

Jerusalem

Religious Aspects



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Contents

Preface.....	1
1. Introduction	
Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi.....	3
2. Islam's Jerusalem	
Dr. Sari Nuseibeh	15
3. On Jerusalem	
Dr. Sari Nuseibeh	27
4. Jerusalem : A Chritian Perspective	
Dr Bernard Sabella	39
5. Religious Issues and Holy Places in Jerusalem	
Dr. Yitzhak Reiter.....	57
Appendix: Biographical Abstracts of the Authors	73

Preface

In 1994, Mr. Janiki Cingoli, Director of the CENTRO ITALIANO PER LA PACE IN MEDIO ORIENTE (CIPMO), Milan, approached Palestinian and Israeli institutions, inviting them to participate in a workshop on the topic of Jerusalem.

Following this first approach, intensive correspondence and consultation began between CIPMO, the PALESTINIAN ACADEMIC SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (PASSIA), Jerusalem and the ECONOMIC COOPERATION FOUNDATION, Tel Aviv.

After several coordinating meetings between the three institutions involved in this project, it was agreed that an academic seminar on the topic of Jerusalem-Religious Aspects would be held from May 9th-11th, 1995 in Milan, Italy.

The papers published here are the presentations given during that seminar, which was arranged and hosted by CIPMO and financially supported by the European Union. The papers represent the free expression of the authors and do not necessarily represent the judgement or opinion of any of the three centres involved.

The three institutions agreed that CIPMO will publish these papers in Italian, while PASSIA will be responsible—independently from any other arrangement regarding the seminar—for translating the presentations into Arabic and publishing them bilingually as part of the PASSIA Research Studies Programme 1995, which is kindly supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), Jerusalem.

Introduction

The different scenarios advanced over the years for the solution of the Palestine question in general, and question of Jerusalem in particular, have all recognized the need to treat Jerusalem as a special case, mainly because of its unique character as the centre of Palestine and as the site of the Holy Places of the three monotheistic religions throughout history. Although the question of Jerusalem was and remains at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict from its very beginning, it is still an unresolved issue generating open conflict between the two people concerned. Jerusalem today consists of two cities: occupied East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem. The PLO and Israel—by signing the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (DoP) on 13 September 1993—have made a commitment that “the permanent status negotiations will commence as soon as possible, but not later than the beginning of the third year of the Interim period”.... And will “cover remaining issues, including: Jerusalem” (Article 4, DoP). Despite this and notwithstanding its reiterated commitment to the DoP, the Israeli government is constantly stressing that Jerusalem will remain undivided under Israeli control. Thus implying that there is nothing left to negotiate about.

The Question of Jerusalem—the Starting Point

There have been various interpretations of the “goods of Jerusalem”. A summary of these crucial components, as I see

them, will serve as the starting point for understanding the complexity of the question of Jerusalem:

1- The Geographic and Demographic Component

In 1947, Jerusalem covered an area of 59.5 km². The West Side of the city covered 53km², while the eastern side covered 6.5km². The old walled city covered only one km². The city boundaries were the village of Abu Dies from the east, Ein Karem from the west, from the north Shufat, and from the south the city of Bethlehem.

The villages surrounding the city on the municipality boundaries were considered to be part of the socio-economic environment of the city, rather than part of the municipality. The West Side included neighborhoods such as Deir Yaseen, Lifta, Ein Karem, Malha, Rumemah, Sheikh Bader, and Khalet Turha. On the eastern side, the neighborhoods included Shufat, Beit Hanena, Azareiyh, and Abu Deis. In the war of June 1967, Israel occupied all parts of Jerusalem and proceeded with its plans to confiscate territories from the occupied West Bank and annex them to the municipal boundary of Jerusalem. The Israeli government undertook "the unification of the eastern part of the city" and enforced Israeli law on Palestinian citizens in east Jerusalem.

The Israeli land confiscation policy went through the following stages:

- 1- June 1967-120 dunums inside the old city, which became part of the Jewish quarter
- 2- January 1968-4000 dunums in Sheikh Jarrah-Shufat, Lifta-Aisawieh.
- 3- January 1970-14000 dunums-Malaha, Sur Baher, Beit Jalah, Lifta, Shufat
- 4- In 1980-4500 dunums in Beit Hanena and Hizma

- 5- 1991-2000 dunums in Im Tuba, Sur Baher, Beit Safafa, Bethlehem and Beit Jalah
- 6- 1969-6000 dunums south of east Jerusalem, Jabal Abu Ghnem, Bethlehem and Beit Jalah.

The total confiscated land was 30.000 dunums, equivalent to 34% of the Jerusalem territories. It is worth while mentioning that the municipality boundary of East Jerusalem was expanded through planning and zoning by the Israeli municipality from 6.5 km² in 1967 to 71 km² in 1996.

The series of Israeli confiscation plans resulted in the following:

- 34% confiscated land
- 40% green land.
- 7% unused land
- 6% roads and infrastructure.
- 3% frozen land.

Total 90% of East Jerusalem territory became contained by Israeli measures. Only 10% remain under the control of the Palestinians, an estimated 9400 dunums.

Prior to 1967 the population of Western Jerusalem was 195.000, while the eastern part was 75,000. Israel succeeded in maintaining the ratio between Jews and Arabs at 72% Jews to 28% Arabs until the mid-1990s.

The Israeli population increased to 330.000 in the western part of the city, with 160.000 settlers in east Jerusalem. This totaled up to 490.000 Israelis facing 210.000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem, in addition to 50.000 Palestinian Jerusalemites living outside the municipal boundaries, totaling 260.000. With the increase of Palestinian citizens in the city vis-a-vis the Israelis, the traditional ration has changed into 67% Israelis and 33% Palestinians.

One should remember that roughly 80,000 Palestinians living in the western part of the city were forced to leave in 1948. The property they owned consisted of 40% private property, 34% Islamic and Christian property, and 26% Jewish property. Israeli policy has prohibited any Palestinian from residency or work in the western part of the city since 1948 till today.

2- The National and Political Component

Historically, Jerusalem has been part of Palestine and Palestinian heritage is deeply rooted in the city. Jerusalem is related to the land and people of Palestine, to their Muslim-Christian beliefs and holy places. For Muslim and Christian Palestinians, Jerusalem is of great importance not only as a holy city but also as the political, geographic, economic and cultural center of Palestine. It is the capital of the Palestinian people, for which thousands have sacrificed their lives to defend and protect; it is the symbol of Palestinian national identity and of their inalienable rights. Its Arabic roots go back 5,000 years to the time when the city of Arab Yabous (Jerusalem) was founded. As Islam had dominated the culture of the Middle East for centuries, it has dominated Jerusalem. Jerusalem is thus identified with Arab culture, heritage, architecture and significant monuments, and there is an agreement on the urgent need and duty to preserve these sites as well as Jerusalem as a historic city. Against the background of centuries of Muslim rule and uninterrupted Arab presence in the city, no one can justify the policies and practices of 27 years of Israeli occupation and ignore 1,400 years of continuous Arab Muslim-Christian rule.

3- The Religious Component

The religious claims of the three monotheistic religions to Jerusalem are each unique with their own special attributes, which cherish different places in the city. Jerusalem's holiness complicates any attempt to solve the Jerusalem question and is often used or manipulated to attain non-religious goals. Yet, the meaning of religious attachment to the city was and remains a major concern. As well as its Jewish heritage, Jerusalem is a city of Arab Islamic and Christian heritage. Its Islamic identity derives from the fact that it was the site of Prophet Mohammed's Night Journey, Isra' and Mi'raj, and is the original *Qibla* for Muslims. *Al-Aqsa Mosque* is the site of Islam's third holiest shrine. The Ummayyad Caliph Mu'awiyah linked his own personal identity with Jerusalem, calling himself caliph of *Beit Al-Maqdis*. Thus, it is part of the Islamic faith. Its Arab identity was further emphasized with the historic Covenant of the Caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khattab in 638 Ad. It is the site of the Holy Sepulchre, the Arab Churches, and of the Mount of Olives. To emphasize this point once more, there has been an uninterrupted Arab presence in the city in terms of population, culture, heritage and monuments.

4- The Legal Component: Ownership and Property

Since the implementation of the article contained in the 1948 Partition Plan (UN Resolution 181) on the question of Jerusalem was suspended, the nature, limits and scope of international, regional and local legislation and administrative by-laws which govern the city have been determined by the creation of facts on the grounds by the occupier. Today, the struggle over Jerusalem is still basically a struggle over property and who controls it.

There is no legitimacy or license under international law or international resolutions passed since the beginning of the century, including UN Resolutions 242 and 338, which allow Israel to take over Arab land in Occupied Arab East Jerusalem. International law prohibits the annexation of territory by force. East Jerusalem is regarded, as occupied territory and Israel's activities in this part of the city (such as construction of settlements, transfer of Israeli population, and annexation) are considered illegal and null and void. Moreover, articles of UN Resolution 194 relating to compensation and the right of return, are still being twisted by Israel in regard to Arab properties in West Jerusalem which were taken by Israel in 1948. In the course of the 1948 war, some 64,000–80,000 Palestinians were forcibly driven out of West Jerusalem and its immediate vicinity and all property left was declared "absentee property". In 1948 40% of the property of West Jerusalem belonged to Palestinians, 34% to the Waqf, Churches and the Government of Palestine, and only 26% belonged to Jews.

5- Institutions

When in the course of the June War of 1967, Jerusalem was occupied in its entirety by Israeli forces, many of its Arab inhabitants were evicted and their property seized or demolished. Eventually when East Jerusalem was annexed and subjected to Israeli law, Palestinians never accepted Israeli sovereignty over the city, but resisted by means such as stressing its illegitimacy, refusing to join the West Jerusalem municipality and trying to preserve the Arab character of the city. The chapters of Palestinian resistance in Jerusalem can be traced back to the very beginning of its occupation in June 1967 when Sheikh Abdel Hamid Al-

Sayeh issued and Islamic fatwa which stated a clear position of refusing to be governed by Jewish / Israeli law.

This resulted in preserving Palestinian commercial and other major institutions, including the Arab Electricity Company. Although the Arab municipality in Arab Jerusalem was dissolved and closed and its premises forcibly by the Israelis, while control of public services was taken over by the Israeli municipality in West Jerusalem following the 1967 War, Arab neighborhoods continued to exist as separate communities and the Palestinians declined to become Israeli citizens, thereby boycotting municipal elections. Palestinians succeeded in maintaining key institutions such as medical centres and hospitals, civil courts, societies, tourist offices intra-city transportation networks, land registration offices, as well as centres and forums providing scientific, cultural and educational research, information and services.

6- The Psychological Component

Jerusalem is not united, it is occupied; the physical borders between both parts of the city have not disappeared, only superficially, to be replaced by psychological, invisible borders. Meanwhile, the presence of settlers who seek to destabilize existing Palestinian society from within has introduced and incidious new threat. Palestinian security needs can only be met by putting an end to the Israeli occupation and by recognising and guaranteeing Palestinian self-determination and the right to self-defence against external aggression or internal subversion.

The Future of Jerusalem—A Palestinian Concept

The main component of my personal vision of a political settlement of the Jerusalem question is the acknowledgment that East Jerusalem is an inseparable part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the political, religious, geographical and cultural capital of Palestine. In the light of the current geo-political and demographic facts in the city, I strongly believe that East Jerusalem must maintain its linkage with the West Bank not only as an integral part of Palestine, i.e. the future Palestinian state, but also as its centre. West Jerusalem remains accordingly part of Israel. Under no circumstances will Palestinians accept the Israeli strategy of creating Palestinian ghettos with East Jerusalem being one of these isolated enclaves.

