslims and Christians in particular. However, (not noted in Macpherson's article) even from the time of Saladin, who was an imperative figure in the history of Islam and Jerusalem, he and his successors found ways to live in peace, with good relations, with their neighbours, even after years of conflict. So what is different today? No agreement will work unless good relations are established and held between all three religions and their people. Easier said than done, but it is possible. In today's situation, with the bombings and attacks continuing by both countries, it seems an impossible thing to aspire to. People need to realize, and I think this is an imperative and fundamental vision and aim of the Journal, that Jerusalem needs the three religions to co-exist in harmony, in order for it to be a religiously and spiritually significant city, otherwise it will cease to be so. The people must again find the common ground that they once held together and the Journal, with its articles, are trying to rediscover and make it publicly known. The behaviour of Saladin and King Nur al-Din Mahmud are examples for which the governments and military today should look up to, maybe then there might be some breakthrough in the contemporary conflict. 'The Muslim world is today in great need of leaders like Nur al-Din Mahmud and Saladin, who will govern with justice and according to God's law and Islamic ethics.' (Faris Glubb, 1999, P.66).

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The Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies is a crucial element in creating an air of understanding about the situation in Jerusalem today from the Muslim perspective and about the history of Islam and Muslims in relation to Jerusalem. It is helpful, especially to the student to have up-to-date research, both in the form of articles and documents, whilst studying in this field. The six Journals published so far have numerous aims which they aspire to and which they achieve in terms of academic recognition. From what is gathered by studying the Journals, the authors intend to project their vision of peace and stability through justice, how this was achieved in history and how it can be achieved in the future. Most of the articles although referring to events and sources from history, are predominantly future orientated. They are using the events and lessons learned from the past to try and path a way for possible peace negotiations and a final, just settlement for the Israeli's and Palestinian's. This aspiration may not be what was intended by the authors, but it seems to be an implication of what they have written. The Journals truly are distinctive and unique and are very important not only to those in academia, but also to the layperson interested and concerned about the overall situation in Jerusalem.

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