Concerning the overall question of the future shape of the city I believe it should be an open city but not united under Israeli sovereignty. We are not interested in dividing Jerusalem but we do have de facto invisible borders between the two sides of the city. Yet, these borders are and remain permeable and porous, allowing for the free movement of all people and goods. Many maps for the development of the city have been drawn up over the years, centuries and changing administrations, and although the obvious expansion of parts of the city recently at the expense of other parts is evident, there are no generally accepted boundaries determining what is Jerusalem. I would suggest that a line be drawn along the "Green Line", which marks the 1967 borders between the East and West, in accordance with the fact that today, despite Israel's illegal annexation of East Jerusalem and its continuous attempts to create realities on the ground segregation predominates. There are no signs nor any acceptance of the idea of "unification" as Israeli propaganda

tries to make the world believe but rather of confrontation and discrimination, with interactions between both sides taking place on a very low level of integration.

According to the perception of Mr. Faisal Husseini, Palestinian leader in Jerusalem, the Israeli strategy towards the city since the Declaration of Principles consists mainly of the following policies:

- 1- Isolating Jerusalem from the West Bank under the pretext of Israeli security concerns and preventing thousands of people from reaching work, medical, educational and economic services, and religious sites.
- 2- Refusal of licenses and permits inside Jerusalem which forces people to leave the city in order to set up their businesses, build their houses or practice their profession elsewhere in the West Bank.
- 3- Cutting Palestinian Jerusalemites off from the rest of the world by putting pressure on foreign delegations not to meet with Palestinian political, business or professional representatives in Jerusalem, with Orient House being the main target.
- 4- Restricting and crippling Palestinian activities in Jerusalem. This does not only involve threats to close down various Palestinian organizations but also the continuous enforcement of new regulations on Palestinian institutions ("Israelization"), such as demanding their subordination under Israeli rules and registration procedures, as well as their reporting of funding sources, projects, working connections and daily functioning to the Israeli authorities.

As a Palestinian response to these threats and in order to put forward some personal thoughts on the future of Jerusalem

from a Palestinian perspective, I want to state that there are fundamental needs to be met and without once more reiterating the logical, legal or moral bases for these, I would simply urge the importance of these in the interest of peace between the two parties, Palestinians and Israelis.

These urgent and fundamental needs to be addressed are:

- 1- An immediate freeze on any actions aimed at changing Jerusalem, be it geographically, demographically, or regarding institutions or governing laws. Needless to say, this would be in accordance with Mr. Peres' letter to the late Norwegian Foreign Minister Holst confirming "that the Palestinian institutions of East Jerusalem and the interests and well-being of the Palestinians of East Jerusalem are of great importance and will be preserved."
- 2- A reform programme to rectify the damages in the Palestinian society caused by Israeli policies practiced for the past 27 years. Such a programme should constitute a guarantee for Palestinians to "not hamper their activity and to allow them to improve their daily lives " (Peres-letter), and should be financially supported by all parties concerned, including Israel.
- 3- To lift all measures governing the political and military state of siege on East Jerusalem and to re-open the doors of East Jerusalem for Palestinian society in order for them to regain free access to the city, free movement between the southern and northern part of the West Bank, and their right to freedom of worship.
- 4- To take immediate action against all Israeli religious and political extremists threatening the Palestinian community or individuals, and to prevent them from escalating their confrontation and provocation in regard to Palestinian property and the Holy in and around the Old City of Jerusalem.

Once these demands are met in one way or another, the door could be open to bring the two parties, Palestinians and Israelis, together on an equal footing to discuss a common future and ways and means to share "the goods of Jerusalem".

The problem of Jerusalem will not be solved unless the rights of *both* peoples, Israeli and Palestinian are recognized, and the occupation of East Jerusalem comes to an end. The collective rights of only one population, the Israelis, are illegitimate. There is no authority for exclusive rule or governance over the whole city and this has to be acknowledged by replacing the current pattern with a model based on sharing the city: what is needed are *two* capitals, *two* sovereignties, *two* municipalities and both people living independently next to each other in an open and free city: "separate and share"! Both Israelis and Palestinians have to have the right to run their own affairs independently, to function independently to make their decisions independently and to take the responsibility for their respective societies' daily life and concerns. This is the key to coexistence. On this basis, we then can cooperate and coordinate on issues with which we are both concerned, such as water or electricity, for example: but in the last resort, it must be possible for me, as a *Palestinian*, to address my own authority on any matter and turn to my own elected *Palestinian* leadership. I am a *Palestinian* citizen in Palestinian Jerusalem governed and guided by Palestinian policies, laws and by laws. To achieve this end and to end hostilities, military occupation and confrontation in the holy city, peace has to be given a chance in the future, starting with mutual recognition of the claims each other to and rights in Jerusalem. We should not longer postpone this crucial issue.

Jerusalem has to become the capital of the Palestinian people and their future state, it is the center of Palestinian Arab sovereignty and legitimacy; it is the center of Palestinian activity, and the heart of the Palestinian struggle. Since Jerusalem lies in the north-south crescent of the West Bank, the integrity of the Occupied Territories-or the future Palestinian State- cannot be maintained without Jerusalem; without its geographic and demographic center, the unity of the whole is divided and lost. After all, a population cannot be separated lastingly from the sovereign forms for which it yearns, based on freedom, equality and self-determination. Therefore, and for the sake of our coming generations, let us start living together *equally and separately* in our city of Jerusalem, let us together share its goods, preserve its holy places and historical monuments, and develop the city's economy. Let us work together for a better future!

Islam's Jerusalem

One often hears the statement that al-Quds, Jerusalem, is the third holiest site for Islam. The reference is in particular to *al-Aqsa* and *al-Haram al-Sharif* in contrast to the Ka'ba and Medina mosques. The prophet is said to have said "The ultimate pilgrimage can only be to three mosques: the Ka'ba, my mosque in Medina, and al-Aqsa." In some versions, the *hadith* places the Medina mosque at the beginning of the sentence.

However, is *al-Haram al-Sharif* truly the third holiest site for Islam, and in what sense is this so? If we simply depend on the *hadith* for this interpretation, it can be argued that the lineistic sequence does not by itself warrant such a prioritisation. The statement could have straightforwardly made such a prioritisation, but it does not. As it stands, one could as easily and even more readily understand by it that these three mosques are equally important. Indeed, the indifference with which the two versions of the *hadith* with regard to the sequence are reported detracts from the argument that the sequence has a special significance.

Yet, current Muslim understanding does indeed place *al-Quds* as the third holiest site, after Mecca and Medina. The explanation for this is, of course, the *hajj*, or pilgrimage, and the *qiblah*, the direction of prayer. The Muslims' pilgrimage, is to Mecca and the direction of prayer is also therefore towards Mecca. Historically, the origins of the Islamic faith

are rooted in the environs of Mecca and Medina. Indeed, as far as we know, the prophet did not move much beyond that geographic area. All of these factors seem to strengthen the conviction that the Mecca/Medina axis is indeed more significant

Religiously than al-Quds. Nevertheless, the acclaimed fact is that the prophet turned towards al-Quds for prayer for the first sixteen months of his calling; that for some time during the Ummayyad period it was the Dome of The Rock (or the rock of God, as it is sometimes called in the literature) to which Muslims made their pilgrimage; or, finally, that for many Muslims, pilgrimage to Mecca is not felt to be complete without a visit to al-Quds.

Paradoxically, however, these latter facts only seem to blur the issue rather than explain it. If pressed, a Muslim asked why turn to Jerusalem at all, might answer that it all has to do with *al-isra'* and *al-mi'raj*, in which the prophet miraculously journeyed from Mecca to Jerusalem, and from there, from the rock of God itself, was received unto the heavens. It was during this journey, furthermore, that Muhammad received the specifically Muslim traditions and rites of worship, met and led the other prophets in prayer, and was graced with the divine vision.

I say these facts only seem to blur the issue because it does not yet address the question: why al-Quds in the first place? Why did Muhammad initially have to turn to Jerusalem in prayer? And why was it necessary for him to ascend to heaven from the divine rock in Jerusalem rather than from Mecca or from Mount Arafat? Why, in other words, does divine contact through ascension need to be located

elsewhere than where divine contact through revelation takes place? Furthermore, how is it that direct divine vision, as well as communion with the rest of the prophets, takes place in al-Quds rather than Mecca; whereas God's contact with his prophet in Mecca is only through an intermediary, the angel Gabriel?

These are, I believe, a set of quite challenging and bewildering questions to a Muslim, ostensibly at least. How can Mecca be more symbolically significant, or be more holy, given these facts? For it would seem, by pure unbiased logic, that of the two locations, it is really al-Quds that is the official gateway to the divine. The events seem to suggest that God can reach man anywhere on earth, but man's route to God must be through Jerusalem. At this juncture, it may be retorted that religious symbolism notwithstanding, Muslim practice is simply such that Jerusalem is deemed less holy (or third holiest). After all, the prophet did quite categorically call upon Muslims to turn towards Mecca for prayer, thus relegating Jerusalem to a secondary station in his religion. Furthermore, we must not forget that another important event mentioned by the holy Qur'an, namely, that the Ka'ba in Mecca was built by the first true Muslim in history, Abraham himself, father of Ishmael and Isaac.

Let us pause here for a moment. The symbolic significance of the Ka'ba, on this account, is predicated on two essential articles of faith that Abraham himself was the first to build the Ka'ba, and that Abraham was truly a Muslim, rather than anything else. The first of these two articles of faith seems to address itself to the then lingering pagan habit of paying homage to the Ka'ba. These pre-Islamic pagan pilgrimages, important both as a socio-religious tradition as well as a trade

or business practice, obviously needed a monotheistic interpretation if they were to continue. The recourse in this context to Abraham, as the father of the monotheistic faith, would thus seem to be wholly logical, regardless of the facts of the case. But as for the second article of faith, that Abraham was truly a Muslim—indeed that he was the first Muslim—there is clearly something in this assertion that, together with the first assertion, takes us back to Jerusalem, and posits before us Islam's view of Judaism, and of itself.

There is something of a mystery about Abraham, especially with regard to his sons Ishmael and Isaac. According to the Bible, Abraham's monotheistic descendant and inheritor is Isaac and through him, eventually, the twelve tribes. Ishmael on the other hand, son of an Egyptian concubine, is something of a black sheep.

Indeed, he will multiply and become a great nation, but in spite of being oldest, he is clearly not the genetic favorite, and it is not through his seed that monotheism will survive. And now the mystery: while on the one hand Islam reveres all the Jewish prophets descended from Isaac and places them on a par with one another, nonetheless it is Ishmael whom Muslim exegesists tend to claim to have been the object of his father's attempted sacrifice, and thus the medium therefore through which Abraham receives God's grace. The act of the attempted sacrifice is pivotal in Islamic thinking, since it epitomises the total surrender of man to God, the pure expression of the essence of Islam. It might seem strange, therefore, and perhaps especially significant, that there is but one reference to it in the Qur'an, a reference which, while contextually implying that Ishamael was the intended son in the sacrificial attempt, leaves the door open for suspecting

that it might have been Isaac after all. The ambiguity, perhaps purposely, allows us to go beyond the question of the son's identity to something far more essential in the story- indeed, to something which is the essence of the story-namely, the essence of Islam as the submission of both father and son to the will of God. In this beautiful Qur'anic verse, both father and son surrender their will (a derivative of "Islam" is used) to that of God, and thus receive God's grace.

On the other hand, the contextual weighting on Ishmael rather than on Isaac does not seem to have a symbolic significance, especially given the avowed reverence of Isaac and his descendant prophets- unless, that is, we are to assume that Ishmael is posited as the genetic ancestor of the Arabs living at that time in the Mecca environs (because he is clearly not a genetic ancestor of the Arab peoples as a whole). In such a case, the significance may have to do with a movement of monotheistic revivalism which at that time, and given the way Judaism had evolved and was being practised in those days, could not have taken place except outside the "genetically" closed Jewish circle. Against this background, the significance would as much as amount to the positing of a human link to be compounded to the spiritual link being posited between the Abrahamic and Muhammadan messages, and between "genetically closed" set and the wider human race. At all events, Islam's claim on Abraham is left in no doubt.

But given Abraham's pivotal role and the religious significance of the attempted sacrifice, what does Islam have to say about the site of this attempt, and about God's intervention? Does Islam, in other words, view the holy rock of Jerusalem as being that site?

In attempting to answer this question one finds oneself answering questions not only having to do with site or location but more importantly with the foundations themselves of the Islamic religion. To return to the questions we earlier described as bewildering and challenging, we can now posit our main question in this context in the following way: Is Muhammad transferred to the holy rock, and from thence to the heavens, in acknowledgment of the prior holiness of this rock endowed upon it by the sacrificial act and the divine intervention, or does Islam endow the rock with holiness as a consequence of the nocturnal miracle? Which comes first?. If one goes by later Islamic interpretations, and modern-day beliefs, one is led to the conclusion that it must be the nocturnal journey, or some undetermined prior event, which endowed the rock with holiness, simply because Abraham's sacrificial attempt most likely occurred in the Mecca environs. But if one goes by earlier Islamic interpretations and trends, including the primacy of Jerusalem as the *qiblah* site, one is led to the belief that Muhammad looked upon Jerusalem, as upon Abraham, and upon the monotheism espoused by the early Jewish prophets, as constituting the physical and spiritual source of his faith. Indeed, the holy Qur'an is categorical in the way it emphasizes Islam's continuity with early Judaism—not as a particularly practised Judaism, but as the monotheistic message first espoused by Abramham

Let us in this connection pause for a moment before the *surah* of the Isra', so-called in reference to the nocturnal journey, and the miracle of Muhammad's ascension. The *surah*, as we know, begins with the well-known direct reference to that event. However, rather than continuing, as one might rationally expect, with a more elaborate explication of the spiritual significance of the miracle, the Qur'an immediately

invokes a reference to the Israelites, beginning specifically with Moses, who was a recipient of “God’s Book”.

One cannot help in this context noting the direct connection between the journey and the Israelite presence—and their predicament—in Jerusalem. Even were this only a sequential connection, nonetheless it consolidated the general impression conveyed by the Qur’an that the religious roots of the Muhammadan message emanate from the Jewish prophets, and that the journey is in a sense a confirmation of this religious heritage. Rather astoundingly, in laying out the Israelite predicament (whether, once supported by God’s grace, they will conduct themselves well) the Qur’an states that, in the second of two forewarned assaults of the city, the invaders will enter the *masjid* as they had done before, and will demolish that construction.

The use of the term *masjid* in this context, normally preserved for Muslim rather than Jewish houses of worship, re-invokes the use of that same term in the first *ayah* of this same *surah*, where the prophet Muhammad is stated to have been conveyed from al-masjid al-Haram in Mecca, to al-Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, a journey which takes place before the present al-Aqsa was built. So naturally the question presents itself: was the Jewish house of worship (temple) in Jerusalem conceived as the first Muslim *masjid* in the city? Does the significance of the *isra’* to Jerusalem emanate from this perception? And was the *Haram* in Jerusalem built, allegedly on the same spot as the temple (notwithstanding present-day political sensitivities associated with the subject), in affirmation of Islam’s legitimate inheritance of the Abrahamic message and heritage?

Let me now move on to the Galiph “ Umar and his entry into Jerusalem in the year 15AH. Early traditions relate that, upon arrival in Jerusalem, “ Umar called for a Jewish rabbi to help him locate the place of the rock, presumably since he was well aware that this was also an area in which the Jewish temple was located. We are also told that, having determined its location and cleaned it, he performed a prayer. Indeed, ‘Umar did not seem to feel the kind of compunction or hesitation about praying in an area he presumably knew or believed to be the site of a Jewish temple the way he did in the Holy Sepulchre, where he was hosted by Bishop Sefronious. Quite the contrary, ‘Umar prayed and gave instructions to build a mosque. Later on, the Dome of the Rock was built as a self-contained prayer site, that is architecturally as a focus of prayer rather than as a mosque facing Ka’ba as the *qiblah*.

What happened after those events is history: the Ummayyads at one stage were said to have been driven by a politically competitive impulse against the Abbasids when they instituted the Dome of the Rock as a site of pilgrimage. But even if and when they did so, however, to us the same question poses itself as before, namely, what was it about the Diving Rock that lent itself in the first place to be a *qiblah*?

In due course, Muslim sights slowly turned towards Mecca, and, perhaps more significantly, they also turned away from the Jewish as well as the Christian spiritual heritage. Nowadays, as one scans the monotheistic faiths, one comes across *three* different and distinct monotheistic religions, Islam being one of them. Even modern-day Muslims tend to perceive matters in this way—that theirs is one of three religions, the last, and therefore the one whose rulings

supersede those of the previous two. In Muhammad's eyes, as revealed upon him, there really was never such a distinction: the monotheistic message is one, not three; the prophets are of one Good; religion is one. This religion is Islam from the beginning, not from Muhammad's time, and Muhammad's role was simply conceived as a revivalist and a correctionist continuation of the same tradition.

If my reading of Muhammad is valid, then it becomes simple for me to understand why the nocturnal journey took place through the divine rock, why this was the *qiblah* for the first sixteen months of Muhammad's message, and why "Umar ordered the building of a mosque on the site of the ruined temple. The mosque, on this reading, was itself a revivication of the old Jewish temple, an instantiation of the unity with the Abrahamic message, an embodiment of the new temple yearned for and forecasted. And why should this seem strange when Muhammad himself, according to the Qura'n, was the very prophet expected and described in the "true" Jewish literature? I realize, of course, the political sensitivity of my remarks, especially in a context in which Muslims feel threatened by Jewish zealotry, and where such zealotry and exclusivity posits the Dome of the Rock Moseque as a "usurper" of a Jewish holy site, rather than as a legitimate celebration of that site.

Be that as it may, the centrality of Jerusalem to Islam cannot be underestimated or denied by any account. True, if one looks at Islam as one of three separate religions, and at Muhammad as Islam's only prophet, one is bound to see or understand there to be far more sentimental attachment by Jews of Christians to Jerusalem. If David's Temple is associated only with Jews as a separate faith, and if the Holy

Sepulchre or the Via Dolorosa only with Christians, and if, in general, a Muslim does not truly identify with all these events and prophets as the Qur'an commands, then one is bound as a Muslim to see one's history in Jerusalem as starting only with the nocturnal journey. The history of Islam's Jerusalem, in other words, would only begin with that journey. But if one had the universal vision of Islam, as Islam truly presents itself, then one's sense of Islam's Jerusalem would by far precede the event of the nocturnal journey, and the year 15 AH.

Before I close my remarks, I wish to turn to a political perspective. The holiness or sanctity of a city in Islam decreases rather than enhances that city's political status or role. We have in Mecca and Riyadh a present-day example. I have always felt that the tradition of 'Umar's entry into Jerusalem also enhances this perspective: taking turns with his manservant one the camel as they made their long journey towards Jerusalem, we are taught of man's humility before God and his city. Before God, we are taught by this story, all men are equal and even the highest religious or political office does not entitle one man to be privileged before God over another. And as the entry into Jerusalem is made, we are not told of a heroic story of battles fought and prizes won. Rather, 'Umar enters the city peacefully, and on foot, as if to tell us that the city of God cannot be conquered by human force or military might. And as we go with Umar towards the Sepulchre but then out again to pray, we are taught that Islam tolerates the religion's different rites and does not presume to impinge itself on them by demanding their replacement or cessation. And as we go with him to the Rock and we see him cleaning it with his own hands and robe, we learn from him that it is an honour and a privilege for any man to serve this holy site. To serve the city but by no means to ever dare pose oneself as its master. This, I believe, was 'Umar's message

concerning a city of which the prophet said, "The rocks of Jerusalem are what the heavens are made out of."

It is thus that Jerusalem, even under the Ummayyads, was never proclaimed the capital of the Muslim nation. For the capital of an earthy nation is an earthly capital, and one, which man can conquer and rule. But a divine capital is above men, and one whose holiness rules. So it is that throughout its history in Islam, the giant Muslim figures associated with the city would simply act as liberators, if they were military rulers, like Saladdin; or as supplicators on major spiritual quests, like Al-Ghazzali or Ibn Arabi. In this later period, unfortunately, we all seem to be blinded by politics as well as blind to our true religion. We all lay claim to the city as political parties and nations, and we make religions serve our respective political ends. And the more we see ourselves as belonging to different religions- the more monotheism is a tritheism- the harder the chances for reconciliation, and the more Jerusalem will be a potential source of diffusion and destruction. The more we lay possession of it, the more we will suffocate its significance. It will be a source of unity, on the other hand, and will shine as the true jewel it is, if it made us aware of the unity of our faith. If the unity of our faith is properly perceived as I have described, then our respective claims on Jerusalem as our political capitals can be regarded as a celebration of this unity, rather than as a point of selfish contention between two ethno-centric tribes.

Jerusalem, September 1995



On Jerusalem

As we know, Israel came to control Jerusalem in stages. First, in 1948, the western side: mostly the fashionable residential districts (Upper and Lower Baq'a, Katamon, Talbieh Mamilla and Shama'a, And parts of Abu Tor, Musrara and Rehavia); the environs to the west, south-west and north-west (Lifta, Dier Yassin, Ein Karem, El- Malha) and the heart of the modern commercial center. In 1967, the Israelis occupied the Old City with its environs to the north, east and south. Israel's development of Jerusalem, east and west, did not begin in real earnest until after 1967, As we also know, Israel's post1967 intensive development programme involved the construction of housing and associated infrastructure in the unilaterally annexed and expanded territory across the Green Line, obviously designed in such a manner as to:

- a- Create an essentially unified metropolitan complex spread indiscriminately across what were once borders, no-man's land, village and town district lines, as well as territory confiscated for this purpose (about 22.000 dunams).
- b- Ensure that this web of infrastructure extensions would to all intents and purposes encircle and dis-integrate the territorial and demographic spread of the eastern, once entirely Arab-populated part of the city, rendering it a desegregated or scattered collection of habitats or areas, conspicuous primarily for their obvious neglect by the construction improvement programme.

We also all know that while this feverish Jewish construction activity was underway, a similarly feverish policy was applied to deny building permits for the Arab population, which had doubled in size over the 27 year period since 1967.

On average, the total sum of housing unit permits made available to the Arab residents of Jerusalem over the entire 27-year period (not much more than 7500), equals the annual rate of such permits made available to Jewish construction. Even so, the major part of the permits given to Arab residents came in the context of the forced evacuation of Arab inhabitants from the Jewish and Moghrabi quarters of the Old City!¹.

In demographic terms, the construction efforts equally transformed the landscape; placing over 150.000 Jewish inhabitants across the Green Line, and making the eastern part of the city almost equally divided between its Arab and Jewish residents. As an aside, it should be noted that when this figure is included, Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories presently number well over a quarter of a million inhabitants, a fact which many observers gloss over.

Israel's blatantly discriminatory policy stands out so offensively that I do not believe one need waste too much time in trying to prove it. The relatively recent, heart-rending protests of the territorially-strangled In Touba and Beit Sahur

¹It is in fact claimed that more than 70% of the property in the "Jewish Quarter" is Arab owned. However, prior to 1948, Jews did reside in that area as tenants or, in some cases, as landlords. Soon after the war ended in 1967, the Israeli authorities razed the entire quarter to the ground to make room for the construction of what is now called "the Jewish Quarter". Arab residents from the quarter, as from other areas in the old city, who were forced to move out eventually settled in a new housing project in Beit Hanina (the Nuseibeh project), or moved to a new refugee camp in the Shu'fat district. The history of Jewish versus non-Jewish presence in the city is often shrouded in ideological as well as religious mist. In relatively "recent" history, it is worth pointing out Z Nuseibeh's recent work in which there is a reference to two significant aspects in this context: a) The Jewish population surge in Jerusalem only occurred in the 19th century in response to the rise in Zionist ideology; and b) it was the caliph Omar who enabled Jews for the first time and after a prolonged banishment to set up residence in the city.

residents against the planned extension of Gilo to the east is but an example.

It may seem strange, against the background of this political and human affront, that a Palestinian Jerusalemite whose sensitivities have become so over-politicised, and whose national existence in the city seems threatened, should nonetheless still regard as the saddest part of this onslaught to be the ravishing of the hills, valleys and countryside of the city. Religious design may still posit Jerusalem as the terrestrial gateway to the divine world, for example, through the story of Muhammad's night journey and ascension, a tradition whose significance seems universally unappreciated. But looking today on Jerusalem's cement and mortar landscape, as indeed on its human landscape, it is hard not to entertain some doubt on the matter, or, at any rate not to feel saddened by the disappearance of that unique fusion of sunlight and earth texture in which the entire pastoral surroundings basked.

I hope the day will come, after a political settlement has been finalised, when minds will turn to preserving the spiritual distinctness of Jerusalem and its environs. But my mission in this brief presentation is less to mourn the past or the present as it is to provide a few sketches of a possible future. In doing this, I am afraid I shall not go much beyond the ideas I have already sketched in various places.²

² See, for example Proceeding of the April 1993 UN sponsored meeting on Jerusalem published by the Information Department under title Jerusalem: Visions of Reconciliation. My contribution there was published in the English Al-Fajr in the 3rd. May '93 issue. I had already made similar suggestions in No Trumpets. No Drums, as well as in a brief article in Tikkun in May '91.

Briefly, my personal approach to the Jerusalem problem, consists of two elements, one that to the Palestinians do not in general savour, namely, the *de facto* existence of Israel on the map; and one which the Israelis do not in general savour, namely, that “the goods” of Jerusalem must be equitably shared between Israelis and Palestinians. Without either of these two principles as an ingredient in the co-existence formula to be designed, I fear that residents of the city—as indeed of the country—will most likely discover that theirs is the gateway to hell rather than to celestial bliss. But also, without these two ingredients in any possible compromise formula, I feel it will not be possible to speculate about peace in the first place—one side or the other can simply bring about what they desire by force, if they can; neither principles of reason, nor principles of morality need be brought to bear on the subject.

But if one were to bring those principles of reason and morality to bear, then it becomes obvious that Palestinians and Israelis must find a formula in which they can equitably share the goods.

In the country at large, as in Jerusalem, two distinct approaches may be considered. Rights may either be divided distributively among individuals, or they may be spliced between collective entities or groups. If one looks at the country as a whole, the distributive approach would imply that each Palestinian and each Israeli would have equal political rights. These would include the right to exist in one’s home in security, the right to be repatriated to one’s home if one is deprived of the first right to be repatriated to one’s home if one is deprived of the first right, and the right to be a

full citizen-meaning, to be a participant to the greatest constitutional extent possible in the determination of one's future, and to be equal in that respect with everyone else who is a citizen of the state. The application of a distributive system like this would obviously mean the establishment of a democratic, bi-national and multi-religious polity, after adjustments are introduced to compensate for those rights—especially repatriation—that cannot be literally applied.

Approached from the opposite end of the spectrum, rights can be divided between the collective entities or groups to which individuals belong, between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, and thus in the form of two separate states.

The same principle of sovereign parity can be applied to the Jerusalem metropolis, again with the same choice between two approaches. Either the right to sovereignty is divided distributively among Jerusalemites, regardless of citizenship or present residence status.³ Or sovereignty can be divided through separation and splicing between two polities, Israel and Palestine. On the first approach, sovereignty will belong to the city and will be exercised primarily by its citizens rather than by their states, through a multi-national and multi-religious government. Special rights and privileges can of course be established for the two respective states, Israel and Palestine, and, to a lesser, or perhaps in a different degree, for other countries in the region and the world. Such rights and privileges, in the case of Israel and Palestine, might indeed include the right to regard the unified city as their respective capital. But to all intents and purposes, the city will enjoy a

³The reference here is to Palestinian Jerusalemites who are denied the right to return, or to live in their ancestral city. These include the estimated 60,000, and their descendants, who were forced to leave in '48; as well as an indeterminate number who left after, and since '67, and whose preference would have been, and remains to return to live in the city.

corpus *separatum* status conferred upon it by the two states, and confirmed by the international community. Within the borders of this entity (whose exact extension and shape can be mutually determined by the two states wishing to take this approach) special care would have to be given to maintain the religious and ethnic balance of the resident individuals and groups, whether politically, demographically, or developmentally. Given the two national groups already in existence, it may be argued that a more realistic version of this model would in fact be better expressed through the aggregate distributive rights being equitably or equally operated or exercised directly by the two states themselves, in the way two persons or more might share in the operation of a computer programme, rather than indirectly through their respective citizens. But even as the respective states share sovereignty, it is understood on this approach that each would be exercising or operating sovereign rights belonging *de primo* to the city and its residents, in whom these rights are distributively divested.

Following the second approach, the city's sovereignty can be spliced *de primo* between the states, each declaring the part falling within its territorial province to be its capital. The guiding principle in determining a borderline in this case should be the same as that which is deemed operative in the Arab-Israeli talks, namely, the 1948 demarcation line, or the Green line, as it has come to be called. While this Green line can be used as a guiding principle, mutually agreed border adjustments can be envisaged whose purpose is to cater for historical or newly emerged anomalies, and whose underlying philosophy is reciprocity. Indeed, ingenuity might allow future negotiators to regard such a line as being of two kinds, a main continuous line, and a series of secondary, scattered-islands demarcating lines. Additionally, while such a line may be regarded as a borderline demarcating where two territorial limits meet, it need not itself be more than an invisible or "imaginary" line, and the highest degree of

porousness across it can be maintained, whether in municipal or in commercial functions.

Observe from what has been said that there is a logical point of departure for any border adjustments (spatial location) or border definitions (functional role) which may be posited in the context of a settlement: in one instance (the first) this logic dictates that each side decide how much of its territory to regard as part of the polis; and the focus of border questions would thus be on the outlying borderline, the overall shape and nature of the city. But in the second instance the focus of border questions (functional and locational) would naturally be on the location and nature of the international border running through the middle of the city, dividing the two separate states. And just as there is such a logical point of departure, there is also a blatant illogically in presuming to address one set of questions if the point of departure does not provide the appropriate basis for it.

The two "theoretic" models outlined can be regarded as extreme versions lying on opposite sides of the same parity spectrum. In outlining them however, I have already hinted at the ways and means that either of them can be worked upon, through the introduction of various adjustments or modules, so that the model as a whole can be made to grow towards the opposite side of the spectrum. Indeed, it might be argued, given the needs and sensitivities associated with Jerusalem, that a "perfect" model would be one which is to all intents and purposes a mixed version of the two. In this third model, a basic sovereign line may be kept which is porous (or permeable) and invisible enough on the one hand to allow for a maximisation of sharing; but which is substantive enough on the other hand to allow for the required degree of separation. It may be continuous enough to maintain an

adherence to the historic green line; but discrete or disjunctive enough to allow for the existence of disjoined or scattered sites of sovereignty. In this way, parity of sovereign rights can be maintained as a basic principle, but the correct mixture of dividing and sharing, separating and integrating will optimise the benefits accruing to the two communities from the implementation of these rights.

It should be noted, in all events, that the nature of such a line will be a function of the nature of the overall borderline between Israel and Palestine, and conversely, for as long as two separate polities continue to exist. Totally porous state-lines, on the other hand, will render any special features in the Jerusalem line redundant.

Translated into practical terms, Palestinian sovereignty over eastern Jerusalem, or Israeli sovereignty over western Jerusalem, can still be made consistent with an undivided city, and with an extended shared local government, which would operate those sectors—such as sewerage, fire-fighting, street lighting, tourist aid and facilities, forestation or public health—whose enjoyment by the citizen and benefit is non-exclusive—indeed, whose enjoyment and benefit with respect to one citizen is a function of their available benefit and enjoyment for others; and whose operation is not culture-sensitive.

Culture, political and religious-sensitive matters can be operated by two separate municipal governments. Various forms of cooperation can be envisaged, as well as various possibilities of representation and sharing. The city can be the capital of two states and seat of two systems of government, but it can have its own single court of law supervised by a judiciary whose members are seconded respectively by the two states, and whose legal framework, adapted appropriately

from the two respective legal systems, is adjusted to address the unique status and dealings of the city's Israeli and Palestinian residents. Also speaking in practical terms, such a formula would address and balance some otherwise jarring anomalies, such as the presence of a Jewish cemetery lying within Palestinian jurisdiction on the eastern side and a Moslems cemetery lying within Israeli jurisdiction on the western side; or of divided Abu Tor of Sur Bahir; or of a jutting enclave deemed religiously essential to one side of the other.

Indeed, it is not logically, physically, or politically impossible to design a formula that would address "minimal reasonable requirements" on both sides, and any such formula, being as advanced form of this unique mixture of separation and integration, may well serve as an attractive model for the overall relationship between the two states. In any case, it would have to be remembered that, to the extent the separating line is made invisible and economically insignificant, while at the same time maintaining a fairly visible and economically significant line between the two states, the outlying metropolitan borderline endowing the city with a special status will become enhanced.

A major problem which will have to be confronted in this effort is demography; and in particular, the Jewish settlers who have come to reside across the Green Line and within the environs of Jerusalem. I would like to assert here that I do not personally feel comfortable with the notion of legitimising Israel's *de facto* transformation of the demographic *status quo* of the eastern part of the city. Thus neither option-of incorporating such inhabitants into Palestinian sovereign territory, or of annexing such quarters to Israeli sovereign territory-seems to me to be readily

palatable. Yet, I have already alluded to the possibility of a at least some adjustments in borders, and it goes without saying that the porousness of the border, allowing for the free movement of capital, goods and people, nationality, and wherever they reside, to move freely. The will in any case make it possible for residents, whatever their basic ingredients for a compromise on this issue, therefore, are obvious, but it would have to be addressed in the same spirit of reciprocity and mutual benefit that all other issues have also to be addressed. I am certain that future negotiations will not be in want of possible suggestions in this area.

Be that as it may- and it may be along while before the two sides finally settle on the most suitable level of mixture and separation –the other aspect to be addressed by both sides will have to be Jerusalem's universal character.

Jerusalem's universal (and religious) character can be maintained by declaring the city a violence-free and demilitarized zone, a sanctified area that provides free access to all pilgrims and visitors at all times where properties belonging to foreign churches and their worshippers enjoy total religious immunity, where the rich mosaic of the different religious quarters is enhanced and supported, and where the international community can continue to have a unified symbolic presence and representation through the United Nation, possibly still on Jebel al-Mukabber, by way of indicating the jealousy with which the peace of the city is to be guarded.

It is not beyond the imagination to envisage the introduction of an honorary role for a distinguished international public figure to be appointed as UN representative, perhaps endowing him or her with a special title that would reflect the

recognition by the people of Jerusalem of their city's international character. Beyond that, however, it is difficult for me to see the value now of an internationalization program of the kind envisaged in the UN partition plan.

My final comment has to do with the immense compensating effort which has to be undertaken by all concerned, once a settlement is agreed upon, in order to bring the infrastructure of Palestinian Jerusalem up to the standard enjoyed by Israeli Jerusalem. This will involve a massive programme of renovations in the old city, in the various neighboring Arab quarters, as well as an environment-sensitised development of the commercial centers. Residential construction must also be undertaken, informed again by an environmentally sensitive plan. Many considerations call for such a programme, not least of which the need to create symmetry between the various neighborhoods which would facilitate human harmony in the city. In financial terms, the reconstruction effort cannot be immense by any international standard. But its human and political value will immeasurable.

Still on the human front, I believe that the time must also come and the effort be undertaken to establish a multi-religious higher institute for the study of the region's civilisations, where scholars from different national and religious backgrounds not only can jointly work on the pluralistic history of Palestine and its civilisations, its peoples and its archeology; but also where a true endeavour can be undertaken to engage in an appreciation of the Abrahamic religion, the source of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

I mention this point here because I believe that Jerusalem's future peace can only be guaranteed if, in addition to any political or geographic settlement which is worked out, a

serious effort is made in the sphere of historical and religious re-construction. The fact that the three contending religions derive their roots from the same divine message is one, which can either help aggravate an already unhealthy state of dissonance and fiction, or be a source of convergence and harmony.

Especially given the unique way in which Jerusalem is regarded by followers of these religions, both in terms of its role in the past as well as in terms of its status in the future, it is incumbent on the contending parties to pursue a course of convergence and harmonisation. This will require a major reappraisal of existing perceptions, and perhaps it calls for a joint reconstruction of the significance of sites and events. After all it is too ironic and sad that the message of a universal truth propagated by a common father should stand in the way of consonance and convergence among those who profess to be his descendants and followers.

I will end by saying that I have, in the final analysis, only presented my personal ruminations on the subject. I hold on to them because of two complementary reasons:

- a- I believe that without them a Jerusalem settlement is not possible; and
- b- I believe that without a Jerusalem settlement a lasting peace in the area is not possible. With them, both a settlement and peace can be made possible



Dr. Bernard Sabella

Jerusalem: A Christian Perspective

Jerusalem: Mater Omnium Ecclesiarum

In Christian tradition, Jerusalem is the Mater Omnium Ecclesiarum. This honour is bestowed upon “earthly Jerusalem” as the city which witnessed the dramatic events of Christ’s death and resurrection. It is also the city in which the first Christian community was born and consolidated in the years 30-32 AD when about three thousand people were baptised, influenced by the message and witness of St. Peter⁴. Jerusalem, then is witness to the new beginning ushered in by Christ and it is also the point of departure for Christianity.

Al-Quds: Holy and as other Cities

For indigenous Christians, Jerusalem is “Al-Quds, the holy, and the presence of their community in the city is confirmation of the continuity of Christ’s new beginning. The long history and rich traditions of Jerusalem’s Christians provide a continuous link to the “earthly Jerusalem” of Christ and its first Christian community.

But Jerusalem, the holy, is not the sole determinant of the experiences of Palestinian Christians. As the city has spread

⁴Dr. Anton ISSA, *The Christian Minority in Palestine Throughout the Centuries*, in *JERUSALEM: The Diocesan Bulletin of the Latin Patriarchate*, Volume 1, Year 1, January- February 1995. P.9

from within the walls, specially since 1967 with the new Jewish suburban settlements, and as socio-economic and technological changes have affected style of life and orientations of individuals and communities, life in Jerusalem has become similar to life in any other city of over half-a-million inhabitants, with attendant pressures and stresses. These troubled relationships have affected the demographic and the socio-economic characteristics of Jerusalem's Christians.

At present, there are 11.000 Christians who make up 7.1% of the 156,000 Arab Palestinian population which inhabits the city. The Christians belong to over ten different denominations and their relative numbers are as follows⁵

Denomination	Population	%of Total
Latins (RC)	3900	35.7%
Greed Orthodox	3500	32.1%
Armenians	1500	13.7 %
Greek Catholics	500	4.6%
Other Protestants	440	4.0 %
Lutherans	410	3.8 %
Syriacs	250	2.3 %
Copts	250	2.3 %
Maronites	100	0.9 %
Ethiopians	600	0.6 %
TOTAL	10.910	100.0 %

⁵Dr. Bernard SABELLA, "Socio- Economic Characteristics and the Challenges to Palestinian Christians in the Holy land", in Christians in the Holy land edited by Michael Prior and William Taylor, The world of Islam festival Trust, London 1994, p.39.

Jerusalem within the walls is home to 55% of the 11000 Palestinian Christians who inhabit the city. Christians are concentrated within the Christian and Armenian Quarters with some families living in the Muslim Quarter, The Christian population clusters around the Christian holy places, as the shops and trades which developed revolved around servicing pilgrims. Christian Jerusalemites become known for such crafts as wax-making, jewelry and souvenirs for pilgrims. Schools, hospitals, hostels and other service institutions, run by Christians, have contributed to the upkeep of the population and to its educational achievements. Jerusalem Christians have participated in running the city ever since the establishment of its first municipal council and they continue to fulfill an important professional role in the city. Outside the walls, most Christians live in the relatively new Arab neighbourhoods of Shu'fat and Beit Hanina, on the road north to Ramallah.

The Decline of Jerusalem's Christians

Jerusalem's Christians are blessed with probably the highest "church per capita" rate the world over as there is one church for every 177 Christians in the city. This, however, offers no solace as the decline in the number of Jerusalem Christians continues. Emigration is responsible for this decline as the political conditions, especially since 1967, have pushed many Palestinians out of their country. Christians are particularly susceptible to the worsening political and economic conditions because of their socio-economic and educational characteristic and the presence of migrant family members abroad. The extent of the Christian decline is best demonstrated by the fact that in 1944 there were 29,350 Christians living in the city. In other words, Jerusalem's

Christian population today is only 37.5% of what it was 50 years ago⁶

Concern of Experts and Church Officials

There is concern by some, both Church officials and experts, that if preventive and curative steps are not undertaken then the decline of Christian numbers will continue unabated causing the eventual disappearance of community life in some of Jerusalem's Churches. But why are the Christians of Jerusalem and of the Holy Land leaving? On the one hand, the answer lies in the composition of the Christian community, which tends to be middle class in its educational background, employment profile and style of life. On the other, the political situation, with several decades of actual conflict, and with negative repercussions on the economic and employment prospects of the population, tends to push middle class families and individuals towards leaving the country in search of better economic and social prospects. This fits the definition of a migrant community as proposed by migration experts: "A community with a high educational achievement and a relatively good standard of living but with no real prospects for economic security or advancement will most probably become a migrant community"⁷.

⁶Tsimhoni, Daphne, Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank since 1948: An Historical, Social and Political study, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut and London, 1993. pp. 22-23.

⁷Danilov, Stavro, "Dilemmas of Jerusalem's Christians," in Middle East Review Volume XIII, Nos. 3-4, 1981.

Excellent Christian- Muslim Relations

Reaffirmation of the traditionally excellent relations between Christians and their Muslim neighbours is found especially in the exchange which takes place, on a daily basis, between Christian and Muslim youngsters who attend Jerusalem's mostly Christian private schools. Here, life-long friendships are made; children learn about each other's religions while common bonds of culture and politics mold the outlook of youngsters as they get progressively involved in the affairs of their community and society. This tradition of good Christian-Muslim relation has evolved through centuries of coexistence and exchange. The contribution of the following factors to this tradition is worth mentioning⁸.

- 1- The Arab-Israeli conflict has affected the entire Palestinian population equally, with the experience of Dispersal and loss of homeland. From fifty to sixty thousand Christians, or 35% of all Palestinian Christians, became refugees following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Altogether, 726.000 Palestinians became refugees as a result of that war.
- 2- The contribution which mostly western Christian institutions have made since the 19th century to the education, health and other needs of the population irrespective of religion.
- 3- The presence of the Holy Places, and the Islamic recognition by of the centrality of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth to Christianity. This recognition is best demonstrated by Caliph " Umar's al- Uhda Al-Umariyya,

⁸Sabella, Op.Cit. pp. 34-35

the guarantee of safety for Christians and their holy places in 638 AD when Islam entered the country.⁹

- 4- The urban nature of the Christian population and its residence in mixed Christian –Muslim neighbourhoods, emphasizes openness and neighbourly relations. In those instances where Christians lived in villages and rural areas, relations were always characterised by friendly co-operation and communal sharing.
- 5- Christians take equal pride in their national and religious roots. Being a good Christian has never detracted from being a good Palestinian nationalist, and vice versa.
- 6- The Ottoman millet system which recognized the autonomy of the Christian communities to run their own internal affairs, especially those related to religious and civil matters.¹⁰

Rites, Rituals and Celebrations

The rites, rituals and traditions of Jerusalem Christians are factors which still pull the community together and reinforce its *raison d'être*. In spite of the somber shadows which politics in the Holy Land sheds on Christmas, Jerusalem parents still endeavor to celebrate Christmas with a semblance of joy. Trees are decorated a couple of days before Christmas and

⁹For the text and an in-depth analysis and discussion of al-Uhda al-Umariyya or Firman d'Omar see Anto Issa's Les Minorities Chrétiennes de Palestine à travers les siècles, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 110-124

¹⁰Dr. Bernard Sabella, The Diocese of the Latin Patriarchate, Introductory Study of the Social, Political, Economical, and Religious Situation, (West Bank and Gaza strip, Jordan Israel and Cyprus), Patriarchatus Latinus, Jerusalem, April 1990. p. 7.

they are kept standing, in most homes, until Greek orthodox Christmas on January 7th and Armenian Christmas on January 19th. Families, especially children, take great pride in the replication of the nativity scene under the Christmas tree and as elsewhere, await Santa's visit with impatience.

Easter Week

The Easter season begins with the carnival weekend when those intent on fasting have the last chance, until Easter Sunday, to satisfy their culinary buds with rich dishes and sweets. Lent is kept by most families including children who abstain from eating meat on Wednesday and Fridays and undertake to perform small "sacrifices", here and there.

With the arrival of the first Easter pilgrims, especially from Cyprus and in years past, from Egypt and other neighboring countries, the atmosphere of Easter starts to appear. Stands selling souvenir items are found on every street corner and in alleys leading to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Candles of all sizes and designs are offered for sale and local children employ their newly learned foreign words and phrases to entice pilgrims to buy pilgrims to buy souvenir items.

Easter week starts with Palm Sunday. Some families in the Christian Quarter specialize in preparing palm branches in tree-like designs with pockets to hold flowers. These are sought by local families, especially those blessed with small children, and they are decorated with flowers and colour ribbons in preparation for Palm Sunday service, which is truly a community event. At the end of the service, olive branches are distributed to parishioners as an omen of peace.

In the afternoon of Palm Sunday the community takes part in the traditional procession, led by the Latin Patriarch, from Bethany, a village on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives, to the Church of St. Anne just inside St. Stephen's Gate in the Old City. Palm branches, symbolizing victory, are carried by all. At the end of the procession, the branches are shaken as the Patriarch enters the church. The sound produced is reminiscent of that of the leaves shaken by the crowd which gathered around Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. After the procession, another of those events which testify to good Muslim-Christian relations takes place. Christian and Muslim boy scout troops circle the walls of the Old City in their colourful uniforms and flags as they play popular and nationalistic tunes.

On Good Friday, Christians of Jerusalem as well as thousands of pilgrims from throughout the world show expressions of mourning and grief as they walk along the Via Dolorosa. The procession through the fourteen stations of the cross ends at Calvary and is accompanied throughout by the Franciscan community choir and the parish boy scout troop which keeps order.

Sabt An-Nour: Saturday of Holy Fire

Easter Saturday is the Saturday of Light, "Sabt An-Nour", when the resurrection of Christ is commemorated in the ceremony of "Holy Fire" which takes place in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Hundreds of pilgrims, mostly Cypriots, Greeks and Copts, sleep overnight by the Sepulchre to be among the first to receive the holy fire. Locals start joining them in the early morning as the church, its square and roofs become packed with crowds. All carry bundles of candles and glass lanterns.

At noon, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch proceeds with his entourage from his residence to the Holy Sepulchre through a staircase leading from the roof inside the church. Meanwhile, Christian youths gather in one of the squares of the Christian Quarter and proceed through the narrow alleys to the church. On their way, they alternately carry one of them on their shoulders as he leads them in shouting slogans. Among these, one can hear: "Oh Virgin (Mary) peace be unto you from Christians and Muslims alike", and "We Christians and the candles in our hands- for St. Gerios (St. George) Al-Khader, we pray." As the youths enter the church, they circle the Holy Sepulchre repeating: "This is the tomb of our Lord – our Lord is Jesus Christ – Christ has brought us- with his precious blood he has redeemed us, we are today happy." After circling the Sepulchre three times. They await for the official procession led by the Patriarch, with the participation of members of old Arab Orthodox families who carry embroidered banners and flags.

The procession finds its way from the Catholican Church, east of the Sepulchre, around the cupola of the Holy Sepulchre. At the end of the procession, the Patriarch is led into the chapel of the tomb and the crowd, which until now having shown excitement, falls silent in anticipation of the appearance of Holy Light. The Patriarch stays for an hour or so in prayer and meditation and then around 1:30 pm, the light appears and is quickly passed from one bundle of candles to another. Glass lanterns are lit as well and the more faithful go over the blaze of the candles with their hands and then cross themselves in benediction. The light spreads instantly to the environs of the church and the whole place, inside and out, is ablaze. Joyful ululations are heard, bells start ringing and holy fire is already on its way to more distant places, in the country and beyond.

The Greek Orthodox and other boy scout troops, including Muslims, who await the light on the roof of the church start playing their bands as they proceed together through the narrow alleys of the Christian Quarter. They are met by the group of youngsters, now carrying lit candles and lanterns as they again shout slogans which intermingle with the band music. The atmosphere is one of public joy and celebration and local Christians start greeting one another with the traditional Easter greeting: "Christ has risen" and the response: "He as really risen."

Christians, Political Developments and the Future of Jerusalem

Where do Palestinian Christians, who number 50,000 in the West Bank and Gaza, stand with respect to the political developments taking place in the region? What do they expect specifically for the future of Jerusalem?

Palestinian Christians, including Jerusalem Christians, support the political developments now taking place in the region. These developments provide hope that an era of peace and prosperity is finally beginning to take shape in our troubled land and region. The peace process is particularly important for Christians since there are indications that with the coming of peace, fewer Christians will think of emigration. In a survey undertaken in 1993 to check on intention to emigrate, Palestinian Christians had a rate double that of their Muslim compatriots. When asked if they would still leave if real peace were to occur, 65 percent of Christian respondents said that they would not leave in such an eventuality. Clearly, the coming of peace will stop the hemorrhage of Christian emigration from Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

The Issue of Jerusalem: the Christian Community and its Leaders

If Palestinian Christians are generally in favour of a just and comprehensive peace, where do they stand on the issue of Jerusalem and its future? We can detect two overall responses from the Christian community and its leaders on this issue: on the one hand, the Christians of Jerusalem are concerned by the daily preoccupations and constraints which the present political environment places on them. On the other, the Church leadership, while sensitive to the preoccupations and constraints felt by its faithful, is conscious of the need to highlight the Christian presence in the Holy City irrespective of the restraints and pretensions of temporal governing arrangements. But such highlighting, as will be illustrated below, is carried out with due respect to other religions and their faithful who equally view Jerusalem as their Holy City.

Daily Preoccupations, Constraints and Concerns

Unemployment in the Jerusalem Christian community is a problem: high school and college graduates do not find employment readily. Estimates place the rate of unemployment among Christians at over 30%. This high rate is attributable to the ageing nature of the community, youth emigration and the community's white collar occupational preferences¹¹.

Data on income indicates that a majority of Christian employees are dissatisfied with their income since it is not sufficient to cover the high cost of living. In Jerusalem itself,

¹¹Hyman, Benjamin, et.al., *Jerusalem in Transition: Urban Growth and Change 1970's -1980's*. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, Jerusalem, 1985.

the average income of a Christian family is only 58.6% of that of a Jewish family¹². Thus, even if two or three members of a family work, their combined income will just be sufficient to break even.

According to the Israeli census of 1983, only 18.7% of Jerusalem Christians owned their homes. This may have increased since then, but indicators show that the great majority of Christian families still do not own their homes.

With Israeli measures and restrictions placed on the construction of homes and dwelling units in the Eastern Arab part of Jerusalem, it is becoming extremely difficult for individuals and families to obtain the required licensing to build a home. These measures are undertaken in order to safeguard the 28:72 Arab-Jewish population ratio in greater Jerusalem. But even if the licenses are granted, the exorbitant cost makes constructing a private home beyond the means of most, if not all middle class families of East Jerusalem. This means that Christian families, irrespective of denomination, will not have the possibility of ever constructing or owning their home or apartment.

Housing Needs of Jerusalem Christians

As an illustration of the concrete effects of Israeli measures and restrictions, official Israeli statistics for Jerusalem in 1992 show that out of 3,155 dwelling units constructed that year in greater Jerusalem, only 240 units, or 7.6% of the total,

¹² According to figures of the Israeli Census of the Population conducted in 1983

were built by Arabs in their part of the city¹³. Using data for housing needs among the Arab population of Jerusalem and considering the proportion of Christians in the city, there is an immediate need to construct 481 dwelling units for Christians. Of these, 176 units should be constructed in the Old City and 305 units outside the walls. Since, however, it is practically impossible to construct inside the Old City, then all of these need to be constructed in the eastern and northern suburbs of the city. Those living inside the Old City will have to rehabilitate and maintain their housing in order to continue living there and to accommodate some of the natural increase, although relatively small, of the community.

With the housing situation as it is, there is fear among Arab Jerusalemites, including many Christians who hold an Israeli identity card, that moving outside the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem will eventually result in the loss of their identity card and consequently their right to permanent residence in Jerusalem. In such circumstances, *bona fide* Jerusalemites, who have been there with their families for countless generations or even centuries, will find themselves excluded from their own city. This is unsettling to the many Jerusalemites who, at present, are living outside the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. This situation is cause for concern, not simply for Palestinians and indigenous Christians, but also to all those who pray and labour for the peace of Jerusalem and the Holy land.

¹³Figures on the housing situation in Jerusalem are taken from the Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem, Municipality of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem institute for Israel studies, 1993

The Cordoning off of Jerusalem

Another concern which has caused immense emotional and practical damage to the Christians and other Palestinians is the cordoning off of Jerusalem from the West Bank and Gaza Strip by the Israelis for "security reasons". This has denied the Christian and Muslim faithful from having free access to their religious holy places in Jerusalem since March 1993. Permits are needed from the Israeli military authorities in the West Bank in order to enable those Palestinians wishing to visit Jerusalem to do so. There are instances of Palestinians from Bethlehem and Ramallah, two areas with relatively large concentrations of Christians, who have not visited Jerusalem since the imposition of the "security belt" This not only contradicts religious rights but also severely limits the exercise of other basic human rights such as education, health and the fulfillment of simple family obligations such as attendance at weddings, funerals and other occasions of family importance.

Arab Jerusalem: The Capital of the State of Palestine

Jerusalem's Christians believe, as do other Palestinians, that East Jerusalem, the Arab part of the city, should be the capital of the state of Palestine. Most Christians do not envisage a real peace without finding a compromise solution on Jerusalem whereby the two national groups, Palestinians and Israelis, and the three religious groups, Jews, Muslims and Christians will all feel comfortable and at ease in the city. This comfort and ease cannot transpire without a solution that will satisfy both the national and religious aspirations of each and every community in the city. It is only then that the city will truly become a city of peace.

Memorandum of Heads of Christian Churches on Jerusalem¹⁴

On 14 November 1994 twelve heads of different churches and Christian communities in Jerusalem and the Holy Land published a memorandum on "The Significance of Jerusalem for Christians." The memorandum presents the vision of Jerusalem as a holy city "for the people of the three monotheistic religions ... with a special vocation... for reconciliation and harmony among people." The heads of churches pointed out that Jerusalem has again been side-stepped in the peace process because of the difficult question of the city's status and sovereignty over it. Exclusivist claims presented by one side or another cannot, according to the memorandum, be but "very divergent, indeed conflicting." The memorandum goes on to stress that, "Jerusalem should be open to all, shared by all" and that it should be made into, "the capital of humankind".

A Place of Roots

Christians, according to the memorandum, "believe the Jerusalem of the Prophets to be the foreseen place of the salvation, in and through Jesus Christ." As to the continuing presence of a Christian community, the heads of churches emphasize that "Jerusalem is the place of roots, ever living and nourishing," and that "the local church with its faithful has always been actively present in Jerusalem and witness to the life and preaching, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ upon the same Holy Places and its faithful have been

¹⁴The full text of the Memorandum can be found in JERUSALEM: The Diocesan Bulletin of the Latin Patriarchate, Volume 1, Year 1, January-February 1995 pp. 20-25

receiving other brothers and sisters in the faith, as pilgrims, resident or in transit, inviting them to be reimmersed into the refreshing, ever living ecclesiastical sources."

Full Freedom of Access

The Christian leaders of the Holy Land churches are aware that Jerusalem is a holy city for Christians, Muslims and Jews who each have a right "to continue to live there freely, with all the rights, which obtain from that." The leaders then specify the "legitimate demands of Christians for Jerusalem," which include that as "quintessential Holy City, it above all ought to enjoy full freedom of access to its holy places, and freedom of worship." The right to come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem should be guaranteed in the spirit of the authentic tradition of pilgrims.

Rights of Christians and Citizens

As for the local Christian communities, they "should enjoy all those rights to enable them to continue their active presence in freedom and to fulfil their responsibilities towards both their own local members and towards the Christian pilgrims throughout the world". The memorandum continues to insist that local Christians should "not only in their capacity as Christians *per se*, but like all other citizens, religious or not, enjoy the same fundamental rights for all: social, cultural political and national. Specific rights are mentioned such as freedom of worship, conscience and civil and historical rights as well as "the right to have their own institutions" to undertake various religious, educational, pilgrimage and other functions. What the Christian heads of churches claim for their communities, they recognize and respect for Jewish and Muslim communities in the city:

"Christians declare themselves disposed to search, with Jews and Muslims, for a mutually respectful application of these rights and for a harmonious coexistence in the perspective of the universal spiritual vocation of Jerusalem".

Special Statute for Jerusalem

The memorandum then goes on to argue for a special statute for Jerusalem in which representatives from the three monotheistic religions together with local political powers should elaborate and apply and that the international community should be engaged in the stability and permanence of the statute. The memorandum ends with the following call: "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."

The Future of Jerusalem: A Key to Peace

Jerusalem's Christians are an integral part of the city: its wounds, woes and promises. As others who live in the city, they have a dream that one day the city will become a true symbol of peace and that their children with Muslim and Jewish children will be able to plan for the city together. The traditionally excellent relations between Christians and Muslims could be extended to include adherents of all three monotheistic religions, on a basis of equal and mutual trust and respect. This is not too much to ask from a city which symbolizes so much to so many. If the three monotheistic religions fail in sharing the city and if the two national groups

Palestinians and Israelis, cannot work out their differences, then indeed the whole peace process would be put in doubt. Success in Jerusalem is the key not simply to the peace process but also to the future of Israel and Palestine and to the whole Middle East.



Dr. Yitzhak Reiter

Religious Issues and Holy Places in Jerusalem-Towards a Permanent Solution

Preface¹⁵

I would like to begin my presentation with a general statement: The views expressed here are my personal views, and in no way represent an official Israeli position. Nor can they be said to represent a "Jewish consensus", for there are a variety of Jewish groups in Israel and the Diaspora with differing approaches to religious affairs and holy places. I assume that other participants in this distinguished forum are aware of this, just as we are aware that there are various streams and outlooks in Christianity and Islam.

Having noted the variety of streams and outlooks among Jews, I would be derelict in my duty if I failed to stress at the outset that which has been, and remains, common to all Jews, at all times and

¹⁵Note: I am indebted to Mr. Daniel Rossing for reviewing the draft and adding editorial as well as substantive comments. The Jewish perspective of Jerusalem was extracted from the following sources:

- 1- R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, "the Meaning of Jerusalem to Jews, Christians and Muslims" (Israel Universities Study Group for Middle Eastern Affairs, Jerusalem, 1983), 14.
- 2- John Bowker, "Feasibility study for the Roads of Faith" (UNESCO, 1992), 6.
- 3- Raphael Josepe, "the Significance of Jerusalem: A Jewish Perspective", *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*.2, (no. 2 1995), 37.

in all places, namely the centrality of Jerusalem to Jewish faith and identity. For the Jewish people Jerusalem is not simply a city containing holy places or commemorating holy events.

The city, as such, is holy and has, for at least two and a half millennia, served as the symbol of the historic existence of a people hunted, humiliated, and massacred, but never despairing of the hope and promise of its ultimate restoration.

Jerusalem and Zion have become “the local habitation and the name” for the hope and meaning of Jewish existence and of its continuity from the days when, according to the authors of the biblical book, God spoke of a certain place that he would choose, to the days of the return which—however improbable it might seem—was never in doubt for the Jews.

After being a Canaanite settlement and the capital of the Jebusite people, Jerusalem entered Jewish history with King David’s unification of the tribes of Israel and capture of Jerusalem, establishing kingship and temple-based worship 1006 years before Christ. Jerusalem thus became the symbol and the most significant expression of the transition from “peoplehood” to the formation of a “nation” and “state”. The sacred character of the city was confirmed by bringing of the Ark of the Covenant from Kiriyyat Ye’arim to Jerusalem. Since then the holiness of the city for the Jewish people has laid in the presence of the *shechina* of God at the site where the Ark was placed. The transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to the Temple built by King Solomon on *Har ha-Moriah* (the site identified by Jewish tradition as the place where Abraham intended to sacrifice his son Isaac) was the reason for God’s promise: “Your dynasty and your sovereignty will stand firm before me and your throne be for your sovereignty will stand firm before me and your throne be for ever secure (Shmuel II, VII 16). At this point Jerusalem and Mount Zion

began their assimilation into the religious consciousness of all tribes including Judah. Under Josiah, a major reform was attempted, which made Jerusalem the place where God had caused his name to dwell and the exclusive centre for pilgrimage feasts.

The centrality of the city to the Jewish people is emphasized by warnings of the prophets that God will withdraw his protection over the city and its people if they prove unfaithful to him, followed by the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 BC, resulting in the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the exile of the Jewish people.

The Jews in the Babylonian exile faced a new problem: how to survive and function religiously despite the loss of Jerusalem as both their national and religious centre. The problem was expressed most eloquently by a psalmist in words, which became, in subsequent centuries, a sort of Jewish pledge of allegiance:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and cried,
as we remembered Zion. On the willows there
in we hung up our harps. For there our captors
asked us for songs, and our tormentors (asked
us) for mirth: sing for us some of the songs of
Zion. But how can we sing the Lord's song on
foreign soil? If I forget you Jerusalem, let my
right hand wither. Let my tongue cleave to the
roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I
do not elevate Jerusalem above my greatest joy.
(Psalms 137: 1-6).

The significance is clear: the Jews had been removed from the heart of Zion, but Zion was never removed from the

Jewish heart. The restoration of Jerusalem came to symbolize both Jewish national survival and fidelity to the Torah, and indeed eventually, the hopes for the messianic era, when the Jews would be restored to Zion and Zion to the Jews.

During the exile two conceptions of Jerusalem developed among the Jewish people: firstly, the longing for the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of Jerusalem, and secondly, the vision of Jerusalem fulfilling its religious role in relation to the whole of humanity and the day when all nations will acknowledge *ha-Shem*, and God will send his messiah-hence the importance of being buried in Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives.

The Second Temple was built in 515 BC after the declaration of Koresh, the King of Persia. It was burnt and destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 A.D.

During the period of the Hasmonean rulers and until the first Jewish revolt against the Romans, Jerusalem was a centre of pilgrimage at three times during the year (*shalosh regalim*). It was said: "He who has not seen Sukkot in Jerusalem has not seen life".

After the second Jewish revolt, the destruction of the Second Temple and the beginning of a long period of exile, the conception of Jerusalem in Jewish understanding had three dimensions:

- 1- The reality of historical Jerusalem, whether controlled by Jews or by others;
- 2- The reality of the destroyed Jerusalem;
- 3- The reality of God's promise, and continuing commitment to his promises in relation to Jerusalem, summarised in the heavenly Jerusalem, which cannot be destroyed.

The reality of the actual Jerusalem continued in Jewish Law (*halachah*) even after the destruction. The jurists continued to work on the proper ordering of worship and life in the city. In Jewish tradition (*hagadah*), Jerusalem was raised above all places on the earth, as the centre of navel of the world from which benefits to all nations flow. The beauty of Jerusalem was said to exceed all other beauties. It was said that of the ten measures of beauty that came down to the world, Jerusalem took nine: here all great events of history took place, from creation, through the binding (*'aqedah*) of Isaac and the establishment of the Holy of the Holies, and here that the final day and resurrection of the dead will take place.

The fact that the Temple was destroyed and Jerusalem was controlled by non-Jews affected Jewish worship and prayers. Prayer was and is performed facing the direction of Jerusalem and special mourning observed on *Tisha B'Av*, the date of the destruction of both Temples, and the saying "If I forget you, Jerusalem may my right hand wither" entered into the Psalms. Jews continued to pray for the restoration of Jerusalem on earth: the thrice-daily "*Amida* prayer has a section devoted to this plea, and the Passover *Seder* and the Day of Atonement service both end with the words "Next year in Jerusalem".

A prime indicator of the significance of Jerusalem in Judaism is the proliferation of sources, from the Bible onwards, dealing with the city in one respect or another. The Hebrew bible explicitly refers to Jerusalem by name some 700 times, and to the corollary name "Zion" (which properly indicates the Temple Mount, and later came to indicate Jerusalem as the capital city, and eventually the Holy Land as a whole) some 150 times. But these hundreds of explicit references to Jerusalem and Zion by name are, of course, only the tip of the Biblical iceberg; the implicit references cannot be counted.

Post Biblical Jewish literature similarly reflects Jerusalem's central significance. Rabbinic literature, the *Talmud* and *Midrash*, is replete with explicit and implicit references to Jerusalem, as is classical Jewish liturgy.

It is the centrality of Jerusalem in Jewish law and history then, which endows the city with its spiritual significance in Judaism. Because it was the capital of the country whenever it enjoyed independence, Jerusalem came to embody Jewish national and spiritual aspirations.

The Political centralization initiated by David and Solomon was focused on Jerusalem and was, at the same time, a religious centralisation of the worship in the Temple. The words of Isaiah (2:3) and Michah (4:2) therefore have both immediate, contemporary meaning as well as eschatological significance: "For out of Zion will come the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

When the Jews imagined the heavenly Jerusalem, it was thus to give direction and meaning to their hopes for the restoration of the earthly Jerusalem. Therefore, when the Jews hoped for the restoration of the earthly Jerusalem, they saw it as the first necessary component of the fulfillment of their universal messianic expectations.



In the spirit of this gathering and our search for peace, my focus in this presentation will not be on stating a clear position or taking a firm stand, but rather on attempting to bring out some of the fundamental issues which I believe we need to examine and discuss with honesty and with open and

creative minds. Furthermore, I will not as this time go into the many details concerning specific holy places which need to be examined and treated, as I assume that such details will form the substance of future discussions. Although I believe that there is a great deal that we can learn from a careful review of the current arrangements at a specific holy place, such as *al-Haram-al-Sharif* or the Temple Mount, I think that it is important to first consider more general issues and principles concerning holy places.

Political and religious aspects of Jerusalem

I begin by noting what is perhaps obvious to anyone familiar with the history, both distant and recent, of the holy places: the political and religious status of holy places are intimately linked. The adherents of a given faith sanctify a certain location, which subsequently acquires political significance to them. The faithful thus endeavour to preserve and develop this centre not only as a destination for pilgrimage but also as a focal point of political interests and concerns, or even of specific national aspirations and identity. Conversely, a political dispute can magnify the importance of a particular holy place for adherents of one faith in the context of their political struggle with members of another faith. In the specific case of Jerusalem, the historic rivalry among the three great monotheistic faiths –Judaism, Christianity and Islam–has served to intensify the political importance of the city. At the same time, the political conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews, which erupted when nationalism penetrated the Middle East, seems to have magnified the religious importance of certain holy sites, thus further cementing the religious importance of certain holy

sites, thus further cementing the bonds between the political and religious realms in questions concerning holy places.

The change of regime in East Jerusalem in 1967—from Jordanian Muslim to Israeli Jewish—and the impact of this change on the issue of the holy places illustrates the nature of the conflict between Judaism and Islam, which are similar in many respects. Both faiths relate to all areas of their believers' lives and daily routine. Neither faith traditionally recognises a separation of religion and state, or of spiritual and political authority. Consequently, for members of both faith, holy places take on a double significance : they are focal points of religious and political identity at one and the same time. The holy places have been mobilized to strengthen the national consciousness of both Zionist Jews and Palestinian Arabs. The nurturing of two foci of identity at the holy places – religious and political – makes the issue of these shrines extremely complex and sensitive. Furthermore each side of the political conflict knows that any change in the status of these places will affect circles much wider than the local community, namely the broader Jewish, Christian and Muslim worlds.

It is true that the majority of Israeli society does not regard itself as “religious”, at least not in the strict traditional Jewish sense of the term. Israel is basically a secular society. However, although most Israeli Jews would not define themselves as “religious “ in the strict sense of the term, a large percentage do define themselves as “traditional”, meaning they continue to observe certain religious precepts or customs which link them to Jewish tradition. Both parental influence and a desire to maintain the link with Jewish history and heritage prompt them to do so. This “traditionalism” strongly effects the way Israeli relate to holy

sites, as was most obvious in the profound reactions of even the most "secular" of Israelis when they were once again able to visit the Western Wall following the 1967 War.

It must also be noted that Israel is not a theocratic state, either as regards its legal system or its government. True, the legal system, in principle, takes "Jewish heritage" into consideration. However, in practice with the exception of the prescribed sphere of personal status, the laws of the State are based not on Jewish religious law but rather on civil law grounded in the legal principles and norms which have been adopted by a large segment of the international community. Likewise, the Israeli "religious" parties play a role—many would argue a disproportionately strong role—in the Israeli Government. All indications are that any government in Israel will, at least for the foreseeable future, depend on religious parties in order to secure a stable parliamentary coalition.

As a result of the above, any Government will have to consider both the traditional sentiments of a wide segment of the Jewish population and the particular perspectives of the religious parties in all negotiations, and especially those concerning Jerusalem and the holy places.

Definition and Categorization of Holy Places

In as much as our discussions focus on the question of holy places, I believe that we first need to clarify what it is that we each have in mind when we speak of "holy places". Some basic understanding and definition of a holy place seems to me critical to our discussions, both for the sake of better understanding between us and as a foundation for any examination of the practical issues surrounding holy places.

Some might argue that holiness is attached to all of *Eretz Yisrael* ("The Land of Israel"—the term most often used by Jews) or "The Holy Land" (the term favoured by Christians) or *Ard Filastin* (the term employed by Palestinians). But it would appear that within this geographic area there are specific places, which are revered by members of one or more faiths as "more holy" or "most holy". Thus it might be helpful to agree upon some common principles for categorising holy places in terms of the degree of holiness. We should, I believe, differentiate places of supreme holiness from other sites of active worship, and especially from places which have an essentially historic or cultural significance. Most careful attention will have to be given to sites, which are of supreme holiness and especially to places which are considered holy by more than one faith. It would be helpful to compile a list of such site.

Freedom of Access and Worship in Holy Places

Together with a basic understanding and definition of a holy place, it would be beneficial if we could also agree on some fundamental principles regarding holy places in general. Two such principles which seem to be essential if a holy place is to fulfill its proper role and function, are freedom of access to a holy place for those who revere it and freedom of worship for all at their respective holy sites or houses of worship.

These two principles have been widely accepted and affirmed by the international community. Without strict adherence to them, we will never be able to convince the members of the two peoples and the adherents of the three faiths represented here today, that there exists in practice true respect for the interests of religious believers and for the holy places which are the foci of their special relationship with God.

As universally acceptable as these two principles might be, we must be fully cognisant of the fact that their implementation is no simple matter, especially in the case of places which are considered holy by more than one faith—such as the al-Haram al-Sharif, or Temple Mount, in Jerusalem and the Cave of the Machpelah, or al-Haram al-Ibrahimi, in Hebron. The same would seem to be true regarding places, which are considered holy by more than one of the different groups within a faith, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Thus, in addition to agreement on the above principles, the parties involved will have to agree on practical arrangements which will appease the apprehensions and satisfy the religious requirements of members of all groups concerned with a particular holy site.

Freedom of access most especially must be assured with regard to a site considered holy to members of one faith which is located in territory that, in one form or another, is under the effective control of individuals or bodies connected with another faith. Thus, for example, Jews will seek free access not only to the Temple Mount (al-Haram al-Sharif) which is administered by the Muslim Endowment Authority, but also to the Cave of the Machpelah (al-Haram al-Ibrahim) in Hebron and other sites of religious significance to Jews in any territory which falls under Palestinian rule. Clearly, Muslims and Christians will have similar expectations regarding their holy sites in territory under Israeli rule.

Administration and Control of Holy Places

Without doubt, a major issue for discussion will be the question of the status and rights of the various faiths regarding the holy places. It is only natural that each religious group wishes to effectively control and administer the sites that are holy to it, regardless of the question of who has political sovereignty over the territory in which they are located. However, granting the need for each group to administer its own holy places, it may be beneficial to reach some consensus and establish certain rules concerning the type of activity appropriate to any holy site. With a view both to preserving the sanctity of such sites and to preventing their misuse, I believe it would be best for all concerned if holy sites would be dedicated solely to worship, religious education and pilgrimage, and not be used for activities of a non-religious nature.

It may also be of benefit to jointly discuss some of the practical details of administration and control. Some practical problems may well be common to any and all holy places. Security and public order are two such problems which apply to any holy place. The question of who can or should best guarantee security and public order is a crucial issue. One of the Israeli fears that needs to be addressed concerns the physical safety of people who wish to visit a holy site that is under Palestinian control. Public order is a pressing issue particularly at sites regarded as holy by more than one group, and may require creative thinking regarding possible division of space, time, or different types of activity, as for example is the practice at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre under the *status quo*. We know from experience that issues such as maintenance, repair, renovations and especially innovations can be a potential source of friction and need to be discussed.

Other Concerned Parties

Israelis and Palestinians are currently the main political sides in the conflict over the final status of Jerusalem and its holy places. But neither Israelis nor Palestinians can ignore the fact that there are many other parties who have a special link with Jerusalem and its holy places and who therefore have a vital interest in the issues which we have come together to discuss. Furthermore, we cannot overlook the fact that Israel has binding agreements with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Holy See which Israel must respect and which have certain ramifications regarding holy places. Other nations and other religious bodies have in the past, or may in the future, make certain claims or demands that will have to be taken into account. To illustrate the need, on the part of all of us here, for sensitivity to the concerns of other parties, one need only recall the deep fears and anxiety which the negotiations leading to the Fundamental Agreement between Israel and the Holy See aroused among Orthodox Christian churches and nations.

Archaeology and Tourism

In addition to consideration for the special interests of other national or religious bodies, any agreement regarding the holy places will have to make satisfactory provisions for archaeological and scientific work, and most especially for tourism, to the benefit of Palestinians, Israelis and others. Tourists, and certainly pilgrims, have an inalienable right to visit and venerate holy places and we should cooperate in every way possible to facilitate such visits. Needless-to-say, tourism and pilgrimage generate resources that can be used for the maintenance and repair of holy places, as well as contribute significantly to both the Palestinian and Israeli

economies. Scientific research, including archaeological studies, are an integral part of our modern world and provisions for such should also be made with regard to holy places. Such scientific or archaeological work, of course, should in no way endanger a holy place or detract from its sanctity. We are all aware that both in the last century and in the more recent past, archaeological excavations in and around holy sites have proven to be a sensitive matter and therefore one which requires special attention. Concerning the recent past, I have in mind the disputes surrounding excavations carried out along the Western Wall and the issue of opening the northern end of the tunnel along the Wall to accommodate pilgrims and tourists who wish to visit there.

Monitoring and Supervision

Any agreement concerning the holy places must include mechanisms for guaranteeing the full implementation of the terms of the agreement. Earlier in this century international and inter-faith rivalry foiled attempts to establish some kind of an objective and effective holy places commission. However, I believe that in an era of peace and cooperation it might be possible to establish such a body and I therefore think that the idea is worthy of our consideration. The true test of such a body would be its ability to win the confidence of the diverse interested parties and to effectively mediate or adjudicate in disputes or emergency situations which might arise.

Preventing Friction on a Religious Background

The history of the Holy Land teaches us that religious passions, intolerance and ignorance vis-a-vis members of other faiths have again and again led to strife and bloodshed.

In our own century alone, one need only recall the painful examples of bloodshed and death which were the outcome of the riots of 1929, the incident in October, 1990 at the al-Haram al-Sharif and Western Wall, and the massacre in the Cave of the Machpelah or al-Haram al-Ibrahimi last year. We all know that the passions, intolerance and ignorance behind these tragedies still exist to one degree or another and we would be foolish to think that political agreements and arrangements will be sufficient to prevent friction in the future. A serious and concerted educational effort will be no less, if not more, important. Both Israelis and Palestinians have to carefully review their educational curricula and mass communications programs with a view to combating ignorance and intolerance and to creating a new atmosphere of peace and cooperation informed by knowledge and understanding of other faiths and inspired by the lofty human values common to all three faiths.

An example of the type of education which I believe is necessary are the religious affairs programs produced by Nur as-Din Dirini (Abu Jarir) and broadcast in Arabic by the Voice of Israel and Israel Television. At Christmas and during Ramadan, these broadcasts emphasize the universal human values common to the holy scriptures of the three monotheistic faiths: the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Qur'an.

Thus, in addition to examining the possibility of a commission to oversee and monitor agreements and arrangements concerning the holy places, we should perhaps also consider the creation of a special interfaith committee to monitor educational materials and programs.

Permit me in conclusion to stress with full sincerity that I and my Israeli colleagues have come here to listen and try to understand and not simply to “score points” or present demands. It is my hope that we will all be able to conduct our discussions with this attitude and approach foremost in our minds.

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Appendix

Biographical Abstracts of the Authors

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi

Head and founder of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), Jerusalem; Ph.D. Bradford University, Uk; member of various Palestinian bodies including the "Jerusalem Arab Council" in Jerusalem; closely involved with a variety of international institutions; fellow of the Centre for International Affairs, Harvard University (1985) ; fellow of the Salzburg International Seminar (1986); currently member of the Black Sea University Foundation, Bucharest; the International Institute for strategic Studies (IISS), London, and the Mediterranean Study Commission (MeSCo) ; formerly editor of Al Fajr : General Secretary of Council for Higher Education in the West Bank; co-founder and president of the Arab Thought Forum in Jerusalem, 1977-1981).

Publications include: Post Gulf War Assessment: A Palestinian Perspective (1991); Jordanian Disengagement: Causes and Effects (1988); Notes on Palestinian Israeli Meetings in the Occupied Territories (1987); the Evolution of the Arab Flag (1979)

Dr. Sari Nuseibeh

Head and founder of the Palestinian Consultancy Group (PCG), Jerusalem, and, since 1995, President of Al-Quds University: Ph.D. in Philosophy, Harvard University (1978); co-founder and member of several Palestinian institution including the Jerusalem Friends of the Sick Society, the Federation of Employees in the Education Sector in the West Bank, the Arab Council for Public Affairs, the Committee Confronting the Iron Fist, and the Jerusalem Arab Council; formerly Professor at Birzeit University (1978-1990), President of the Birzeit Teacher's Association (1979–1980), co-founder and President of the Union of Faculty and staff at Bir Zeit University, member of the Steering Committee of the Delegation to the Peace Talks, and head of both the bilateral and multilateral technical committees.

Publications include numerous articles and, with Mark Heller, *No Trumpets, No Drums: A Two-State Solution of the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict*, New York: Hill & Wand, 1991.

Dr. Bernard Sabella

Professor of Sociology at Bethlehem University; Ph.D. in Sociology, Virginia University, USA; member of various Palestinian institutions; scientific and research interest focuses on Palestinian society; co-author of many academic publications.

Publications include a series of articles, an *Introduction to Sociology* (1983), and *Christian Emigration–Comparison Between Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem Areas* (1991).

Dr. Yitzhak Reiter

Director of the Institute for Israeli Arab Studies, Beit Berl, and lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Department for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies; fellow of research projects on Jerusalem at the Harry S. Truman Institute for Research and the Advancement of Peace, and the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies; Ph.D, Hebrew University, Jerusalem (1990); main research fields are Islamic institutions, modern Middle Eastern history, Islamic Law, and the Arabs in Israel; formerly Deputy Prime Minister's Advisor on Arab Affairs(1978-1995); in 1982-1983, Managing Director of Al-Anba' daily newspaper (published in Arabic in Jerusalem); in 1993, nominated by the Israeli government to head a public Committee for Integrating Arabs into the civil service.

Publication include: Islamic Awqaf in Jerusalem, 1948–1990, The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1991 (Hebrew); The Political Life of Israeli Arabs, with R. Aharoni, Beit Berl, The Institute for Israeli Arab Studies, 1992 (Hebrew) ; Islamic Endowments in Jerusalem under British Mandate, London : Frank Kass, forthcoming (English).
